



## A Note From the Editors

Robin: What's the theme of this editorial?

Melanie: Last issue of the year. Heh.

Marcie: Hey! You need the rest of us to do that!

Melanie: While Michael's on the phone, let's think about what we've done this year.

Robin: If I keep writing, I'll never get a chance to say anything.

Lisa: Or eat anything.

Melanie: Okay, here comes Michael.

Robin: Seriously, what are we going to write about?

Melanie: Well, let's start at the end.

All: We'd like to thank our contributors, especially the WTC consultants and coordinators who've supported us by sending material from their schools.

Marcie: Oh. I was going to put that in "Project Notes."

Robin: Too late! Should we thank anyone else?

Lisa: The contributors are the lifeblood of the newsletter, but how about the typists, proofreaders, and collators?

Melanie: No... We only have an hour to finish this.

Robin: What's different this year? Is "Steal These Ideas" new?

Marcie: No, we started that last year.

Lisa: But it's a great column. I've shared it with non-Project members who have appreciated it.

Michael: Hmm. There haven't been any contests this year--my best pieces of writing.

Lisa: I miss those. They were fun to read--and to respond to.

Marcie: What about tracing some themes this year, like writing connected to art? We had the piece Marlene Dodes wrote and the one in this issue about Paul Allison's assignment.

Robin: What about Gary Eiferman's lesson in "Steal These Ideas"?

Melanie: Wasn't that about music?

Marcie: The first part used art, and the second part used music, I think.

Robin: We had a lot more math and science pieces this year; the fall issue had really good pieces by Shirley Solomon and Ellin Singer.

Lisa: You take 10 writers, divide them in 2 groups, you end up with...?

Melanie: Yeah, and wait till people read about the math raps!

Marcie: Another theme is computers.

Robin: Every issue we've had a computer article, thanks to Joel Goldstein, Peggy O'Brien, and Gloria Lindenbaum.

Marcie: And the conditions under which we work. Lots of pieces on that.

Lisa: This reflects the attitude city-wide.

Melanie: Yeah, we didn't say much about that in past years.

Robin: Are people perceiving the newsletter as more political?

Marcie: Well, I think Ed's piece last fall let people know that this kind of thing would be welcome.

Melanie: Yeah, people got really excited about that piece.

Marcie: And Mickey Bolmer's piece continues to examine this idea.

Melanie: Does printing these articles have any effect on people?

Lisa: We know that we aren't alone in our attempts, in our frustrations, in our hopes.

Marcie: As Project teachers we may sometimes think that because we are so skilled, we can teach under any conditions, but we shouldn't have to.

Melanie: Just because we have successful lessons doesn't mean we should accept the conditions.

Michael: I have to agree. That issue came up several times in the course I was leading; school conditions have an effect on what you can and cannot do.

Marcie: I'd say also that Carla's piece dealt with that issue, in describing the shift from teaching in high school to teaching in college.

Robin: Another theme this year is interviews.

Marcie: Last year we were up to our ears in articles about literature logs; this year it's interviews.

Lisa: I wonder if that emphasis grew out of last summer's advanced institute.

Robin: I wonder what this summer's central activity will be?

Marcie: Yes, it's really exciting to see people think up ideas and then try them, and then see other people begin to use them.

Lisa: And share their experiments.

Michael: How many years did we do three issues?

Marcie: Two years.

Melanie: Before that?

Marcie: Two a year.

Michael: This is our fifth year--since 1982. We should put that in. So what's next year going to be like?

All: (Groaning) Not now! We need a vacation!

## Writing Testing Reading

Doreen is a 48-year-old Jamaican woman who works as a maid for a wealthy family and who, one evening each week, works on her writing with me at the New York Public Library. She comes to the program because she wants to make changes in her life--her plan is to get a GED and a better job.

Of all the people I have worked with at the library, it is Doreen who is the writer. Although she had only written letters before, during the past year she has produced a number of lengthy stories about her life--narratives entitled, "Taking My Son Home," "Living on a Sugar Estate," "A Make-Believe Grandma," "Sisters-in-Law," "Going to Belgium." Now she is working on a piece called, "My First Novel." She's writing it in response to all the reading she's doing now in her reading group at the library. "After I read a few of those books," she told me, "I said to myself, 'I can do this!' So I am doing it."

But in spite of her engagement with writing, when Doreen took the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), she scored only 3.3. If I had not seen her writing

happen, I would not have been surprised. As a young girl in Jamaica, she often missed school because of her asthma. Her condition was bad enough to cause her to be hospitalized repeatedly. She remembers that the announcement of examinations made it worse. This combination of sporadic education and early test anxiety has contributed to Doreen's current problems with the TABE. She fears its officiality--the bubbles she must darken, the printed booklets, the time pressure. She deliberates interminably over the multiple choices, uncertain about what makes an answer more correct than another. When she finds passages difficult, she gives up. She was out of school too often to learn about tests.

The 3.3 score does not represent the Doreen I know. At the same time that she is paralyzed by the TABE, she is steadily growing more confident as a writer. The novel which Doreen is writing is a peculiar thing. Unlike her memory pieces which are rich in details from her own and her family's lives, "My First Novel" happens outside Doreen's experience. It is a story of the rich and privileged--people who own private planes and huge engagement rings; children who, if victims of tragedy, like *Oliver Twist* are restored to their proper place in the upper class and reunited with those who love them. For Doreen, fiction is the "not true," and so she creates a story line very different from her personal narratives. Although I have told her that she can use her own life experiences as the basis for fiction, and that other authors do the same, "My First Novel" is Doreen's deliberate departure from her own life story, the result of her desire to write what she doesn't know, to try unfamiliar territory: "Write about a man who does the deed and leaves the woman to have her baby on her own? I know how to do that. That is just what Danny's father did to me. I want to try something else." She knows how her memory pieces will end as she writes them. But this--a novel--provides her with the wonder of watching something take on a life of its own.

Doreen "writes" while she is at her job. While she is ironing or cleaning, she thinks about her characters, imagines

their dialogue, tests out the twists in the plot which she wants to include. Then, when she has a break, she transcribes what she has written in her head while she was working. In a job in which almost no literacy is required of her by her employers, Doreen has included it for herself. Lately, she has even begun showing parts of her novel to the people she works for. She needs more response than she can get from me in two hours a week at the library.

It could be that the composition of "My First Novel" signals another stage in Doreen's development as a reader and writer, a stage which the TABE is not picking up. The TABE tests vocabulary, reading comprehension, and familiarity with simple references (table of contents, dictionary headings, etc.). Although the vocabulary is tested in a context of sorts ("pitch the ball") and the answers to the reading comprehension questions can be found within the context of the passages, the test items on the TABE often do not make sense within the contexts of the test-takers' lives. In fact, the test is extremely decontextualized for the people taking it. This distancing from Doreen's interests and own knowledge is a major problem she faces when she attempts the TABE. There is no reason why Doreen should be made to read about geographical variations in Mexico, except that the passage was chosen to be on the test. Doreen's newfound interest is in narrative, but no narratives ever appear on the TABE, only voiceless details about erosion or wheat, or bizarre logic problems dealing with the members of "Mrs. Bowen's acting class," where groups of students are called "casts," members of the same cast are called "mates," and students reading for the same part are called "companions." In the vocabulary section, Doreen is surprised to learn that "nice" is the wrong choice for "a normal day." In Jamaica, she reasons, a nice day is normal.

In a way, "My First Novel" is Doreen's own test of her knowledge of reading and writing, demonstrating what she has learned of the writer's craft from the books she has begun to read. The TABE does not test her sophisticated skills. Through her own writing she shows that she knows

what a novel is, what characters do and say in a book, how narration moves a plot along, how through a character's actions a reader can infer his intentions, how readers may react to a line or an event.

Like the books she has been reading, Doreen's novel is a bittersweet love story with a happy ending (so far). She has been anxious to get reactions to the parts she has written. "I want you to read the first part," she whispered one Tuesday night, rustling a fistful of papers.

"Why don't you read it to all of us," I suggested. Three other members of our writing group were there.

"All right. Now I want all of you to know that I added some surprises in this story for you."

"Some surprises?"

"Yes. Like the ones we talked about. The ones that writers put in to keep us guessing about what will happen next."

And so Doreen read her first page. A young girl, Patty, sat in an airport with her parents' lawyer, waiting for a plane that would take her to America. The group asked a number of questions. Where was Patty leaving from? Why was she with the lawyer? How old was Patty? Doreen smiled and read on. It became apparent that Patty's parents had died in a car crash and she was being sent to Maria, her mother's best friend in America. Well. One member of our group, Mr. Weeks, was surprised by these developments in the story. He thought that Patty's parents had gotten divorced--not that they were dead. Another group member, Marjorie, had assumed that the lawyer was taking Patty to her parents. "I will have more surprises later," Doreen said, satisfied.

What Doreen calls "surprises" are her interpretation of how writers invite their audiences to make predictions and construct meaning when they read. We have discussed this in the group and demonstrated the connections between predictions and meaning through a piece of my writing in progress and through some poems we read together. By consciously building "surprises" into her writing, Doreen demonstrates that she understands what happens to herself when she reads, has observed the same phenomena in others, and makes

the manipulation of her reader-audience part of her craft as a writer.

Her understanding of readers' responses to texts has had dramatic effects on Doreen's desire to revise. At one early point, she and I talked briefly about some revision strategies--making carets to insert phrases and words, cutting and retaping paragraphs in new arrangements. We practiced on "Sisters-in-Law," reading it aloud until Doreen came to a part which she realized was unclear. We discussed how she might revise the piece; I then assembled scissors, tape, paper, and a green marker pen for inserts.

But when she brought in the early sections of "My First Novel," neatly written in longhand on legal paper with no crossings-out or other marks on it, I wondered whether she had understood what I had been trying to show her about revision; I even began to wonder if she had written the piece herself. Was this clean, even writing really her first draft? Then she explained that she had rewritten the piece for neatness, and pulled the original draft out of her purse. It was on long and short paper, slips sometimes only three inches long. Some of it was taped in so many places that it unfurled like a proclamation. Carets pointed up and down throughout. I almost fainted.

Doreen, would you like to explain what you've done here?" She settled into her chair, rocking side to side slightly like a schoolgirl. "Sure," she said. "After I wrote about Patty, I wanted to tell about her mother. I didn't know how to do it. I was writing about Patty but I wanted to tell some things that happened before she was born. So I went back to the part where Patty is flying to America and I added a sentence to have Maria, who is waiting at the airport in America, thinking about herself and Yola, Patty's mother (or so we think), in earlier days."

"So you needed to make a bridge between the Patty section and the flashback." We talked for a while about flashbacks--how they work in movies and books. Then Doreen directed me to a taped section. "When I was reading it over, I kept seeing more places to change the writing.

At this section I thought to myself, 'Marcie's going to say, what happened at college?' But I had already written the next part about the wedding. So I got the tape, cut off the wedding part, wrote about Maria and Yola at college, and taped it in."

She showed me the additions:

At the airport waiting room in the U.S. Maria Morris her mothers friend waited her eyes were bright with unshad tears of joy because today she would see the beatufull little baby she placed in her friends armes so-long-ago, her mind drefted back to the days when she was so young and childech she though he was the ondy man she would every love he was so young and handsom and he made her feel beautiful, The happiest night of ther life was when he ask her to become his wift, after he took her home kissed her goodnight and drove away she danced into her apartment and round the livingroom to the telephone and dial her friends number and waited for her to answer. It was just a few short weeks ago Yola got married and moved out, They were room mates in college. Yola had know famely so she had to work her way through college.

Maria's parents was in the restaurant business and lived in New York, her mother would send home made cookies each month for Maria and each month she would toss them on Yola's bed.

Maria was short and fat right up untill college, then she put her foot down and desided she would go on a diet, by next yeas she was beautiful, Yola was tall, slim and very lovely and she could eat anything and never get fat. Maria some times thought "I wander what Mom would do if she should meet Yola and try to fatten her, and could not do it? Mom would go mad, I know she would."

After college they both got jobs in Town and desided to get an apartment together. Soon after Yola met a yound Frenchman...."

I was surprised at how quickly she had taken to the physical strategies for revi-

sion, but I was even more struck by her claim that the revisions were prompted by problems in her text which she noticed because she thought I would notice. She thought that parts of her piece would violate a reader's sense of story, and recognized that revision can assist a writer in shaping her meaning for an audience. She saw beyond her own intimate involvement with the piece to the potential response of a more distanced reader. She herself became a more distanced reader of her own writing --deciding when I would question the writing, and thereby seeing the gaps and possibilities herself.

Of course, these awarenesses bring some pain--the struggles and difficulties writers face when their creation refuses to be born the way they want it to. Doreen now knows the misery of writing oneself into a corner; she knows how awful it is to have a problem in a piece which resists being solved. In the section before Patty is born, Maria and her new husband Robert take off for their honeymoon in Rome:

The comershall jet was filld with happy people, when suddenly the singe came on, Please return to your seat and fastin your seat belts we are having some truble with one of our engeen. Then the plane started shaking hearder and hearder. The st \_ \_ were bezze passing out life jackit and helping the people to put them on sunddenly the plane started going down faster and faster people were screaming and fighting to stay in there seats Robert and Maria huged each other and Maria prayed. faster and faster the plane went down Maria closed her eyes....

The plane crashes; Robert is killed. Maria is in the hospital for a year and then Patty is born. How? So far, none of her solutions have worked.

I frequently beg Doreen to let me kick her out of the group and place her in a GED program. I think her 3.3 is a fluke, a terrible joke. She doesn't believe me, and doesn't want to leave. "I didn't know before I came here that I could write," she says. "I want to stay a bit longer,

work on my stories, and get my reading up. Then we can talk about a GED. But for now, I still have to build up my confidence. I'm not ready."

Both of us realize that sooner or later, Doreen will have to face the TABE again. Although the body of work that she has produced in the past year shows what she has learned, no measures of literacy have been developed yet which would reveal her knowledge and ability. This is a shame. Many adult basic education students learn to love reading for the first time by reading and discussing stories. As with Doreen, the skills that they develop in this process are evident in their writing--in word choice, revisions, structure, and dialogue. An analysis of the writing of students in adult literacy programs, coupled with periodic interviews with them, would uncover these achievements and would provide a broader view of the students' literacy, something which the TABE does not do. But until such alternative measures are implemented and widely accepted, the TABE will remain the official arbiter of progress, and its value to participants in literacy programs will remain significant: without a score higher than 3.3, a GED and the future it symbolizes will be impossible.

I'll be sorry to lose Doreen, but I can't wait to see her go. I'm urging her to take the test again soon. As someone who has only just learned to love literacy, maybe she expects too much from the TABE. I keep telling her that she should not expect to enjoy it; she should not expect to learn from it; she should not expect that it will resemble the reading she likes to do. This test is not designed to provide her with "surprises." I am confident that somehow Doreen will prevail, that her score will go up, she will enroll in a GED class, and set other goals for her future. That will be fine, and important, but I can't help thinking that Doreen's ability to achieve on the TABE is but the smallest slice of her success. Literacy teachers, GED program directors, employers will know Doreen only by a grade-level number. If they read Maria's mad scene, which Doreen researched by interviewing a psychologist and struggling

through parts of I Never Promised You a Rose Garden, or the diary entry she included after she began reading Diary of Anne Frank, or the sex scene; if they saw the revisions...! If they read the novel, they would discover the real Doreen--the reader, the writer.

Marcie Wolfe  
Institute for Literacy  
Studies

## An Interview Project

Last fall I was privileged to teach two freshman writing classes of 16 students each. Early in the term, as an introductory activity, the students interviewed one another.

To prepare for the interview, during class we drew up a list of about 10 questions, such as "Where were you born?", "What kind of work do your parents do?", "What are your favorite subjects, hobbies, activities?", "What are your goals?", "How do you like your chosen high school?", and "Who are your best friends?"

The students were mostly on-grade in reading and math. They were enthusiastic and cooperative. They interviewed one another in turn, and wrote down the answers to their questions. I encouraged them to pursue any unpredicted or unexpected topics that might arise during the interview. Since the activity took several days to complete, I often filled in as either an interviewer or an interviewee for a student whose partner was absent.

Once the students had finished interviewing one another, they organized the answers (school, family, friends) and wrote up the interview in paragraph form. Then they read the biography to the entire class. When they had finished reading, the class sometimes asked the student who was being described to clarify or explain further something that had been mentioned. Throughout this entire procedure, the students were involved, alert, and attentive.

About two weeks later, after other writing activities had been completed (point-of-view on a short story, for example), we decided it would be fun to extend

the interview technique to parents, if possible, or other family adults, in order to learn what their growing-up experiences had been.

We brainstormed about 20 questions. They were somewhat different for each class. One class, for example, asked about the sexual mores of their parents' era, while the other did not. Some popular questions were: "What disagreements did you and your parents have?", "How were your parents disciplined when they grew up?", "What kind of dress code, if any, did you have in high school?", "How successful were you in reaching the goals you had in high school?"

The students had two or three days to complete their interviews. During this time I asked them to report and discuss any problems they were having. Most parents cooperated fully and were enthusiastic about being part of the project. Some, for various legitimate reasons, hesitated to take part. It was made clear to the students that their parents were under no obligation to participate, and that, perhaps, another adult in the family or in the neighborhood would be a willing substitute. (In one case, a student interviewed a teacher in school, since there was no family member available.)

When the interviews were completed, the students wrote them up and shared them in class with their writing groups. This proved a riveting experience for many, who listened attentively to their peers' family backgrounds. There were many students whose parents had come from South America or Asia, and their experiences were unique and their difficulties sometimes inspirational.

Once the interviews had been shared in groups, several students volunteered to read theirs aloud. After that I collected and read them, indicating by a check (✓) the lines on which there were errors. When I returned the papers, with appropriate encouraging comments, they worked in groups again to find the errors. I went from one group to another to clarify any problems or verify corrections.

After that, I gave the students reprograph stencils and they wrote the final corrected copy of the interview on that

stencil. When I had run off enough copies of each stencil for every class member, we collated and stapled them. One student designed a cover sheet called "The Way It Was," with pictures of a jukebox, a 78 rpm record, etc. It was cleverly done and very attractive.

Students immediately looked through the finished booklet to find their own stories and then proudly took home the class journal for their parents to read.

Reviewing this experience, it seemed valuable for many areas of learning. Students first had to think carefully in order to write well-phrased questions. Then they had to listen as they interviewed, take notes, and transcribe the notes into organized paragraphs. In their group work they listened again to one another and made revision suggestions. They then used oral and listening skills in reading their revised interviews to the class for comment. Finally, they were writing again as they revised the paragraphs and arranged them in final order for copying onto stencils. It was a growing, learning experience.

\* \* \*

#### RAQUEL'S INTERVIEW

This is a story based on some facts of my mother's life and her environment. My mother was born on January 31, 1932 and is Puerto Rican. Her parents named her Flora because it means "blooming."

My mother went to a school called Rincon. She was forced to wear dresses, stockings, and shoes. In those days girls were forbidden to wear pants. There was one teacher for all grades, so it was difficult to learn. The books were small, had small print, and were compact. Grades were given personally to your parents in a yellow card saying you were either good, bad, or okay. My mother was a smart pupil but she fought a lot. She was kicked out of school from third grade because she was a troublemaker. Mom says, "I wish I had a ed-ju-ca-tion. Everything would be so different." The only thing she doesn't regret about school is the fact that the teacher would punish her severely. "I remember the crack of the ruler on my

fingers," she told me. The worst would come when she arrived home. Her mother would beat her until she got tired.

In the camp where she lived there was no electricity. Things were done by hand. "It was hard work but it was natural." The children played and sang songs like "London Bridge." Teenagers didn't have bad habits. They were taught discipline and manners while they were young. She respected her parents and praised them.

She left her parents' house at the age of 18 because she fell in love with an older man and came to the United States.

My mother lived on a farm and raised chickens for eggs and meat, cows for milk, and pigs for meat. She also grew vegetables and fruit. When everything was raised and harvested, her father would separate everything into two piles. One was their supply and the other was to sell for others. My mother prefers to live like before because then everything was quiet, peaceful, and there was a low percentage of crime. She also had her parents. Now all she has is her family.

I enjoyed interviewing my mother because I really got to know her and I have a better view on life before I was born. I benefitted a lot from this composition because I got to know what upsets her and why she is like she is.

Anne Mercer  
DeWitt Clinton HS

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## Report from The Intermediate Computer Group

The Intermediate Computer Group (Irene Abrams, Mickey Bolmer, Patsy Brown, Jim Fairclough, Alberta Grossman, Shawn Gerety, Sally Keith, and Peggy O'Brien) has been writing about and discussing the topic, "How does bringing computers into the writing workshop affect the interaction between students and teacher, and student and student?" All the members of the group are enthusiastic about using computers for writing. They say that because they enjoy writing on the computer students write more, and that this leads to an improvement in their writing. Other benefits include increased collaboration on writing tasks, more learning from each other, and a strong development of the sense of being a writer. But while convinced of the value of using computers to teach writing, most members of the group voiced some misgivings, because of difficulties that can make such teaching tiring and frustrating. We decided to focus on these to support each other and exchange information that would help our teaching.

What then, are the difficulties? They include space and logistics, and the impossibility of transferring tried and tested methods wholesale into this totally new setup. More specifically, they emanate from an interplay of the following factors: the use and provision of space, the ratio of computer hardware to the number of students being taught, the longtime stress of continually teaching new users, and the selection, management, upkeep and supervision of both hardware and software.

Most computer labs are too small and poorly arranged for the kind of groupings needed in teaching a writing workshop--that is, small group gatherings, read-arounds and discussions, and hard copy editing. You can't hold good discussions in the typical computer lab because the layout effectively prevents it. Speaking of students being "corralled into a computer maze," Shawn Gerety noticed that "their line of vision in the room is cut down by 75%, so that when I'm leading a discussion, all the students see me, but most cannot see the student responder. They can hear the responder, but not see

her, much less make eye-contact."

Involving writing and English teachers in designing new labs or redesigning existing ones would cure a whole slew of problems. The lab should be large enough to house a computer for each student, with the computers ranging the walls and room in the center for a large table around which students could gather for proof-reading, editing hard copy, read-arounds or discussions. A printer for every four computers with a switch giving multiple access is a reasonable ratio. Colette Daiute, in Writing and Computers (her recently published book, which I highly recommend), advocates placing the computers fairly close together to encourage collaboration and exchange during composing.

Shawn feels that the ideal set-up would be to have a group that has already been taught word processing--not many of us would quarrel with that! The next best case would have the teacher lead an initial training period, with short sessions to refine and add to students' knowledge once or twice a week. He would like the teacher to be able to sign up for the computer lab twice a week, so that the other class periods could be used for discussion, editing or read-arounds. My own school, the United Nations International School, has such a system, and it works well.

Several members suggested using computer-proficient students as monitors (for service credit) to help a teacher with a large group of new users. A suggestion from Sally Keith is to assign one student to be "teacher for the day." This could have multiple benefits. While I suspect that it might not in practice free the teacher to any great extent at first, it would give each "teacher" in turn a thirst for information to pass on to his or her peers, and might help them to empathize with the teacher in similar situations. Unfortunately, however, I think we are stuck with this problem for a while, until the kids have had much more exposure to computer systems in more than one subject. I've tried "teaching by showing" to groups large and small, and it doesn't work. To really learn, the tutee has to

be pressing the keys and experiencing the effect of his or her actions. Until the average student acquires more computer sophistication, whoever gets a student first gets the short end of the stick.

New users need individual help.

Compared to working with paper and pencil, stopping a piece of writing on a computer and printing it is much more unpredictable, and can make mincemat of even informal lesson plans. The general shortage of printers contributes to this difficulty. Similarly, a shortage of computers (and the new user's need for help) means that the teacher cannot write while the students are writing, a factor that changes the whole tone of the workshop.

Another member of the group, Patsy Brown, laments, "I've just finished a class in which two disks were not saved and another had the boot file go on the blink. I start to wonder why, and that's when I wish I wasn't doing this." Stress is the name of this game--Patsy teaches classes of up to 30, usually with no aid. She badly needs an assistant--and says that fewer students is not the answer. She switched to PC-Write from Wordstar so that she wouldn't have to worry about "copying and the law. That's one headache gone." But disk and file management take a tremendous amount of time, all on top of her teaching schedule.

One problem is that most computer equipment is not designed for classroom use, especially relentless use by wave upon wave of inexperienced new users. It is designed for an individual owner's use. The machines currently being used in schools stand up amazingly well to the kind of use they are getting, but not surprisingly they break down, sometimes in the middle of class, and then both students and teacher feel annoyed, frustrated, and inadequate. For obvious reasons, a teacher cannot stop mid-class and trouble-shoot the problem, even supposing the teacher has the technical know-how. Equally, no teacher with a regular teaching load can do this in preparation time. The solution, for every school that wants an ongoing computer program, is to hire an educational technologist.

Teachers fear vandalism of expensive

machines. For those of us who work in schools with too few computers, deciding who should use the machines (the strong writers versus the weak, say) always leaves a group of disgruntled students however we choose, who work poorly because they feel cheated.

The non-authoritarian style of the average writing workshop teacher, however dynamic, is at a disadvantage compared to the attention-grabbing power of the video screen, and teachers need to develop strategies to surmount this. Sally, who works with 5-10 students at a time, does a lot of writing and preparation in class before going to the computer, sitting down at the computer with the student to help her revise a composition, and in so doing, demonstrating and teaching the correcting/editing functions of the editor.

Other strategies to help the teacher include making large posters for bulletin boards with the most used commands written large, making smaller versions of these as handouts, and even smaller versions attached to the monitor. Referring to these when teaching the commands leads the student to remember where to find help. Make sure students know how to obtain help screens if these are available, but go over these carefully, because both the concepts and terminology may be unfamiliar to the student. Even if the students give no overt sign of hearing you, at crucial times you should continue to give advice. At some level, the message penetrates.

Another underlying source of stress is judging the priorities for the class. As Mickey Bolmer so aptly put it, "We seem to be asking, 'What am I teaching?'" This question is a familiar one, and there's no simple answer. We talked about how we want to teach writing, but often it feels as if we are only teaching computer and program use. Another difficulty is, where and how do you fit in read-arounds and discussions? How do you balance teaching writing with teaching students to use the computer? I empathise with Shawn's remark, "Sometimes it's a relief not to have to use the computer room. You can have a normal discussion with the students!"

Alberta saw the same concern about teaching priorities and problems created

by the word processor, when, as a researcher, she watched resource teachers working with learning disabled (LD) students whom she had taught to use the word processor, but the two teachers who began to learn the word processor themselves seemed willing to work around those problems. But her guess was that two of the other teachers involved would probably abandon the word processor as soon as she left, to the detriment of two of the students who really seemed to profit from using the word processor.

As yet, there seems no answer to the question about balancing the teaching of writing with teaching about computers, except to say that much more scheduled time is needed, because what we're really doing is teaching two courses at one and the same time. We will continue thinking about this, but hope that those whose job it is to balance such things will also give it some thought, find solutions in consultation with their writing teachers, and, where they have the power and resources, implement them.

Daiute, Colette. Writing and Computers.  
Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1985.

Peggy O'Brien  
UN International School

## Sisyphuses

Each day, the teacher goes to her sixth period English class. She unlocks the door, puts her name, the date, the Do Now, and the Aim on one of the two small portable boards. She arranges the tables and chairs in a circle. The noise from the hall is deafening. The walls of the room stop four feet short of the ceiling. This is how the walls were built when the printing plant was converted to a high school twenty years ago. Two students come in. One helps her with the tables and chairs. The other student gets their journals. The late bell rings. The two students and the teacher sit down to start the day's work. The teacher gives the students a sheet with forty phrases like "I love...., I hate...., Yesterday...., In the year 2000...." She says, "Pick one

phrase to start your journal writing. Then we will write for five minutes without stopping. Keep writing. If you run out of things to say, write 'stuck, stuck, stuck,' until something comes. Do not worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar. You do not have to stick to the topic. Follow your mind. Remember. We are doing this like practicing the steps of a dance. You will improve your ability to get words on paper and learn to use writing to find out what you have to say. Volunteers will be asked to share."

All three start to write. Two minutes after the writing starts, there is a loud banging on the door. The teacher lets in five students. They are talking loudly. Two of these have not been in class for three weeks. This class is part of a program for students who are likely to drop out of school. Twenty students are enrolled. Four come every day. Others come once or twice each week. Some come for a week or two and then do not come for a week or two. There are usually ten students in the classroom. It is never the same ten. The two students who are writing stop to greet the newcomers. The teacher tells the arrivals to get to class on time and gets them seated. One of the students already in the classroom passes notebooks to the three students who have been present. The two students back after three weeks keep talking loudly. The teacher tells them to be quiet. They stare at her for a moment and then continue talking. She restarts the first two, starts the three, and goes to the cupboard for notebooks for the two returned students. She gives them the notebooks and the assignment. One tries it. The other says that he doesn't have anything to write and asks for the pass to the bathroom. She gives him the pass and sits down to write with her students.

Just as everyone is writing, shouting comes from the hallway. One student shouts back. A second belches loudly. The other students look up and then return to writing. The teacher glares at the students who shouted and belched and points at their notebooks. The commotion moves down the hall. The one who belched starts writing again. The other student puts her

head down on the desk. The teacher glances at her watch and the room. Only two more minutes and they will have written for five minutes. The five are writing away. A loud banging on the door. The student is back from the bathroom.

The teacher opens the door. He saunters in. "Hey, ya gonna pass me?"

"You can still pass if you come every day and do the work."

"This is baby work. I did it in junior high."

"The others are just about to finish. Sit down and you can listen as we read."

He sits down and gets out a cigarette to play with.

"That's five minutes. You may stop or you may take a minute more to finish up what you are saying."

Everyone who is writing keeps writing, so she lets them go another two minutes.

"All right. Finish up."

"I've got a headache."

"Keep your head down and listen while we read. Who will volunteer to read?"

Four of the five students who wrote raise a hand.

"Great. You start. Remember that everyone must listen closely so that you can say what you heard."

"In the year 2000 it will be terrible. All around my project kids, little kids are selling crack. Their brothers get them to do it 'cause they think they won't get caught. And there's fights and murders most nights. Those little kids'll do anything--grab your chains, stick each other...."

A double knock at the door. The teacher lets in a dean. He points to two of the girls and explains that they have to come with him. They get up, taking bags and coats. At the door, one calls, "Don't read till I get back."

The student finishes reading and there is a general discussion of conditions in the projects. All agree it's not safe. The next student begins reading. "In my family my brother gets to do everything he wants. They don't let me do anything...."

A student interrupts. "That's what my piece is about." The teacher says, "Let her finish and then you can read." Discussion after the two pieces starts with,

"They won't even let me out on Friday night."

"Yeah, I got to go home right from school and baby-sit my sisters."

"They think I'm still a kid."

After the discussion, the teacher reads her piece and then begins the second part of the day's work, spelling. She gives a pretest, puts the words on the board, and elicits definitions. At the third word, the girls come back. They report that a girl was cut by someone in a black jacket so they searched all the girls with black jackets.

"Can I read?" asks one of the returned students.

"We are working on spelling. But you may read."

"Teacher," the boy with the cigarette shouts, "we are doing spelling. That's more important."

"Let's give her a chance to read. We will get right back to spelling. Listen closely so that you can tell her what you heard. All right. You can read."

"I love to talk with my friends...."

The bell rings. Sixth period ends. Students stand and move toward the door. The teacher turns to the student who was reading.

"We will pick this up tomorrow."

Mickey Bolmer  
Writing Teachers  
Consortium

## Steal These Ideas

Barbara Batton has been using double-entry notebooks with her class of third graders, most of whom read on a fourth or fifth grade level. They have been observing meal worms and tadpoles, recording their observations in one column and their reactions in another. As the meal worms developed into beetles, the students kept track of the small changes that occurred, and speculated about the causes of these changes. Sometimes, though, they still put "opinions" on the "facts" side, just like we do. They enjoyed keeping a log of their discoveries and ideas.

\* \* \*

Written active listening: have stu-

dents write: "I heard [Mary] say..." This helps students get the feel of active listening, and it's a way to have everyone do it. Done occasionally, it is a way to check on the quality of the listening in groups. Bernice Lewis, who teaches social studies to special education students at Curtis HS in Staten Island, used written active listening as a tie between reading and discussion. She read 2 paragraphs on Louis XVI and wrote on the board, "I heard Mrs. Lewis say..." The students began by writing this prompt and then wrote for 5 minutes. Then she formed small groups in which students read their "I heard..." pieces and drew up lists of information about Louis XVI. She reported, "They were really talking about Louis XVI!"

\* \* \*

Candis Sparks, a history teacher at Erasmus Hall HS in Brooklyn, has her students creating fictional characters who lived for 100 years at some point in American history. After brainstorming lists of inventions and historical figures at the board, she asked them to write diary entries which describe how 5 of the inventions and 5 of the historical figures changed American life during that time period.

\* \* \*

Aleta Levine, an art teacher at Franklin K. Lane HS in Queens, has always had students in her cartooning class design comic strip heroes and comic book covers for the heroes. While participating in the WTC, she worked with Helen Ogden on ways of including writing in this process. Students created time lines for their heroes --to give them a past and a future. The top portion of the time line was devoted to good events in the life of the hero; the bottom portion displayed bad events. The class then wrote the stories of the events noted on the time line. At the same time, Aleta instructed students in the art aspects of the project--how to show changes in the body of their heroes over time. Finally, students wrote and illustrated their comic books on the lives of their heroes. To do this, they had to review their time lines and the writing in order to condense it into the comic book form, which uses dialogue and art to move

the plot along, punctuated occasionally by brief lines of narration.

\* \* \*

Two quick ideas on letter writing:

--Elaine Spielberg tells us that the Writing Core at Seward Park HS (5 teachers who have been planning together: Irene Abrams, Lair Decker, Leah Gitter, Linda Jungreis, and Beverly Marcus) have decided to spend some time this summer writing letters to their as yet unseen classes for the fall, 1986 term. At the beginning of the term, they plan to distribute the letters to their classes and invite the students to respond.

--In the business classes of Muriel Strauss, a teacher at Jane Addams HS, students have written letters to companies about products or services they have enjoyed (e.g., a letter to the company which manufactures M&Ms in which the student wrote that she would never make it to school without them, or a letter to a taxi service thanking them for taking the student's grandmother to the hospital each week). The students are typing the letters and sending them to the companies. Maybe Muriel and her students will receive some letters back--with free samples!

\* \* \*

"Steal These Ideas" is a regular feature of this newsletter. We invite you to submit any ideas which you'd like to share with your colleagues.

## Arithmetic Rap

From the outskirts of little foam speakers covering adolescent ears, the faint sounds of the latest raps can be heard. Between snapping fingers and piercing late bells, I realize what I am up against. It has walked into the classrooms along with the students and it is my job to be more exciting and more fascinating than the greatest invention of the twentieth century--the Walkman!

The approach that I have invented is a series of math raps that not only incorporate poetry, but step-by-step instructions to different mathematical operations. This marriage between art and math has proven to be an innovative technique to persuade children to want to learn and then to

fathom math. Even a child with poor academic performance can learn easily from this new process. I have seen children with failing grades memorize entire songs and then recite them repeatedly. Why can't the same be done with logical concepts? Year after year, teacher after teacher, children expect lessons from the book. After a while, this repetitious approach becomes an arduous chore for students to grapple with. They lose interest quickly and it is difficult to get it back. As a teacher, it is my job to grab the attention of the children and then to teach.

Recently, I have come across a number of ambiguous math questions in various texts and booklets. One question asked whether shingles are perpendicular or parallel to a roof. A student in my remedial class approached me and asked the definition of a shingle. Unless you have grown up in a suburban environment, or lived in a house, or are an extensive reader, the chances of knowing the definition of a shingle are slim. Raps, though, are a way to bring math to the urban child's own territory.

One may refer to the raps as a "can't beat'em, join'em," innovation. If this is the case, so be it! I feel I must grab the child's attention. Comprehension can only take place when this task is complete. A teacher has great power over the lives of children. You can make or break a child's self esteem and you can also make children love to learn. If learning can be done in a fun way, an easy way, then the educator has accomplished her task!

The rap can be utilized in a number of ways. Copies of the rap are distributed to the students in the class. They read it silently and observe step-by-step instructions. The problem that is already incorporated into the rap is written on the blackboard. While pointing to each step of the problem, I then recite the rap. After this, volunteers go to the board and repeat the process. They enjoy keeping rhythm, saying the rap and pointing to the board. The concepts of mathematical operations become imbedded in their minds. Inhibited children who won't go to the board partake in the lesson by tapping pencils and feet. If some stu-

dents forget a particular procedure while doing homework, they simply refer back to the poetry. I encourage students to write their own raps because, in doing so, they learn mathematical operations while creating a piece of poetry. I take great satisfaction when I hear students recite the math raps. I take even greater satisfaction in test scores that have improved considerably.

#### MULTIPLICATION RAP

A fast way of adding  
is to multiply.  
Words that mean it  
are of and by.  
Instead of writing  
four plus four  
and adding like  
you did before,  
multiply four  
by the number two.  
It's simple and fast.  
That's all you do!  
If you times a number  
that's bigger than that,  
see what it asks  
before you react.  
If the number's fourteen  
multiplied by eight,  
start from the right.  
Don't procrastinate!  
Eight times four  
is thirty two;  
a two digit number?  
What do you do?  
Like addition,  
the two stays on.  
The three packs up  
and now has gone  
to hang out  
on top of the one.  
It gets added on  
when you are done  
multiplying one  
by the number eight.  
Think you're done?  
Then just you wait.  
Put the eleven  
next to the two.  
That's your answer.  
There's no more to do.

#### DIVISION RAP

Divisor, dividend,

quotient too,  
 means division  
 if you never knew.  
 The divisor goes  
 into the dividend.  
 Divide until you  
 get to the end.  
 The number on top  
 is the answer that sits.  
 Times the divisor.  
 Find a number that fits.  
 Place it underneath  
 and then subtract.  
 Whatever's left over,  
 divide into that.  
 If the number's too small,  
 do not frown.  
 Bring another number  
 from the dividend down.  
 The number that divides  
 goes up on top.  
 When you can't divide,  
 that's when you stop.  
 A number left over?  
 Do not write R.  
 Put it over the divisor.  
 Do you hear me so far?  
 What you have  
 is a fraction.  
 If the fraction is big,  
 You'll have to take action  
 and find a number  
 that fits into each.  
 The smallest fraction  
 is what to reach!

#### SUBTRACTION RAP

Subtraction, you see,  
 will make your day.  
 Instead of adding,  
 you take away.  
 Re-write the numbers,  
 under each other.  
 If you can't do that,  
 go ask your mother.  
 Like addition,  
 start from the right,  
 but don't go fast,  
 like the speed of light.  
 The number you take from,  
 is it too small?  
 You'll have to borrow  
 and that is all!  
 If you take six

from the tiny three,  
 borrow from the column,  
 Just listen to me!  
 If you borrow from five,  
 it now becomes four.  
 Take the little one. Quick!  
 Wait! There's more!  
 You took from the five.  
 Stealing is mean!  
 The three is lucky  
 and becomes thirteen!  
 The six can be taken  
 away from its number.  
 The digit is seven.  
 Are you ready for slumber?  
 Subtract the rest  
 and see what you get.  
 To check it, add it  
 and do not forget!

#### FRACTION RAP

##### (Introduction)

A fraction is a segment,  
 a part of a number.  
 Suppose you just bought  
 a fresh cucumber,  
 cut it in half  
 to give to your friend.  
 Uh oh! Company!  
 Divide it again.  
 It's no longer whole,  
 but four equal parts.  
 Watch out 'cause  
 The eating now starts!  
 Fractions are written  
 in a special way.  
 Read this carefully  
 and hear what I say!  
 Always two numbers,  
 a line in between,  
 denominator, numerator,  
 what does this mean?  
 Numerator up!  
 Denominator down!  
 Remember this always  
 and never will you frown!  
 Denominators show  
 the total amount of parts,  
 but numerators count  
 'cause they are really smart!  
 They count the pieces,  
 the parts of the whole.  
 Whatever the amount,  
 that is their role.

Now. Back to your friends  
and their cucumber.  
Follow these rules  
To show your new number!

SUBTRACTION  
by Taudies P. (student)

You take away the number on the bottom from the one on top. Now if you can't do that your smoking crack. If the number is too small to be subtracted from. Go on next door and borrow ten. Now start to subtract all over again. And if you want to get the minuend just add the difference to the subtrahend. (Scratch it)

23456 Minuend	-	23456	
<u>18539</u> Subtrahend		<u>18539</u>	
			4917 Difference

18539 Subtrahend	
+ 4917 Difference	
<u>23456</u>	

Maxine Nodel Druger  
Park West HS

## The Color Poetry

Paul Allison came to the HS of Art & Design as a student teacher and had the abundant good fortune to work with Elaine Spielberg. He learned a good deal about art, literature and education during his apprenticeship. Upon finishing Hunter College he moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he was a substitute teacher in a junior high school. Paul taught reading there for the most part, and wondered if places like Manhattan still existed.

He is now comfortably re-ensconced at the HS of Art & Design once more where his bright and imaginative style produced the following small gem.

One day Paul came to class with a hand-out displaying poems about colors which he had arranged in the shape of a color wheel. He used "Nature Rarer Uses Yellow," by Emily Dickinson, "How Roses Came Red," by Robert Herrick, and "Too Blue," by Langston Hughes to illustrate primary colors.

After the class had read the poems, he encouraged his students to free write

about their favorite colors or any color. He likes to be purposefully vague about what they should do, preferring to suggest and then see what happens.

When he heard their free-writes, he was struck by the amazing things about colors they wrote. "Is it because they're art students?" he wondered. He might have stopped at this point and felt satisfied with their expressive compositions.

Nevertheless, the next day his class looked at the color poems again and turned their free-writes into poems, either like the ones they had read or self-styled ones. They had a read-around following this and one could suppose that this was a successful "lesson" and experience for them.

Paul's next surprise was to extend this activity by having the students put their poems on colored stationery. His plans were changed when he found that the stationery had been stolen from the trunk of his car. Undaunted, he cadged some colored construction paper, and had his students paste their pieces on paper the same color as their poems. They were able to rewrite and correct their verses at this time and created a large bulletin board in the hallway under a colored rainbow.

\* \* \*

### WHITE (by Richard)

I hate the color white  
Too plain to even explain  
There's nothing much to look at  
It's driving me insane  
I'm wearing brand new sneakers  
White from front to back  
The day is almost over  
Now they're total black  
White is like my paper  
My teeth, my socks, my underwear  
But everytime I look for them  
They're never even there  
I hate the color white  
Not because I'm racist  
For I myself am white  
And black in many places.

### BLACK (by Paul)

The color black  
Takes no sides  
It disguises an ambush  
Or the hunted it hides.

RED (by Tru)

"Bang!"

Flying directly in search of blood  
Swirl through the wind, cut by the flood  
Go ahead, penetrate through the skin  
Push hard and meet the red.

Michael Simon  
HS of Art & Design

## Presenting Poetry

June Chory has been using small group work in a variety of ways in her speech classes at Jane Addams Vocational HS. Her projects were so successful that she decided to use small groups again for a poetry unit.

After teaching several whole class lessons on poetry, she had the class analyze the process used to learn each poem:

1. Read the poem aloud.
2. Discuss possible ideas/meanings.
3. Look up meanings of unfamiliar words.
4. Identify figures of speech to clarify the poem's meaning.
5. Summarize the poem.
6. Reread the poem.
7. Analyze the rhyme scheme/rhythm.

After discussing this, the class was divided into small groups. Each group had to choose a poem to present/teach to the class. Each group was given three days to select the poem, discuss its meaning, and decide how they were going to present it to their classmates.

The project took 6-7 days to complete. The groups spent one period reading through various poems in their textbook before agreeing on the one poem they wanted to teach. Then, they discussed the meaning of the poem. On another day, they had to make decisions about the lesson itself:

1. Who will introduce the poem and how will this be done?
2. Who is going to read the poem for the class?
3. What questions are we going to ask the class, and what should be the order in which the questions are asked?
4. What notes will we write on the board for students to put in their notebooks?

5. What will the homework assignment be?

On the fourth day, groups rehearsed their presentations. Then, oral presentations were given over a period of several days, two groups per period. Groups determined their own daily homework assignments during the planning days. Whatever needed to be done at home (in order to prepare for the presentations) was decided by the group.

When the presentations were completed, Ms. Chory asked students to submit a piece of writing about their reactions to the entire assignment. In the writing, they were asked to include the following:

1. Explain the assignment.
2. What problems did you have working in the group?
3. How did you handle these problems?
4. What were the good things about working in a small group?
5. What did you learn from working in a small group?
6. Was it better to learn the poem this way or by having the teacher teach it to you? Explain.

Here are some excerpts from the student responses she received:

I learned from working in this group that you can learn more when you do it in a group. It brings up your confidence in yourself. I understood the poem better. (Cassandra)

It was better to learn a poem this way rather than from a teacher. The teacher could be writing notes down and we copy it. This doesn't mean anything. The way we did it is better because we talked about it and acted it out and read it to the class...The thing we didn't understand was the vocabulary words. As we went through the poem, we would look up the words and discuss them as a group. (Carmen)

The best thing about working in a group is you can all split the parts and act out the poem. You can also ask questions that you don't know and

one of your classmates can explain it to you and you can understand it...You don't have to raise your hand and wait for the teacher to answer. You could just ask your classmates in your group. (Shawn)

The best thing about working together was it got the work done three times as fast. I learned that by us putting our ideas together we understood the poem better than we would have alone. By each group reading and discussing their poem, we covered more than a teacher could cover. (Bobby)

The problem which developed in our group was which poem to read. We wanted a poem that was funny and joyful and short. We overcame the problem with finding a funny and joyful and short poem...My opinion in learning a poem is that you have to read and reread a poem to understand it. Concentration is needed. (Nicole)

Doing this project demonstrated two things to Ms. Chory. Once again, she witnessed how successfully students can learn together in small groups when they are given some guidance. Secondly, she found that process writing--writing about the way in which one does a particular assignment--serves several purposes. For her, it provided a means for knowing how each student reacted to the same learning task. For the students, it gave closure to a shared experience and also helped them to become more reflective about the ways in which they learn.

Ed Osterman  
Writing Teachers  
Consortium

## Project Notes

A number of Project members have received new jobs and new titles.

We'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate Ed Osterman on becoming an associate director of the Writing Project. We have all benefited from his expertise and leadership in the Writing Teachers

Consortium, and his innovative work in summer institutes and in-service courses.

With the expansion of the WTC, eight Project members will be working as on-site consultants in eight schools. In those schools, they will be consulting with teachers, as well as teaching one class in a "language and learning core" comprising 100 10th graders and 5 teachers--an innovation in the WTC model. Next year's WTC schools will be Erasmus Hall and John Jay in Brooklyn, Washington Irving in Manhattan, Franklin K. Lane and Newtown in Queens, and Adlai Stevenson, Alfred E. Smith, and Evander Childs in the Bronx. Ed and Helen Ogden will be continuing as on-site consultants; they will be joined by Maura Couck, Christine Kissack, Gail Kleiner, Thomasina LaGuardia, Lydia Page, and Ronni Tobman. Good luck to all!

Mickey Bolmer, Lillian Rossi Maida, and Elaine Spielberg will be leaving their jobs as on-site consultants in June. Mickey will be returning to Norman Thomas HS, and Elaine will be returning to Art & Design. Lillian has accepted a new appointment to Franklin D. Roosevelt HS. Thank you all for the contributions you have made in the past two years to the Project, to the high schools, and to the newsletter!

Two other job changes should be noted. Sondra Perl's appointment at Lehman has been changed from Academic Skills to the English Department. She still lives at the Project office. Bob Whitney, though, is moving further away. He has accepted a job at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi, where he will be designing the college's writing across the curriculum program. We're happy for Bob, sad for ourselves.

\* \* \*

A number of consultants will be visiting the Project's summer institutes at Lehman and in Shoreham in July. They are:

Sondra Perl 6/30; 7/1,2 (Shoreham)  
Jerome Harste 7/9 (Shoreham) 7/10 (NY)  
Marian Mohr 7/14 (Shoreham)  
Marilyn Boutwell 7/21 (NY)  
Janet Emig 7/23 (NY)

Project members are invited to attend a consultant's presentation, but space is limited. Please call the office in ad-

vance if you plan to come.

\* \* \*

This issue's published Project authors are Mickey Bolmer, whose second "Metropolitan Diary" piece was published in the New York Times on May 21, 1986, and Maxene Kupperman-Guinals, whose column, "Seeds from the Big Apple" is a regular feature of Radiance, a magazine for "big, beautiful women."

\* \* \*

Finally, on May 18, the Project hosted a publication party for Sondra Perl and Nancy Wilson at Elaine Avidon's apartment. Clutched in fingers stained by the ubiquitous strawberries, dip, and vegetables,

many copies of Through Teachers' Eyes found their way into the homes of Project members. Happy reading.

### Newsletter Staff

Robin Cohen, Martin Luther King, Jr. HS  
Melanie Hammer, HS of Art & Design  
Lisa Rosenberg, James Monroe HS  
Michael Simon, HS of Art & Design  
Marcie Wolfe, Inst. for Literacy Studies

New York City Writing Project  
Lehman College: CUNY  
Bedford Park Bldg  
Bronx, NY 10468

THOMASINA LAGUARDIA  
333 PEARL ST.  
NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10038