

# New York City Writing Project NEWSLETTER

Vol.19, No. 2 INSTITUTE FOR LITERACY STUDIES • LEHMAN COLLEGE • THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK Fall1999

## A Note from the Editors

As we know, teachers live very busy professional lives and rarely have time to maintain regular communication with Writing Project friends and colleagues who work in other schools and boroughs. Periodically, many of us see each other at meetings or conferences, participate in study or reading groups initiated by the Project or re-connect through summer institutes and seminars. A lot of us now communicate via e-mail. But it isn't easy.

Over the years the Newsletter has been one of the ways in which we have attempted to support each other, share our experiences and engage in dialogue about issues that matter to us as urban teachers. Last winter the New York City Writing Project (NYCWP) initiated another way for its members to keep in touch: through a membership listerv. Once the dialogue began, there was no stopping it.

The conversation started with a discussion about student reading and soon turned toward the new English Regents exam. In the spring, NYCWP teachers throughout the city voiced their concerns about the new exam. They shared what they knew and didn't know about it and how they were preparing students. They debated its validity and contemplated its impact. In the summer, the listerv conversation turned to other matters (summer reading and Holocaust literature) and in the fall, other topics emerged (planning units, requests for help with specific works of literature).

These on-line conversations have proven to be a rich resource for those on the listerv and, we now realize, for the Newsletter as well. In this issue, we have excerpted some of the listerv dialogue that we thought would be of interest to the entire NYCWP community. We anticipate that this will be just the first of many Newsletter issues that will be enriched by our on-line discussions. If you are interested in joining the listerv, please contact Ed Osterman (osterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu) and supply him with your name, home address, school and e-mail address.

As always, however, NYCWP teachers continue to write and reflect on their work in greater depth than e-mail messages and so, a few words about this issue's features.. Kiran Chaudhuri reflects on her early experiences with books

as she watches her own students at work. Steven Koenig writes about his experience at the Matthew Shepard vigil last year and his struggle to teach his students to rise above societal racism and prejudice to make the world a better place. Nancy Mintz and Sharon Rosenberg celebrate their work with Linda Vereline and bid our Associate Director a fond farewell as she takes time to be with her family and tend to other professional matters. Finally, there are our regular columns, Steal These Ideas and Project Notes.

One final, but important note. As always, we welcome your views and feedback, and invite you to let us know what you would like to see in upcoming issues of the Newsletter. Beyond all that, however, we are eager to support your writing. We are always looking for articles and stories about teaching: what you have tried, what you have changed, what has been hard and what has been exciting. These are difficult and complex times for public school teachers; let's use our Newsletter to support and inform each other!

We wish our readers a wonderful new year and a smooth beginning to life and work in the new millennium!

## Letters to the Editor

We encourage you to agree or disagree with a viewpoint expressed or to suggest a theme or topic for a future issue. Send your letters or suggestions to the NYCWP, Institute for Literacy Studies, Lehman College, 250 Bedford Park Boulevard West, Bronx, NY 10468. Attention: Newsletter. Or email us at edosterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu

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## My History As a Reader and My Teaching Life Converge

*Kiran Chaudhuri, a teacher at East Side Community High School, describes an experience of discovery she encountered as an instructor at University Heights Secondary School. Reflecting on her own personal delight with books, she is puzzled by her students' lack of interest in reading. Kiran speaks to the heart as she witnesses the power of the "right read" - Elie Wiesel's Night - and lays aside assumptions made about her "reluctant readers."*

Angie strides up to the bookcase in my classroom and picks out five books. I see her out of the corner of my eye as I am reading Elie Wiesel's *Night* with the small group nearby and note that she brings the books back toward her table. My fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen and nineteen-year-old high school students have been making books with the seven and eight-year-old second graders they mentor each week in Service Learning. Maybe Angie is checking out how *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *When I Was Puerto Rican* are put together, with dedication pages and chapter headings. Or maybe she has had her eye on those five books sitting on the middle shelf and will choose one to take home. Later, when I make my way toward her small group by the back workbench, I see that the books are paper weights, holding down the five piles of literature circle role sheets I have laid out.

There is one bookcase in our classroom. It holds books and dust, not unlike my parents' bookcases. In my classroom, that dust is depressing. I am puzzled and disappointed that the books do not get pulled out, thumbed through -- that my students do not browse. The bookcase is dead. My parents' bookshelves, though quiet and dusty, were alive. That is, they were waiting.

They were waiting for me, had been all along, floor to ceiling, waiting to be discovered by one 13-year old. It

can't have been any later, since my parents divorced when I was fourteen, and I imagine the discovery would have been bitter after that. It was a moment before the separation, one of idle perusal. Boris Pasternak: *Dr. Zhivago*... If I could watch the movie, I figured, I could read the book. This was in 1975 or so, and I had seen the movie the week before on TV. I reached for it and thumbed through. I could read it! I put it back up on the shelf and pulled down the slender one next to it, *Mother*, by Maxim Gorky. I found myself caught up in the author's description of the city, finding his way as a university student. I began to travel along the shelves toward my mother's books, full of a new curiosity.

I had always liked the expanse of bookcases across the walls, making the big room feel lived-in and friendly. I would dip into a book here and there to sniff its dry mustiness. 1951 and 1952, the dates my father had written inside many of the covers beneath his name, smelled satisfyingly of age. The brittle, yellowing pages were artifacts of a past before I came into the world, proof that those days really happened.

Now the books took on a distinctive aura. They became evidence that my parents had lived other lives. They were part of what my mother and father had each experienced to become who they were. I saw that the books would become part of me if I read them. I saw that they could become mine in a way. I saw that I could become an adult, reading adult

books. I floated to yet another bookcase, unsettled, looking at the shelves with new eyes. What could I understand? What might even be fun? I wanted to investigate each book now. The bookcase was lined with booty, and I was a pirate.

We are reading, writing, sketching quietly in my classroom, and my students' eyes are all either glued to their books or their

notebook pages. I look up from my copy of the book we are reading, *Night*. This is new. Can it be the first time I have ever had them engrossed in a novel for an hour and a half? I have witnessed this with play reading, where the pull of the narrative, the bonding of the group around it, as if around a campfire, and the chance to read a role aloud rivets many students' attention. But I have never seen my class as a whole so avidly reading a class novel.

*Night* is short, 109 pages. It is devastating, breathing fear and death, faith and its loss. But so were *The Color Purple* and *The Bluest Eye*, which I had attempted to use as whole-

*continued...*

***This represents the first time in my seven years of teaching that I am succeeding...in getting a class to read a book together.***

class texts in prior years. Before reading *Night*, we viewed *Europa, Europa*, Agnieszka Holland's movie based on the autobiography of Solomon Perel, who survived the Holocaust by passing as a Hitler Youth. I hoped this film would serve us in building a shared context for the Holocaust. What hooked them into viewing it is not altogether clear to me. Since when are fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen and nineteen-year-olds enthralled by a subtitled foreign film? The letter writing I prompted them to do, pausing the movie every twenty or thirty minutes, may have helped them to make sense of it. I asked them to pretend they were Solly, writing his father, his brother, his mother about what was happening to him. After viewing, we read Solomon Perel's speech about where the film diverged from his life, and the schizophrenic aftermath of those years. Richard kept asking, "You mean this really happened? This is a true story?" He saw that it was autobiographical. Their own extended writing of autobiographies, in the initial weeks of the unit, may have primed them to bear witness to the story of another person's survival, in another time of extremes, not so far away or long ago.

The next day as we are reading quietly, I wonder privately how they can permit themselves such an intimate experience as reading Weisel's book in the middle of the classroom. Sprawled on the carpet, curled up in a corner, I see that they are in their own worlds, and more comfortable here than I. What makes it so cozy for them?

In front of me the following day, the small groups' members lean in over the table, and I want to know what it is that they are discovering, why they have made this book theirs. Will, looking up from the notes he has prepared as Discussion Director, pauses and says pointedly, "Kiran, we're in the middle of discussing." I butt out. I notice Hunter, my student teacher, also hovering about a group. I beckon to him and suggest, "Let's step back and describe what we see." I begin to write on a scrap of paper.

At "Campo 101's" table, Angie reads in a low voice to Valerie, Stephanie and Carlos V. She interrupts herself. "What's that word? What's that word?" she asks. Then she quizzes Valerie, "Would you die before or after?" Valerie answers something about how she would have decided to take her own life rather than live through the concentration camps like Elie Wiesel. "But maybe not," she muses, "because I'm a Latina, I'm strong...."

Encased in his headphones and flagrantly violating my new ban on walkmans, Jonathan is surly. Yet he has surprised the others by becoming engrossed in the book and in writing reading logs in response to its chapters. In fact, he has written more pages than anyone else has. This is a new role for him. He scowls at anyone who gets near. He insists that he is a group, unto himself, and that he will play all roles. I let him be. At the table by the window, Carlos L. has made a

sketch and is holding up his notebook for Jennifer, Carolyn, and Christina to guess what scene it portrays.

My notes are sparse, and I wonder, how do teachers describe what they witness unfolding before them? What place does a teacher's excitement that students are "onto something" have in documentation? This represents the first time in my seven years of teaching that I am succeeding to this extent in getting a class to read a book together. My students live "lives on the boundary," as Mike Rose says, somehow sustaining a sense of their own potential in spite of the society and the educational system that has failed them, and that, in one way or another, fails many.

These are the darkest days of the year. December's overcast skies outside, adolescents struggle to stay this side of the boundary. For each of the students here there is one who is not. One has been suspended for carrying a knife in school and will not be allowed to return; another injured himself falling down the subway steps; a third is backing his sister up in court; a fourth is home helping his mother get up bail for his brother; a fifth cannot make herself come to school in the morning; a sixth is translating at her mother's doctor's appointment; a seventh is cutting with her boyfriend; and there are others. Yet there is a sense here in the room that this is the place to be, that this chance to read *Night* together is important. The groups of five have named themselves after "Ghetto Life 101," the radio broadcast by teenagers LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman that we listened to last week and compared to Weisel's ghetto. Each table is developing a group identity, based on the way its members work and what they are discovering in the literature.

I teach with a desire for my students to stumble onto their own experiences of discovery. When I witness it happening, it causes me to rethink my assumptions about how I'm doing what I'm doing, and to open myself to surprise.

Kiran Chaudhuri  
East Side Community HS

## Matthew Shepard Vigil

*Sometimes what we teach our students doesn't come from the literature we read with them or the lessons we plan. In this piece, Steven Koenig reflects on his experience at a vigil for Matthew Shepard in October 1998 and shares the sorrow, anger and fear he felt while joining the protest. He contemplates how to use his experiences to help teach his students to "love each other" in the face of hatred and prejudice.*

continued . . .

It's 11 p.m. and I'm home, exhausted, but there are still many of our sisters and brothers waiting to be released from One Police Plaza, many of whom they say will be kept overnight.

The police were absolutely out of control, clearly under orders to keep the crowd on the sidewalks at any cost. It was a sick power play, as many were clubbed and the police used horses to stampede the crowd. At least one member of the crowd received head injuries. The police claimed buses could not get through, yet these same buses were either empty or filled with police. They were regular city buses planned way in advance to be used as cattle cars for the over 90 arrested after they already filled three paddy {apologies, my Irish friends} wagons.

Meeting with my friends I.G. and M.T. at the Plaza Hotel, we waited peacefully for the march to begin, when we were told by organizers, "They will arrest you if you march in the street. Those willing to be arrested should have identification." I did some soul-searching, and with one buddy, decided to stand behind a Matthew banner and take our chances in the street. We watched the police cuff the protesters with plastic cuffs, and fill three wagons. Some went peacefully, some went limp and were dragged. The police looked hungry for more.

I got scared, and ultimately let go of the banner and went to the side and started to cry. I remembered all the brave people who had done this before me, and I don't mean just today. I remember protesting apartheid in front of the South African embassy, with other teacher friends and with students, and being scared, even though I was told by my buddies who had done it before that it was just a mock ritual. The police had the routine worked out, and everyone would be processed within the hour, promise to be good next time, and go home. That was over ten years ago. Guiliani was unknown.

I started crying, not because I was scared, but because I was afraid and angry that I was afraid. Then I got angry at myself for being angry. I was wearing my Students Against Violence Everywhere shirt and obsessively debated with myself over which lesson I should be teaching my students. I

got out of my own head and continued down Fifth Avenue, and although I was separated from my friends, I was in a sea of brothers and sisters.

I won't go through the details and detours and traps set up for us by the police, the cars that tried to plough through the marchers, how Martha Stewart's dark-windowed limousine (confirmed by her initialed license plates) was trapped with us on 43rd Street, how the police tried to show how butch they were by revving up their motorcycles and running into the crowd, or how the moment of silence at the rally at Madison Square was rattled by news and police helicopters overhead, and how the speeches were not heard by most for the same reason.

I will tell you how during the moment of silence some were silent, some were deep in thought, and I couldn't stop crying thinking of the day in ninth grade when I saw "kill all fags" carved in the school desk, and I got up in a daze and left school muttering over and over, uncomprehending, "There's somebody who wants me dead. There's somebody who wants to kill me." That day I took the train home at 10 a.m. and cried myself to sleep until my mother came home and found me trembling under the covers. All I could say was, "I feel sick."

As we left the rally, spontaneous candle memorials mushroomed all over the park. I recalled the same feeling from ACT UP marches on D.C.

I'm "out" to my colleagues at work, and to those students who don't choose to remain oblivious. However, how do I assign my students persuasive essays about extra penalties for hate crimes or design projects based on the *Africans in America* series on PBS without explaining why their teacher looks so tired and angry today? How do I show them, who are all young and Black or Latino and face this every day of their lives, that they must love each other, and be independent thinkers, and not parrot the "Adam and Steve" jargon without thought? How do I do this without telling them of the night's events? How do I let them know that I participated, not because I am a moral person and want the world to be a

better place, but because I am in terror of the possibility of continuing to live in a world where they and I may be tortured and killed for being what we are?

Steven Koenig  
Clara Barton HS

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the NYCWP?**

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## Listserv Conversations

### Dialogue on the new ELA Regents

*Created last spring, The New York City Writing Project Member Dialogue, the listserv, has been a wonderful way for Writing Project members to keep in touch with each other, to share the work they have been doing, to seek help, and to discuss pedagogical issues. Shortly after the listserv was established, the discussion moved toward the new ELA Regents, and many people shared their thoughts and feelings. Here, we share with you some of the dialogue centered on teachers' questions and concerns about the new exam.*

**Joe Bellacero, Evander Childs High School:** Another topic is dominating my thoughts- the new English Regents exam. Like many schools, mine had as many juniors as possible take the old exam in January. That worked out pretty well, but now we have to prepare those who failed or did not take the test then. I have three classes filled with these students. As time rushes on, I am feeling increasingly frustrated. Certainly there is much to be said for the way this test focuses on listening skills in a more realistic way, brings charts and graphs into the area of language, and breathes new life into reading and responding to literature. The fact that the students I am working with are vastly underprepared to deal with "real" writing does not take me by surprise, although it saddens me. But what frustrates me to no end is my lack of actual knowledge of the real test.

**Ed Osterman, NYCWP Associate Director:** I do believe that the new Regents has admirable tasks on it and am in favor of an exam with extensive reading and writing. What upsets me is the rush to thrust this upon students and teachers without proper preparation and the seemingly chaotic ways it is being done... How do people who believe in, strive for and want higher standards and more intellectual rigor in the schools stand up for these values and at the same time resist in a serious and thoughtful manner the onslaught of standardized tests and state exams that might not be administered in the best way for kids and schools and might not accurately tell us what kids really do know and can do?

**Anita Dutt, Taft High School:** The uproar over the test at best, I think, puts a spotlight on the very real problems many NYC students have with literacy; the more we focus on what

supports "literacy," the better off students will be. A real mystery will be whether kids will return on the second day of the test.

**Paul Allison, International HS: A Charter School at LaGuardia Community College:** I learn a lot more about what a student has understood about a book by reading his/her reading logs. Although I am not satisfied with leaving this work in such an informal state, I am not at all convinced that the type of essay called for on the Regents exam will give me the evidence I need to be convinced that a student has written in ways that show his/her learning or that supports an understanding of the books read.

**Barbara Martz, NYCWP teacher-consultant:** I actually believe the writers of the state standards when they talk about using different methods and materials for a diverse population. The amount of reading kids do worries me, (so do) the opportunities to listen to adults answer their questions on a subject they are interested in, so I'm more comfortable with the standards than the on-demand task... What I'm worried about right now is having even less time spent on long-term projects with kids in an effort to conform to the Regents.

**Gail Kleiner, Middle College High School:** Although I can accept that the intention of the new Regents testmakers is to provide more students with richer literacy experiences, which is what we were told when scoring pilots in Albany last year, I totally agree with Paul that doing these four tasks on-demand means nothing in terms of deeper teaching or learning... I realize that different schools are at very different places about the Regents, and I don't know what would really be possible in a large, traditional school. However, if we are going to collectively argue the dangers of the test, it might be helpful to simultaneously think about what alternatives - not just new tasks, but what processes, curriculum, instruction and assessment systems - might look like in all kinds of settings.

**Peggy Maslow, Franklin K. Lane High School:** I miss having students do more personal writing. I still have students do journal writing, but almost everything is geared to the four parts of the new Regents.

**Elaine Avidon, Lehman College, ILS:** I worry that any one-shot testing and its particular formats replace one heuristic with another, again placing a limit on how we ask students to think. Narrowing the range. I want students who are at home in range. Testing limits how we all learn. I think Paul is on to something when he implies that it renders teaching invisible.

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**Robin Migdol Freiman, Christopher Columbus High School:** As a resource room teacher, I see my students are struggling along in their English classes. They are barely able to do the required writing projects as well as read the assigned books. How are they ever going to endure this exam?

**Joe Bellacero:** The one hope I cling to with the new form of the Regents is that it will allow us to start over with the idea that students should be allowed, encouraged and taught to think, because writing is thinking.

*After the new Regents exam was given, Ed Osterman encouraged Writing Project members to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences about how the testing went in their schools. Below are some of the responses.*

**Anita Dutt:** I think the need to grade with six levels makes it harder than necessary and causes some of the subjective grading that may lead to argument. For example, if you are looking at an essay which looks like a "three," you may then peruse the "four" column and find it hard not to view the same essay as a "four." Do other people see this? Is there going to be any opportunity for teachers to give their reactions to "the powers that be" up-state?

**Peggy Maslow:** My problem with the rubric was that a "three" seems to describe a rather poor paper, but a "three" is supposed to be a passing paper. But passing is considered a 55% on this test. Another problem I had with the rubric was that a student's paper could have received different scores on different parts of the rubric and you still had to take a composite, which was very subjective and tricky. I think the grading was subjective, but no one seemed to complain. We were all very stoic.

**Joe Bellacero:** The first day was nearly crushing for me. Despite several training sessions and clearly presented guidelines (at least I thought they were clearly presented and there was a lot of head nodding), I found my colleagues often ignoring the rubric.... At one point a teacher asked me how one of his best students had done. I looked and found that the student had received ones from all four readers. The teacher was shocked. I reviewed the two essays with rubric in hand

and found they were both worthy of fours!!! I reproduced the first paper and presented it to the entire department. The majority of the department gave it marks in the two to five range, although the vast majority were in the three or four range. We went step by step through the rubric and the same people who marked it originally and had forgotten about it all rated it a three or better. We had another reread committee and the results were generally better. I kept wondering what happened. What happens when we are asked to mark in this torturous way? I think there is something seriously wrong here. Does anyone else? All in all, I'd say the marking went more quickly than I had expected and no better than I feared.

**Thomasina Joan LaGuardia, NYCWP teacher-consultant:** I was in a Regents room relieving a teacher when a boy asked me to come to his desk. When I got there, he was

showing me his paper with a rather uncertain handwriting on it and his attempt to reproduce what must have been his teacher's blackboard model essay. He wrote a few words and some long dashes where he should have filled in titles and other information. He asked me, "Miss, is this right?" I was stunned and didn't answer immediately.

"This is what Mr. -- showed us. Is this the right way to do it?" I said, "That's a model, and you have to finish these statements." He said, "Statements? We have to write a paragraph, an essay...." I can't continue telling the story. As I type this I can hardly breathe! The remainder of the conversation made it clear that the boy had no idea he was meant to produce meaningful, connected discourse based on two readings. I realize this is an extreme case, and I did learn from another teacher that the boy is a truant, but the incident brought home to me once again what is wrong with teaching kids a formula.

**Marion Halberg, Dobbs Ferry High School:** I worked with the Dobbs Ferry English Department grading the labor essay and the essays in section two. It seemed to me that they had spent a lot of time grappling with the rubric and really came to a consensus over what score could be given in regards to specific student work. Each essay was graded by two teachers, and each of us frequently referred to the rubric for each paper. In the end, students seemed to score quite

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*The Writing Project listserv  
is for use by current members of the  
New York City Writing Project.*

*Contact Ed Osterman  
([osterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:osterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu)) and  
supply him with your name, home  
address, school and e-mail address.*

consistently across the essays. I found this interesting, and though I tend to rail against standardized testing, I think these results - consistent grading and consistent scores - might be worth discussing in terms of the validity of the rubric.

## In Praise of Linda

*Linda Vereline began working full-time at the New York City Writing Project in September 1990. She first worked with Linette Moorman as co-director of the Junior High School Writing and Learning Project. In Fall 1996 she became Associate Director of the NYCWP, assuming greater responsibilities both locally and nationally and devoting much of her time to the Project's work in middle schools. Upon her leaving, two of her closet colleagues, Sharon Rosenberg and Nancy Mintz, share their thoughts with us.*

## Lessons Learned and Friendships Formed

It started back in '89,  
When I met Linda Vereline;  
From the Writing Project she had come,  
At 210, a grant we had won.

Writing process, writing-to-learn,  
Process writing, dialogues discerned,  
Double-entry, point of view,  
With handouts on strategies and examples, too.

Linda encouraged a turn-about.  
With courses and training, she drew me out;  
A Project teacher-consultant I was to become,  
A Bronx trekker to Lehman, with a twice-a-month run.

Using articles and anecdotes that Linda brought us,  
Units in all disciplines caught us;  
Teachers together in meaningful ways,  
With Linda inspiring and brightening our days.

With evening course debriefings and homecomings delayed,  
Good times with family were sometimes waylaid.  
It gnawed at us both as we did what we must;  
We're grateful to Phil, for his patience and trust.

Working together and working apart,  
Keeping district and school goals close at heart,

Planning, timing, "Would this be best?"  
In late night calls, we put ourselves to the test.

A mentor to me, Linda had become;  
Enamored of her knowledge, I had been won.  
With her friendship, I've been richly rewarded;  
Following in her footsteps, I still feel supported.

Yet, Linda now has taken leave  
Of workshops, meetings and deadlines perceived,  
She's touched so many, from the mainland to Rockaway,  
We hope for Linda's return... someday.

Sharon Rosenberg  
Writing Facilitator  
Community School District 27Q

## Knowing Linda

When I first met Linda Vereline, she was the co-director of the JHS Writing and Learning Project, and I was teaching language arts at Robert F. Wagner JHS. It was inevitable that our paths would cross frequently. Over the past nine years we've worked together closely, coordinating seminars and workshops for middle school teachers.

Three years ago, when I became a full-time teacher-consultant for the Project, Linda became my mentor, helping me to ease into this new role. I can't thank her enough for all the time and effort she put into supporting me as I learned how to work with teachers in the context of their classrooms and schools. It wasn't easy. I missed having my own classroom. Sharing my thoughts with Linda always helped me see things more clearly.

Last year I helped Linda with the district-wide work she had been doing with middle school teachers in Districts 10 and 27. We designed and led monthly meetings for District 10 Social Studies Leadership Teams and held monthly "literacy conversations" with the literacy team members from District 27 middle schools. As usual, I learned a great deal just by listening and watching Linda do her work.

I can't say exactly when our work relationship became a friendship, but I'm glad it happened. Maybe friendship was inevitable. Linda, her husband Phil, and her daughter Kate have often included me in family outings. Without their insisting, I would never have heard the Fourth of July concert at Fort Hamilton or spent time picnicking in Prospect Park before attending a concert. And, of course, there was the exercise class that neither of us would have done alone.

People make life decisions and, consequently, things change. Linda has decided to take some time off from work

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and concentrate on being a full-time mother. I've taken on some of the work she was doing, and I try not to call her too often for help. Our professional relationship has changed, but our friendship is still strong. I miss working with her, but I'm thrilled that she's allowed herself this time.

Nancy Mintz  
New York City Writing Project

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## Steal These Ideas

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When I teach *The Catcher in the Rye* to my sophomore classes, I follow the study of Salinger's work with Nicholas Ray's 1955 classic *Rebel Without a Cause*. In the analysis and comparison/contrast of Holden Caulfield and Jim Stark (James Dean), the students come up with wonderful insights into both of these rebellious teen icons of the 50's. The pressures of today's society create heavy burdens for many of our students to deal with, and they may not compare to the intensity of the world fifty years ago. However, the psychological behaviors, such as acting out to gain attention, depression, acceptance by a group, parental conflicts, and proving your worth, even if it means physical harm or death, all enacted by the film's main character, remain all too evident today. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden Caulfield represents the true icon of teenage angst. Students can work to generate comparisons and contrasts between the two protagonists, and after generating a list of similarities, groups or individuals can develop written or oral presentations of the character traits. In addition, students can examine the symbolism of the colors red and white in both works. Also, an examination of the characters' malaise and isolation is beautifully realized by Ray's use of the Griffith Planetarium throughout the film. The teacher may ask about the use of this setting and what the universe represents, leading to an investigation of humanity's place in the universe.

Gary Eiferman  
UFT Teacher Center

One thing our students have never been taught is how to take notes from an oral presentation. To prepare for the listening section of the ELA Regents exam, I decided to read my students a two-hundred word excerpt at the beginning of each class. I would write a "Your Task" on the board and instruct them to read it. The students had to decide what kind of information they would need to listen for in order to do the task. I chose speeches by General Colin Powell, Neil Simon,

Cathy (of the Cathy comic strip), JFK and other interesting people, and took articles from *Time*. After reading the piece twice, I would go around the room evaluating the results, and then we would discuss what we felt we did best. The early results were not encouraging, but I persisted. As they improved, I added to the length of the readings and had them write essays each time.

Joe Bellacero  
Evander Childs HS

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## What texts have had the greatest impact on your teaching?

Paul Allison is asking Project members to suggest books that they would recommend to a young teacher who was just beginning to think about teaching reading and writing in new ways. Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle*, Peter Elbow's *Writing with Power*, James Moffett's *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, and Louise Rosenblatt's *Literature as Exploration* were just a few of the titles that emerged. What texts would you choose? Why? Let us know by signing on to the listserv or faxing your response to Ed Osterman (718-960-8054). Responses will be published in the next newsletter.

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## Project Notes

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The summer of 1999 is already a distant memory, and the fall semester will end shortly. Here are a few of the lively and exciting activities that have occurred along with some important announcements about friends and colleagues.

### 1999 SUMMER INSTITUTES AND SEMINARS

The 1999 Summer Invitational Institute was co-led by teacher-consultant **Paul Allison** for the second consecutive year. This summer Paul, who now teaches at The International HS: A Charter School at LaGuardia Community College, co-coordinated with **Dusty Miller** of Manhattan Center for Science and Mathematics. **Enora Egland** of The Legacy School for Integrated Studies in Manhattan served as their intern. This summer's institute was structured around an inquiry into the purposes of education. Once again, the Open Institute was specifically designed for middle school teachers; teacher-

consultants **Julie Conason** (currently working as an on-site teacher-consultant for middle schools in District 10 in the Bronx) and **Linda Garcia-Torres**, a humanities teacher at West Side HS in Manhattan, led a group of middle school teachers from Districts 8 and 10 in the Bronx through a reading and writing seminar in which time was devoted to exploring the theme of responsibility for education. We are delighted to note that both Dusty and Linda were participants in the 1998 Summer Invitational Institute. We welcome and value them as coordinators!

Director **Linette Moorman**, on-site teacher-consultants **Nick D'Alessandro** and **Nancy Mintz**, and teacher-consultant **Melanie Hammer** of Nassau Community College conducted a series of all-day workshops for middle school teachers of District 22 in Brooklyn focused on reading and writing.

Two new endeavors were initiated last summer that have the potential to benefit all Project members. Excited by the work done by the participants of the three advanced literature seminars held from 1996-1998, directors **Linette Moorman** and **Marcie Wolfe** urged Associate Director **Ed Osterman** to assemble a team of teachers to put together a publication that combines the suggestions, bibliographies, and ideas from each of the previous three summer's anthologies. A team of five teachers, all former participants and/or coordinators of the literature seminars, collaborated tirelessly over a two-week period in July to create a beautiful and useful publication. We want to both thank and salute our colleagues responsible for this work. **Lisa Lauritzen** of Erasmus Hall Campus School for Humanities and the Performing Arts in Brooklyn and **Sarah Katz** of Long Island City HS in Queens coordinated the group's work. Their team included **Carmen Bardeguet-Brown**, currently on sabbatical at The Principals Institute at Bank Street College, **Jennie Chen** of Stuyvesant HS in Manhattan and **Barbara Sheinmel** of Bayside HS in Queens. **Barbara Martz** and **Ed Osterman**, both of whom had coordinated one of the summer seminars, assisted periodically. When this book is completed and published, we think all Project members will be both proud and grateful.

In our efforts to integrate technology more fully into our classrooms and into the daily work of the Project, **Ed Osterman** invited Project members to become part of a leadership team responsible for exploring the broader uses for new computer technology and software. Ed and six Project teachers spent a week at the Center for Educational Technology at Middlebury, Vermont. Under the guidance of **Hector Vila**, a Project member who is now Associate Director of Distance Education and Teacher Training at the Center, the group was exposed to new software that supports the creation of fully

interactive lessons and units. The group plans to share what they have done and learned at our spring conference. These teachers include **Martin Brown** of Long Island City HS in Queens, **Marcy Jones** formerly of Theodore Roosevelt HS in the Bronx, **Teresa Sullivan** of John Bowne HS in Queens, **Sue Schaller** of Professional Performing Arts School in Manhattan, **Inez West** of Legacy HS in Manhattan and **Matt Wildman** of Bushwick HS in Brooklyn. During this school year, the team was joined by **Bo Wu** of Murray Bertraum HS in Manhattan and **Paul Allison**.

Another technology initiative was also begun at the start of the summer. Members of the NYCWP (**Marcie Wolfe**, **Elaine Avidon**, **Julie Conason**, **Nancy Mintz**, **Ed Osterman**, **Inez West**, **Matt Wildman**, and **Bo Wu**) are collaborating with several of our colleagues at Educational Video Center on a project investigating the ways in which video and computers can support and promote the development of literacy.

*Share your thoughts and professional experiences by writing for the NYCWP Newsletter!*

- *What you have tried in the classroom recently and what was the result?*
- *What instructional challenge did you face and how did you handle it?*
- *What's changed about your teaching or your classroom? How and why did it happen?*
- *What successful lesson or approach might you share with colleagues?*
- *What have you read or seen recently that other colleagues might want to know about?*
- *What have you been thinking about lately with regard to teaching and learning?*
- *What student or class has raised issues for you that you might want to explore in writing?*

*We will work with you! Just get started! You can submit your pieces by mail or e-mail ([osterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:osterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu)).*

In the spring of 1999, NYCWP members **Claudette Green**, now teaching at Spring Valley HS, **Gail Kleiner** of Middle College HS in Queens, **Andrea Swenson** of Newcomer HS in Queens, and **Ronni Tobman-Michelen** of Theodore Roosevelt HS in the Bronx co-led a new collaborative initiative between the NYCWP, the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors and CUNY's Office of Academic Affairs. This initiative, directed by **Marcie Wolfe** and **Sondra Perl** (former director of the NYCWP), along with three other CUNY faculty members, was called *Looking Both Ways* and brought together high school and college teachers of writing for six Saturdays of learning about each other's practice, assignments, student work and assessments. Many WP teachers around the city participated. This work will resume in the spring of 2000.

#### AWARDS, PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

Congratulations are due to several Project members. First, we want to congratulate **Ray Durney**, a long-time Project member and director of our "sister" program, the New York City Mathematics Project, on the advent of their 10th Anniversary. Ray celebrated this event with colleagues and supporters at a lovely reception in the gem room at the Museum of Natural History in Manhattan in October. The event brought together members of both the Writing and Math Projects, as well as friends from Lehman College and the New York City Board of Education.... Congratulations to **Nancy Mintz** on her new position as co-director of Middle School Programs for the NYCWP. Nancy's extensive classroom experience and professional development work in middle schools will prove an invaluable asset in this leadership role.... **Gail Kleiner** has been appointed as Assistant Principal Instruction and Curriculum at Middle College HS in Queens, and **Ronni Tobman-Michelen** is currently serving as Acting Assistant Principal Supervision English at Theodore Roosevelt HS in the Bronx. We all know how much they have to contribute to colleagues.... **Alysoun Roach** of Bryant HS in Queens, who has participated in our inservice program at Bryant as well as in *Looking Both Ways*, was named Queens Poetry Teacher of the Year.... **Jane Berkowicz**, currently serving as Bilingual/ESL Liaison to the Alternative High School Superintendent's Office, has a chapter entitled "How Are You Doing? Using Student Progress Journals for Self-Assessment" in the new TESOL book, *New Ways in Teaching English at the Secondary Level*.... In November, **Diane Giorgi** was honored with the Ely Trachtenberg Award for her "diligent, untiring and outstanding work" as UFT Chapter Leader at Queens Vocational HS.

Several of our colleagues presented work at the NCTE Convention in Denver this past November. **Nancy Mintz**, **Grace Raffaele**, who now teaches at the new Life Sciences Secondary School in Manhattan, and former NYCWP Associate Director **Linda Vereline** presented the work they've done in middle schools on literacy-related issues on a panel entitled "Collaborative Conversations for Literacy Development: Possibilities for Classrooms and Districts." Nancy and Grace shared the work they did with literature circles in Grace's English classes at IS 143 in Washington Heights. Linda discussed the work she did on the ELA standards with teams of teachers, staff developers and administrators from middle schools in Community School District 27 in Queens. **Marcie Wolfe** was the chair for the panel.... **Nick D'Alessandro**, **Andrea Swenson** of Newcomer HS in Queens, and **Melanie Hammer** of Nassau Community College invited participants to write and share at their workshop, "Queer Teaching and Learning: Telling Our Stories." Nick served as chair for the presentation.

#### DEPARTURES AND ARRIVALS WITHIN THE NYCWP

In addition to the departure of **Linda Vereline**, whose work is celebrated elsewhere in this issue, the Project staff experienced the departure of two dear and long-time colleagues. **Claudette Green**, who has served as an on-site teacher-consultant in Bronx and Manhattan high schools since 1992, decided to return to the classroom. She is now teaching at Spring Valley HS where the Assistant Principal of English is teacher-consultant **Eileen Cuff**. As so many of us know, Claudette brought great care, thought and grace to her work with teachers in a variety of schools. In the Bronx, she served teachers and students at Taft, Clinton and Gompers High Schools, and in Manhattan she worked at Park West and A. Philip Randolph High Schools. Claudette worked for several years at both Taft and Park West, making important contributions to literacy practices at each school. We already miss her, but wish her well in her return to the classroom.... We also want to acknowledge the retirement of **Alan Stein**. Alan has worked tirelessly and with enormous skill and dedication in a range of schools in his tenure as on-site teacher-consultant. Under the guidance of **Helen Ogden**, Alan was the social studies teacher in our Language and Learning Core at Bayside HS before joining the Project full-time. In Queens, he has influenced teachers at Aviation and Queens Vocational High Schools (where he worked for three years) as well as at Jamaica and Forest Hills High Schools. For the past five years, as part of the Students at the Center initiative, Alan has worked closely with both the administration and staff of the

new Erasmus Hall Campus School for Humanities and the Performing Arts in Brooklyn. His work there has been transformative, and many of the Project's approaches can be seen throughout the school. We are fortunate that we will continue to see Alan on a part-time basis throughout this school year as he brings closure to his work at Erasmus and serves the Project in a variety of other ways.

For the past three years **Harriet Stein** has worked part-time as an on-site teacher-consultant for a range of Manhattan high schools (and several small Bronx high schools). Harriet has traveled throughout the borough assisting and advising school-based literacy teams and has coordinated various large-scale Project conferences and year-long seminars in literacy. Harriet has brought great intelligence and commitment to her work with teachers. She has decided to take this year off to be with her children. It is a well-earned rest and we wish her well....The Project also wants to thank **Arlyne Tessler** for her contributions as on-site teacher-consultant last spring to several small Bronx high schools. Arlyne is now the Assistant Principal Supervision English at Herbert H. Lehman HS in the Bronx. We wish her much success.

As people leave, others join us. We are delighted that **Felicia George** has joined our ranks as co-director of Middle School Programs. Felicia will be working with Nancy Mintz. Felicia comes to the organization with a rich background in literacy work, particularly in youth and after-school programs....We want to welcome long-time Project member **Laura Schwartzberg** as a full-time teacher-consultant. Laura, who has taught at PS 234 in Manhattan, brings a wealth of experience to her new position and we are delighted to have her with us full-time at long last! Laura is joining **Linda Garcia-Torres**, who has left West Side HS to carry out the Project's work in District 8 in the Bronx. It is wonderful to have Linda with us as well. She has been a participant in and a co-coordinator of various inservice seminars, served as an intern in the 1998 Summer Invitational, and co-coordinated the Open Institute this past July. Her warmth and enthusiasm and many of years of classroom teaching at both the middle and high school level will be a great asset to teachers of District 8. What a great team Laura and Linda will make....We also want to celebrate the arrival of **Diane Giorgi** to our ranks of on-site teacher-consultants working full-time for the Project. As a social studies teacher at Queens Vocational HS, Diane was greatly influenced by her work with **Alan Stein**. She has participated in many Project activities, and for the past several years Diane has collaborated with **Suzanne Valenza** on our

Saturday program for students and teachers in several small Bronx high schools. Diane's knowledge of writing and interdisciplinary teaching, as well as her many years of experience as a social studies teacher, will bring variety to our group....We also want to welcome back **Susannah Thompson**. Before taking a child care leave, Susannah had been active in the Junior High School Writing and Learning Project. She taught English at IS 70 and at Art and Design HS in Manhattan. Susannah will be working two days a week at Brandeis HS in Manhattan as an on-site teacher-consultant. Susannah's experience as both a high school teacher and adjunct faculty in basic composition at Lehman College will benefit all who work with her this year. Welcome back, Susannah!

Long-time Project member **Patsy Wooters** of Bronx Regional HS is spending this school year at the Project in our Teacher Sabbatical Program. Patsy will be assisting in a broad range of initiatives as she studies professional development work.

Much thanks to **Becky Walzer** of **Urban Academy** for her work on the newsletter these past several years. We welcome **Grace Raffaele** who has now joined the editorial staff.

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The New York City Writing Project is a program  
of the Institute for Literacy Studies, Lehman College, CUNY.

New York City Writing Project  
LEHMAN COLLEGE  
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250 Bedford Park Boulevard West  
Bronx, New York 10468-1589

Nonprofit Org.  
U.S. Postage Paid  
Bronx, New York  
Permit No. 632

New York City Writing Project  
**NEWSLETTER**

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