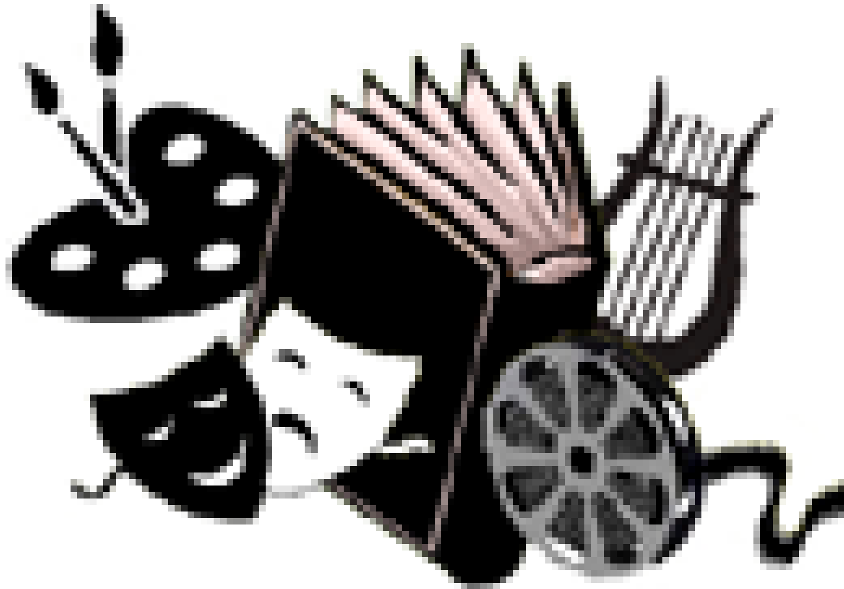
Carolina English Teacher



Fall 2003
SCCTE

Carolina English Teacher

Fall 2003

Journal of
South Carolina Council of Teachers of English
www.sccte.org

An affiliate of
National Council of Teachers of English
www.ncte.org

Co-Editors

Kelly Harrison-Maguire
Converse College

Paul Thomas
Furman University

Manuscripts

CAROLINA ENGLISH TEACHER

We need your articles, your short prose, your poetry, reviews, and letters to the editor. Also, please send cover ideas—original artwork or photography. Please submit your original work for the next issue of ***CET*** by <u>March 15, 2003</u> for the June 2003 summer publishing.

Please submit your work by email with an attached Word document. Please limit the amount of formatting in that attachment for ease of layout if your work is accepted.

E-mail submissions to: Kelly Harrison-Maguire—kelly.harrison-maguire@converse.edu

E-mail editorial/submission questions to: Paul Thomas—paul.thomas@furman.edu

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the following article referees
from the Upstate Writing Project:
Missy Smith
Suzanne Glattli
Amy Verga
Larry Bounds
Rebecca Kaminski
Vicky Gill
Becky Corbin
Elizabeth Lusby

This document was created on an iBook using Microsoft Word:mac v.x

Carolina English Teacher is a publication of the South Carolina Council of Teachers of English and a subscriber to the NCTE Affiliate Information Exchange Agreement.

Copyright © 2003 by the South Carolina Council of Teachers of English

Contents

Trying Times, Kelly Harrison-Maguire……………………………………………………..2

Feeding the Tests, Starving Our ELA Students, P. L. Thomas……………………3

Ideal v. Practical: How to Revise Writing Instruction, Erich Sturgill…………4

Five Challenging Steps to Creating a School Literary Magazine,
Holly Westcott………………………………………………………………………………5

I Think I Just Taught, Kris Harrill…….…………………………………………………14

Writing to Learn: Short Exercises that Work, Laura Feitzinger Brown…..15

Top Ten Characteristics of an Effective Language Arts Classroom,
Dawn Mitchell………………………………………………………………………………17

When Our Students Write, When Our Students Read—The Paradox of
Genre, P. L. Thomas……………………………………………………………………..19

Reviews………………………………………………………………………………………………….23

A Think, A Think. . .My Kingdom for a Think……………………………………….26

SCCTE Membership Form…………………………………………………………………….28

SCCTE 2004 Conference Form………………………………………………………………..29

From the Editor

Trying Times

Kelly Harrison-Maguire
Co-Editor
kelly.harrison-maguire@converse.edu
Converse College

Jonathan Edwards said, “These are the days that try men’s souls.” We would all be hard-pressed to find someone without similar sentiment. Our country is in the midst of a war that some people aren’t sure we should be fighting. One thing I am sure of is that my family is greatly relieved that Thomas, my brother-in-law, returned safely from Baghdad on Thanksgiving Eve. On the home front Springs Industries is closing another plant in the Upstate. The last such closing left my Aunt Margaret unemployed. And, then, there’s the upcoming presidential election. I can hardly bear the thought of how tedious and depressing that process will be.

• • •

Let’s celebrate what is going well in English/language arts education in South Carolina, and let’s use Carolina English Teacher *as one forum in which we share our successes.*

• • •

Things are no different on the education front. Policymakers ask us to do increasingly more with less funding and fewer resources. NCLB, PACT, and NCATE have us all scrambling to figure out how to meet such seemingly impossible demands. Dr. Bob Green, a wise Clemson professor under whom I once studied, says, “Schools don’t change society. Schools reflect society.” Now, he would be the first one to argue that we do make a difference in students’ lives, and certainly in their academic achievement. But, the process is complex. Students, parents, taxpayers, and educators are all partners in the schooling process, but we educators are the only stakeholders really being held responsible for student achievement. This student achievement_ is, of course, being determined, for the most part, by standardized tests like some of the end-of-course tests that evaluate student writing with multiple-choice items.

Nonetheless, this is where we are. Morale is low, but we plug away, because we know that nothing is more important than the good work we do with and for our students. We still have a passion for our students, our subject, and our profession. And, we know that there is some good news in education, especially in South Carolina. For instance, I am energized by the talk of the S. C. Reads study groups in schools across our state. Lee Turmel is optimistic about the influence _ books like Regie Routman’s *Reading Essentials: The Specifics You Need to Teach Reading Well* are having in the classrooms at Mary H. Wright Elementary School. _Turmel and Lou Jacobs of Spartanburg County School District Seven presented their related work through SCRI at the NCTE conference in San Francisco last month.

Let’s celebrate what is going well in English/language arts education in South Carolina, and let’s use *Carolina English Teacher* as one forum in which we share our successes. Let’s make our voices heard so the public will know that our students are becoming good listeners, speakers, readers, writers, and viewers. Let us hear from you:

> What is working well in your classroom?
>
> What books are teachers talking about in your area?
>
> What is your reaction to the opinions/suggestions represented in our journal?
>
> What good books have you read lately?
>
> What creative writing of your own are you willing to share with our E/LA community?

These are trying times in both our country and our profession, but we are rising to the challenge in English/language arts education. Let’s help each other along the way.

From the Editor

Feeding the Test Monsters, Starving Our ELA Students

P. L. Thomas
Co-Editor
paul.thomas@furman.edu
Furman University

Release standardized test scores into the media and politicians gather like sharks in chum-filled water. The analyses that follow are often simplistic and predictable—though lacking in educational merit.

Recently, there has been much hand wringing over the drop in English/Language Arts (ELA) scores on the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT). The governor called for school choice, and the State Department of Education blamed test fatigue. The truth is far more complicated—thus far less politically attractive.

Reading and writing are whole activities. When we try to fit literacy performances into standardized testing constraints, the results are disastrous. Driven by the need to be manageable and quantifiable, standardized testing tends to reduce and fragment whole activities into small measurable parts—such as phonemic awareness in reading and grammatical knowledge in writing.

Consider how we would respond if our local football teams practiced all week only to take multiple choice tests each Friday night. Consider how we would respond if our children in art or band never were allowed to create artwork or play an instrument, but they busily labeled the parts of an easel or a French horn each day. Yet, we allow such practices with reading and writing.

Further, we have a tendency to be careless in what we mean by the terms "reading" and "writing." "Reading" in testing situations is often little more than decoding or answering multiple-choice questions on a brief (and often lifeless) passage. In the real world, "reading" is comprehension—and it can be evaluated only by having students both perform extended reading and demonstrate comprehension through whole activities such as discussions or writing.

"Writing" suffers the same dilemma. Standardized tests for decades have passed off mere editing—identifying grammar and usage errors in other people's sentences—as writing. What students need to develop are composing skills. Again this would require having students create their own topics and produce a piece of writing through a lengthy process that cannot be managed or quantified as easily as grammar tests can be.

• • •

When we reduce reading and writing activities to worksheets that look like PACT, phonics drills, and isolated grammar instruction in order to feed the monsters of NCLB and PACT, we actually harm students' literacy skills and destroy their natural interests as readers and writers.

• • •

Robert Coles, a leader in reading research, and George Hillocks, Jr., the foremost national authority on writing instruction, have shown over the past couple decades that as accountability measures and standardized testing expand in both their power and their frequency, reading and writing instruction is negatively impacted; thus, students are being directly harmed in their literacy development by legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and South Carolina's own PACT.

In our local schools, the threat of failing school report cards and the looming declaration by the federal government that most schools in South Carolina are failures have forced administrators and teachers to ignore authentic reading and writing instruction in order to address PACT for PACT's sake. Much of our literacy instruction has become isolated to mirror the fragmented nature of standardized tests.

When we reduce reading and writing activities to worksheets that look like PACT, phonics drills, and isolated grammar instruction in order to feed the monsters of NCLB and PACT, we actually harm students' literacy skills and destroy their natural

interests as readers and writers. Hillocks, in fact, has shown that direct, isolated grammar instruction produces inferior writing in content and surface features when compared to pieces by students who free write daily with no teacher input.

Standardizing and standardized tests are by their nature contrary to individual acts such as reading and writing. But neat numbers from high-stakes testing are manageable, and they provide easily manipulated political capital.

The drop in ELA scores on PACT should be a wake up call. Who do we want dictating how our children learn to read and write? Politicians who have experience in business, insurance, or law? Politicians who may benefit only if they can assure that our schools are labeled failures?

What our children need is both messy and politically neutral. Students need classrooms where teachers are free to engage them in rich reading and writing activities that do not include worksheets, that do not include text books or reading programs, that do not include checklists of curriculum to cover passed down from Washington, DC, or Columbia.

Reading and writing instruction are the most valuable gifts we can give our students; language is their passport to empowered lives. The current drop in ELA scores on PACT is an indictment—but not on our children or our teachers. It is an indictment on our political leaders who are enjoying a season of playing political football with the education of children.

A Taste of Barbara Kingsolver's *Small Wonder*

"We know so very much about the trees, and miss the forest. I was talking with a friend, though, so I told her on that I was deeply sorry for the Kennedy family, to whom the tragedy [of John Jr.'s death] belonged, but that it would make no real difference in

Ideal Versus Practical: How to Revise Writing Instruction

Erich Sturgill
esturgil@greenville.k12.sc.us
Greer Middle School

I have always considered myself a successful teacher. I was just given the teacher-of-the-year award by my faculty in only my sixth year of teaching. For years now, parents, students and fellow teachers have been pulling me aside to praise me for giving children the tools they need to be successful. Countless numbers of former students have come back to my eighth-grade classroom to thank me for the writing foundation I gave them. They say my instruction has helped them in all of their classes in high school (and now that I'm older, college). I have been asked to head committees, make presentations and conduct workshops for faculty and other teachers within my district. All of this had led me to believe that I "have it made" in the classroom and that I was set for a successful, smooth-sailing career in education.

Then I began pursuing my master's degree. I have taken numerous graduate classes before and not had my teaching principals shaken too severely. Then I took an Introduction to Literacy class with a professor who violently upset my teaching oasis. I was introduced to the works of people like Constance Weaver, Lou LaBrant, George Hillocks, Judith Langer and Jane Kiel. All of these teachers have shown me that my ideas and formulas for writing success, the very ones that have brought me praise and admiration, are not considered "best practice." My lessons and curriculum have been harming my students by wasting their time and limiting their development. My zeal to produce higher test scores has created one-dimensional writers who are only proficient in the formula-essays required by standardized testing. I have created many of the conventions-based problems (usage, mechanics, etc.) that have

nagged me, and therefore my students, for years through behaviorist teaching.

My limited success in teaching has drawn a veil over my eyes and made me complacent in what I do. I am now at a career-crossroads. Do I completely abandon my current philosophies and strategies for teaching students how to write "formally" or throw that away and adapt what research says are the best methods for producing real writers? Adhering to research reduces my paperwork load (and headaches) in teaching grammar and vocabulary, but do I abandon my traditional teaching methods at the risk of losing students who are "trained" for operating in an analytical classroom environment? I believe that shedding all of my current teaching practices will set me up for failure because a.) there will be too large of a transition for students and b.) progress would become untraceable in regard to the traditional grading standards in which we must operate. Despite these obstacles, adjustment can be made to what I do. I can become a better guide for students—pointing them toward the proper conventions and nuances of the English language.

• • •

The arena of assessment also stifles the needed transformation of my English instruction. One of the major reasons for whole-language instruction lies in the unpredictable manner in which children acquire linguistic competency.

• • •

An abrupt and complete transformation of my teaching program will not just traumatize me. Taking my students out of their years of traditional, behaviorist classrooms and placing them in a more constructivist classroom will cause more harm than good. Sudden changes in a learning environment are "problematic in a traditional educational setting filled with prescriptive curriculum, lesson plans guided by observable objectives, and assessment that is empirical, analytical and close-ended" (Thomas 18). Just as simply throwing a child into a lake is not the best way to teach him/her to swim, I should not blindly throw my students into a completely alien learning environment.

Although I believe most students would be excited to no longer have grammar or vocabulary units, this loss of structure will cause them to focus less on the desired objective—learning conventions of effective writing. The students' elation over their newfound academic freedom would overshadow the importance of learning how to write well. We should not expect all eighth graders to show the maturity necessary to pursue their own improvement. Much of the instruction in ideal language programs involves students actually striving to learn on their own. They must want to improve their writing.

Where you can trust *some* students to choose meaningful tasks and texts to facilitate their learning, we must admit that a number of the "other" students will choose less challenging materials to work with (or perhaps not choose any materials at all). Many students don't really know what they like to read and only write in school because of their traditional schooling. Can we blame them for this lack of direction and desire? Years of brow beating and demoralizing from a constant barrage of inappropriate and ineffective lessons, worksheets, tests and quizzes play a major role in creating student apathy. However, a teacher should not immediately remove all of the familiar (but still ineffective) structure from their instruction. Not slowly integrating various aspects of effective literacy education into my classes "complicates [the] student's ability to reap the full benefits of autonomy" (Thomas 18). Without a sense of the commonplace instructional philosophy, my class would seem more like a vacation than a learning opportunity.

The arena of assessment also stifles the needed transformation of my English instruction. One of the major reasons for whole-language instruction lies in the unpredictable manner in which children acquire linguistic competency. Learning how to effectively use all of the grammatical and lexical "tricks" of English is not as simple as checking off items on a list. I cannot simply add knowledge or skill, one tidbit at a time, to a student's intellect. Learners do not learn

and then master one skill at a time. Constance Weaver's *Teaching Grammar in Context* maintains a.) "learners do not typically master something correctly all at once" and b.) "something learned may be [only] temporarily applied as the student is trying something new" (60). These two claims account for the recurring problems with sentence structure, possessives and homophones that have brought about the onset of my male-pattern baldness. I was always baffled by the fact that students could identify and form correct complex sentences on tests, but could not consistently write them in essays. As they would finally start showing consciousness of their sentence structure in writing, they would regress to not being able to correctly use there/ their and you're/ your. Weaver's research helps to ease this frustration. I always considered my students' inconsistent grades a result of apathy and carelessness where in reality it signifies their normal development. However, such oddities in performance throw a monkey wrench into the traditional assessment I must conduct. Students should not be punished for "doing what comes naturally."

True progress in linguistic competency cannot be gauged by my usual tests, quizzes, worksheets (I'm so ashamed—although I do create a lot of my own) and essays. Quizzes, tests and worksheets unnecessarily separate skills from their natural context—again, not promoting true learning. My essay rubric, based on Ruth Culham and Vicki Spandel's *Six Trait Writing* program, is also rendered ineffective by Weaver's contentions concerning student learning. Years of experimenting and "engineering" with this program have produced an extremely effective tool for writing instruction and assessment. However, the nature of *Six Traits* assessment is very analytical. Each aspect of a piece of writing (*Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency* and *Conventions*) must be individually scored and added together to create an entire grade. The integral philosophy behind this is no one trait is more important than another. This makes the subjectivity necessary for fair and accurate assessment of writing ability impossible.

According to research like Weaver's, a student's performance in one trait may suffer due to his/ her effort to improve in another. My *Six Traits* system punishes this natural process of "errors" when, ideally, such errors should be ignored or forgiven. I would have to praise and award credit for the demonstration of some grammatical and vocabulary skills while simultaneously ignoring others. (Sounds like worksheets.)

Assigning traditional and rigid numerical scores to such compositions would be a tricky undertaking. In today's age of public distrust of education and educators, teachers need concrete, objective analyses of student progress to show parents. This helps us avoid problems and makes us seem more professional. Objectivity breeds integrity. I could not easily defend one kid's scores versus another's when they both show an equal amount of deficiency—even if I know that one child could write in a more sophisticated way than the other. Parents are not trained like English teachers. We cannot expect them to understand language acquisition like we do. Therefore, they should not be expected to immediately trust the more subjective grading and scoring of ideal literacy programs. Administrators could play a vital intermediary role in this parent-teacher relationship, but asking a principal to immediately do this is unfair considering an administrator's already strenuous workday. Slowly integrating the practices and assessments of effective literacy education would allow both administrators and parents to "warm up" to it and gradually learn of its value. Again, it would be too hard for everyone (myself included) to adjust to an abrupt and total transformation of instruction and philosophy.

My current instruction style, while partly traditional, has many practices leaning toward effective whole language teaching. My writing instruction emulates many of the best practices outlined by research. The *Six Traits* program allows me to go through writing in an effective analytical manner. We concentrate on one aspect of effective writing at a time while emphasizing the importance of each trait working together with the others. No one trait (or part of a piece of writing) is ever prioritized over another. I use mini-lessons (those provided by the *Six Traits* program and ones I have created) to teach stylistic points concerning the traits and other facets of the writing process. Students are taught to become editors and critics of writing. We use

the *Six Traits* to evaluate sample writings from texts and other student writings (identities withheld, of course). In time, students become competent enough to evaluate their peers' essays as well as their own. My students write a large number of essays and compositions during the year to help them absorb the skills and qualities of good writers. These practices are the strength of my teaching. These lessons and experiences in writing are what prompt the positive feedback from my colleagues, students and parents. This has made me what I thought was a good English teacher. The problem is, this has only made up approximately one-third of my instruction.

• • •

Unaware of research, I always assumed that teaching grammar from texts improved reading and writing skills. I have never known a middle school language arts teacher to not teach grammar in isolation.

• • •

Research from the past seventy-five years shows that my approach to grammatical instruction is not effective. I have taught grammar in isolation during my entire career. I've used two different grammar texts to take students through parts of speech and sentence types. After three years of teacher/ student frustration and boredom, I turned to a new approach to teaching grammar. My plan involved placing less emphasis on grammar in the classroom. The goal was to review all the grammatical concepts I planned to cover with students early in the year. Then we would cover areas of weakness identified in our review. At strategic points in the year the class would review these points again to aid in retention. I believed that this would help to eliminate the repetition of things students have known for years and, therefore, make grammar more meaningful to them. Using Michael Clay Thompson's *The Magic Lens* as a guide, my classes survived all the parts of speech, parts of a sentence, phrases and clauses. Unfortunately, this approach taught *me* a lot about grammar and failed to reach a majority of my students. Only the students with a solid foundation in the study of grammar could excel and learn this way. Other students, just as with the other teaching approach, struggled to remember what they needed for the next test. Very little knowledge carried over to other lessons, assignments and writing.

Despite my attempts to enrich my grammar instruction, I still was practicing what Judith Langer labels "separated instruction"—a more effective means of covering than teaching skills (13). Teaching skills in isolation from their regular context (i.e. writing) is ineffective and does not promote development of linguistic competency. Unaware of research, I always assumed that teaching grammar from texts improved reading and writing skills. I have never known a middle school language arts teacher to not teach grammar in isolation. I feared that not covering all of the skills could possibly come back later to haunt me in standardized testing. As I watched my students "go through the motions" with grammar exercises and then not apply those skills in their true context (writing), I knew that what I was doing was not working. The problem was no one I knew or had even heard about was doing it differently.

I now know that I can make grammar instruction be more valuable by teaching lessons in the context of student errors. To avoid abrupt transition to an unfamiliar, uncomfortable learning environment, I will still conduct, from time to time, mini-grammar lessons sparked by these errors in writing. Repetitive practice will still be used occasionally to help "drive home" certain concepts. This should help to prevent students becoming passive with this learning. Because the grammar lessons will come from the mistakes they are making in the present, my students should be more receptive to the instruction. This student-driven approach to grammar will hopefully attach more ownership and relevancy to the intricacies of English, better fostering their appreciation for the language—one of our ultimate goals.

My new direction in vocabulary instruction should also help improve my students' grammatical deficiencies. Yet again, my vocabulary program consisted of one to two vocabulary texts and their accompanying exercises, worksheets and tests. Although students had to include the

vocabulary words we studied into their essays, I found students would often manufacture artificial sentences in order to get vocabulary words in their writing. Often these sentences would interrupt the flow of their compositions and take away from the overall effect. How can I continue to let vocabulary actually harm some students' writing?

Gradual "de-structuring" will be critical here as well. I plan to continue to use one of the two vocabulary texts I have always used to keep the students feeling like they are in a conventional learning environment. This, coupled with abundant exposure to well-written texts, will better serve my students. Emphasizing this learning over that in the vocabulary text will be more effective in the long run. Research states that students can actually learn "the rules and complexities, or syntax, of the language without even being taught" (Kiel 6). Language immersion is key to students' development of an educated grammar and vocabulary. Through their reading and interacting with great writers, fiction and nonfiction, I hope to guide students toward the finer points of the language-lexical and grammatical manipulation. I want students to see that effective vocabulary usage does not necessarily involve large and "sophisticated" words. Students should know that grammatical "errors" are sometimes effective and can be used. Exposing students to many examples of fine written language will, and should, serve as the main source of vocabulary acquisition (Kiel 9). I plan to make this exposure key to all elements of language acquisition-the key to the third area of my instructional revision.

Absorbing my students into literature and other examples of good writing will be crucial to the ultimate objective of my teaching revision. I want to not just create good writers but good, multi-dimensional writers.

Over the years, in fear of standardized testing, I have turned my student writers into good test takers. I forgot that a good writer should be able to do more than write a well developed, five paragraph essay with a correctly placed thesis statement. This is virtually all I worked on for the entire school year. Recently, I have even begun to discourage the use of personal pronouns like "I" and "me" in essays to help provide a formal tone to my students' writing. State tests have clearly intimidated me to the point where my instruction had become completely focused on writing nothing but formal essays and research papers. I even went deeper into incorrectly training students by dictating that they show several levels of the writing process (i.e. brainstorming, free writing, webbing, drafting, revision, etc.). My students were required to do something that I do not follow in my own writing. I thought that since state tests asked to see these things (only as an option—not even a requirement), I needed to "condition" my students to produce them, too. In doing these things I completely neglected all of the other genres, creating stagnate and entirely too "serious" writers.

Where this aspect of my teaching needs to change, I will not totally start from scratch here either. My current practices provide students more than adequate exposure to the formal, formula type of essay. This style of writing constitutes the bulk of writing students will do in high school and college. Focusing on formal essays and research papers gives students an opportunity to prepare for assignments in all disciplines. This, along with good performance on standardized tests, is an adequate reason to keep doing a portion of what I have before.

The biggest change I plan to make is that instead of this being the sole focus of my writing instruction, it will now only be one part. Formal writing should be treated like another genre of writing like poetry or short stories. I want to expose students to these other types of writing as well. Reading a very wide variety of literature will provide students with the valuable opportunity to interact and even mimic different forms of writing. Students can learn about style and technique through this kind of exposure, creating more diverse, interesting and "real" writers. Simultaneously, students will be "soaking in" the vocabulary and grammatical structures they need to master as well. I will no longer ask students to show me a step-by-step linear writing process. Instead of expecting them trying to follow a "prescribed" order of thinking, I will need to learn to accept the period of "incubation" students go through and be satisfied with a non-linear process (Weaver 82-83). All the pressure of standardized tests sometimes

clouds the fact that the end result is most important.

This extensive analysis of my teaching has shown me that research on best practices in English classrooms is valuable. However, I doubt that any of the researchers I have studied would advocate the complete destruction of my old practices. In time I will be able to have a more ideal classroom, but not without the help of my colleagues. Teachers below and above me will need to also re-think their philosophies of teaching before we can truly begin to teach students how to write effectively. Maybe they will come to see, as I have, that the process will not be painful. I will now begin to do my part both in my classroom and with my colleagues.

Works Cited

Culham, Ruth and Vicki Spandel. *Six Trait Writing for Assessment and Instruction.* Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 1995.

Kiel, Jane. "How Language is Learned: From Birth Through the Elementary Years and Beyond." *Lessons to Share*. Ed. Constance Weaver. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998. 1-17.

Langer, Judith A. *Effective Literacy Instruction: Building Successful Reading and Writing Programs*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 2002.

Thomas, Paul. "Speaking My Mind." *English Journal*. 92.6 (2003): 17-19.

Thompson, Michael Clay. *The Magic Lens: A Spiral Tour Through the Human Ideas of Grammar*. Unionville: Royal Fireworks Press, 1995.

Weaver, Constance. *Teaching Grammar in Context*. Portsmouth: Boynton/ Cook, 1996.

Secondary Voice

Five Challenging Steps to Creating a School Literary magazine

Holly Westcott
wwestcott@bellsouth.net
Greenwood High School

Does your school have a literary magazine? Would you like to start one? Literary magazines can be an exciting and interesting way of encouraging student writing talents, and, by drawing on resources from student photographers and artists, they integrate the arts into one beautiful publication that represents your school's best. Best of all to those of us engaged in teaching English, a literary magazine can add impetus to a school's writing program. Barbara Thomson says that the greatest value of a literary magazine is that "It provides an authentic publishing outlet for real writing, not just writing for one teacher. It validates everything we teach in our language arts classes about the value of writing." And Barbara should know, having spent twenty-one years working with *Notations*, Richland Northeast High School's literary magazine.

Though there are many good reasons for both high and middle schools to have a magazine, producing one is not an easy task. As with so many things that go on in a school, even if the students do much of the work, the advisor will work harder than anyone else. Putting a magazine together requires five basic steps:

1. Building a staff
2. Gathering writing and artwork
3. Getting funding
4. Creating the magazine
5. Taking it to press

Building a staff may be the easiest step. If you're lucky enough to have a creative writing class in charge of putting out the magazine, you simply start with those who are enrolled. I was never so lucky, nor are most South Carolina high schools that have literary magazines. Producing *Quill & Scroll* at Greenwood High School was strictly extracurricular. Though that meant that

both my staff and I had only the energy left once the school day was over, it also added a certain conviviality. There was no enforced togetherness, only togetherness by choice. It also meant that I got to know a lot of wonderful young people whom I had not gotten to know through the classroom.

Karen Flowers, a former Irmo High School journalism teacher who now works with high school journalism through the University of South Carolina's School of Mass Communications and Information Studies, told me that the teachers she knows are attracted to literary magazine advising because "they enjoy working with bright, creative students." She said, "The teachers get to watch imagination and creativity in action—two qualities that seem to be dying in our public schools." Advising the school's literary magazine provides you contact with young people who have an appetite for the same things you enjoy where the written word is concerned.

As a magazine advisor, I knew I had found my kind when we held a book sale and most of the student workers spent their work hours perusing the books. Fundraisers like our book sale help to build staff unity as well as earn money, but there are a multitude of activities that can also build staff interest. These are your school's literati, so attending an after-school session on how to plot a short story is something they are eager to do. While advising *Quill & Scroll*, I made a special effort to have a variety of workshops after school, inviting various writers in our community to lead them, in order to encourage the writing efforts of my staff. I learned something from each of our presenters and so did our students. We opened these sessions to the student body at large, hoping to expand our range of influence. While few non-staff members participated, a few staff members invited friends, and they felt more comfortable knowing that everyone was welcome.

You do need to be forewarned: All who sign up to work on your magazine at the beginning of the year may not make it through May. Barbara Thomson notes that "Teens often say they want to do something in a burst of enthusiasm and then forget that drive when the real work begins." There are some who will sign up simply looking for another item to list on their resume. Even so, there are enough who will remain interested and enthusiastic throughout the year, and you, as advisor, can draw on their spirit. You probably need to devise early on some method of determining just whose names will ultimately be listed on the masthead. That is, how much activity is required in order for someone who signed up for the staff to be listed as a staff member in the magazine itself? In determining who gets credit, you need to think of both fundraising activity and editorial activity, recognizing also that someone who is strong in one area may not be as strong in another.

While you're enlisting participants, provide the students with a form that asks for basic information as well as their school schedule. Being able to locate a particular student during your free period or even after school is enormously helpful. I kept a big notebook with this information so that I could find it quickly when I needed it.

Of course, your magazine needs an editor, and you may want to place students in other positions as well: poetry editor, prose editor, art editor, managing editor, whatever. You might study mastheads of other magazines to see what categories they use and then decide what will work for you. Judges in some competitions prefer to see students having lots of different, very specific jobs. Nancy Swanson, who advises the *Roar* at Daniel High School, says that her advice to anyone undertaking a literary magazine for the first time is "Pick a good editor." This is someone you will work with closely, so you need a person with whom you get along well. Perhaps the most significant criterion for the editor is that he or she is willing to put the interests of the magazine above other interests. Early in my experience as an advisor, an editor got so involved with the senior class play during the spring semester that I rarely saw her even though we were approaching publication. Her name remained on the masthead, but she was strictly a figurehead that year, not a worker. After that, I was careful to select editors who understood that the literary magazine required their full attention even when they were involved in other activities.

Even though you are encouraging the writers and artists among your own staff, gathering writing and artwork is a challenge. Your school may have many talented and creative young people, yet if they do not bring you the fruits of their labor, it does your magazine no good. You need to

advertise widely so that students will know that you want their poems, essays, stories, articles, and artwork. You also need to gain the goodwill of teachers who can channel student writing and art to you. Perhaps the most important source is students themselves, not just the writers, but the friends of the writers who spot their good work and see it as worthy of publication. The prize-winning poem in the last issue of *Quill & Scroll* that I advised came to us by way of the poet's friend who brought a sheaf of poems from this young poet early in the year. The poet was entirely too modest about the quality of her work, but thank goodness, the friend stepped in. Remind your staff members to be on the lookout for good writing and to encourage student authors to submit.

The prizes that *Quill & Scroll* offers were incentive for some to submit their work. When I took over the magazine from its former advisor, the students on staff very quickly informed me that the magazine traditionally gives $50 awards for best poem, best prose, and cover art. While most who submitted were oblivious to the awards (publication was prize enough), there were indeed some students who had their eyes on the cash when they gave us their work. Obviously, such awards must be paid for, a fact which leads us to the ugly subject of money.

As you begin, fundraising may be a major hurdle. Printing is expensive. While you can stick to black and white, color adds to your magazine; however, the more you use, the more you pay the printer. If you are lucky, your school or district may fund your magazine, either completely or in part. Unfortunately, neither Greenwood High School nor Greenwood District 50 offered me any financial backing. Finding money for *Quill & Scroll* was left completely up to me.

While we tried many different fundraisers, Ghoulie Grams were the biggest moneymaker every year we did them. A Ghoulie Gram is simply a bag of candy delivered on Halloween. After papering the school with orange flyers promoting Ghoulie Grams and of course making the inevitable PA announcements, we set up shop at a table outside the school cafeteria during each lunch period where we sold the Ghoulie Grams for about two weeks before the Big Day. We had an appropriately decorated orange form on which the buyer, who paid $1, filled out the name of the person to receive the Ghoulie Gram, that person's location during the period we planned delivery, and his or her name or, in some cases, alias. The school's registrar helped us find room numbers when the purchaser could not tell us where to deliver. Sales always started slow, then ended in a frenzy with lots of last minute buyers, even repeat buyers. And of course filling the bags, stapling the form, and then getting the bags organized and delivered also involved its own frenzy. Brookland-Cayce High School's *Laureate* deserves credit for introducing us to Ghoulie Grams. Though exhausting, they made our bank account grow. Despite my frustrations in keeping the project organized, students loved it. It helped my staff members to bond as they shared the work, and it gave our staff an identity in the school long before the magazine appeared.

The second biggest contributor of growth to our bank account was begging letters. I probably did not get checks from even a tenth of the businesses, industries, and individuals to whom I mailed letters signed by both our editor and me, but that small group helped us build our coffers. And there's nothing like getting a check in the mail, even when you have to deposit it to an account that does not have your name on it. My mother always said that the sweetest words in the English language are "Enclosed, find check." She was right! Of course, receiving the money meant writing a thank you note and then, when the magazine was published, seeing that our donors received a copy, which had their names listed at the back.

As I worked on *Quill & Scroll*, I widened the range of those I sought money from. I put out pleas to teachers, many of whom responded generously, and then, this past year for the first time, to school organizations. Many of the latter work to raise money, then have more than they need, so they were willing to share their profits. I also made it possible to give a donation in memory of someone, in honor of someone, or to thank someone. I became so talented at begging that I thought perhaps my next job should be with United Way.

Once you have some poems, essays, articles, and stories—and, I'll warn you, the prose pieces are the hardest to get—you need a selection process to determine which will reach publication. For many staff members

and even for advisors like Nancy Swanson, this is the part that is the most fun. Seeing what others write is a major motivation for students to join your staff. It's important to see that writing is judged anonymously. I blacked out the name if it was on the piece, assigned it a number, then kept a record of what number belonged to that name. I borrowed someone's sticky note idea for the actual selection procedure. I had students sit in a circle, read, then write "yes," "no," or "maybe" on a sticky note, and put the sticky note on the back of the piece of writing. A preponderance of *yes's* or *no's* determined the fate of the individual piece. Many *maybe's* meant that the piece would be recycled, ie, judged again at another time, potentially by a different set of people because most meetings had different assortments of staff members in attendance. The sticky notes kept one person's initial judgment from influencing another's, but it did not prohibit discussion of individual pieces.

Did I intrude into the process? Rarely. One year there was a prose piece that I thought had been misjudged. Though it had gotten a lot of *no*'s, I held it for another round. Fortunately, there was a different set of students on hand for the second round, and they voted *yes*. In this case, the student writer was at the meeting at which the *no* vote was cast and left thinking that her essay had been rejected. You can imagine her surprise when it not only met publication, but received the Eagle's Quill Award for Prose.

Once or twice, poems that were approved by the staff seemed to me to be too good to be true. After checking up on the particular poets by asking other teachers questions about them, I decided that they were probably plagiarized and simply took them out of our "yes" folder. Suspicions of plagiarism are easier to deal with in the literary magazine than in the classroom, where the teacher must grade the work and therefore is obliged to make some clear decision about how to regard it. You need no proof of plagiarism in order not to publish something because you are under no obligation to publish it. If in doubt, take it out.

Artwork is selected not only for its quality, but for how well it complements the writing. Therefore, its selection is worked out a bit differently. A staff member who is also an art student can keep an eye out for what's being produced in the art rooms. I normally consulted with the editors and of course the art teachers and whoever else might be handy in trying to decide what would work in a particular issue. Occasionally, I solicited a drawing of a particular subject. Practicality is definitely a factor in the decisions you and your staff make. Color costs money. Not every work of art will reproduce well. Selecting the art and integrating it into the magazine was always for me the hairiest part of the process, but also one of the most rewarding because of the way in which it enhanced the final product. Because the art teachers were so important in helping our staff create that product, they were listed on the masthead as art advisors.

Some years, it was quite easy to determine what would go on the cover. The particular artwork virtually announced that it was meant to go there. This past year, the decision was trickier than usual. A student artist had created, using mixed media, an intriguing, but sensual piece. Was it too sensual for our magazine? We ultimately decided to be brave and used it. Did we get flack for our bravery? Not that I know of—but we did get a lot of long, drawn out "hmmmm's" from people when they first saw the cover. When it comes to decisions like this one, you need a lot of staff and teacher consultation, and you need to have a good sense of who your public is.

Once you know what will go into your magazine, getting to that final product is not easy! There are probably many ways to do it. I can thank *Quill & Scroll* for forcing me to learn Adobe PageMaker. On my last issue, I was lucky enough to have an editor, Sarah Magness, who was not only literate and artistic, but also very computer-savvy. She created this year's layout completely on her own, and it's one of our best. Also, for the first time, we had every artwork on a slide—thanks to the assistance of Bob Poe, Lander art professor, who has a studio set up for taking slides of artwork. I used a scanner to transfer the slides to a compact disk, and Sarah was able to place the slides as she worked on the magazine. We gave the printer our magazine on a zip disk, including the graphics in a separate file, so pages were not subject to the vagaries of the computer's printer. This enabled our printer to give us a

good price and do much better work duplicating the color than in the past.

Dealing with the printer is an important step. The state requires that you get three bids if the job is to cost over $1500, and it probably will, so prepare to take time for that. Learn as much as you can about what the printer will want before you start. For example, pages should be in multiples of four; your printer can explain just why. This year we made some last minute changes in order to group our color pages near the center to make the process easier for the printer and therefore cheaper for us. While I always pushed the two-weeks-before-graduation deadline for distribution really hard every year that I did *Quill & Scroll*, our printer always helped us see that the magazine got to students in time to be distributed. Despite my nightmares of having boxes of magazines arrive after graduation, it never happened.

When I started as *Quill & Scroll* advisor, I followed the lead of the previous advisor and simply gave it away. Eventually, I decided that our magazine would be more appreciated if there was a cost to students, but our charge was always minimal, and we sold magazines only after they were in print. Many school literary magazines take orders early in the year, sometimes in conjunction with the sales of other school publications such as the yearbook and newspaper, and charge a healthy price. What works best? As with many aspects of literary magazine publishing, the answer depends on you and your school. Certainly, the greatest reward of what you are doing is not in the numbers of copies you sell nor in the money those sales produce, but in the glow of pride that you see in student writers and artists.

Once the magazine is published, you and your staff will receive many compliments. It's nice to bask in the response to a job well done. However, you can also get more discerning feedback from programs that judge magazines. One is the National Council of Teachers of English's Program to Recognize Excellence in School Literary Magazines (PRESLM). It will cost you $25, but it's good to see just how your magazine stands among other magazines from across the country. The South Carolina Scholastic Press Association (SCSPA) also judges magazines, also for a fee. Its criteria are somewhat different from PRESLM's, so the two complement each other nicely. With PRESLM you get only a rating, whereas with SCSPA a judge makes evaluative comments on a copy of the magazine that you get back. These will help you recognize specifically what you are doing well and where you need to improve. Obviously, it's a good idea to take a look at the criteria both use before you get started so you'll have some idea of what to aim for.

SCSPA's twice-yearly conferences were an inspiration to my students and an excellent resource for me. In fact, some of the ideas I've mentioned here like Ghoulie Grams and sticky notes were picked up at their conferences. Carolina Journalism Institute (CJI), held at USC during the summers, also provides good grounding for advisors and students. Every student I sent to CJI loved it, and I never met an advisor who did not learn from it.

Soooo—Are you ready to help your school produce a literary magazine? It's definitely hard work, but you will learn a lot and enjoy being a part of a creative process. Not only that, but you will provide a showcase for talent that might otherwise go unrecognized. Now that I'm retired and my last issue of *Quill & Scroll* is behind me, I'm glad that I will no longer deal with fundraising frenzy and deadline panic, but I also know that I'm going to miss the students I worked with and the magazine that we, together, produced and took pride in.

Helpful info:

Kim Tiedemann
South Carolina Leader for PRESLM
PO Box 25792
Columbia, SC 29224
(803) 736-9635
ktiedemann@sc.rr.com

South Carolina Scholastic Press Association
http://www.sc.edu/cmcis/so/scspa

For info on SCSPA or CJI, you may contact:
Karen Flowers
flowersk@gwm.sc.edu

Parts of this article appear in the South Carolina Scholastic Press Association's Advisor's Handbook 2003. The South Carolina Scholastic Press Association is headquartered in the University of South Carolina's College of Mass Communications and Information Studies.

I Think I Just Taught

Kris Harrill, English Education Major
lar0330@yahoo.com
University of South Carolina

About a month ago, I called my dad around 2:30 in the afternoon, knowing he was in the middle of a meeting or was out of the office working in a school. Last year, I programmed his cell phone so that when I called, his phone would light up in a fluorescent blue. I needed him to know when it was me, and I was even nice enough to go ahead and make my mom ring in with yellow and my sister with red.

I called to tell him that I'd just had my first ADEPT evaluation, that I'd fulfilled the Performance Dimensions, that I was on my way to becoming a teacher. Of course, he was excited, but obviously not about the evaluation. I hung up the phone and laughed about my call, "Dad! I had my first ADEPT and it was great!" No, it wasn't the evaluation, the piece of paper with my student-teaching supervisor's written notes to critique my classroom performance. I was calling, really, just to say to someone who would be as excited as I was, *I think I just taught.*

Of course, my dad was proud of me and that's all I'd wanted from the phone call. But I think I was proud of me too.

Young teachers are thrown into a whirlwind of curriculum, research, readings, discussions, and now, the popular reflection upon it all. And this is where I am. But I'm lucky. I attend a university that boasts a fifth-year program so that in a mere five years I will have a B.A. in English and a Masters degree in teaching. I have professors who *are* in the field. I read the latest books, the studies done by Harvey Daniels and Regie Routman, as well as Harry Noden and Katie Wood Ray. I subscribe to journals. I read poetry and fiction. I linger in the young adult section of Barnes and Noble as often as I do the Best Seller section. I'm a young teacher, not yet a part of the action, on the outskirts, trying to find my cue for an outstanding entrance that no one will miss. And I know I'm not alone. There are classrooms full of students just like me.

In college, I worked on an English degree, and though I also worked on an education minor, I thought about doing everything except teaching. Each fall at Thanksgiving dinner, those family members that I only see a few times a year asked about school and what I planned to do in the future. Everyone goes through this. The expected answer was simple, "I'm going to teach," but I never felt confident enough to actually admit that I might follow my dad, the thing *most* expected. So I responded with every other idea I'd recently had. I wanted to be a writer, *just* a writer, and maybe a photographer for a magazine to make a living. I wanted to move to California or Oregon and live on the coast. I wanted to go to graduate school and become a scholar, know everything about Shakespeare, read all the plays and sonnets, be able to quote the greatest lines and the many that no one else can remember. I wanted to be anything other than a high school teacher, even though that was the most direct route I was taking.

I did the undergraduate work in local schools, tutoring and mentoring, completing my hours of service learning to get my grade in a class. And I enjoyed it. But I could never say I was a teacher. I sat in the school library with Nick, trying to motivate him to complete a history assignment, but ended up letting him show me a map of Harlem, NY, where he once lived, on the Internet instead. I wouldn't call it loss of focus, but rather a last resort to gain his trust. Looking at a digital image, pointing out the red star on the map of his old neighborhood, marking his house, I made a connection with a child. I listened to stories of Harlem and knew that Columbia, SC, was never going to feel like home to this child. We completed half of his history assignment, and his teacher wasn't impressed. But I was. I had taken the time to understand a child.

I sat in a rundown hallway outside a third-grade classroom with two students, working through pages of activities, learning how to count money and tell time. In the process, while Dustin made circles around me with his energy, I learned that Georgina's older brother hadn't finished school. We talked about the money, counting paper nickels and dimes. We read the purple-printed clocks on the worksheet and even

reset my own watch a few times for a more realistic perspective. All I wanted to do was let Dustin continue walking around and around me because I knew it felt good to him. All I wanted was to pull Georgina over and whisper in her ear, "I know your brother didn't finish, but I *know* that you will." I wanted to keep these two children all for myself and let them grow. But I couldn't.

• • •

In college, I worked on an English degree, and though I also worked on an education minor, I thought about doing everything except teaching.

• • •

During my first internship, I landed in an eleventh grade English classroom, and had an experience completely unique, unlike my previous time spent with kids in libraries and hallways. I was working with kids who've probably experienced more of the real world than I have, and yet, I was trying to teach them something. I wouldn't say that my experience with the students jarred me at all, or even stressed me out, though I did see myself changing. I had to come out of myself with a new voice that I wasn't used to at all. I had to find the balance between being their friend, a kid, myself, straight from college, and a teacher who actually had some new insight to offer. My experience is a familiar one I'm sure, perhaps just growing up a bit, something most everyone reaches eventually. Right now, it's simply what is real to me—a short glance at what's left for me to do.

Last weekend, I ran into one of the students from my high school placement at Wal-Mart. He ran over, shouting, "Ms. Harrill, we miss you!" Other customers in the store might have looked around, wondering where I'd been hiding, but all I could do was laugh because this was the kid who'd come to class just a few weeks earlier in sock feet, forgetting that his shoes were in his locker. Before I could even get a response out, he filled me in on things at school, "OK, listen, the new student teacher's nice and all, but you have to come back, like, you have to!" And I'm sure I will.

So, I completed my first ADEPT evaluation. Obviously that's not the point. I'm standing on the outside of something big, something I can't describe except to say that my time with students is unlike any other time of my day. A voice creeps out of me that I've never heard before, a sound that I'm still getting used to. I can hear my father, see his facial expressions, see his stance in front of a group. I can hear my mother, her sarcasm and jokes that make a person know she's really just trying to get a smile. I can hear the examples and stories of past teachers. All of these lifelong influences seem to work together and appear each day to give me something to pass on to the minds of an entirely new group.

I realize that this is exactly where I'm supposed to be. I can still be a writer and photographer. I might still move to California or Oregon. I'm almost positive that I will continue on my way toward a PhD, ending up in that university office quoting Shakespeare. I'm on the outskirts, once tiptoeing toward a future, but now steadily walking, and I think I'm ready.

Voice from Higher Ed

Writing to Learn: Short Exercises that Work

Laura Feitzinger Brown
laura.brown@converse.edu
Converse College

Most instructors now require little convincing that our students need to write more effectively and need to write more often. Few of us need to discuss **why** we need to incorporate writing into our courses. Most of us, and I include myself here, would appreciate more information on **how** to incorporate writing. Given the heavy workload at many schools, however, we want to learn how to include more writing without adding mounds of grading to our already heavy briefcases.

Researchers in writing across the curriculum have identified a way to incorporate more writing practice into a course without necessarily increasing the

grading load: "writing to learn" assignments, in contrast to "writing to communicate" assignments. Art Young in *Teaching Writing across the Curriculum*, 3rd ed. (Prentice Hall: 1999) defines "writing to learn" as a fine tool for "discovery" in which the teacher functions more as "mentor" than as "judge" (p. 9).[1] Here I must add an important caveat: a strong writing-intensive course must include **both** kinds of writing; a student rarely improves her argument style without careful comments and grading from a teacher who is indeed acting as judge. But in my experience teaching both kinds of writing, "writing to learn" exercises work far better to spark discussion and engagement with a topic. "Writing to learn" assignments work in many disciplines and also help students become more willing to work seriously when given research-paper or other "writing to communicate" assignments.

Over the years I have experimented with suggestions from colleagues and graduate students to arrive at several successful "writing to learn" exercises.

Performance/Staging Exercise:

This task works best in classes where the subject matter involves a text or a situation that could be set to music, translated into another medium, or performed. Pick your text or situation. Before students write, ask the class to generate a few features of this kind of performance or staging. For example, if you're asking students to devise a musical setting for a poem, encourage the class to list musical elements (which you then scribble on the board), such as tempo, dynamics, style, rhythm, voicing, instrumentation, etc. Then give students 5-10 minutes to write directions for staging this text/situation. Once students have written, call on several students to share their ideas. Then compare what each student's ideas suggest about and emphasize in the original text/situation.

Modified Four Corners Exercise:

On four different sheets of paper, place in large font the phrases "strongly agree," "strongly disagree," "agree," and "disagree." Before class, tape each sheet in a corner of the classroom. During class, place upon the blackboard a controversial statement related to the day's readings. Ask students to respond in writing to the statement, giving both their stance and several reasons for it. Once they have written what they believe and why, ask students to move to the room corner that best corresponds to their written response. You then may ask all or some of the students to justify why they have taken their "stand" where they have. This exercise often helps a student defend a position more articulately and is very effective on the first day of class, especially if you call on each student; students who speak on the first day are more likely to feel comfortable speaking later. At any time, though, this task often leads to lively discussion.

First Day of Class:

Before you begin, announce that you will collect but not grade this exercise. Then, for at least five minutes, have students write what they believe they already understand about course material and what they would like to learn. This exercise has several happy results. First, you can see quickly if you've pitched your course significantly above or below these individuals. Second, your students are more likely to perform better simply because they have taken the time to think about their own goals for the course.

Case Study/Situation Analysis:

Provide class members with several scenarios related to course material. Assign each student one scenario; have her write for 10-15 minutes how she would apply principles from course readings to handle the situation. Once students have written, have them assemble in groups according to the scenario they were assigned. Have students discuss their responses and then report back to the class on the proposed responses. As with the Four Corners

---

[1] For other earlier but very helpful ideas on "writing to learn," see Janet Emig's seminal essay, which spurred discussion in the U.S., "Writing as a Mode of Learning," *College Composition and Communication* 28.2 (1977): 122-28; Toby Fulwiler, "How Well Does Writing Across the Curriculum Work?" *College English* 46.2 (1984): 113-25; and Susan H. McLeod, "Writing Across the Curriculum: The Second Stage, and Beyond," *Composition and Communication* 40.3 (1989): 337-43.

exercise, the writing step often leads to more specific and more productive discussions.

These exercises help students not only to engage with the material but also to take risks without being penalized. As such, these writing tasks help students prepare to write better and argue more clearly in other assignments where it "counts" more. Class discussion becomes livelier and more productive. Finally, students' enthusiasm, writing fluency, and critical thinking all improve, with little increase in the weight of the large stack of papers I already carry home.

Elementary Voice

Top Ten Characteristics of an Effective Language Arts Classroom

Dawn Mitchell
mitchedt@spartanburg6.k12.sc.us
Anderson Mill Elementary

"I want children to know what it is to open a good book and be opened by that good book." (Lucy Calkins, *The Art of Teaching Reading*)

I believe that the teaching of reading is an art. It is not a scripted textbook, a district reading program, or a set syllabus of chronological activities. It is a craft that is carefully practiced, researched, and reflected upon in the hope that the result will produce a room filled with life-long readers. It is an eclectic art that changes subtly or entirely with each child and with each experience a teacher undergoes. Like art, the teaching of reading can never be perfected or "mastered," but can only be molded and shaped into a craft that is successful.

Lucy Calkins says, "If we want children to read with wide-awake minds, then we need to invite them to live this way in the dailiness of our classrooms. Teaching reading, then, is rather like teaching living" (15). As a life-long learner and reader, I embrace looking at the teaching of reading from this perspective as a process that is on-going and that is a part of their daily lives in and out of the classroom. My philosophy on the teaching of reading is holistic and whole-language based. Through reading a body of research from educators like Lucy Calkins, Jerome Harste, Regie Routman, Harvey Daniels and Lou LaBrant, and through interacting and observing my own students construct meaning from print, I have found that the teaching of reading is most effective when it is based on these researched best practices. Here are my top ten characteristics of an effective elementary language arts classroom.

Comprehension and communication are the overarching goals in the ELA classroom. What we strive for as teachers is a connection between the words of an author and the mind of a reader. Without this connection, we are left with isolated skills. Our instruction should not get lost in skills and strategies, but should have comprehension and communication as the overarching goals that guide our practice. Reading means understanding print and taking meaning from it. Nothing can match the motivation that comes from a student reading a book that has changed the way they think, made them feel something they've never felt, or opened them up to a new way of looking at the world. This connection is what moves students to pick up a book. Reading seen as comprehension is key when compared to many who see reading as mere pronunciation.

Students are independently reading and writing. Reading and writing are learned constructively through cognitive processes that students use before, during, and after. Reading and writing are active, aesthetic activities that should be modeled and discussed. If we want students to become life-long readers and writers who make meaningful connections with print, then we have to provide them daily opportunities to read and write independently, and to interact with others about what they have read. Reading and writing are the best activities to teach reading and writing. We have to find creative learning experiences that motivate students to read and to participate in literature circles and reading workshops.

Students have a choice in what they read and write. Student choice is vital. Research has shown that students must have ownership in their reading for learning to take place. Because they have a choice in choosing a book or a research topic, they have a certain responsibility for their own learning, and they don't run from this independence-they embrace it. If we choose all of the texts that students read in our classrooms, then students do not have a vested interest in their learning. We must give them a focused choice in what they read and in the learning experiences that they participate in for it to be meaningful and purposeful. Providing my students with choice in reading and throughout the curriculum has had the single biggest impact on my student achievement.

Reading is taught through the content areas. I believe that reading should be taught throughout the curriculum. Reading and writing are tools for learning and cannot be extracted and isolated into their own subject. When students view reading as a skill for each content area, they learn to understand the concept of reading to learn and how it is different from learning to read. Integrating reading and writing throughout the content areas helps students make connections with what they've learned and with what they've read that is essential in validating the importance of reading.

Students are able to share and discuss what they are reading and writing. It is vital to reading and writing achievement that students are able to participate in meaningful discussions about what they read and write. Sharing and discussing their own reading and writing validates the process and encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning. Participating in reading and writing conferences and workshops, interacting with partners and cooperative learning groups, participating in group projects and activities are all ways that students can become active participants in their own learning.

Teachers are modeling reading strategies and writing techniques. How can we expect our students to find reading meaningful and crucial to learning if they never see us read or never hear us enthusiastically discuss a book? Research says that students need mentors in reading and writing. They need us to model reading strategies and writing techniques. Literature circles and writing workshops can never be successful without us modeling what they look like and what kind of discussions should take place. When a teacher interacts with students through a conference or a read-aloud and discusses their thoughts and ideas, or shares a piece of writing with their students, the process is immediately validated for the student. When you show the students that reading and writing is important to you, that you are a lifelong reader and writer, it becomes important to them.

Students are provided with a challenging and encouraging environment that promotes risk-taking. Children learn reading best in a positive, inviting environment. Reading and writing are activities that involve risks. Sometimes students who can be successful, choose not to try because they feel the risk is too great. If we want students to feel comfortable reading and writing and experimenting with strategies and techniques, we have to provide them with a positive, low-risk environment that is engaging and conducive to learning. I have found the most productive reading and writing activities in my class are not structured, hierarchical lessons, but are informal reading conferences, literature circles, or writing workshops that my students participate in freely. Children need daily opportunities to interact with their peers and to share and discuss what they've read and written. I am always amazed by the impact positive peer pressure has on my students.

A variety of assessments, traditional and authentic are used to determine student progress. Assessment should match classroom practice. Reading assessment should not be limited to chapter tests, isolated skill and drill worksheets, or standardized testing practice. If we believe that reading is a life-long cognitive process where students strive to gain meaning from texts, then we should assess reading progress the way we teach it. If reading is learned in various ways through independent self-selected reading, peer conferences, group workshops, and teacher

guided mini-lessons, then our assessment should also be varied. Reading logs, student conferences, anecdotal records, and independent research projects should all be primary approaches to reading assessment.

Parents and the community are involved in ELA classroom. Reading and writing should be viewed as lifelong skills necessary for success in any field, in any endeavor. The saying, “It takes a village to raise a child” also applies to literacy. In education I take that saying to mean, “It takes a village to educate a child.” Involving parents in the goal-setting process for students’ reading and writing helps generate support and encouragement for the student while communicating high expectations to the parents. Inviting parents to writing workshops, publishing parties, book shares, and read-alouds are great ways to involve them in their child’s education. Inviting guest writers in to conduct a mini-lesson and writer’s workshop, scheduling a published author to read aloud from a book, attending local plays and performances, and taking students to read and write with senior adults or with younger children are all ways to involve the community in the learning process.

Teachers are constantly reflecting and evaluating their instruction and are involved in the professional community. If we want our students to value reading and writing as tools for learning, and for them to become lifelong learners then we have to model this value in our everyday lives. As professional educators, we embody the life of the mind by constantly teaching, learning, implementing, evaluating, and reflecting. For any ELA classroom to become successful and to remain effective, the teacher must consistently strive to provide students with the best education possible. With research on learning styles, brain development, learning disabilities, and current trends and issues it is imperative that teachers are reading and conducting action research in their classrooms. With the recent budget cuts, it is also important that as educators, we collaborate with one another to learn and share new ideas, to write grants, to conduct research, and most of all, to provide the encouragement and support needed for teachers to be successful.

These best practices are the basis for my philosophy on the teaching of reading. These practices empower me on my journey of creating life-long readers who know the magic of a great book and the power that it has for them. Donald Hall has said, “Great literature, if we read it well, opens us up to the world and makes us more sensitive to it, as if we acquired eyes that could see through things and ears that could hear smaller sounds” (13). My philosophy of teaching reading is continually changing through my research and classroom experiences, but it is solidly based on the practices that open up my students to good literature and in doing that, opening the door to the world for them.

Voice from Higher Ed

When Our Students Write, When Our Students Read—The Paradox of Genre

P. L. Thomas
paul.thomas@furman.edu
Furman University

After reading S. E. Hinton's *The Outsiders*, then watching the movie, my twelve-year-old daughter was trying to explain to me the kind of reading she enjoys—struggling as most students do with the terms "fiction" and "non-fiction," a struggle further exacerbated by our proclivity to teach the terms using the word "true." As I tried to help her with the terms, we came to the conclusion that she likes realistic fiction—as opposed to fantasy, such as the popular Harry Potter series.

Similar to the quandary I have created for my high school students during the first semester of American literature, my daughter was wrestling with genre—how to know what a piece of writing is—and facing the distinction between historical truth and metaphysical truth, or as I phrase it in my class, the distinction between big “T” Truth and little “t” truth. For my American literature students in tenth grade, we have recently ridden a roller coaster of genre that begins with Howard Zinn's *A People’s*

History of the United States (where Zinn introduces the biased nature of historical writing and the possibility of "creative history") and ends just before Christmas with musings over song lyrics, poetry, and the nature of art.

When our students write, when our students read, just what role does genre awareness play? Ultimately, what do our students need to understand about genre in order to be effective writers and independent readers? Do our traditional approaches and definitions of genre (both in writing assignments and reading analysis) serve well those ends?

From Kurt Vonnegut to Henry David Thoreau to Margaret Atwood

John Gardner, of *Grendel* acclaim, muses in "What Writers Do" about the great arc of qualities that separate writers under the single umbrella "writer"—can we really call Kurt Vonnegut and William Shakespeare and Henry David Thoreau simply writers? And just what *is Slaughterhouse-Five*, or *Walden* for that matter—or Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, a work portraying a futuristic society that displays all the horrors of actual human history? Are they true? If so, in what way?

As a teacher of writing and reading I have come to realize that such distinctions are worthy of the English classroom—but in a much different manner than our traditional approach. In *The Disciplined Mind* Howard Gardner argues that education should concern itself with the big issues—large conceptual learning experiences that are open-ended and somewhat chaotic. He proposes dealing in all content areas with the true, the beautiful, and the good. As well, he establishes a core of ideas that should guide us as we lead our students into the quagmire of genre:

> Much of education occurs implicitly rather than explicitly. . . . To put it in terms of my endeavor, I do not believe in singular or incontrovertible truth, beauty, or morality. . . . On my educational landscape, questions are more important than answers; knowledge and, more important, understanding should evolve from the constant probing of such questions. . . . I distrust people who claim they know what is true, beautiful, or good. (H. Gardner 22-24)

What I am proposing here is both when we teach students to write and when we teach students to understand text that we have to turn our discussion of genre into a never-ending question, a searching, instead of a process for labeling a writing assignment or a piece we are about to read. With a shift toward blurring our students' conceptions of genre—instead of labeling work for them—I believe we can increase our students' authentic experiences as writers and as readers. The nature of our learning units, the nature of our writing assignments, and the nature of our reading curriculum must change in dramatic and complicated ways as we turn the English classroom into set of problems instead of a set of prescriptions.

What Makes Big Questions, Big?

During a traditional school year in my English class, we weave through an assortment of literary experiences—each revisiting central questions and each raising unique problems. The big questions include the nature of existence, the multifaceted nature of writing forms (yes, poetry is distinct from formal academic essays—but how?), and the gray area that separates scholarly reactions to literature from personal reactions.

A wonderful beginning to dealing with both genre and reading and writing is Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. Here Zinn himself openly and implicitly deals with key issues that students themselves must wrestle with. Zinn's book is a historical text—somewhat in the synoptic tradition of a history textbook. Yet it is also an anti-text, a postmodern view of history:

> [U]nderstanding the complexities, this book will be skeptical of governments and their attempts, through politics and culture, to ensnare ordinary people in a giant web of nationhood pretending to a common interest. (10)

His discussion of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, for instance, is both expository and persuasive writing.

What is the nature of truth—and Truth?, he asks. And can human expression be anything other than biased? (The answer—for him—is no.) In short, through direct references to Columbus's own diaries, through figurative language, through rhetorical questions, and through vivid and lively language, Zinn both reveals one view of history to his readers while also raising more questions than he can or would answer for the reader. Zinn's mere history text is political, expressive, provocative, and artistic—just as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speeches are, just as Emily Dickinson's poems are, just as Margaret Atwood's novels are, just as Kurt Vonnegut's works are.

Through Zinn and King, through the lyrics of REM and the poetry of Plath and Dickinson, through news editorials by Barbara Kingsolver or Mike Royko—students come to face the big questions concerning truth and Truth, concerning beauty and Beauty, concerning good and Good. And all through an exploration of coming to know as a writer and a reader both the unique qualities of genre and the ultimate inability to distinguish among genre.

Along with delving into multigenre studies to approach the big questions, we add multimedia through movies that do much as Zinn or Atwood or Vonnegut—what is true and what is True? *Pleasantville* offers such an experience for students who are beginning to wonder about the nature of expression and the nature of art. This movie deals with passion, censorship, and artistry in a repressive society. It also raises issues of racism, love of family, and the perennial struggle between innocence and experience.

Ultimately dealing with genre as a problem—and not as a prescriptive label—allows students to experience the complexity of being a sophisticated reader (a sophisticated viewer of art) and introduces students to the overwhelming complexity of self-expression through writing—a coming to know a sense of purposefulness with their own language.

Multigenre Classrooms as an Agent of Change

Integrating a discussion of multigenre works in the classroom to address the big questions of life and to offer students authentic experiences as emerging readers and writers can also contribute to significant curricular, instructional, and assessment changes. This approach to multigenre works gives authenticity to the students' learning experiences and it aids those teachers making a transition from traditional approaches to best practices. Such changes can include:

(1) **Lesson planning**: The traditional approach to planning is linear, closed-ended, prescriptive, and moribund. Dealing with a variety of complex genres throughout a school year allows the teacher to center planning on the educational experiences that focus on works of literature (or other media such as songs or movies); the planning involves facilitating a rich literary experience—student as reader, student as writer. But the planning shifts its focus from prescribed observable outcomes (which are inauthentic) to big questions to be discussed—not even necessarily answered. The student is to be active as reader and writer, the student is to be challenged by the teacher-as-expert, the student is to be offered a variety of experiences within the lesson and unit, but the student is not judged against a predetermined end.

(2) **Writing assignments**: Once students and their teachers come to accept the complex nature of writing as practiced by professional writers the false nature of traditional writing assignments can end—as they should. In John Gardner's "Amber (Get) Waves (Your) of (Plastic) Grain (Uncle Sam)," he begins the piece:

> A month or so ago I had an all-night, relatively drunken conversation (I was drinking, not he) with an eleven-year-old about patriotism. He, I should mention, is one of your more brilliant eleven-year-olds, a promising philosopher. (J. Gardner 95)

This is the first paragraph of a persuasive essay written by a professional. It is not a traditional introduction and it certainly has no

explicit thesis. Yet, Gardner does have a beginning—one that is interesting, humorous, and implicitly focused. His argument actually begins as a narrative.

Gardner's piece offers writing teachers an opportunity to resee writing assignments. We must avoid prescribing introduction (with thesis), body, and conclusion as the template for authentic writing. Exploring a variety of genres for the millions of forms they take will lead to students mimicking those forms in their variety—producing authentic pieces that have a central purpose, a focus, but revealing that purpose through the thousands of techniques at a writer's disposal. A larger issue is one of choice. Gardner wrote this piece by choice; something moved him to write. We as teachers of writing should use a variety of literary and art-based experiences as prompts for our own students' essays—authentic works that spring from them in purpose and form as they gather the many and varied tools that writers manipulate.

(3) **Reading assignments**: My greatest struggle as an English teacher remains assigning reading. Young readers need choice, but they also need guidance. What is a teacher to do? Approaching the reading assignments in a multigenre classroom designed to question the forms (and to mine those pieces for nuggets of writing gold) requires that the teacher resee reading assignments—combining a backbone of required (and targeted works) with a series of opportunities for students to gravitate to those works they love—by choice. That students have a rich and authentic experience with literature is more important than any single work they read—or don't read in many classes.

My first semester includes Zinn, Jefferson, Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, King, and John Gardner; also we listen to the music of REM and Counting Crows; as well, we watch *Gandhi* and *Pleasantville*; then we read dozens of poems, many by choice, including Dickinson as a class-wide discussion. We debate—What is art?, What makes poetry, poetry?, What is the difference between art and pornography?, What is historical truth?, Can a person teach someone to write poetry?, Why have teachers been so prescriptive in teaching reading and writing?, and Did the writer really do that on purpose? These questions—none of them fully answered—will linger with my students long after they forget authors' names, characters' names, or that Edgar Allan Poe has two "A"s in his "Allan."

Reseeing our approaches to genre as an agent for changing our classrooms will make our students reading and writing experiences more authentic; as well, it gives us as teachers an avenue for growth as well.

Postscript—Coming to Know through the English Classroom

I polished this piece to submit to a journal while my ninth graders watched *Schindler's List*. After we finished reading Elie Wiesel's *Night*, I realized that despite the horrifying beauty of Wiesel's narrative, my students just did not understand. They were unable to comprehend the reality of the Holocaust.

As we watched the movie, I saw them begin to know—as well as we can so far removed from the horror. But another wonderful thing happened: I stopped the movie from time to time to discuss what the purpose of a scene was; the students began to see the Truth of *Schindler's List* in the symbolic scenes—scenes essentially fiction attempting to capture history.

And this is the classroom I want—a place of becoming through language and art, a place of ambiguity and complexity, a place of happenings I cannot plan for or create by the sheer will of behavioral objectives. Life is a multigenre experience—and thus should our students' learning be.

Works Cited

Hinton, S. E. *The Outsiders*. New York: The Viking Press, 1967.

Gardner, Howard. *The Disciplined Mind: What All Students Should Understand*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999.

Gardner, John. "Amber (Get) Waves (Your) of (Plastic) Grain (Uncle Sam)." *On Writers and Writing*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. 95-100.

Gardner, John. "What Writers Do." *On Writers and Writing*. New York: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company. 216-227.

Pleasantville. Dir. Gary Ross. New Line Cinema, 1999.

Schindler's List. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Universal Pictures, 1993.

Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall,2000.

Zinn, Howard. *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1995.

Reviews

Codell, Esme' Raji (2001). *Educating Esme'.* Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books.

This book is a "must read" for aspiring teachers; it is most assuredly a "quick read." Madame Esme', as she is affectionately called by her students, engages her readers immediately as she relates her experiences as a first year teacher with candor, creativity, and humor. The reader is drawn into the challenging, frustrating, and joyful happenings that all teachers eventually experience in the classroom. Ms. Codell's ingenuous delight for books is contagious. Her innovative methods for getting children to read and her clever approach(es) to common classroom problems are thought-provoking and effective.

Educating Esme' is required reading in my student teaching seminar. The contents provide focus for lively discussions about many of the situations the student teacher will encounter. Teacher candidates are also invited to take a critical look at this first year teacher and see how she measures up to the performance dimensions of the South Carolina ADEPT instrument.

This book has become a campus hit. Our education students laugh and talk about the contents so much that students in other fields of study also read it!

Codell, Esme' Raji (2003). *How to Get Your Child to Love Reading.* Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books.

Ms. Codell has done it again; she has created another best seller! In fact, I think she has created the best reading resource book on the market since Jim Trelease's best selling *Read-Aloud Handbook.* Esme's talent for engaging the reader continues in this book as she provides book reviews, author/illustrator projects, countless reading web site listings, and other hot reading tips for the book connoisseur. From "The Math and Science of Reading" to "Now Playing in a Book Near You: Broadcast and Performance," Ms. Codell's ideas give you sensory overload. Although this book is listed as "A Parents' Guide," every teacher who treasures the magic of books will want to peruse the contents and keep a copy handy.

• Sara S. Odom, Coker College
sodom@coker.edu

The English Teacher's Companion: a Complete Guide to Classroom, Curriculum and the Profession (2nd ed). Jim Burke, 2003, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Burke's *The English Teacher's Companion* is a must—for beginners and for our honored National Board certified teachers. Readers quickly learn to trust Jim as he takes us step-by-step into the marvels and complexities of teaching English. He fills his book with references to current research and best practice and then follows them with his own specific adaptations. His cited professional companions include Arthur Applebee (curriculum as conversation), Randy Bomer (making time for meaning), Robert Coles (the call to story and moral development) Mihaly Csikszentimihalyi (flow theory), Peter Elbow (writing with power), Howard Gardner (multiple intelligences), John Gaughan (cultural reflections and critical theory), Maxine Greene (releasing the imagination), George Hillocks (writing as reflective practice), Judith Langer (envisionment-building), Robert Marzano (thinking processes in the English classroom), Donald Murray (a writer teaches writing) Miles Myers (translation-critical literacy), Leila Christenbury and Pat Kelly (dense questioning), Linda Rief (seeking diversity), Tom Romano (multi-genre essay), Peter Smagorinsky (standards in practice), Frank Smith (joining the literacy club), Stephen Tchudi (the new literacy), Lev Vygotsky (scaffolding), and Grant Wiggins (backwards design for performance based instructional design and assessment. It's loaded!

You'll love his ready-to-use Conversational Roundtable charts that help students think deeply about characters or themes within one or up to four other literary texts. His innovative adaptation of curricular design (Wiggins) is also timely as we TRY to help all students engage in performances that evidence mastery of state standards. He is the first English educator to really show how we can design meaningful instructional sequences that address essential themes but also provide scaffolding for student MASTERY of standards. For example, using his instructional design model, I was able to model how to prepare for teaching our SC English Standard E2.R2.1 (The student will demonstrate the ability to show how the cultural, philosophical, political, religious, or ethical perspectives of a particular period influence the plots, characters, settings, and themes of literary works written during that period) within a meaningful integrated unit on *Coming to Know the Other.* I used Burke's strategy (and graphic template) for Conversational Roundtables but then adapted it by taking it a step further. After interns explored four character dimensions of the Old Woman in Alice Walker's short story, *The Welcome Table*, they returned to their findings about her 1) actions, 2) statements, 3) beliefs, and relationships with others. Using colored markers, they then tagged each of their listed character traits in terms of possible cultural (red), historical (blue), philosophical (orange) and/or political influences (purple) that may have influenced Alice Walker as she created such a nameless African American woman within the late fifties. These possible influences were then discussed in small groups and then as a whole class. Together, we provided evidence that we could, indeed, use a few strategies to think about and document our understanding of period influences on literary characters. With Burke as our companion, we learned a helpful

method by first learning it ourselves. Order a copy today if you struggle to design meaningful instruction in our new performance-based teaching and learning milieu.

• Bea Bailey, Clemson University
cbeatri@CLEMSON.EDU

Image Grammar by Harry R. Noden

On any given week during our English departmental meeting, the great debate on teaching grammar comes up. Because we each have such different ideas and thoughts on teaching grammar we, we cannot come up with a solution, and the debate continues. One solution to the problem could be Harry Noden's *Image Grammar,* which gives teachers a whole new perspective on teaching grammar through writing. He views grammar as the "process of creating art." Noden compares the writer to an artist and through a series of strategies gives the writer new brushstrokes to add to his or her image palette. Readers may at first be disappointed because this is not a book on teaching the basic mechanics of grammar, but it helps students create images with their words emphasizing the structure of grammar.

Image Grammar provides a companion CD that makes the book especially user friendly. Teachers may print the lessons directly from the CD or modify them to suit their specific lesson plans. The CD also has a student section where students can upload images to enrich their writing. The text includes lessons on active voice, using specific details, imitating the professionals, writing fiction and nonfiction pieces.

After teaching my students active voice, adjectives shifted out-of-order, and using specific details, we revised our personal narratives using these brushstrokes. Not only did I see a significant improvement in my own writing and my students' writing, but my students saw improvement also. In one student's reflection on these lessons Beth wrote, "I was kind of skeptical about how not using those being words would make my personal narrative much better. But I stand corrected. It sounds much, much better now. So thank you, Mrs. Turner, for helping me."

Although the great grammar debate will continue, it is reassuring to know that there are different perspectives to help teachers tackle grammar through writing.

• Kris Turner, T. L. Hanna High School
kristinaturner@anderson5.net

When Kids Can't Read by Kylene Beers

When Kids Can't Read is essential reading for any dedicated teacher. As a graduate student, I have read many books about reading instruction. This is by far the most practical and inspiring book I've read. Beers humbly draws upon her past mistakes to illustrate typical mistakes that teachers make while offering clear alternatives to mindless teaching methods. Beers breaks down the expression "reading problems" into specific categories of difficulties and then proceeds to offer many practical strategies for struggling readers.

Her writing is entertaining enough to be read straight through, yet designed as a resource for middle and high school teachers of any subject.

While this book is designed for the upper grades, elementary teachers will also find reading this book to be beneficial. Reading this book is time well spent for any teacher who dreams of making a real difference in the reading skills of his or her students. Each teacher who reads this book will unlock the door for countless students to the world of lifetime reading.

• Amy Knapp, Converse College
Amy.Knapp@converse.edu

Paulo Freire's
Pedagogy of the Oppressed

One of the basic elements of the relationship between oppressor and oppressed is *prescription*. Every prescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness.

Adrienne Rich's
Arts of the Possible

When relationships are determined by manipulation, by the need for control, they may

Voice from SCRI

A Think, A Think . . . My Kingdom for a Think

Ginger McIntyre Manning
South Carolina Reading Initiative—
Middle Grades, Regional Literacy Coach

Gene Siskel, renowned movie critic, recently complimented Al Pacino on his "silences" in his new movie *The Making of Richard III*. What did he mean? Why were "silences" significant? Siskell said:

Constant sound track drives audiences back into their seats and takes away their control over their responses. Silences are missing, and they are important because they allow audience in and don't say, "I'm the director – I'll drive your response."

I felt an astounding resonance. I immediately grabbed my writer's notebook and began recording his words and my connections. Silence in drama, then, must be like the "negative space" in art. What's not there – not said – not painted – speaks as eloquently as what is. And if silence i. e. "what's not there," is so important in the other arts, then logically, silence is an essential part of the art of teaching.

As director of my classroom, I used to fear silence. I once was cited in a teacher evaluation for not allowing enough "wait time" for students to respond to questions. How could I? My impatience was warranted; my performance had little time to waste. Student silence was a reflection on my failure to keep to a minimum the time between my expert serving up of the piquant, flaky question and the on-cue student regurgitation.

As humorous as that emphasis on product may seem in today's process-centered classroom we are still pressured by test results and performance-based evaluations. It is often tempting to cut short the time for student reflection, to fill the silences. Pacino pushed to create a movie in which his audience could see the process of making a movie. He immersed himself, the actors, and the audience in the process. Explaining what he was doing, not keeping any secrets, he revealed drama as a messy, muddled process just like writing, just like all learning. And he didn't cheat us by eliminating one of the most important aspects of process, time for finding out what we think. When Gene Siskel patted the great importance of his "silences" as time for audiences to respond to the process, he paid the supreme compliment. He said of Pacino, "This was a risk, but it creates ownership of our own response." What an omission it would have been had Pacino dictated the audience response, not allowing us time through silence to reflect and create our own connections.

In our classrooms, if students are to be a part of the process, they must be allowed the time to create a response. We, as teachers who believe in process, must not become so obsessed with "filling space" that we dishonor process. Learning is not a three-ring circus or an MTV video. We don't have to fill each minute any more than an artist has to fill every space on the canvas. Sometimes we forget. Our productivity-centered western culture does not honor empty space as the Oriental cultures do. We have a preference for "real things" that can be named or categorized. The following verse from Witter Bynner's *The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu* presents the idea of the importance of empty space:

> Thirty spokes are made one by holes in a hub
> Together with the vacancies between them,
> They comprise a wheel.
> The use of clay in moulding pitchers
> Comes from the hollow of its absence;
> Doors, windows, in a house
> Are used for their emptiness:
> Thus we are helped by what is not
> To use what is.

We see the exquisite truth in this poem and say, "Ah!" It takes practice, however, to remember to think that way. When I took my first art lesson, it was especially difficult for me to grasp the concept that negative space works at least as hard as the objects to make a piece whole. And even though I know what matters in writing and reading process, I have to remember to incorporate time for students to listen to their own minds. As Dale Worsley tells us in *The Art of Science Writing*, "Listening to ourselves is where communication begins."

Sometimes we fear time for student reflection and response is not as important as covering the prescribed curriculum.

It's like that wonderful example from Sherlock Holmes when he said, 'Did you notice anything about the dog barking in the night?' and Watson said, "I didn't hear the dog bark.' 'Precisely,' said Holmes. It was the fact that the dog did *not* bark that was significant' (Jonathan Miller, *States of Mind*).

We can't always hear or see the most important things that happen in our classrooms. Jerome Bruner explains "…if ever there was a silent process, it is the creative one. Antic and serious and silent." In a recent letter to the editor, Tom Parks tells of a time the late James Dickey talked of the importance silence plays in the creative process. Tom, stopping by to have a book autographed, found Mr. Dickey sitting on his dock, strumming a twelve-string guitar. Humming a few bars of Beethoven's Fifth "ta-ta-ta-tumm" (and then waiting a few beats before continuing) "ta-ta-ta-tum," Dickey mused that the silence was as important as the notes themselves. He continued, "Take lace. The material in lace is not the thing that makes it pretty or catches our eye. It's the space in between, the silence, the emptiness." Gazing at the night sky, he went on, "It's the air there that sets the start." We can't have process classrooms without silence, empty spaces, time when nothing happens that can be measured, labeled, categorized. The creative process takes time, and when every nook and cranny of every school day is filled with something, "nothing" can't take place. We are then left with an incomplete process, a bastardized version.

A favorite story told by physicist Albert Einstein's friends in *Einstein: A Centenary Volume* sums it up:

> When discussing a scientific problem with a colleague, Einstein would sometimes step away from his friend, saying in his charming, German-influenced English, "I will a little think."

So that silence and space for creativity won't be as remarkable in process classrooms as they are in Pacino's movie, we teachers must work to honor time for our students to also "…a little think."

CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS
CAROLINA ENGLISH TEACHER

We need your articles, your short prose, your poetry, reviews, and letters to the editor. Also, please send cover ideas—original artwork or photography. Please submit your original work for the next issue of *CET* by March 15, 2003 for the June 2003 summer publishing.

Please submit your work by email with an attached Word document. Please limit the amount of formatting in that attachment for ease of layout if your work is accepted.

E-mail submissions to: Kelly Harrison-Maguire—kelly.harrison-maguire@converse.edu

E-mail editorial/submission questions to: Paul Thomas—paul.thomas@furman.edu

SCCTE Membership Form 2003-2004

The South Carolina Council of Teachers of English invites you to join an organization that offers professional development opportunities through an annual state conference, provides teaching resources through publications such as the *Harbinger* and *Carolina English Teacher*, and connects you with a network of professionals in your field. To facilitate your joining SCCTE, we offer many exciting options for membership.

Print clearly all information for complete processing of membership application. We will use email to send you important announcements.

Name____
email____

Address____

City____ State______________________
Zip___________________________

Grade Level_________________________
Subject Taught____

Name of Your School
____

Are you National Board Certified? ____________ If yes, list year certified (________________________________)
and area of certification (____).

Membership is effective August 1, 2003 to July 31, 2004. Check only one type of membership below:

________ Regular Membership $20 ________ Two-Year Membership $35
(2003-2005)
________ Student Rate/Retiree $5

________ First –Year Teacher Free (Membership dues for a first-year teacher are waived if you provide a letter from your principal.)

________ Second Organization Membership $10 (Members of other professional organizations in the state may join SCCTE for ½ price.)

________ The Promoter Membership Free (Sign up four of your colleagues for SCCTE and receive one membership free.)

<u>SCCTE SCHOLARSHIP FUND</u>

You may also make a contribution to the SCCTE Scholarship Fund that offers competitive scholarships to senior high school students who will be entering the field of English education in college. SCCTE Scholarship information is available at www.sccte.org.

Yes, I will contribute $____________ to the SCCTE Scholarship Fund.
(You may include this contribution in your check for membership if you desire.)

Return this form along with membership dues to the address below. Make checks payable to SCCTE. If you have questions, please contact Michael Ward at michael_ward@charleston.k12.sc.us or by phone at (843) 937-6566.

Michael Ward, Vice-President for Membership
1276 Horseshoe Road
Mount Pleasant, SC 29464

South Carolina Council of Teachers of English 2004
Conference Pre-Registration Form

Name____
School____
Address____
City/State/Zip____
e-mail address____
phone____

Please notify us of any special dietary needs so that we may better accommodate you at lunch on Saturday.

Early Registration for Saturday, January 31—received by 10/31 (includes lunch)

_____ SCCTE Member $60
_____ Non-Member (fee includes SCCTE membership) $80

Registration after October 31, and before conference (includes lunch)

_____ SCCTE Member $70
_____ Non-Member (fee includes SCCTE membership) $90

On-site registration (includes lunch on Saturday)

_____ SCCTE Member $80
_____ Non-Member (fee includes SCCTE membership) $100

Special Rates

_____ Students and retired teachers $35
_____ Confirmed Presenters $35

Pre-Conference Workshops—Friday, January 30

_____ SCCTE members attending entire conference $20
_____ Non-members attending entire conference $30

Make checks payable to SCCTE and mail to:

Michael Ward 1276 Horseshoe Road Mount Pleasant, SC 29464 attention: SCCTE conference registration

Refund requests must be made prior to December 1, 2003. Conference room rate at the Embassy Suites Conference Center in Greenville is $89 per night. Call 864-676-9090 for reservations. Be sure to inform the hotel that you are attending the SCCTE Conference in order to get the discount rate. Reservations must be made by January 4, 2004.

Please **choose two** of the following if you are registering for pre-conference workshops:
_____Harry Noden _____David Considine _____Gail Haley

* Updated conference information is available at www.sccte.org