

# New York City Writing Project NEWSLETTER

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## A Note from the Editors

Summer brings with it the time for reflection which is all too scarce during the school year. It affords us the luxury of looking back and evaluating new strategies we have tried and new literature we have introduced. It brings opportunities to meet with colleagues, perhaps at summer institutes, and hear about the work they've been doing. It also gives us time to think about new approaches we'd like to incorporate into our classes in the future.

We dedicate this issue of the Newsletter to looking back over the past year and looking ahead to the next. In this issue, several teachers let us peer into their classrooms and share with us recent successes. In her piece, "Reading Between the Lines," Charlotte Marchant tells us about her powerful experience of reading *Daddy was a Number Runner* with students in an adult literacy program. She discusses the various methods used in small reading groups to actively engage the students and recounts the touching connections the students made as they became engrossed in the literary work. In "Assessing Assessment," Kim Hengen reflects on her decision to teach the Global History curriculum in a new way as her students prepare to take the RCT. She questions the validity of an assessment which cannot measure the learning which occurred for her class during a student-centered project. Next, Andrew Dinan and Gary Eiferman discuss how they introduced the writing of poetry to Dinan's ESL students. Finally, Patsy Wooters reflects on her struggle to overcome racial issues in her classroom to find a common ground upon which her students could meet and move forward.

Running concurrently with our practice in the classroom over this past year was the onset of the new standards and, for those of us who teach in high schools, the new English Regents. So while some of our colleagues look back on their work with students from the past year, others also look ahead to what these new standards might mean for the future. After attending a four-day meeting in Albany, Gail Kleiner, Barbara Martz, Ed Osterman, Neil Schweitzer, Jonathan Shapiro and Martha Sussman share their thoughts and concerns about the new English Regents.

This issue also includes our regular features: Project Notes, the Small Group Network and Steal These Ideas. In the spirit of reflection, we've altered the format of our Steal These Ideas column so that contributors might explain various approaches in further detail. Thomasina LaGuardia describes how Winnie Cao-Bush introduced a new way to teach students

about abstract concepts in "The Concept Map: Drawing a Word," and Richard Ploetz details how he helped his students to understand a difficult psychology text in "The Id, the Ego and the Superego Rob a Bank." In this issue, you will also find a new feature in which we invite you to respond to a question or issue raised by a teacher.

So, we hope the summer provided you with time for rest and relaxation. And, as always, we invite you to put pen to paper and share with us something exciting that happened in your classroom or in your school last year. An upcoming issue of the newsletter awaits your voice!

Please Note: It is our policy to print student work as is when it is embedded within an article.

## Letters to the Editor

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

In addition, we invite your response to the following issue raised by one of our colleagues.

Ryan Ward, an art teacher at Seward Park High School, writes, "In my art classes, I hesitate to show the students examples. If I do, then work will almost always resemble my example, and they won't get the chance to explore their own creativity."

What do you think? Does the same apply in writing classes? Does using models stifle student creativity? Mr. Ward also wonders whether or not subject area teachers should correct errors in English on their students' papers. What is your practice?

You can mail your responses to Ed Osterman at the NYCWP or e-mail him at [osterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:osterman@alpha.lehman.cuny.edu)  
We look forward to hearing from you!

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## Looking at Classroom Work . . .

*What happens in classrooms is always of greatest concern and interest to Writing Project teachers. We like to read about the challenges our colleagues have faced, the new approaches they have tried, and their thoughts and feelings about the work they have done with students. In this section, several Writing Project teachers look back on particular projects and activities. These teachers work in different settings and serve varied populations. What they share is a commitment to students and a willingness to reflect on their practice.*

*Adult literacy students, with their myriad responsibilities and complicated lives, are often the most motivated students of all. In this moving account, Charlotte Marchant relates how thirty adults allowed themselves to be swept away by the power of a novel.*

## Reading Between the Lines

How could we make a novel come alive for 30 adult literacy students as we competed with the instant gratification of videos, TV sitcoms and soap operas? For most of them, it would be the first time they would be reading a novel cover to cover, and for some, this would be a long, hard struggle.

By using a whole language approach and the reality of the students' own lives as a focus, my colleagues and I were able to bring Louise Meriwether's *Daddy Was a Number Runner* to life for our students. Thanks to PEN's Readers & Writers Program, we were given multiple copies of the novel, and a visit from the author was arranged.

From January through May 1996, we worked with approximately 30 students and two teachers. The students were on different reading levels and had different educational needs, so two groups of 15 wasn't the answer. We wanted smaller, intimate groups where the students could get the attention they needed and deserved. We were able to utilize interns from The New School's Teaching Adult Literacy Certificate Program to expand the number of our reading groups from two to five, giving us an average of five to six students in each group. They met once a week for two hours, reading and discussing the book. Each teacher developed different strategies for helping the students in their struggle to read and understand the content. For vocabulary development and word recognition, Michael Willar, one of our salaried teachers, played bingo with the students by creating bingo cards with key words instead of numbers; when he read passages from the book aloud to the students, they would put markers on the words they recognized. Stacie Evans, our other salaried teacher, had her reading group writing letters to characters in the book, giving them advice and sharing their own life experiences. Susan Frankel, a student teacher from The New School, devised a treasure hunt whereby the students searched for key sentences in

each chapter. These were all techniques to help the students master the actual reading process, including word recognition, and more importantly, comprehension.

Throughout the week, during homeroom or at lunch break, you could hear students in pairs or small groups commenting on the latest escapades of Francie, the main character, or Sterling, her brother. Francie and Sterling's stories were soon taking the place of *General Hospital's* Luke and Laura. And the stories Francie and Sterling had to tell about life in the 1940's in Harlem for working poor people sustaining themselves with an underground economy that included number running, proved to be much more compelling. It wasn't an easy battle — some students raced through the book anxious to find out what happened next, while others took longer to reach that level of interest and skill.

It was when we brought the book back to their own life experiences that it was the most compelling. Some of the students had relatives who had been or were still running numbers. And in some cases, the students themselves were part of this underground economy. It was then that the students became the teachers and the teachers the students. "Now explain that again — you find the winning daily number in what newspaper hidden in the attendance statistics on what sports page?"

The questions raised by the students gave birth to the projects each group prepared for the upcoming visit by the author, Louise Meriwether. We didn't want to sit passively as the author read her work and answered the standard questions: "Was it based on your life?" "Why did you end it that way?" We wanted the students to give something back to the author beyond flowers and a pen set (not instead of, but beyond—it's nice to give gifts to authors).

Each reading group came up with a project that they worked on over the course of the last month before the author's visit. Susan's group had talked a lot about how much Francie had been molested by shopkeepers in the neighborhood. It was very distressing to the students, some of whom brought up their own experiences of sexual abuse. They decided to make two posters, one for parents and the other for children. They used poster board, markers and pictures cut out from magazines. They wrote a list of rules for kids to follow: "Don't talk to strangers." "Don't let nobody tell you to go with them anywhere." Amelia Crespo, the student who first raised the issue of sexual abuse in the book drew a picture of a young girl with a tear streaming down her face asking: "Why is everybody touching me?" The poster ended with the bold statement: "Francie, you don't have to be abused!"

Marilyn Robeson, a student teacher from The New School, got into exploring maps with her reading group. They used a map of Manhattan and located where Francie lived in Harlem, where the Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center is located and where each of the students in the reading group lived. They used string and push pins to show all these locations on the poster. Together they also drew a map on poster paper of Francie's block, putting in the details mentioned in the book such as stores, churches and schools. The students were able to identify on what corner Francie's friend's sister, the prostitute, worked. Marilyn had also arranged for her friend, Pearl Bowser, who had grown up in the same neighborhood and who is a contemporary of Louise Meriwether's, to visit and share her childhood experience with the students. She had very

positive memories of the local number runner helping the neighborhood children with school books and supplies. There was a little confusion at first in anticipation of Pearl's visit. Some of the students thought she was the author and others thought she was the main character, Francie. Reading a novel became a living and breathing experience when we talked with Pearl and brought the neighborhood home.

Michael's group did a "Where Are They Now?" poster by cutting out magazine pictures to represent different characters in the book and writing short fictitious biographies on their present life situations. All had become successful and had overcome their addictions and other obstacles. Some (like Luke on *General Hospital*) were on their third marriage, but had finally found their true love. And Francie had become a leader in the fight for the rights of children against sexual abuse!

Brenda Bareika, another student teacher from The New School, used photographs from the book *Harlem On My Mind* with her reading group. The photos showed Harlem street scenes in the 1940's. Brenda used the book to make *Daddy Was A Number Runner* more tangible to the students, with the photos bringing the words to life. Two students and sisters, Michelle and Brenda Corbett, had grown up on the same block as Francie and were fascinated by this coincidence. One of them went back to the community to take photographs of some of the same streets in *Harlem On My Mind* and added them to their poster display with captions like: "This is how it looked in the 1940's," and "This is how it looks now, in 1996." Another was a picture of a man in Harlem with the caption: "There is Francie's father standing there trying to work for his money and to support his family and make an honest living."

Stacie Evans had her reading group write personal stories that were inspired by *Daddy Was A Number Runner*. She compiled these stories into an anthology, *Reading and Writing About Daddy Was A Number Runner*. (For copies, send a \$4 check to Stanley Isaacs Neighborhood Center to cover printing and mailing.) Rosalina Campos, a student, wrote about a friend who had been molested as a child. She entitled her work, "A True Story." July Almodovar, another student, wrote about how her parents had grown up in Harlem. Reading the book helped her to understand them better.

At the end of the five months, when Louse Meriwether came to visit, we set up the projects around the room, exhibiting them for all to see. Copies of the anthology were distributed and representatives from the reading groups described their projects to Louise Meriwether and other guests. It was a wonderful exchange of ideas and feelings. Ms. Meriwether was overwhelmed by the students' thorough immersion in her book. She was very warm and open and let the students know how pleased she was with their hard and productive work with her book. She looked around the room at the exhibits and listened to the students' questions and comments, and exclaimed, "Well there's certainly no doubt that you all actually read *Daddy Was A Number Runner*!"

Charlotte Marchant  
Adult and Family Learning Center  
Stanley M. Isaacs Neighborhood Center

## Assessing Assessment

*Preparing students for a mandated exam frequently requires that one teach a broad body of information in a limited amount of time. Sometimes, this goal conflicts with our desire to nurture creativity and intellectual rigor in students. Balancing these two objectives can be an on-going struggle for teachers, particularly our less experienced colleagues. Here, Kim Hengen describes what happened when she, as a new teacher, took a pause from RCT preparation to initiate an arts-funded project with her Global Studies students.*

What kind of students do we want to see walk up onto the stage in the auditorium in cap and gown to receive their diplomas? What will they know how to do? What skills will they possess? What abilities will they be able to demonstrate? What ideas will they be able to discuss? If we can't answer these questions then the diplomas we are granting signify little more than our students' ability to jump over hurdles that we've thoughtlessly set up for them.

One such hurdle is the RCT in Global Studies. What does this tell us about our students? Having taught to this test, I believe it merely demonstrates whether or not a student has familiarized his or herself with a large body of disconnected information. It doesn't tell us whether any thinking has occurred in our classrooms. My greatest fear is that thinking hasn't been happening in my classroom. The RCT dictates a curriculum that I believe is detrimental to the well-being of our students.

To take just one example, the Global RCT—a test 10th graders are required to take after the successful completion of 2 years of Global Studies—covers everything from the beginning of time to the present day. With such a huge terrain to cross, the teacher adjusts her materials, strategies, and class activities to achieve utmost efficiency. Long lectures, copious note-taking, and dry textbook readings characterize these classrooms. This push for coverage and the consequent anxiety about time shape a very distinct approach to teaching and learning. The student becomes a passive recipient of knowledge.

As a Global Studies teacher, I have been trying to work around the test for two years now, to no avail. The RCT is always there, waiting on the sidelines, distracting me, and ultimately pushing me. And it has pushed my students in undesirable directions. Although my newly created school has yet to graduate a senior class, I've seen a lot of students leave, as is typical with many New York City public high schools. Some moved out of the city, others transferred. Many more just stopped coming and their whereabouts are unknown. Given the population of students at my school, I'm almost certain that these students came to my classroom with difficult lives, chaotic homes and uncertain futures. Nonetheless, I have a nagging fear that their time spent in my class has done little to influence their lives. Those who are still coming to school—often only sporadically—have merely learned how to play the game to some degree, and to suffer quietly.

Upon visiting my classroom on any given day, or any other Global Studies classroom in the city, it might appear that students are learning about Renaissance art, the causes of the French revolution,

*continued . . .*

or women's changing roles during WWII; the unstated curriculum is less obvious. Students are also learning (possibly only learning) that they are deficient, that their voices don't count, and that they have little control over their lives. Nonetheless, now and then I see a glimpse of a student who has experienced the excitement and power of his or her learning.

In order to maximize these glimpses we need to start with a vision of the kind of students we want to see graduate. My vision is of students who can do more than just pass a multiple choice test. They can think critically and reflectively. They are proficient and fluent writers and readers. They work well with others and are effective communicators. They can make connections across seemingly disparate bodies of information, identifying patterns and trends. They can analyze things from multiple perspectives. They understand who they are and how their experiences have influenced them. They know what steps to take to solve a problem. The list continues, but these are some characteristics that are the most valuable in a high school graduate ready to enter college, the work force, a vocational training program or almost any other post-graduation experience.

Last year I tried to teach the Global curriculum thematically in an attempt to make it more connected and thus more meaningful for my students. I organized the curriculum around themes such as power/powerlessness, oppression/exploitation and revolution/change. Once I did this, I saw glimpses of students excited by their own learning, but no substantial change happened. Then in the spring my school was awarded a grant to integrate art into the curriculum. I took a big risk; I put aside the mandated curriculum and negotiated a project with my students.

This was a new area for me and I stumbled more than once while trying to gain my footing. Though I knew the project would be developed around the same themes we had been using as a lens for studying the regular Global Studies curriculum, we were at a loss as to where to begin. I had thought the boundaries of the Global curriculum were enormous, but this was infinite; there were almost as many ideas and areas of interest as there were students. The project required use of the arts, so we settled the matter by deciding to do something that resembled a collage and would incorporate several ideas and artistic approaches. Students set to work. They considered a range of contemporary issues and situations that might be explored in light of the previously identified themes.

One group wanted to interview a homeless person and create a dramatic performance based on this interview. Two students in the group began to create interview questions while the other two started to write a letter explaining our project and requesting an interview from a homeless person we identified through a contact.

Another group wanted to study the effects of clothing and behavior on others. Their hypothesis was that clothing and behavior

would influence a social interaction characterized by cultural difference. They began to plan a sociological study complete with hypotheses, stimuli, and control groups. An in-depth interview with their subjects would follow to debrief the respondents. This was all to be documented with a hidden camcorder.

Other groups wanted to look at police brutality, drugs, racism, and violence. This was getting very messy. I craved order. Much of the time we didn't know where we were going with all of this, if anywhere at all. I wish I could say that the commitment I had made to my students and their learning kept me with this project, but I think the \$7,000 at stake (of which only one third was allotted to our project) also played a role in my perseverance.

Eventually we changed directions and decided the collage

would be on video. Any art forms students opted for would be videotaped to provide some continuity to the collective project. We continued to conceptualize it and it continued to evolve. Some setbacks also provided direction: the homeless person refused to do an interview with us, even after a second letter, and we decided the sociological study could lead to confrontations and was therefore too dangerous. After many other trials like these, we changed course yet again,

settling on a documentary on the Lower East Side: students would investigate their original issues by interviewing residents.

This was a long process. I was still struggling to teach the Global Studies curriculum. For work on the project, I took the students out of class about 15 times. Additional time was spent after school, during lunch, and on weekends. All lessons were learned the hard way. For instance, we couldn't seem to remember to turn on the sound on the camcorder when we were shooting and interviewing people. After one particularly good interview with a homeless man my students were devastated when they realized their mistake, yet determined to track him down again and repeat the interview.

It was amazing to see and hear students' evolving thinking and changing perspectives as they became steeped in their findings. I think students approached this documentary thinking they would get a shocking and grotesque look at one of the most deprived and hopeless pockets of New York City. At first they were spying on apparent drug addicts and mentally ill homeless people. After critical discussions with many residents, however, students' vision changed. They decided to end their documentary with a section that would investigate the positive changes some community activists had effected or were trying to effect in their neighborhood—from the community gardens to community-organized housing projects. There was no doubt in my mind that learning was happening.

Not all of the work was fun. Transcribing all the tapes (about 10) and storyboarding the footage was very time-consuming. After classifying all the information, we arranged it in the order we

*There was no doubt in my mind that learning was happening.*

wanted, creating an elaborate coding system to keep track of everything: twenty seconds might be an interview with both the sound and picture; the next 15 seconds might be a silent visual shot with an interview laid over it, and still the next 25 seconds might be only the visual and the music track. They picked over, arranged, and often discarded the footage, yet it still ended up 32 minutes long in total. During this time we were often at each other's throats; we never had enough time, and we encountered lots of logistical problems.

Ultimately, I was very impressed with the choices students made in arranging the videotape and juxtaposing various segments; this creative process demonstrated a great deal of critical thought and reflection. More importantly, however, I was surprised with the sense of purpose my students demonstrated throughout the project, gaining momentum along the way, and at the sense of achievement we all felt at the project's conclusion. The finished documentary included interviews, poetry, voice-overs, a variety of visuals, and shots of a dancer expressing the themes of power and powerlessness through movement.

This project wasn't without its problems, most of all, carving out extended periods of time to work and involving all the students at once. Much of this could have been resolved had organizational restructuring—limiting class size and programming in blocks—accompanied the curricular reforms that were implemented. Unfortunately, many schools don't support this kind of work. Also, though I did ask students to reflect on their work process and their own contributions to the documentary, I had not designed a formal assessment of the content and style of the finished product. This may have been due to the fact that I was a new teacher.

This past June these students took the RCT. Less than half passed—roughly the same outcome our school has always achieved through traditional teaching practices. Though I know that the project was a valuable learning experience (no elements of which were captured on the RCT), I'm still left wondering if I didn't do my students a disservice by not taking every opportunity to teach to the test—a test they will eventually need to pass in order to graduate from high school. Obviously, if opportunities for learning must be sacrificed in order to have students pass the RCTs, then something is horribly wrong. I believe correcting this wrong is no small task. It will necessitate rethinking the kinds of students we want our schools to graduate and asking ourselves a lot of difficult questions: what kinds of assessment practices will allow students to demonstrate the skills, abilities and knowledge we expect of them? What kind of curricula will support this kind of assessment? What kind of programming and scheduling will support this kind of curriculum? The vision is an integrated one and no one piece can be ignored, including consideration of the state tests. If we're serious about educational reform in order to address the needs of our students, then we need to find viable alternatives to assessment and not allow ourselves to be pushed into a set of compromises from the beginning.

Kim Hengen  
Leadership Secondary School

## Using Poetry to Increase Linguistic Awareness in a Beginning Level ESL Class

*Collaboration between colleagues has always been important to Writing Project teachers. Here, Andrew Dinan and Gary Eiferman, a teacher and a staff developer, discuss their work together with a group of ESL students learning to write various forms of poetry.*

Last year, in early fall, Gary Eiferman, the Teacher Center Coordinator at Park West High School, asked me if he could teach several sessions of poetry writing to one of my ESL classes. Knowing how guest teachers had enriched my classes and me in the past, I was eager to say yes. I was not, however, at all certain that any of the classes I was teaching had the skills and the temperament to benefit from Gary's enrichment sessions. Attention, attendance, and punctuality in my first period class could be kindly described as sporadic, and my ESL 2 class was comprised of beginning learners of English with an average of fewer than six months in this country.

In spite of these challenges, I asked my ESL 2 class if they would like to have someone come in once a week to teach them poetry. They expressed enthusiasm at the prospect, and Gary was equally interested in finding ways to teach beginning learners of English how to express themselves in poetry. Not one to stand in the way of such overwhelming and unified enthusiasm, I agreed to bring them together.

Over the course of his time with my class, Gary introduced three poetry projects: cinquains, poems from photography, and astrological acrostics. The completed poems were put together in a book with title and cover designed by the students.

The first project was to write cinquains. Gary said he wanted the first activity to be as non-threatening as possible. There are several approaches to writing cinquains. The one we used was as follows:

- Line 1 - one noun
- Line 2 - two adjectives
- Line 3 - two verbs in the form of gerunds
- Line 4 - one adjective
- Line 5 - a synonym for Line 1

As is readily apparent, to complete this project a student needs to define and use nouns, adjectives, verbs, and synonyms. When Gary first presented the project, the students smiled politely but did not have a clue as to what he was talking about, although they were not totally ignorant of the above ideas and terminology. The issue was applying that knowledge in a new context and, of course, conquering the eternal and ubiquitous problem of getting started. Together Gary and I, and the students among themselves, negotiated meaning. With the aid of the class, Gary produced a cinquain about himself. After that, we helped students to get started on their own cinquains and assigned their completion as homework for Gary's next visit a week hence.

In spite of frequent reviews and admonitions, the next week did not bring any completed cinquains. It was clear that this work would need further in-class guidance. That guidance came not only from us; but from peers as well. Some of the poems reached completion only when we transferred them to poster paper and posted them on the classroom walls. They remained there for weeks giving pleasure to (and receiving surprisingly little abuse from) the other classes. Here's a sample:

*Friend  
Big, Strong  
Playing, Winning  
Disappointment  
Carlos*

*Cristian Pena*

The great variety of topics chosen by the students really seemed to indicate a high level of interest and understanding. The students also indicated their interest by giving their enthusiastic and unanimous approval to continuing. At this point they were told that their poems would be made into a book. They were very excited by this prospect, but somewhat skeptical about the possibility.

The next project was to write poems from photographs, a technique Gary had used successfully in his own social studies classes. Gary handed each student a photograph with a strong emotional content. The photos were dramatic examples of photojournalism, and they struck deep emotional chords in the students, as was evidenced by their responses. He then asked them to write sentences describing what they saw and how it made them feel. With the support of teachers and classmates, the descriptions were completed. Then the fun began; we asked students to experiment with the removal and reinsertion of words. Students were asked to eliminate words that were not necessary to convey meaning. They were asked to eliminate articles, prepositions, and helping verbs. (Eventually, some of these words needed to be put back into the poems to clarify what some of the students wanted to say.)

I'm not sure that the students completely understood the whole process, but some saw how the function word was sometimes needed to convey meaning and sometimes not. It was interesting to note that the resulting work was different from the "bare bones language" that second language learners often produce. These poems have a certain haiku quality; they combine a terse observation of a scene with an observation that resonates with the writer's whole experience. Reading them, one cannot help but be moved by how touched the writers' lives are by the violence and poverty of the inner-city immigrant experience.

When completed, these poems were added to those already festooning our classroom walls. They appeared in the class poetry book, accompanied by the pictures that inspired them. You can get a sense of how art is created out of experience if you read the poems with the pictures both covered and uncovered. Reading them with the pictures, they serve as captions that describe and explain. Reading them without the photographs, they paint pictures of their own that resonate in our memories. The latter experience is perhaps the stronger of the two. Here's an example:

*Old Woman*

*American flag around her neck  
Talking with someone  
70 years old  
In big house, long dress  
Pointing.  
Feel sad.  
Remember my country.  
Lots of people like the old woman.*

*Elvin Arredondo*

The final project directed the students to write acrostic poems that described themselves, using adjectives that began with the letters of their astrological signs. Gary believed the students would have fun doing this and, at the same time, be challenged in their search for an appropriate word. Gary began by doing a poem of his own at the blackboard and again, after much explanation, the students began theirs. Some finished their poems rather quickly; others needed the week to search out appropriate adjectives. At a later date, I read the acrostics back to the students and had them guess whose they were. Some were clear from the descriptions. Others were remembered because they had helped each other. All were recognized by their authors. Here's one:

*Smart  
Curious  
Open  
Romantic  
Patient  
Immigrant  
Organized*

*Yanera Cabrera*

One of the students designed a cover for the poetry book. Gary reproduced a modified version of it using computer graphics. The student designer is interested in computers and was delighted to see his work reproduced in this way. The students suggested possible book titles which were written on the chalkboard and then voted on. "Poems of Our Worlds" was the near unanimous choice! Gary brought the completed books to the class just before the winter recess. When we came back from the vacation, most of the students still had their poetry books with them and we engaged in a read around. Talk about the gift that keeps on giving!

The project proved enjoyable and profitable to all involved. There are, however, some improvements I think we could make. The reading of published poetry should be a much more integral part of the process. Finding generative poems that would be appropriate for the ESL 2 level would take some doing, but would be more than possible. The poems selected for reading need not, and perhaps should not, be limited to the types the students are composing themselves.

We might also have taken more time preparing the students for each of the projects. The cinquains might have been easier and more satisfying to write had the students worked more with the grammatical

terminology during the week just preceding the project. The picture project might have benefitted from more prior work on description. The acrostic project could have been greatly improved by working with the students to produce a word bank of adjectives for each of the letters needed. As beginning learners of English, the students just don't have the store house of vocabulary from which to have the appropriate adjectives leap forth. In addition, even highly educated native speakers have trouble thinking of non-pejorative adjectives starting with the letter "o". For example, this is a real problem for Scorpios (even if they do tend to be odorous, obnoxious, odious, overbearing, opinionated, ornery, obvious, and ordinary!) This might be an excellent opportunity to introduce dictionary skills using one of the fine ESL dictionaries that are available.

There is an axiom that states that we learn best by doing. These students were propelled to do a lot of doing, and I believe that they proved the axiom by learning a lot. They developed their English further, sharpened their cooperative learning skills and enhanced both their linguistic awareness and self-esteem. By observing and working with Gary, I was able to add a few more arrows to my pedagogical quiver and learned, once again, not to underestimate the potential of motivated students.

Andrew Dinan  
Park West HS

As I began my fourth year as a site staff developer at Park West HS, I felt both a professional and personal need to have more ongoing interaction with individual classes. Besides missing regular contact with students immensely, I believed that long term projects would be a lot more meaningful than the "one-shot" approach or occasional "in-class" assists. So, I was eager to collaborate with a teacher on an extensive classroom project that might span a series of lessons.

Andrew Dinan, teacher and veteran of the NYCWP's two years at Park West High School, was enthusiastic, albeit skeptical of the idea of doing a poetry project with his ESL 2 class. I went into the class fairly "blind" to the students' abilities in English language acquisition, as well as my own limited expertise in ESL pedagogy. Thirteen of the students in the class varied in their verbal and written competencies, but the feeling of community and support was very strong. Three students who had more command of English often assisted the others in a very natural exchange. Although using native language is typically frowned upon in ESL classes, occasionally Spanish was necessary for translating concepts and synonyms.

Although I was part of an ESL study group last year, it did not prepare me for the instructional strategies that one must be cognizant of when working with an ESL population. I found myself speaking too quickly the first few weeks so I started paying attention to Andrew's methods of communicating with the class. When giving directions and working individually with students, I needed to enunciate very clearly and speak more slowly. As a result, the attention the students gave me and their attention to the tasks increased. What was also apparent in this class was the motivation, the hunger these ESL students had for learning. A more dynamic learning environment that included traditional and creative learning experiences had to be created. I needed to model the writing of each

type of poem by writing one myself with the help of the class. Students needed to work together and they needed time, both to compose and edit. The visuals helped: photographs were used and poems were transferred to newsprint with different colored markers and displayed around the room. This climate helped to support the experiment. In fact, the publishing of these simple poems on newsprint gave the students a real sense of accomplishment and a feeling of trust towards me, this stranger, who was there to teach them how to write poetry in English.

Gary Eiferman  
Park West HS

## The Virus of Racism

*In our previous issue, Theresa Davidson described the experience of acknowledging and confronting racial issues in the classroom. Here, Patsy Wooters adds her voice to the dialogue.*

I grew up and went to public school in a quiet corner in a racially mixed suburb of New York. On the surface, all was peaceful. I remember being taught that racism was wrong. The adults in the community fought for civil rights, but among my peers was a superficial peace. After high school, I left the country to live in Canada and England. I came back 18 years later to work in the Bronx.

My education began a few years later in a class that produced the school newsletter. A Puerto Rican student, who had straight hair and light skin, wrote an article criticizing Blacks for smoking tobacco, an important crop to the institution of slavery. Black students in the class took his point to be an attack on them. They didn't realize that this student identified himself as a person of color, because they perceived him only as Puerto Rican. For once, angry words boiled over in spite of the taboo. One student in particular voiced his fury over racial incidents he had endured. He stood in the back of the class and shouted out his fury at what he perceived to be one more insult.

As I stood in front of the room, for all appearances the target of his rage, I realized that far from trying to offend me, he honored me by revealing the hurt. I just listened. I accepted his account and made no effort to defend American society. What I learned was a revelation: continual racial oppression had led many of my students to the profound grief and despair in which they live. This was news to me. Life for my students was far from the modicum of racial harmony I had thought existed in America.

Reflecting on my stance through many classroom conversations, I have come to see that my early superficial training that "racism is bad" was not enough to save me from internalizing its tenets. I cannot assume that my behavior is fair simply because I want it to be fair. I must be willing to look at myself continually if I want my students to take the risk of dialoging on such a sensitive issue. I also have to signal to them that I will not be defensive in response to their stories of only oppression. With some students it takes a great deal of time to gain their confidence. Misunderstandings are frequent. This subject is not for the faint hearted. I have been accused of

*continued...*

racism many times. I don't defend against it, but rather look to see if the charge is valid. I don't stop the dialogue because I am under attack.

I have had to ask myself what legitimacy I have as a teacher, as I am pale-skinned and my students are dark-skinned, although to dismiss the possibility of a role for me would promote segregation. I cannot do this. But I believe I am required to establish my bona fides before I can begin.

Currently, I teach a self-contained class where there have been many discussions of racism. The fact that we have a lot of time together makes it easier to build a common understanding. I will never forget the day one of my students brought her father to talk to me and sat silently with tears streaming down her cheeks as he defended his version of what "physical attributes" are better than others. The student felt comfortable enough to talk with me during the semester about her father and their differences regarding racial attitudes. I feel gratified that I have been able to support her in facing these issues.

In America, racism is like a virus that survives in the air after the water droplet has evaporated. We all breathe it in constantly and no one is immune. Good intentions aren't enough. What I have come to see is that teenagers' fierce honesty is helpful to me. Trust can be earned. If I don't wish to live in a world where growing privilege and deprivation exist side by side, I have no choice but to counter racism in my teaching.

Patsy Wooters  
Bronx Regional HS

## In the Coming Year. . .

*For quite a while now, high school English teachers have anxiously awaited the advent of the new English Regents, due to be administered for the first time in June 1999. By now most English teachers have seen the tasks students will be required to perform on this new exam and have begun to consider the impact on instruction and curriculum. Until recently, however, few of us have had the opportunity to experience what it might be like to score this lengthier and, perhaps, more rigorous test. In this section, we get a sense of what the future might hold.*

*Last March, the New York State Education Department held a practice scoring session of the new English Regents for two hundred English teachers, administrators and staff developers around the state. For four full days, teachers worked in small groups under the leadership of colleagues who had been trained to score the new exam a couple of months earlier. On each day, teachers focused on a different task. They read the question, considered the range of appropriate responses, examined rubrics, discussed and scored student samples, and then spent the bulk of the day scoring student responses from pre-tests that had been administered throughout New York State earlier in the year. It was a challenging, exhausting, and enlightening experience for all involved.*

*About ten Writing Project teachers from various schools participated in these scoring sessions. The Newsletter staff invited several of these teachers to share their thoughts with us.*

## The New English Regents: Thoughts, Questions, Concerns

I felt the training session last March was useful, but I still left Albany with questions and concerns:

1. If papers are scored with a rubric ranging from 1 -6, what is passing? A score of 2 or 3?
2. We were told the test is going to be six hours in length. As of now, many of our students do not stay for a three-hour exam. How will they be expected to meet this new challenge?
3. If the students are to take this Regents in June 1999, how do we prepare them in so little time? I think if this new Regents in English Language Arts is going to be beneficial to students, then we, as teachers, need to start adapting our curriculum to meet these new standards.

Neil Schweitzer  
Lincoln HS

Scoring with a rubric was a new experience for me. It was incredibly slow, hard work, and I couldn't help wondering when and how the State was going to train other teachers in this scoring system and how teachers would react to this shift. I think many of us came away from Albany feeling that there were still some problems with this particular rubric (not to mention how there would be enough time within the typical Regents marking schedule to go through such a process), but that scoring for different elements against a rubric was enlightening. I think it has enormous possibilities for students; imagine what it might be like for students to judge their own work against a rubric.

One final thought. As usual, it was stimulating to share one's responses to student writing with other teachers. Having to explain your scoring to colleagues and discussing in detail the relative strengths or weaknesses of a particular paper is always eye-opening. Will this happen when such scoring occurs in schools?

Ed Osterman  
NYC Writing Project

The four days in Albany reminded me of my first Regents-marking experience in New York City. I had the sense that I had to prove myself worthy of the privilege of doing this work and that meant I needed to put aside my immediate resistance to standardized tests.

As I began to gain some confidence in scoring this new Regents, I noticed something. The students were not failing because their technical skills were wanting. They were failing a task because they couldn't figure out what the question was asking them to do: choose a position and develop it. It took me right back to Toby Fulweiler's article on "Writing and Learning." Years ago he said that it's the *thinking* that needs to be improved in student writing. I also feel that the best way to prepare students for these exams is not by practicing "fake" tasks (which would really be like pounding students' heads against the wall). What's needed is a richer curriculum with lots of

long-term project work and access to a variety of readings around a central theme.

I noted in conversations with teachers across the state that the emphasis in an English classroom would have to change drastically for students to be able to perform well on some of these new tasks. For example, most people agreed that they weren't doing much with speech or reading for information. On the other hand, we also noted what was missing from the new Regents. Several teachers, myself included, deplored the loss of an opportunity for students to produce personal narratives of any kind (the old thirty-point essay question.)

I'm left with a question of validity, even though the State took pains to assure us that they wanted to produce a "legally defensible" exam. I'm still not sure that you can take an adequate sample of a student's performance across all the standards under exam conditions. The tasks are designed to be able to stand alone; supposedly, all the information to answer the question is right there. But it seems to me that prior knowledge *is* involved in many questions. If you had an economics course, for example, you'd do better on the reading for information task when the content of the reading is about the relationship between a person's educational level and earnings. If you'd had an art appreciation course, you'd do better on a listening comprehension question about modern art. In short, the more you read about a topic, the better your reading and writing become. But the tasks on the new Regents ask students to write in an information-deprived setting. That concerns me.

Barbara Martz  
NYC Writing Project

I tried to go to Albany with an open mind. My school has been working hard on creating alternatives to the Regents. As part of a consortium of approximately fifteen other small schools, we plan to lobby hard to get a state variance. However, the process has been slow and difficult, and even when we do finally come up with a plan that we can live with ( a plan for more authentic performance-based assessments that equals or exceeds the state's standards for the Regents), there is a huge political battle to be won. So, I went to see the test and to get a sense of the political climate surrounding it.

I really do believe that the intention of the testmakers is, as they say, to raise standards and to provide all students with rich literacy experiences. The four tasks we scored were varied and fair, there are many fewer short-answer questions, and the focus of the test is reading and responding to "real" texts. However, legitimate as the tasks were, I realized that testing conditions led to awful writing—not just from students who you could tell were struggling writers, but even from the most competent. It seemed obvious that students who took this pre-test raced through the tasks. All you could tell from their work was just what the RCT tells you: the degree to which students have mastered basic literacy skills. Perhaps I'm overstating it, but I really did feel, especially upon reflection when I returned home, that work done over time within the context of a particular classroom study will show us much, much more about what our students know and can do than even this improved, well-intentioned test. How much thoughtful work will students produce if they must do four substantial tasks for three hours on two consecutive days?

Two more quick notes. Ironically, our graduates have given us

feedback that they need more practice with on-demand tasks. So, although I don't want the entire graduation requirement in English Language Arts to be based on a test like the Regents, we do plan to incorporate an on-demand task into our overall final assessment plan. Also, if we do have to give the Regents, I think our biggest challenge will be to continue to plan our academic program based on our own collective best ideas rather than a state-imposed outside exam. In this way, we can provide students with the reading, writing and thinking skills that will enable them to be thoughtful and smart and, at the same time, pass a Regents. I do not want to spend four years teaching to a test.

Gail Kleiner  
Middle College HS

While reading through my allotment of papers at the scoring session in Albany, I was struck by how often the students' mechanics were pretty good. For example, most thoughts were written in complete sentences. I wondered what was preventing students from demonstrating more complex and interesting ideas. I am not sure, but I couldn't help noticing the undeveloped thinking.

When I returned to work, we began reading *The Bluest Eye*. Morrison's use of figurative language, her rich ideas and the complex relationships portrayed do not result in easy reading, but the story is compelling, in part, because of its complexity. Students connect to its honest response to disturbing behavior and all the contradictions and paradoxes. Many of our students know such behavior all too well, but rarely is it teased out and bound for them.

Morrison's nuanced portrayal of experience challenges simplistic thinking. Will my students' prose become stronger by reading more complicated material? Doubtful. But their literature logs show more than a mild interest and good understanding. A complicated, beautiful and terrible reality has grabbed them, and with practice, their ability to convey complexity in writing will grow. With literature we love, higher standards become a lot more human.

Jonathan Shapiro  
Lower East Side Preparatory HS

*Below, Martha Sussman presents her views satirically. By using George Orwell's 1984 as a model, Martha reveals her feelings about some of the plans regarding the new English Regents.*

Albany, March 8th-11th — Welcome Back to 1984  
Newspeak and Revisionist History

"New performance standards are good."

"Students who cannot meet these standards do not deserve a high school diploma."

"You have all known about these changes for several years now."

"Once you have spent twenty-eight hours learning to grade the New Regents, you will be enlightened. You will be sent out to enlighten all English teachers. You will be able to do this in thirty minutes at a departmental conference."

"1000 teachers applied to come here to Albany, the Holy City

of Educational Truth to receive the New Assessment. You here are the 200 chosen teachers. You will receive the New Words. You represent all other teachers. This is proof that all English teachers throughout the State have been included in the process of devising this New Assessment and believe it is good."

"Any questions?"

Young teacher: "What if my students fail?"

Big Brother looks vaguely in the direction of the question and with the least possible effort, so as not to deplete his store of indifference, shrugs.

#### Regents Task #4/The Critical Lens:

In his great book, *1984*, George Orwell wrote, "Zeal was not enough. Orthodoxy was unconsciousness." Explain what these words mean to you. Then discuss how these ideas emerge in the tragedy, "The State Education Department vs. The Students of New York." Be sure to show that you understand the *metaphor* of Elitist Snob Bullies pitted against the Unsuspecting Poor and Middle Class whose children will soon be deprived of the possibilities of acquiring employment. Make clear that those who cannot achieve passing grades on the New Regents will come to *symbolize* those elements unfit for inclusion in society. These will then *foreshadow* a Second Coming of a People's Revolution. Do not neglect to mention the tone of late twentieth century Theater of the Absurd.

Martha Sussman  
Aviation HS

## Steal These Ideas

*For years, this column has provided our readers with brief descriptions of activities and projects that Writing Project teachers have executed successfully with their students and wanted to share with colleagues. Newsletter editors felt that the following pieces not only present activities that a reader might want to adapt, but also describe them in compelling detail. Therefore, we invite you to learn about these pedagogical approaches directly from the authors.*

## The Id, the Ego and the Superego Rob a Bank

In our Lehman GED Program, "Identity" was the theme for Fall '97 and my class was dipping briefly into psychology. Following the opening discussion on our own psychological identities, I assigned "The Organization of Personality," by Calvin S. Hall, from *A Primer of Freudian Psychology* (Mentor, 1954), a basic college text, which defines and explains id, ego and superego. I asked students to keep their reading-response logs for any questions, comments, vocabulary words, etc., that they might have.

From the other side of the desk this appeared an efficient preemptive strike into Freudian territory: secure and capture a few terms and definitions, then following next day's discussion/

debriefing, perhaps a quiz—we're ready to move on the next objective: heredity and genetics.

Well. Students found the text fairly impenetrable: dense, discouraging—boring. They'd given up on it and were waiting for me to provide a quick fix. In about five minutes, I could have described what the id, the ego, and the superego are. But would anyone have understood? Of course then we could get on with science. But what would have been learned?

Instead, I broke the class into three groups of five and assigned each group one of the personality concepts: id, ego or superego. The tasks: read and discuss for understanding your concept, be able to describe it clearly to the class, and finally; create a scene in which a character displays the personality facet you are studying. Rehearse and be prepared to present your scene before the class.

I wandered around trying to be helpful. After about an hour, each group presented its scene.

"Miz Id in the Toys r Us" concerned a spoiled brat acting out in a toy store when she couldn't get everything she wanted.

The second group, assigned *ego*, came up with "Arlene and the Boyz in the Hood". This skit was based on an incident that had occurred the day before in class, during break. Arlene, a spirited black woman, had taken offense at remarks a male Puerto Rican student had made regarding the racial make-up of the Bloods gang (in the news that morning over a slashing incident): "They're all black, and now they're cutting their own kind." A buddy of his echoed support, and Arlene hit the roof, accusing them of racism. After the break, things calmed down and we got through the rest of that period. What I didn't know was Arlene had gone home, reflected on what had happened, particularly her emotional response, and this morning before class took the two guys aside, explained why she had responded the way she had yesterday, and apologized. The guys, for their part, were apologetic too—for their flippant attitude and not having the facts straight.

Group Two's scene reenacted that incident and the morning's reconciliation, Arlene explaining how her first reaction had been all gut *id* anger, but then given a chance to cool off, rational *ego* cut in with understanding, and finally *superego* came along and said, "How about turning the other cheek and trying to make peace?"

We were amazed how real life, Freudian definitions of what constitutes human personality, and art (our dramatization) had all come together in a rather magical, illuminating way. It was also clear that it was difficult, or at least artificial, to try and consider the three personality traits in isolation. Id, ego and superego were all connected.

This was brought home in "The Bank Job," the most ambitious dramatization. Id, Ego and Superego were three buddies who decide to rob a bank. Pleasure-seeking Id just wants the money; Ego, the brains of the outfit, plans the heist; Superego, the conscience, goes along with it despite his better judgment. In the last scene when they're dividing up the loot, Superego wants to return the money; Id accuses him of turning yellow and shoots him. Id kills Superego and goes off to the Caribbean with Ego.

Following the scenes, I asked the students to process-write in their journals for ten or twelve minutes. Then we read around. Almost unanimously the response was: this was fun, and acting out these scenes really helped in understanding what had just been

words on a page. Several students went so far as to say they would not look at people behaving in quite the same way again. In other words, perception changed! In fact, capitalizing on their enthusiasm, we videotaped the skits.

I guess the "lesson" in this is fairly obvious: if you can find a way to push something off the page into students' laps, do it. If they get excited, take over, do it themselves—learning takes place. I'm not saying anything revelatory — "hands on" is practically a buzz word—but I wanted to show how it worked here for us. I'm not sure how "hands on" everything can be. It's a time-consuming way of teaching. I could have gone through forty pages of GED test preparation questions with their multiple choice answers in the six or eight hours we spent on this project. But maybe this "process" is working at a way of teaching and learning which has applications to the way we live our lives and treat people, something well beyond the scope of the GED test.

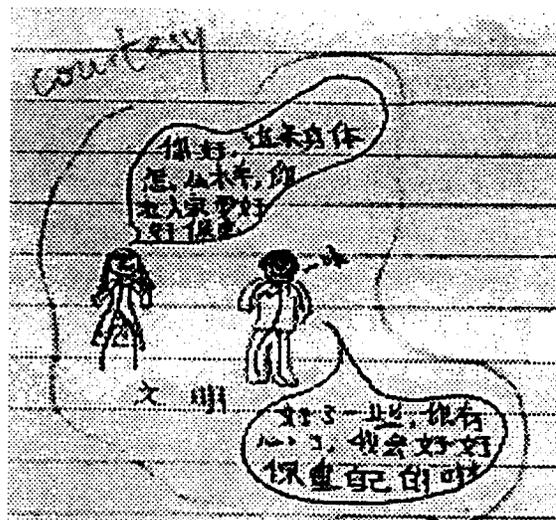
Richard Ploetz  
Adult Learning Center  
Lehman College

## The Concept Map: Drawing A Word

Winnie Cao-Bush, a teacher of Chinese language at Seward Park High School, has adopted an idea from the New York City Writing Project for teaching such abstract concepts as *freedom, family, human nature, knowledge, love or culture*. She asks the students to write the Chinese characters for the concept in the center of a piece of paper, and draw pictures, symbols, or other words all around it. She encourages students to depict everything they associate with the concept. You might notice that this activity shares qualities with guided freewriting, brainstorming and mapping.

The concept map for *culture* made by student Li Mei Huang, a budding artist, depicts a character from ancient mythology, the arts of music and painting, foods, and a cartoon representation of the idea of courtesy. The arts are depicted in three corners of the page: vocal music, orchestral music, and painting. At center top is the image of the mythical, magical monkey from an ancient story, Sun Wu Kong, who sits on a cloud. He travels by somersaulting as fast and as far as he needs to. He can pull out one of his hairs and blow on it and it will become whatever he wants. He carries a stick because, it is told, as a student of a monk he was charged with guarding the monk on his travels to the west. One section has no images, but decorative ancient characters declare "culture includes religion, art, morals." Depictions of a fish served on a platter, and delicately rendered fruits, represent food, another component of *culture*. A little scene shows a young girl talking with an old man. *She: How are you? Can I help you with anything? He, coughing: I feel better. Don't worry about it. I will take care of myself.* This vignette is labeled "courtesy." Marching across the sheet diagonally from the upper left corner, labeled "primitive society" are footprints, growing larger as they move down the page, each one imprinting the

characters for *culture*, finally arriving at bottom right, "modern society."



Nang Sai Aung, a student from Burma who is a Buddhist nun, created her concept map with the large characters for *culture* in the middle but, instead of art work surrounding the central image, she chose to write an essay filling all the remaining space. After a description of some of the customs of Chinese New Year, she noted that fish is traditionally served at the New Year's feast, that a fish has a head and a tail, a beginning and an end, and so a fish is a reminder that all things must have their beginnings and their endings. She also makes note that the word for fish is the same as the word for "something left over"; the fish, she says, represents money left over at the New Year.

Hui Ling Chen depicted a house decorated for the New Year festivities, with banners reading *Good Luck, Prosperity, Long Life,*

continued ...

and *Happiness*. Below the large characters for *culture* is a numbered list of ten additional characters, rounding out the definition of the central concept. These are: *morals, science, religion, art, literature, customs, thought, knowledge, ability and life*.

Another student created a page which bears a very close resemblance to Hui Ling's, with a female figure rather than a male looking out at the viewer. She listed the same ten words (in a new order), but added two more: *theory* and *culture*. Winnie noted that the girl had usually not completed assignments, but was very enthusiastic about this one. Like a true teacher, generously valuing what each student can do rather than measuring deficits or blaming a student who has apparently "borrowed" from another, Winnie says this instance is an indication that "the Concept Map is a good idea for exploring important vocabulary items, both for higher and lower achieving students."

Winnie has found concept maps a helpful activity for teaching an abstract term or a major concept, although she cautions that it is time-consuming, and she does not recommend it for more concrete terms.

Thomasina Joan LaGuardia  
NYC Writing Project

## The Small Group Network

As teachers, we sometimes become so consumed with our students' reading and writing that we don't make enough time for our personal growth and development. Making time for ourselves and for our own reading and writing is essential. Small writing groups provide teachers with the opportunity to get supportive feedback on their written work. In reading groups, teachers meet to discuss fiction and non-fiction, or to read, contemplate and argue about the various educational issues that surface in professional articles or students' work.

Now that the summer vacation has ended, perhaps you would be interested in joining a reading or writing group which already exists or in forming one of your own. You might want to create a group revolving around a particular interest of your own. Please call Ed Osterman at the Writing Project office if you are interested in establishing a small group.

Here's an update on what's been happening:

The Adolescent Reading Group continues to meet at the Institute for Literacy Studies. Cecelia Traugh reports, "We completed a two-session look at the work of a student from University Heights High School which raised some interesting questions about a student's relationship to text and how we can know the meaning the student is making of what he reads." At the next meeting, Elaine Avidon presented the reading journals of a student from Community Service Academy in Washington Heights.

Enid Kaplan, Susan Herron, Devorah Tedeschi, Laura Pacher and Tracy Peers Pontin, teachers from Westchester and Manhattan, continue to meet as a reading group. Recently the group read *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* by Julia Alvarez. Responses to Ms. Alvarez's novel were so positive that the group looks forward to reading her work *In the Time of the Butterflies* and discussing it at their next meeting.

A small group of teachers, including Ronni Tobman Michelen, Janeth Wynter-Bell, Jeanne- Marie McAnanly and Janet Saraceno continue to meet at Theodore Roosevelt High School to read and discuss literature. In the spring the group read Ernest Gaines' *A Lesson Before Dying*. For each book group meeting, the entire faculty is invited to read the book and plan the discussion. At a recent meeting, Margaret Jones, an ESL teacher, brought eight students to observe the teachers and to take notes on what they noticed about the way adults talk about a book. Ronni reports, "As a result of this book group meeting, the English Department added Gaines's novel for students to read as a class text."

## Project Notes

Last spring Project members were as busy as ever. Here are a few of the activities and achievements of NYCWP teachers over the past several months.

The Newsletter's own Benita Daniels retired in the spring. During the course of a thirty-two year career in the New York City school system, Benita taught speech at many high schools: New Utrecht, Maxwell, John Jay, Hillcrest, and Grover Cleveland. However, her spiritual home has been Newtown High School in Queens where she worked for twenty-one years and was particularly dedicated to teaching speech and writing to ESL students. At Newtown, Benita served on the Writing Project's writing/study committee for four years and co-coordinated several mini-courses in writing for her colleagues. Two summers ago she served as a coach for the Invitational Summer Institute. Currently, Benita is a field site mentor in the Masters of Science in Teaching Program at The New School. Newtown's staff and students will miss her; the Newsletter, fortunately, still has her....

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As always Writing Project teachers have been presenting their work at various forums over the past several months. NYCWP Director Marcie Wolfe delivered the keynote address at the National Writing Project Annual Meeting at NCTE in Detroit. Marcie raised issues about the new roles Writing Projects might assume in an era marked by widespread school reform and demands for higher standards. You can read a revised version of Marcie's talk in her article in the spring issue of the *National Writing Project Quarterly*... Teacher-consultants Barbara Martz and Donna Mehle presented at the CUNY Writing Centers Conference in March. They presented

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the work they have been doing on Latin America with Donna's students at E.B.C. Bushwick...NYCWP Director Linette Moorman, Associate Director Linda Vereline, and two of the Project's dearest friends Helen Ogden and Lydia Page, both now retired, led an all-day workshop for teachers from four Sisters of Mercy of America high schools...Peggy Maslow of Franklin K. Lane High School in Queens conducted a workshop, "Fusing Technology into the Study of Literature and other Writing Forms," at the New York City Board of Education Technology Conference in March...Andrea Swenson of Newcomers High School in Queens presented "Learning Strategies in the Music Classroom" at the TESOL Conference at Teachers College. The focus of the conference was "Classroom Strategies for Teaching Language Minority Learners."...NYCWP Associate Director Linda Vereline and Susan Howard of Community School District #10 in Bronx presented at the Bronx Educational Alliance Conference in March. The focus of their presentation was the year-long inquiry that District #10 middle school social studies teachers and assistant principals have been doing to expand the use of reading and writing in the social studies classroom...At the New York City Middle Level Conference at St. John's University in April, Linda presented with several colleagues from District #27 in Queens: Sandy Ehrlich, assistant principal of JHS 202, Edna O'Keefe, teacher at JHS 202, and staff developer Sharon Rosenberg. They discussed the work of the school-based literacy teams that have been formed throughout the district...

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Writing Project teachers are always highly visible on Staff Development Day. Under the leadership of on-site teacher-consultant Debra Freeman, several Writing Project participants at Lincoln High School in Brooklyn facilitated workshops for their colleagues

*We would like the Project Notes column to be as inclusive as possible. What Writing Project member:*

- has received an award or special recognition?
- has recently won a grant?
- has had a story, essay, poem or book published?
- has presented work at a local or national conference?
- has created a writing, study, or reading group?

*Please let us know what you know.*

on Staff Development Day in March. The day was organized around the theme, "Reading, Writing and Learning: Supporting Students Literacy Across the Curriculum." Isobel DiMola, Tracy Peers Pontin, Brenda Salzberg-Gindi, Renee Schoenfeld, and JoAnn Valente all presented to a warm response from their colleagues...On-site teacher-consultant Alan Stein and Lisa Lauritzen co-presented on Staff Development Day in Brooklyn, using work Lisa and her colleague Kress Behlen created for the ninth grade Discovery Program at Erasmus Hall Campus High School for Humanities and the Performing Arts. Lisa, Kress, and colleague Juan Batista also attended the Heidi Hayes Jacobs conference in St. Louis in April...Liz Hila of IS 53 in District #27 in Queens and Suzanne Scalcione of JHS 202 and IS 53 also presented on Staff Development Day. They shared the ways in which they have encouraged students to use drawing to respond to literature...Janeth Wynter-Bell of Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx facilitated a writing workshop at the Bronx Superintendent's Office for ESL, bilingual and foreign language teachers.

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The Manhattan Superintendency's Literacy Initiative is now in its second year and, once again, the NYCWP is supporting this endeavor in a variety of ways. During this school year teacher-consultant Harriet Stein has been working with the literacy teams from various Manhattan high schools. She and Linette Moorman facilitated two Saturday institutes at Lehman College for teachers on these teams. Following Marcie Wolfe's opening remarks and Linette's opening activity, various teacher-consultants facilitated workshops or presented work (Nick D'Alessandro, Claudette Green, Azi Elowitz, Weston Lund, Barbara Martz, Nancy Mintz, Donna Mehle, Nigel Pugh and Harriet Stein).

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Congratulations are always appropriate when Writing Project teachers see their work published. Teacher-consultant Lona Vilmar-Jack co-authored (with Lise Winer) a chapter entitled "Caribbean English Creole in New York" for the book *The Multilingual Apple: Languages in New York City* published by Mouton de Gruyter...Melanie Hammer's essay "Across the Seams for a Curve" has been published in the Summer 1998 issue of *Under the Sun*, a journal of creative non-fiction....

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Cheers are in order! James Madison High School in Brooklyn has been awarded an Annenberg Arts Grant. The NYCWP, along with the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), Kingsborough Community College and Flying Bridge Community Art, are partners in this three-year project which will help the school to expand its arts

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program and move the arts to center stage by linking arts to the core curriculum, especially in English and Global History. We know how pleased director Linette Moorman is, and we congratulate the staff of Madison. The project has already begun with teacher-consultant Nick D'Alessandro collaborating with Karen Miller, Director of Secondary School Services at MOMA, on a two-day workshop on art and writing for Madison teachers. The workshop was held in April at Kingsborough Community College. The NYCWP is thrilled to be reunited with James Madison High School, a school where our inservice work and our Language and Learning Core student program flourished for many years.

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Once again, it is time to acknowledge the outstanding work of all the teacher-consultants who coordinated inservice seminars this year. Several Project teachers co-coordinated inservice series for the first time. They are Martin Brown, Kiran Chaudhuri, Carmen Kynard, Lisa Lauritzen, Tracy Peers Pontin, Grace Raffaele, Michael Sansone, and Andrea Swenson. These teachers have joined our experienced coordinators throughout the city: Paul Allison, Julie Conason, Linda Correnti, Nick D'Alessandro, Theresa Davidson, Portia Dillard, Debra Freeman, Andrew Galinsky, Diane Giorgi, Claudette Green, Lona Vilmar-Jack, William Klann, Gail Kleiner, Thomasina LaGuardia, Barbara Martz, Donna Mehle, Nancy Mintz, Peggy Montgomery, Ed Osterman, Nigel Pugh, Sharon Rosenberg, Alan Stein, Harriet Stein, Gilda Tesser, Ronni Tobman Michelen, Suzanne Valenza, Linda Vereline, Nancy Wilson and Janeth Wynter-Bell.

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Another Writing Project summer has passed and we want to acknowledge the teacher-consultants who made it so rich and productive for all participants:

Paul Allison and Donna Mehle coordinated the annual Invitational Summer Institute. Ed Osterman assisted participants in the design of their presentations and Grace Raffaele and Linda Garcia-Torres served as interns.

Ronni Tobman Michelen and Amanda Gulla coordinated our Open Institute and Holly Fritz was the intern who assisted them.

Tracy Peers Pontin and Lisa Lauritzen coordinated the third consecutive advanced seminar focused on literature. Jennie Chan served as their intern.

NYCWP Director Linette Moorman and Nick D'Alessandro led middle school teachers of District 22 in Brooklyn through a two-week literacy seminar.

Congratulations to all on a job well done!

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As you know, the New York City Writing Project celebrated its twentieth anniversary this year. In May, following a reception at The Chase Manhattan Bank and the annual Urban Sites Network Conference, nearly one hundred Writing Project members and friends gathered on board *The Mystic* for an evening cruise around lower Manhattan. The celebration included dinner and dancing. We were particularly delighted to be joined by colleagues from various other Writing Projects. We owe Nancy Mintz much heartfelt thanks for arranging this glorious event.

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*The Newsletter is eager to report on the activities of Writing Project teachers throughout the metropolitan area. Clearly, we are not always able to ascertain this information on our own. Please contact a teacher-consultant you see regularly, Ed Osterman or other members of our editorial staff when you have conducted a workshop, presented at a conference, received an award, or have published a story, poem, essay, or book. We would like this column to reflect the achievements of our entire membership! We look forward to hearing from you.*

### New York City Writing Project

Linette Moorman, Marcie Wolfe, Directors  
Ed Osterman, Linda Vereline, Associate Directors

### Newsletter Staff

Benita Daniels, *Newtown High School*  
Ed Osterman, *New York City Writing Project*  
Tracy Peers-Pontin, *Abraham Lincoln High School*  
Margaret Timmins-Knoesel, *Academy of Mt. Saint Ursula*  
Becky Walzer, *Urban Academy*

Desktop Production: Eileen Cropper

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LEHMAN COLLEGE  
The City University of New York  
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