



A Note from the Editors

We are pleased to be publishing our second issue, and would like to thank all of you who submitted material. We expect to publish more issues this year keeping pace with events with which the New York City Writing Project is involved. We would like to keep our members informed about the impact the writing project is having. Therefore, we would appreciate your sending us material for future use. Please send your contributions to: Newsletter, New York City Writing

Project, Lehman College, Bronx, NY 10468.

We would like to thank Lynn Kearney and Phyllis Tashlik for their editorial assistance and Johanna Mosca for contributing information. Special thanks to Ann Daniels in the Writing Project office at Lehman College for typing this issue.

Toby Bird, Nassau Community College
Michael Simon, Literacy Center

Project: Self Study

Connie Anestis was a member of an in-service course in the spring of 1982. She teaches at St. Barnabas High School in the Bronx.

and did write, and didn't dare make a mistake or cross out or erase or misspell or misplace a comma. The motivation was external - fear of the ruler, the eighth grade Regents, and rewriting ten times for homework.

I entered kindergarten in the late forties with a head full of letters, numbers, nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and Robert Louis Stevenson's poetry - all acquired during four years as an only child. I loved to sing - and knew the words. I loved to color - and stayed within the lines.

More nuns in college, rabbis in grad school. How could they all speak the same language? Have the same theories? And somehow it worked. Was the underlying value the consistency? The absence of contradictory theories? The certainty of it all?

Of course, there were the little defeats. One day while we were singing, and I was belting out some pious hymn, I was told by one of the nuns, (finger in SHH! position), "Just move your lips, dear." This didn't exactly squelch my love for singing, just moved it to the shower. And when my drawings were received with, "That's lovely, dear, what is it?" I just drew less and colored more. No big deal!

By the mid sixties I had my own classroom and a large desk facing rows of adolescent girls who looked and dressed and spoke and acted exactly as I had a few years earlier. And convinced of the rightness of it all, I taught the one truth, the one method, exactly as I had been taught - and it was good.

Writing. When and where did that begin? First grade, second grade, every grade. We wrote and wrote, but only after we copied and copied, and learned the rules. Nothing in those days about freewriting. draw a picture first, do a dialogue into a cassette recorder - and no articles or books on "Why Johnny Can't Write." Johnny - and all his classmates could

But now a course, a writing course, a course I freely took - threatened me with a rare form of mid-life crisis. Far worse than gray hair and capped teeth, this threat. Chaos is garbage is good, fragments are fine, even run-ons can be right. Form follows function, and if the function is to feel, then form can go - no, never - well, maybe. And suddenly I wanted to try it.

cont.

I meet a new Moses and study his commandment to go forth and create chaos. I read Peter Elbow's WRITING WITHOUT TEACHERS, and when I reach page 31, I discover, "The reason it feels like chaos and disorientation to write freely is because you are giving up a good deal of control." I cringe because I do not like chaos.

My own attempt at writing poetry is just that - an attempt. The decision to make the attempt was far more difficult than the actual undertaking. Breaking away from prose, from paragraphing, was not so earth shaking as I had expected. I was not struck by bolts of thunder and lightning when I wrote my first non-sentence. And since my first piece of verse was on the same topic as an earlier prose selection, I was able to compare the two - both the process and the product.

The prose piece came quite naturally, as I enjoy story telling and do a good deal of it in my teaching. Humor, more tongue-in-cheek than slapstick, also was easy, for that too is often a teaching tool. And the subject lent itself readily. The prose form, at that point, was the only form I could consider. And so I wrote. But I was not to get off so easily. There was to be a second assignment and a third. I got little consolation from the assurances that the second "point of view" would flow from the first. I put my trust only in what is carefully planned - never in flow. But flow it did and took me and many of my convictions with it. Something that resembled verse was happening. Words were forming lines, not sentences. Lines were forming stanzas, not paragraphs.

Whatever - it happened again: at a faculty meeting, during a study hall, on a plane to Florida, in the doctor's waiting room. And

in the middle of a fit of late April sneezing, a third "point of view" was born, this one inspired by E. E. Cummings. All things are possible...

Some fear is still there. Ann Berthoff, in THE MAKING OF MEANING, says, "...the fear of losing control is very real: having an agenda is, after all, a pretty good defense..." (p. 35) And I have always been an agenda person, an outline person. I have never walked into a meeting without having distributed a detailed agenda a day earlier - never, that is, until this week. The meeting went just fine. My classes have always been required to hand in an outline along with their essays. Lately I've said "forget it." As Berthoff says, "...chaos is scary... learning to write is a matter of learning to tolerate ambiguity." (pp. 70-71) Perhaps this has been my problem, the inhibiting factor, all along. I'm not sold on chaos and garbage. I think, however, that I'm now willing to do and to have my students do many of the exercises described by Elbow and by Moffett (ACTIVE VOICE), and demonstrated in the course this semester.

As I became less fearful, less inhibited in my writing, I found I was able to try many of the techniques with my students. I had done free writing for years, but simply as a warm-up. Now I encourage students to look to their freewriting for key words, phrases, ideas that they could use for "real" writing. I did a memory chain and they loved it. But more than that, they did some of their best writing after that exercise. Next semester I will even have them draw, and I will be sure never to say, "that's lovely, dear, what is it?"

Connie Anestis
St. Barnabas H.S.

What You Have Heard Is True?

This past summer the New York City Writing Project ran an advanced summer institute for teachers who had already attended the basic summer institute. Bob Whitney, currently enrolled in the doctoral program in English Education at N.Y.U., did a presentation that

involved writing a piece modeled after the tone and style of a professional prose piece Bob had handed out. The piece started with the line: "What you have heard is true." Here is Bob's version of what went on in the Advanced Seminar based on his presentation.

"ADVANCED"* SUMMER INSTITUTE '82

*(read "remedial," for those who didn't get it the first time.)

What you have heard is true. We were there. They held it in a room. The room was in the library. The library was at Lehman College. We sat in a circle. We took out pencils and paper. Some of us were nervous about what we were going to do. There was some noise as we rustled and shuffled about to get comfortable. It was like sprinters getting set in the starting blocks. There is no other way to say this. If I said it some other way it would be something else. The sun bounced up into the sky like a ball on a string. There were guards in blue uniforms at all the gates and doorways. Food was prohibited. Robin brought in a cup of coffee

under her coat. Outside the sky darkened and rain shot toward the earth in large pellets like liquid Quaker Oats. Steve prepared the slide projectors and tape recorders. There was a pencil and pad on the desk beside him. "I'm going to take you on a little trip," he said. Arnold Palmer lined up a shot with his three iron. Sondra picked up the printed sheet in front of her. "Writing is recursive, and teaching is contextual," she began. "Shake out your hands, take a deep breath, and settle comfortable into your chair. Make room for what you don't yet know." Some of the pens made little squiggles of black ink on the white and yellow pages. Some of the pens poised themselves in the air.

Robert Whitney
Expository Writing Program
New York University

After The Beep

This is the Preston residence
and this is she speaking. Sorry
I'm not broadcasting live
but do leave a message and I
or my machine
will get back to you
or your machine. Please wait
until the third cannonade
from Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture
has completed its volley
and the strains of the Marseillaise
begin to stir faintly in the background
before starting your message.
Kindly repress the impulse
to be cute or cryptic;
on the other hand
don't make it ten years long either.
I would also ask you to refrain
from rhetorical questions
and subordinate clauses—simple declaratives
will do fine.
Just be yourself, keeping in mind
this is the late twentieth century
and literary flourishes
tend to disgust.
Now, if you're the guy I met out jogging,
I'm sorry but forget it,

it was all a mistake and anyway
I'm into squash now.
If this is my sister,
before you even begin I'm tired
of your whining
and how many times do I have to tell you
to make a clean break
with the creep.
If this should be about an appointment
or interview which could advance
my career or in any way redound
to my having more of anything
please speak distinctly
and don't make any decisions
until I can process your message.
Lastly, if you've gotten my number
from any other source
except me personally,
you'd better have a good story.
So, until I get back to you
have a nice day or,
should I decide to ignore your call,
a nice rest of your life.

Alan Devenish
Hunter College

Process Notebooks In J.H.S.

Phyllis Tashlik teaches eighth graders at Mahattan East, an alternative junior high school in District 4. She asked her students to comment on the "Process books" that they have been keeping. (NOTE: Process books refer to ongoing private notebooks in which anything that is not "product" is written.)

Gregg Goldstein: I feel the process book has been very helpful simply because it's unlike anything I've ever tried before to help me write. The lack of structure makes me feel more comfortable writing and loosens me up and gives me ideas as I write. The most helpful method for revising is for three people to simply discuss the work. We should talk about it, not write about it.

Elissa Farrow: I think the process books are good to express your feelings and bring out things you didn't know you were feeling, but it doesn't help in writing. Although it brings up good writing topics, when you are writing a paper to give in to the teacher, you close up and don't feel you can express those private feelings to a teacher (or anyone). So in the end, you don't really use the material in the process books. I also think working in couples is extremely helpful because the other person brings out things you didn't see yourself.

Chandra Taylor: The kind of writing I like to do in my process book is inner thought writing. When we do it, we have to relax and search our inner selves for ideas. Actually, it's easier

to do because you pick the subject that you want, and you can say what you want. The writing that I don't think is helpful is automatic writing. You don't have a chance to think or sort out what you want to say.

Kerry Adelson: I have found the process books an extremely helpful way to get myself writing fairly well. Reading your work in a group of three is also very helpful. They come up with suggestions that you yourself couldn't come up with. Sometimes you know that something is wrong with a certain section you're working on but you're not sure what and it helps when you read aloud to other people because often they can spot what is wrong.

Patricia Torres: When we write in our process books what I especially like is the automatic writing because at first you write anything, but then as you write, things pile up in your head and you can write them down. I also like when we close our eyes and relax and let our thoughts flow because it lets you see things clearly and you can get more into what you write. Another method that helps is when we write something and then share with three or four people because when you read aloud you find errors that you didn't find when you read it to yourself. Also the people you work with can help you by sharing their opinions.

Phyllis Tashlik
Manhattan East J.H.S.

NYSEC Conference

On October 15, 1982, Ellen Shatz, Johanna Mosca, and Perry Green presented teaching techniques at the Thirty-Second Annual Conference of the New York State English Council, in Syracuse, New York.

The panel -- "WRITING READING: APPROACHES TO USING CLASSROOM PUBLICATIONS TO GENERATE LEARNING (K-13)" -- presented various methods and values of helping students publish their writing.

Ellen Shatz showed slides of her fifth grade writers at work at P.S. 41 and spoke

about "Publishing to Learn Skills in Elementary School." Johanna Mosca shared strategies for using publications to motivate writing communities in her classes at Grace Dodge Vocational High School and distributed a variety of student booklets. Perry Green described his college teaching experience with "Student Process Sharing, Group Revision and Publication in Non-Traditional Education."

The panelists enjoyed their session with the NYSEC participants and are now submitting their publications panel proposal for the State Education Conference on Writing to be held in Albany in May.

Channel 13-Writing Project

The New York City Writing Project will be participating in a Channel 13 (WNET) writing project funded by a grant from NEH and directed by Jane Garmey. On January 21-22, 1983, Liz Francklow, Johanna Mosca, Cail Kleiner, Marilyn Wiener, will attend a two-day workshop led by Alice Trillin and Dixie Goswami. The purpose is to review and evaluate a film on the writing process entitled Before The First Word. Following the workshop, the three will use the film in their writing classes and report the results of the experience to Channel 13.

A Noteworthy Announcement

At the NCTE Annual Convention, held this year in Washington, D.C. an evening session entitled the American Studies Conference: Cultural Patterns and Rhythms of the 1950's drew an enthusiastic throng. It took place on November 20, 1982 from 10:00 pm to 1:00 am in the Maryland Room of the Sheraton Hotel. The seminar facilitator, Kenny the "K" from the University of Georgia, judged Sondra Perl and Michael Simon winners of the Rock and Roll Dance Contest. The duo "shocked the house" with their terpsichore done to a classic rendition of "Rock Around The Clock" by Bill Hailey. The victors were awarded a pair of bobby socks. These are now on display in the Project office.

Pen Pal Project

A Pen-Pal Project is underway between students at Grace Dodge and Adlai Stevenson High Schools. Students in Johanna Mosca's English classes at Dodge are very excited about communicating with their pen-pals in James Fairclough's and Noreen Perlmutter's classes at Stevenson. The three NYCWP colleagues started the pen-pal exchange to provide a real audience for school writing, and now participants at both schools are impatient to receive answers to their second letters and to write back. Most of their letters request: "P.S. Write Soon."

Both schools are preparing group photographs of pen-pals because they are so eager to see who is writing to them. The teachers, students and administrators at each school seem pleased with the enthusiasm generated by the project.

