



The New York City Writing Project Newsletter

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A Note From the Editors

The NYCWP Newsletter began four years ago this spring. As the Project has grown in size, scope, and commitment, the newsletter has attempted, as a professional journal, to chronicle our development. We consider essays, book reviews, letters, Project information, curriculum projects and personal writing by teachers and students essential to our burgeoning community of writers. Ideas and open discussion are basic to the Project and our still fledgling periodical needs more in the way of contributions from our readers to improve its caliber.

A bit of history. In our first newsletter, we published an interview with Donald Murray entitled, "Donald Murray Talks About Writing Fiction." This "interview with myself," originally presented at a summer institute, was revised by him for the newsletter and later was published in the National Writing Project Network Newsletter. Last year an article entitled, "Diary of a Writing Unit," by Milt Polsky, a WTC participant, was given a wider readership as it, too, was republished in the NWP newsletter. The widening circulation of newsletter pieces demonstrates that there is a larger audience out there interested in what our newsletter has to offer. (Our newsletter is sent to many other Writing Project sites and they, in turn, send us theirs. In our Winter 1984 edition, we reprinted an interesting piece from the East Asian Writing Project newsletter. We're not provincial, are we?)

The continuing development of the NYCWP newsletter depends on how we expand our universe of discourse, to borrow a phrase from James Moffett. I hope that next fall even more voices will be heard in our pages.

Have a splendid summer enjoying beaches or mountains, reading, relaxing and yes, considering pieces you want to write for the newsletter. Meanwhile, the newsletter staff will be throwing darts and downing pints of bitter in Waltham

Cross (see Project Notes), thinking of you, and anticipating a wealth of material for our next edition.

Michael Simon
Literacy Center

The Writing Process Meets Adult Literacy

My adult literacy writing group meets each week at the St. Agnes branch of the New York Public Library, 81st Street and Amsterdam Avenue, an airy, open space where books line three of the walls and a battery of computers glows against the fourth. People group around the computers or cluster at the round tables which are placed throughout the space. There is a constant hum at the library, of computer printers, typewriters, telephones, voices, squeaky magic markers, accompanied by occasional lulls, when people are silently reading or writing.

Our group consists of six adults between the ages of 22 and 62 who read, according to a preliminary test, between the second and fourth grade levels. Although its make-up is unusual for a Writing Project class--adults, after all, who have never finished school and who are still beginning readers and writers--our group is, in the best spirit of the Writing Project, a community of writers and learners, in which the participants feel a strong connection not only to their writing but to each other. There is a shared vulnerability among these people: each person in the group has essentially done a very brave thing. Each has come alone, and each has decided to admit to strangers what he or she has been hiding from friends all along.

"Before we do anything, I have something to tell you privately. I am illiterate," Milton tells me slowly, making sure I understand. "And do you know how old I am? I am forty-five years old. I look young, but I am forty-five years

old. I cannot read or write. I thought you should know." He has been embarrassed before. He decided to control the situation by saying it first, before I "found out" and exposed him to the others. He thinks he is the only one.

At our first meeting we huddle around one of the tables. "We're going to go around the table for introductions. Say your name and anything else you want to tell us--where you work, or what you like to do, whatever you feel comfortable saying." Everyone looks down, no eye contact. Before I come over to start the group, they are all sitting together but avoiding each other's eyes. "It's really hard to keep your head twisted away from everyone else's, isn't it?" I joke with them later on. "It hurts, right?" They say who they are and then one says why he came, what he wants. Then the others join in. They talk about their fear, their isolation, hiding their secret from friends, employers, family.

"I came here because I want to read a newspaper and talk about it with other people."

"I don't want to depend on mens, I don't want mens to take advantage of me, you know?"

"My son said I should come."

"I thought either I came here, or go the other way, turn to drugs and all. It could happen, I could do that."

"I'm retired now, so I thought, it's time."

"I write songs all the time in my head. But I forget them. I want to be able to write them down."

And then Milton again, this time to everyone. "All of you should know, I cannot read or write."

I explain that we'll be working primarily on writing, but that I'll be bringing in some reading work as it's needed. Eventually they will be scheduled for a reading group two other nights a week (where they will also be doing some writing). I assure them that they will be writing this evening (a promise that's met with a groan and some rolled up eyeballs), but that we'll talk some more first. This will be the pattern for our sessions--talking, maybe a mini-

lesson, writing, and then more talking. I ask them, What's difficult for you when you write? How do you deal with those difficulties?

For the people in this group, writing is equated with spelling. They all agree that spelling is the main hurdle: they know they've got it wrong and they get stumped. One or two mention relying on a dictionary for each word they need to spell. Another shows all of us his laminated pages of spelling words. Milton volunteers that he always carries the same book with him, and when he needs a word, he searches for it among the unfamiliar pages. In the past, they all agree, spelling has been enough of an obstacle to cause them to just stop writing.

"How does stopping to figure out a spelling affect the rest of the piece you're writing?" I ask.

"I forget everything I was going to say."

"I never say what I really want. I change the words to ones I can spell and then the meaning isn't right. But I don't know what to do. I just don't like it."

"You know, it's not just the spelling, either. I know a lot of words. When I see them, I recognize them. But I don't know how to use them myself. I use words that don't fit right and then when I see a different word, I say to myself, 'That's the word I wanted,' but I can't get it myself."

I ask, what strategies do you use to get beyond these feelings? Is there anything that you do that helps you finish what you start when you have trouble with spelling? I show them some of Sondra Perl's samples of children's invented spelling, which we read aloud together. I ask what they notice about the words. They notice that they're wrong, but they can read the writing anyway, and they notice that they like the writing, too. I ask if they think they could do that, "invent" the spelling of words they're not sure about. They agree that they could. We spend a few moments on the word "invent" and on what an inventor does. Milton interrupts to recommend the book he carries as a great repository of words. He's getting nervous.

I ask, what if you don't know how to invent a spelling? What would you do then? Mr. Wilks mentions that he leaves a space if he doesn't know a word and fills it in later when he can ask someone. Building from his point, I write a sentence on a flip chart and leave most of a word out: "I can r__ a bike." They all read it back to me. "How did you know which word I meant?" I ask.

"We got it from the other words," they answer.

"Oh. I see. So you mean you can write an initial letter if you know it, and then leave a blank (maybe a long blank for a long word and a short blank for a short word) and you still might be able to read it back to me later? Then we could fill in the missing words together." They are more suspicious of this, but agree to try.

Finally, there's nothing else to "teach" that evening. It's time to write. I'm amused to hear myself say familiar Writing Project words in this unfamiliar situation: "Ask yourself, what can I write about this evening? What things are on my mind that I would want to put in writing? List some things, either on paper or in your head, and then when you're ready and you've chosen something to write about, just begin. I'll come around after a while to see how you're doing." They think for a minute and then get started. I wait for five minutes, doing my own writing, and then I go around, asking whether they'd like to read back their writing to me or continue. During the forty minutes of writing time, I visit briefly with everyone. Here's some of what I see:

I word light to lown how to rade the new papy. be it so hart to read it. I am trying to tell my silt to hang in deer becuse you will make it. to night its a wo _____ f _____ ing.

And another:

I Went to Class to Day We talked about red and writing. We look at the Writing that we can Put on P_p_. the P____ p__ in my Class is Good P____p____ we

talked we talked about _____ Writing I think _____ Writing will h_____ me to uner _____.

After we all finish and reassemble, we talk about how it felt to do the writing. They had struggled, they say, but it wasn't as hard as they thought, and they were surprised that the spelling strategies had worked. They mention that while they were writing they thought of things they'd like to write about later on-- letters home to Jamaica, the story of being a soldier in Italy during World War II, stories about people they knew. But most of them had, this evening, written something about being in the literacy program. I had told them, they remind me, to write about what was on their minds.

Gerard, Vera, Carlos, Sandra, Milton, and Mr. Wilks have been coming to the library for two months now, and have become a very tight group. They are willing to struggle with their writing, some liking it more than others, but I think what they really come for is the talk. At our first meeting, Sandra had said, "I don't talk to no one. I keep my mouth shut so no one can say I'm stupid. So no one takes advantage." She talks a lot in this group. She and the others will go along with my crazy need to hand out folders and set people to work as long as they know we'll all talk at some point--about writing, or reading, or what's happened in life that week.

Often the writing done by the group sparks our conversations. The first round of published pieces in March leads to a number of discussions which have become recurring themes in our talk and in the writing--living in other countries, working for other people, trusting friends. Much has been written about the isolation of marginally literate adults, who are cut off not only from the information to be gotten from a print world, but often from other people, who they fear may be potential sources of humiliation for them, or possible predators. It is not surprising, then, that although the topic of friendship is of great interest to everyone, only one person in the group, Gerard, mentions belonging to a set,

identifying with a group of peers. The rest seem more solitary, having one important relative in their lives, if any-one at all: Vera lives for her son, a college student; Milton depends entirely upon his wife; Sandra travels only to her job and to the library, never goes "out," trusts only the aunt she lives with. Carlos and Mr. Wilks mention no one, talk about friendship in the abstract. Discussions soar and circle back. I push a bit, trying to return to the ostensible reason for our being together: What are you learning about yourself? How do you read? How do you write?

Sometimes the conversations help to define writing topics. When Sandra returns to class after going on job interviews, we all ask, did you get a job? "Yeah," she says, "but I don't think I like it. You work and work and for what? They pay me almost nothing. They just keeping you down. They don't give you a chance." There's lots of agreement around the table. Gerard, who has also just gotten a job he doesn't like, agrees with her, but doesn't feel beaten--he knows it's just temporary, he says. When his reading and writing get better, he'll go after a better job. In the meantime, he says, "I keep my head up high." Mr. Wilks offers advice, "You just stay with it now, uh huh? You got to start someplace. It don't mean you have to stay, but it could get better. And you're young." "Mmmm," Vera agrees. Sandra decides to write the story of her two interviews, for a job she wanted but didn't get, and for the job she has just begun. The group, veterans of many interviews, is anxious to read her story when she finishes.

Now that most of the group members have become more comfortable with their own writing, we end our sessions with some reading and responding to pieces in progress. When a writer reads, the rest of us listen very closely (something which they do better than I as listening has been their most important avenue to information), respond to what we hear in the piece, make predictions about the direction of the piece from what we hear (a reading strategy which I'm reinforcing),

and ask the author questions about parts we do not yet understand. Having had practice hearing and telling the stories which grow out of a life's experiences, these adults feel quite confident responding to the narratives of others. I take the group's process and revision discussions for granted now, although I was surprised at first at how similar they can be to writing discussions I've led in teacher in-service workshops. And, they have more experience than myself and my colleagues at getting things wrong and needing to try again and again; I suspect that this is one reason why, unlike many of us, they do not balk at revision.

As in other writing groups I've been in, sometimes conversations do veer off. One reason for this, in writing groups of teachers or high school students as well as in this group, is because the responders react as consumers of the text, rather than as the writer's helpers. In a group of beginning readers, I don't think that this is a negative development. Rarely have they had the opportunity to enjoy someone else's writing and talk with other people about its effect on them. I want them to understand that pleasure is a legitimate reason for reading and make the connection between getting that pleasure and giving it through their own writing. So, when Sandra writes about riding on a New York subway for the first time with her father and Gerard launches into a story about losing his father on the subway when he was a little boy, I explain that Sandra has done something powerful in her writing; she has triggered a response in Gerard. Sandra's writing made Gerard associate, connect to related ideas. This is what happens when we read ourselves; this is what we want readers to do when they read our writing. When we write and revise our pieces, we need to think about what response we want to evoke in an audience.

* * * *

For every lovely moment at the library, there are the dozens of problems typical to adult literacy teaching. The sweetness I could feel after a great high school class is missing from this. Here,

a sense of crisis permeates everything-- it's in the group's intense desire to make immediate, recognizable progress, in their recurring doubts about themselves

me, in their real-life worlds outside the St. Agnes branch. Often their responsibilities, habits, families, and associates conspire against their success. Homework is impossible because their time is already precious, or because their work at the library is being kept a secret from the people they live with. And learning for them is often hard and slow. I feel the pressure. What do I do about Milton, who is on the edge, threatening to quit every week? His wife agrees with him that all this writing is not going to help, that what he needs is lists of words to memorize. How much improvement will Mr. Wilks really make at his age? With his difficulties, shouldn't he be practicing the letters of the alphabet? How can I get to everyone in two hours? Do I know enough about beginning readers to help them with their writing? It's the anxiety all teachers face--am I doing enough? Do I know what I'm doing?" I admit that I'm a little overwhelmed.

I am noticing, though, in this first attempt at teaching writing to adult basic readers, glimmers of the effect of a writing process approach on the group's attitudes about writing, on their image of themselves as language controllers, and on the amount and quality of writing they produce. I see Gerard bringing in four drafts of a piece about his friend Jimmy and explaining to the group how he changed his mind about expanding or deleting certain parts, and Sandra trying out three or four beginnings for a piece. I notice that now, when Mr. Wilks stumbles over a blank in his writing and doesn't remember the word he wanted, he then charges ahead to the rest of the sentence, remembers and returns to the missing word. I read the poems in the notebook which Carlos has started carrying. But it is still too soon to know how important any of these developments are to their achieving the kind of literacy which would make them more autonomous, satisfied people.

Sometimes I get the feeling that they

would come each Tuesday evening whether I showed up or not. But each might not come if any of the others disappeared. These are strong, resilient people trying to change their lives. What matters on Tuesday evenings, first, is the support they get from each other for the risks they're taking. In one case, this support is the only encouragement in the man's life. In other cases, it supplements the one person--the aunt or roommate or son--who urges them on, but usually that person is a reader already, a success, not someone who shares what it feels like to be learning. Sharing the struggle keeps them sitting tightly together during writing time, reading aloud to each other, surreptitiously asking for spellings. These are very optimistic people. They recognize in each other their own hope; they come every week to see it again and again in the process of learning to read and write.

Marcie Wolfe
HS Support Services

Teaching a Computer Course in Language Arts

Since my first real encounter with a computer began in late 1983, I felt somewhat threatened when I was asked to teach a graduate course at Brooklyn College in "Computers in Language Arts" in the spring, 1985 term. But as I thought about it, I began to see that my own hostility with computers occurred because of the mumbo-jumbo of impenetrable jargon I had been fed by "computer experts." It was only when I had a teacher who was outside the field of computers and who did not try to razzle-dazzle me with his computer acumen that I began to learn how to harness some of the power behind this beast.

I was determined to do the same thing for my "Computer Language Arts" course. I remember planning the first night of the course: I was going to give the class a simplified version of how to program in Basic, thus establishing the groundwork for almost all software

applications.

There were sixteen people in the course. They let me prattle on about REM's and ROM's and RAM's until I detected faint smiles on their faces. It had never occurred to me to ask how much they already knew about computers. Most of them, I discovered, not only had written sophisticated programs in Basic, but had better than passing acquaintance with Logo, Machine Language, and an array of word processing programs. I gulped, took a deep breath, and announced that my special talent as the teacher this term would be to provide a climate so that we could all learn from one another. I spent the rest of that first class finding out what each student already knew about the beast. And it was formidable!

Undaunted, I spent several hundred dollars on books about Pascal, authoring programs, spreadsheets, and data base management systems. But what I really learned that term, I learned from sixteen people every Wednesday night from 6:00 PM to 8:30 PM. They were very tolerant of me and didn't allow me to interfere with their learning. After getting over my humiliation of thinking they were beginners, and my terror at realizing I knew little more than they knew, I recognized that these sixteen individuals were at very different levels in their knowledge of computers. Not only were their levels of knowledge different, but the kinds of things they each seemed to know about computers were different.

Judy, for example, was a superb programmer. Hyacinth had an intuitive understanding for the workings of just about any word processing program she was introduced to. Sue Ellen immersed herself in SUPER PILOT to the point of becoming an expert in it. Sandi and Artie became our resident Logo experts. What confounded me even more was the fact that the students were not necessarily interested in learning the same things. And they told me so. With gusto.

There were a few students who needed help with the fundamentals. I think I was of most assistance there. But for the most part, these students simply

needed the technology to master a process they were already intent on learning. I stepped back, let them "do their thing," and asked them from time to time if they would share their knowledge of what they were doing with the rest of us. And they did it. Gladly.

Rarely would a week pass without at least one of the students xeroxing sixteen copies of an article pertinent to microcomputers and language arts and passing them out to the rest of us in class. Several even asked if they could have a half-hour or so to explain to us their understanding of the material they were working on. For my part, I was able to provide a rich source of resources and a variety of alternative programs, structures, and computer languages which might prove valuable to them as language arts teachers. They each seemed to have an intuitive sense of what it was they wanted to know.

My greatest frustration came from the fact that the college would not provide me with a budget to upgrade the Apple II+'s we were working with, nor to purchase the needed software for a course such as ours. My reliance on outside help with materials--especially from the students--made me feel that it was unethical for an institution which cannot financially support a program to have one in the first place. But in spite of this problem and due to the resources and support of my students, I learned much more from this class about the ins and outs of software, the availability of computer resources, and evaluating the performance of existing programs, than I ever did from taking computer courses myself.

Jerry Megna
Brooklyn College

Newsletter Staff

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Confusing Means With Ends: Naming a Writing-With-Computers Program

Years ago, if we had decided to use typewriters to encourage student writing, calling such a program "typing" would have been misleading. Yet today, the most commonly used term to describe writing with computers is "word processing." The name is borrowed from the business world, where word processing and writing are separate activities. Actual writing is done by an attorney or an executive, for example, and then given to a word processing operator to type. In schools, "word processing" legitimately belongs to the secretarial studies department, not the English department.

Some people use "text editing" instead, but that name is too narrow. Computers allow for much more than editing. They can be used to help writers freewrite, generate ideas in the pre-writing stage, write a first draft, produce perfectly neat copies of everything written, check spelling, print out multiple copies of a draft for peer conferences, and facilitate revision.

At least one school has labeled its program "computer English," a somewhat ambiguous phrase. It could just as easily refer to teaching computer vocabulary or skill-and-drill mechanics practice as well as writing.

A more promising name is "computer-assisted writing." It puts things into perspective, indicating that the computer is, after all, an assistant. Of course it's an incredibly helpful assistant, and the effect it has on writing might well parallel the effect the automobile had on transportation. Both make life easier and more pleasant, but both are basically tools. A name like "computer-assisted writing" indicates that our purpose is primarily encouraging students to write and rewrite. "Word processing," in contrast, confuses means with ends, the tool with the outcome.

One problem is that the eight syllables of "computer-assisted writing" make saying it somewhat cumbersome. I've seen it called CAW, but that too has drawbacks. Like computer English, it's

ambiguous. Some people might think it's "core," a combination of English and social studies. Others might think we're talking about bird calls.

Maybe there's another name we could use, accurately describing what our priorities are and easy to say. But I haven't heard it yet, and I feel like Stephen Job that afternoon he was trying to think of a good name for the new computer he had just developed. As the afternoon wore on and nothing acceptable came to mind, he told his partner that if they didn't find a name by five o'clock, they would call it what he was eating at the time: an apple. As our own writing-with-computers program is about to start, "computer-assisted writing" remains the best name we have at hand.

Joel Goldstein
Winthrop JHS

Poet's Corner

MUNCHIN' AT MCDONALD'S

The grandma and the mother
both a bit obese
sat and stuffed their chipmunk cheeks
with taters fried in grease.

Their lips and tongues and pudgy hands
completely occupied
by the task of shoveling
all the food inside.

Beside them sat two little girls
quite delicate and thin
who pushed their food about their plates
while taking little in.

I wondered as I sat there
if genetics would win out
and turn the tiny children
into ladies stout.

Norma Crown
George Washington HS

Project Notes

As the school year comes to a close, we can look back on a successful and productive season. The enthusiasm of Project members is greater than ever, as evidenced by the tremendous attendance at our monthly meetings. Enthusiasm for joining the Project is also high. Applications are pouring in for our summer courses.

This summer the NYCWP is offering four programs to New York City's educational community. Lehman College will house three of them--the Writing Teachers Consortium Summer Institute (for high school teachers) coordinated by Mickey Bolmer and Helen Ogden, the Open Institute (for teachers of all grades) led by Linette Moorman and Bob Whitney, and the High School Students Writing Project, taught by Gail Kleiner and Meta Plotnik. The fourth program, an advanced seminar, will study the connections between reading and writing. Ed Osterman and Marcie Wolfe are coordinating this institute, to be held in England.

Though plans were not yet fully developed as of our April meeting, everyone was looking forward to the challenges of the summer. Linette and Bob explained that the focus of the Open Institute will depend upon the number of elementary school teachers who are involved. They plan to integrate learning theory more than in the past, as it is valuable to all teachers. Meta Plotnik, who was recently awarded her doctoral degree in English Literature from the CUNY Graduate Center, said that the High School Students Project will focus on writing and literature. The London Institute plans on several site visits to study British writing programs. The seminar is designed to foster an exchange of professional ideas and knowledge.

Grants have been rolling in for NYCWP members. Lila Edelkind's 1980 IMPACT Award for her program, "Write to Read," has been republished in the 1984 IMPACT Catalog. Currently 10 people are replicating this program, after taking Lila's workshop. Based on the premise that young children learn to read best when

they read their own material, Lila's 6-7 year olds began writing their own books. After her NYCWP training, Lila shifted her approach to the process model which, she says, is "Far more exciting. The children are very enthusiastic. They consider themselves authors and illustrators, and have been able to evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses." Their work, the product of conferencing, sharing, revising, and editing, stocks the classroom library.

Also at the same school, P.S. 152 in Brooklyn, are NYCWP members Lillian Winter and Fran Cook. Both have received grants for similar programs. Lillian is working with kindergarten students, using nursery rhymes as the basis for teaching reading. Fran's fourth-graders are keeping literature logs as the foundation for their own writing; she conducts authors' luncheons where the blossoming writers discuss their works.

Peggy O'Brien has been granted six months' paid "project leave" from the U.N. School to write a guide, "Micro-computers in the Teaching of Writing." She has extensive experience in the field, having used computers very successfully with ESL students, led word processing workshops for the staff of her school, and trained modern language teachers in the use of computers. Peggy mentioned that not much has been published about writing and computers, so her guide should prove a welcome addition to the field.

Janet Rogow has received an \$1800 development grant from the Mamaroneck Union Free School District to study writing across the curriculum this summer. She will apply what she learns to developing a senior course, "Composition for College," which she will pilot this fall. She expects that the course will take students beyond their usual high school curriculum and into anthropology, sociology, and political science. Her real goal, she says, is to use writing to help students learn "how to think about things."

As a final Project Note, all of us on the newsletter staff would like to thank Carla Asher for performing an outstanding

job as acting director this year. The Writing Project has continued to reach out to new members, as well as provide a noncompetitive atmosphere for sharing and learning.

Enjoy your vacation, and let us know what you've been doing for publication in future issues.

Lisa Rosenberg
James Monroe HS

Life and Death and Writing in a Nursing Class

My co-op senior nursing class is working in a paid alternate week program, performing full nursing assistant duties for terminal patients ranging in age from late teens to 105 years. The students begin working with ambulatory self-care patients and slowly, over a period of five months, move on to the more acutely ill. It is vital that these students identify and begin coping with their personal feelings about death and dying, explore their own myths and superstitions, and come to terms with their approach to the situation before working with the dying patient and his/her family.

In the past two years that I have prepared students for this experience, it has taken several periods before they would even listen to the word, "death." Several times I have had students cover their ears or leave the room rather than listen. I decided this time to use one double period for my curriculum project and approach the subject of death and dying using techniques I learned in the Writing Consortium: point of view and journal writing, bubble outlines, and small group response to writing.

The class began with the students writing in their journals their personal definition of living. Here are some samples:

--Living is a daily process of working, cleaning, eating, breathing, and taking care of living expenses just as long as your alive.

--Living is having fun and a good life.

--My definition of living is being with my friends and getting to know myself.

--Living means being able to move your body at your own will. Being able to breath your own self, be able to think and do for your self.

The students read their definitions to each other and discussed them. We then went to the bubble using the words "death" and "dying." The students freely called out the words, turning around and agreeing with each other as we filled up the board. It was very successful in terms of the students but the results were shocking to me and to Ms. Zwerling, my observer. When we stopped and joined the words together, three categories emerged with the following words:

<u>The Patient</u>	<u>The Family</u>	<u>The Funeral</u>
nothing	grief, anger	coffins
stiff	loss	cross
cold	punishment	church
deteriorating	loneliness	black
	expense, work	priest

Ms. Zwerling's comment about the bubble was that the students completely lost sight of the patient, completely identified with the family. I, too, felt that since the students had worked with patients they would have thought about them more. But I had asked them about their personal feelings and this is what they gave. The students quickly noted that in their thinking, everyone suffered but the patient, and that they really did not think about the patient at all.

During the second half of the double period I showed the class a film called "Choices," which depicts patients' feelings about dying and their desire to have choices in the quality of their living. Immediately following the film I asked the students to write a journal entry on their thoughts at that moment. The following two responses show differing opinions in the class:

--The way I feel about death/dying is a little more clearer since I saw the film. It showed and told me a lot of different situations. At this point I say I

might let the patient go or I might re-suscitate the patient. But if I really was in that situation I think I wouldn't know what to do. But as I get older I think I'll understand better. I guess if you are not living and a respirator is keeping you alive I think you should let that person die naturally. This only makes a family suffer more.

--I feel that in some cases its alright to not prolong death but I also feel the decision to do that is not right. I know that I could not do it. If I had to make the decision I would feel I'm taking someone's life from them. And I am not god to decide that. Even if a patient is in pain or difficulty with living I still don't think I could do it.

After sharing their entries, many heated discussions erupted in the small groups. The students' true feelings and fears were clearly verbalized. What in the past took several days was accomplished in one. As a follow-up to this lesson, the students have been asked to write journal entries on their discussions at the hospital with their terminal patients, and their feelings following their deaths.

I felt after discussing this lesson with Ms. Zwerling that it was most successful. But I also see how to improve it for the next group. I will have them make journal entries earlier discussing their feelings about the quality of life of their patients, their own feelings on living and dying and go from there. Writing more will enable them to get their thoughts together and will help them to come to terms with this emotional and difficult topic.

E. Stacey Konstant
Julia Richman HS

Steal These Ideas

Once again, the NYCWP Newsletter highlights classroom ideas which Project members have developed. We encourage you to steal them from us.

1. After seeing a presentation by

Bob Whitney on using double-sided notebooks to respond to a text, Linda Farrell, an ESL teacher at Martin Luther King, Jr. HS, developed a series of lessons for her highly verbal but poorly skilled ESL 4 students. For homework, the students had been asked to respond to a short story, "The Angry Sea," which they had read in class. The next day, Linda asked them to change papers with a partner and told them to pretend they were the teacher and comment in writing on their partner's paper. She told them that they could ask questions, comment on the writing, and express their own opinions. When the papers were returned to the original students, she told them to read the response and begin a dialogue with their partner, either in writing or orally. The dialogues continued, with students arguing points from the story back and forth. After the dialogues were concluded, Linda asked her students to write about the story again. These second pieces were more developed, more detailed, and showed a better understanding of the story. She found this process to be a useful way to help students understand a text.

2. When her students finished reading a novel, Marsha Slater, an English teacher at Murry Bergtraum HS, collected on the board questions which the students were "burning to ask" about the book. The class then clustered the questions by category. Next, students worked in groups to discuss one major question. After the discussions, students wrote essays which were revised and proofread in the groups.

3. After a discussion with Lois Weiner, her colleague in the English department at M.L. King, Robin Cohen adapted the idea of writing a group story to practice revision strategies. She asked her intermediate ESL class to generate interesting story starters. Each student began a story, wrote for a few minutes, and then passed the story to the next student.

After five people had worked on the story, it was returned to the original writer, who composed an ending for the story and then revised it. They treated

the pieces added to their stories by other students as "ideas" and felt free to accept some and alter others. Robin felt that this exercise demonstrated to students a variety of options for revision and stressed the importance of maintaining ultimate ownership of one's own text.

4. Myrna Walters, a WTC participant and typing teacher at Tilden HS, produced a typing magazine with her students. This magazine described the parts of a typewriter, the kinds of type, the symbols, steps for centering, proper posture, and rules, and will be a good learning tool for future typing students.

"Steal These Ideas" is a continuing feature of the NYCWP Newsletter. Let us know about any ideas you've developed which you are excited about and would like to share with others.

Robin Cohen
M.L. King, Jr. HS

ESL Students Talk and Write About Literature

Currently, literature logs seem to be in vogue in the Writing Project, and understandably so. I began using lit logs about one and a half years ago, and my entire approach to teaching literature changed. Previously, I planned lessons which focused on what I thought were the questions necessary to elicit the main idea of the story or selection. I asked, students answered, and when their answers matched my questions, I felt successful.

When I began teaching ESL, I asked my intermediate class to read The Pearl. I prepared the same type of developmental literature lessons I had always taught in English classes. The students worked their hardest, but I felt that they did not get as much out of the experience as they could have. They needed a lot of time to comprehend the questions I asked because they were thought rather than fact questions. They answered in bits and pieces which I would then elaborate and write on the board. They simply did not have enough language to process the

questions and answer them in a short period of time. I began to ask more fact questions, which they were able to respond to, and collected their responses as lists of characters' personality traits (adjectives) on the board.

During the summer of 1983, Carla Asher and Marcie Wolfe taught a summer institute at Lehman College for high school seniors. They used lit logs and reading groups, and invited me, a vacationing high school teacher, to keep a lit log of my own and join a group. I was so impressed with the results that when I returned to my ESL classes in September, I launched my own project.

Martin Luther King, Jr. High School in Manhattan has a multi-ethnic ESL program for Burmese, Chinese, Cambodian, Arabic, Vietnamese, Haitian, Portuguese, Puerto Rican, Laotian and Taiwanese students. The one common factor is that they are all learning English as a second language. But there are vast discrepancies in these students' native language skills and cognitive development. In addition, the age range in any one class can span 10 years.

Lit logs seemed to be an approach geared to the ESL student. Since they were all on such different levels, each student would be able to relate to the chosen novel on her own level. I wanted them to practice writing, become more comfortable with it and see it as a valuable means of expression. They would be given the opportunity to read, think and write in English at their own pace. They could explore any avenue they chose. The writing itself would help them think, allow them to question, to speculate, to compare. This was a vital step in the process if I wanted to engage them in discussions about the novel. The writing helped them to process new information and generate ideas. Speaking about these ideas was a natural progression.

I was astounded by what I received. Our first novel that term was The Secret Garden and students responded on all different levels. Some students asked questions, loads of them, and happily looked over their papers for my responses. Other students personalized everything. In many

cases, they related heartrending experiences of escape, famine, fear, etc. In other cases, they wrote warm childhood memories or cultural anecdotes. Still other students analyzed, compared, discussed and critiqued. I was amazed at the depth with which they were able to examine the book. But I think the one single thing that impressed and humbled me the most was the fact that not only did they collectively make every point I would have made, they made several points I had not even thought of. Collectively, they did a better job than I could ever have imagined, and in many cases this was done using intermediate English.

Initially, I was thrilled. I was the reader of these rich lit logs. Occasionally I could encourage a student to read to the class, but usually, I had to read for them. How could I get more of an interaction going? Wasn't it a shame that all this marvelous thinking was for my eyes only? It was at this point that I began to realize the important connection between talking and writing. I decided to try them in talk groups. I explained that each person in the group would read an entry and then the group would discuss the novel. Very often, students would ask me questions. Instead of answering them, I would throw them back to the groups. The job of the group was to discuss and answer other students' questions. It was extremely successful. They read, they discussed and they answered.

One might read this and wonder what the fuss is all about. For me, the fuss is about the way these students were able to discuss their own reactions. They wrote and talked about what was important to them, not about what I had determined was the significance of the novel. And they wrote and spoke in English. They were able to write and speak well enough to communicate their ideas to others. Many of these students had been in the United States for less than a year, were in an intermediate ESL class, and yet were actively involved in their own learning.

As I continued using lit logs in my other classes, I made an interesting observation about writing and talking. At

first I had thought that the writing helped them talk. That was true. But then I realized that giving them the opportunity to talk in small groups first also helped them with the writing. The two became inseparable.

I also began to read the research on second language acquisition. Research shows that students learn a second language best when they are engaged in "real" communication with their peers. I remember walking around the classroom listening to students argue about what makes a good parent or whether it is possible to teach a nasty child to be nice. Literature logs invited my students to make personal connections to the novels we read and share them with others. Their understanding of the literature as well as their experiences speaking English were enriched.

Robin Cohen
Martin L. King Jr. HS

Results of Competition #2: Great Writing Groups for Great Writers

The writing group is recognized as part of the classical model of the Writing Project. It is appropriate that the winner of our second competition this year, Lisa Rosenberg, reexamined several classic works in a single genre and offered a truly pithy commentary to their author.

RESPONSE TO AESOP'S FABLES

Well. Longer than a minute has elapsed since I last read your stories. Certain analytical perceptions compel me to respond to them. I enjoyed the stories about animals. We are all animal lovers, in one way or another, I guess. Though I have indeed encountered wolves, apes, foxes, asses, cocks and stags in my urban existence, I personally would like it if you also included tales about more familiar city animals.

I would be interested in having you display more of your grasp of the subtleties of imagery. When you wrote, in "The

Lion, the Ass, and the Cock," that "the cock, rising to his full height, uttered a tremendous crow..." it created quite a tangible visual impression. Sales might rise as well if you included more of this type of sensory description.

I have one suggestion to make. Your preoccupation with certain subjects might turn off your audience, rather than turn them on. For instance, your tale about "The Blind Man and the Cub"--scouts are all-American, and notoriously moral. Who would even believe this? Also, topics such as "The Mistress and Her Servants," "The Milkmaid and Her Pail," "The Slave and the Lion," and "The Crab and His Mother," might offend the less adventurous of your readers. Perhaps you could publish a second volume for separate distribution. You could entitle it, "Tails of the Extraordinary." I would check with your publisher about this--or is that the theme of your story, "The Ass and His Masters"?

End-of-Year Message

As my term as acting director comes to a close, I thought it might be a good idea to report to the Project about some of the things we accomplished this year and some of the directions we may be heading in the future, sort of a State of the Project message for 1984-1985. So, here goes.

I guess the first thing that strikes me about the Project this year is that we've gotten much bigger. Our meetings are bigger, our mailing list is longer, our in-service program has expanded and so have our summer offerings. While this growth is welcome, it poses the challenge of serving the varied needs of our membership, and integrating new people into the Project, while maintaining the high quality of what we do.

One innovation that seems to have helped us meet that challenge this year is the on-going special interest groups at Saturday meetings. Several groups met at our monthly meetings all through the year (the college group met at other times, too). It was especially good to

see a strong elementary group since we've been weak in that area in the past. We also benefited from the reading/writing connections group, which pushed us in new directions theoretically. Some of these groups will continue next year and no doubt there'll be new ones, too.

Our coordinators training course which Chris Kissack piloted helped to integrate new people into our in-service program. Five of the ten grads of the course coordinated Project in-service courses this spring and we hope to give the others a chance to coordinate in the fall. We also expect to offer the course again. As far as I know, we're the only National Writing Project site to conduct a special training course for in-service coordinators. Chris has even been invited to write an article about the course for the National Writing Project newsletter.

While our in-service program expanded greatly this year, we seem to have maintained our usual high quality and our ability to experiment with our model. The Writing Teachers Consortium and our other in-service courses continue to have an excellent reputation in the city. The Writing Teachers Consortium worked in four boroughs this year, as compared to two last year, and four Project members, Helen Ogden, Ed Osterman, Lillian Rossi, and Elaine Spielberg worked full-time as on-site consultants. Because of their excellent work, we've already had calls from the Brooklyn/Staten Island High School Superintendent and the Vocational High School Superintendent asking that their schools be included in the program next year.

We also began to experiment with some new formats for our courses, including a 6-session Saturday mini-course for PREP teachers and a follow-up mini-course in Searching Writing for last year's Writing Teachers Consortium schools. The follow-up courses, which were conducted in four schools, were coordinated by NYCWP teacher-consultants who are faculty members at those schools. All together, 26 Project members worked as NYCWP course coordinators this past term and many others worked as presenters.

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