



Book study leads to teacher inquiry, schoolwide changes

by Jane Carlile Baker

Look at these!" said our principal, Charles Hill, pushing letters of apology for misbehavior written by fourth and fifth graders across his desk to me. Little understanding of letter form, missing punctuation, terrible spelling and penmanship, as well as lack of organization made the letters close to illegible.

"These aren't exactly the committed students," I observed.

"Nevertheless, this is unacceptable!" Mr. Hill responded. "We have to do something. I want you to think about this and give me ideas for improving the writing at Bohn School. Take time to think about it, and get back to me."

His indignation reminded me of my own when I finished my multiple subject credential, realizing I'd been ripped off. The teaching of writing had supposedly been combined with the teaching of reading, but the program included precious little on writing. Teacher's editions of our reading program were also seriously limited in the teaching of writing.

After I'd been teaching for a few years, I became a teaching consultant with Great Valley Writing Project. That helped tremendously. The guiding concept of teachers teaching teachers helped me learn both better teaching of writing and to share with other teachers the strategies and lessons I use. One day during the Summer Institute, while browsing the CSU Stanislaus bookstore at lunch, I came upon a book by Gail Tompkins. (Tompkins is a former California State University, Fresno professor and retired director of San Joaquin Valley Writing Project.

Teaching Writing, Balancing Process and Product covered the writing standards and process for elementary school students in just about every way a teacher could want. I bought her book, and year by year have incorporated more of her ideas, as well as those of others, into my lessons.

When Mr. Hill challenged me to come up with a way to help our

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students write more comprehensibly, I thought about how much guidance Tompkins' book would give all Bohn teachers. I had this thought just as the U.S. economy took a dive. Textbooks run \$40 to \$50. However, perhaps small groups of teachers could be given *Teaching Writing, Balancing Process and Product* and participate in a study somewhat like Summer Institute. Each teacher could choose a grade level standard that he or she either felt excited about or struggled

with and plan a lesson using one or more of Tompkins' strategies that resonated with their teaching style. We'd meet weekly at a coffee place off campus to present and critique the lessons as well as discuss whatever issues we faced in our writing in the classroom. Then we'd go back to school and teach the lessons to the teachers at our grade level.

The cost was still prohibitive, but next I discovered that I could get used textbooks on Barnes&Noble.com for a tiny percentage of their original cost! We ordered seven books for our first study and picked a teacher from each grade level.

Once the group began to meet, it reminded me so much of the joys of Summer Institute. We wrote to Words of the Day and developed showing paragraphs from telling sentences as openers. Writing together had the additional benefits of helping us to get to know each other on a deeper level and start our creative juices flowing. Each of us received seven new lesson ideas that could be adapted to all the grade levels. With new excitement we've gone back to begin research with our students on how these ideas will work in helping them learn to write.

One of the kindergarten teachers used *I Know the Moon* by Stephen Axel Anderson to teach metaphors. Using picture books to teach writing is one of Tompkins' suggestions, and the one this teacher picked is written so beautifully, even we adults were awed. An example: the fox in the story thought that the moon was a rabbit with whom he could play a merry game of chase. It's a marvelous book about the differences in

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Thoughts on organizing a

by **Deanne Andrade**

At the conclusion of the 2008 Young Writers Symposium (YWS) I was exhausted yet excited by how wonderful the day turned out. With one under my belt and a true understanding of the expectations of organizing the Young Writers Symposium I began to think of what I could do for 2009.

I went back to one of my favorite trimester projects that I taught in eighth grade, The Career Project. Students researched a career to learn which college degree was necessary to obtain a job in that profession. From there, they had a series of tasks to complete. They were always psyched to write to three different colleges, not so much the letter writing. However they thoroughly enjoyed the replies, especially if the college sent college memorabilia. I realized that if my former eighth grade students were interested in their future, I could assume that most students would be. The idea was born. At the Young Writers' Symposium 2009, we would invite a panel of professionals that the students could interact with and share how writing is used in their professions.

Creating the title of the workshop was an easy task, I'll bet that you have heard these words come out of the mouths of your students, "What? We have to write?" Now my work began. Who do I get to share their stories? Who will connect with the students? How long will the guests speak? How will students generate questions? What mini-lesson could be given prior to the discussion? These were a few questions that bombarded my mind, but I needed to attack each one separately to complete my list of assignments.

1. Who do I get to share their stories?

To answer this question I tapped into my resources. I sent an email to GVWP fellows, family and friends sharing the idea of the career panel and asked for contact names. This

was very successful, and I am very thankful for all of the support I received. With today's technology, I simply sent out an email to the contacts I was given, and I was pleasantly surprised that everyone agreed to present. The panel members came from varied backgrounds, and

Panel members shared their professions, successes and struggles in school, and had a supportive message for the audience members: you can do what you put your mind to. I can honestly state that the students took a great deal away from the panel discussion.

that was perfect. Members worked in banking, law enforcement, business and broadcasting.

√ Assignment completed: Tap into your resources

2. Who will connect with the students?

Remembering the audience, third through eighth grade students, a variety of professions needed to be represented. It was great that the names I received from my email were from diverse professions and seemed to be right up the students' alley of interests. From prior experience, I assumed that this varied background of professionals would connect to the audience.

√ Assignment completed: Remember the audience

3. How long will the guests speak?

I wanted each panelist to share his ideas, so a maximum was set at 10 minutes. I knew that was too much time, but an agenda needed a starting

point. Once the draft was completed the panel members were asked to speak for only 3-5 minutes.

In addition to speaking, each panel member was asked to write a brief biography sharing how writing is used in his profession. The biography was a tool that allowed students to learn more about the panel members as well as a stepping stone for the mini lesson that would start the session.

√ Assignment completed: 3 - 5 minutes to share their stories

4. How will students generate questions?

A true confession, I began to freak out about how the students were going to generate their questions. There couldn't be questions about salary, personal life or what kind of car do you drive, so how was I going to aid the students in developing strong questions.

I toyed with two different formats. The first was to have the students move in small groups and speak to each panel member. But how would monitoring take place?

My second idea was that panel members would remain in their seats and the monitors would run around and collect questions, like a television host. The more I thought about the collection of questions, being able to proof the questions and make sure that all panel members were asked appropriate questions, I loved the idea.

In the end students were asked to generate a "fat" question for a specific panel member first and write it on a note card. Once that card was collected, then a second card was given and students could ask any of the panel members a "fat" question. Reflecting on this procedure, it worked well, and everyone was able to participate.

√ Assignment completed: Television host format

relevant YW Symposium

5. What mini-lesson could be given prior to discussion?

As mentioned before, I was very nervous about the questions that the students might ask. I needed to develop a mini-lesson that would direct the students in writing appropriate and thoughtful questions. How will this be accomplished in a room of 100+ students?

Simple! Each student received a small packet that included a welcome address sharing the norms of the session, definitions of a “fat & skinny” questions, copies of all the panel members’ biographies, one biography on a colored piece of paper, two sheets of binder paper and an index card. As the students walked into the room the room monitors distributed the packets and the students were directed to quickly and quietly find a seat and begin to read the biographies.

Once everyone was seated I thanked and welcomed everyone to the afternoon session of the 2009 YWS. Students were asked to take out a piece of binder paper and write their answer to “What is the difference between a fat and skinny question?” Students quickly began to log their ideas. It was a true sight to see a diverse group of students begin the task with such enthusiasm, I swear I heard all of their wheels turning; it was wonderful!

Next the students shared their thoughts with neighbors. After sharing their thoughts we shared as a whole group. Great news! They nailed it. A skinny question requires basic recall; the information is right there. For example: what color of shirt am I wearing? A question that requires thought, makes you think from a different point of view, or asks you to read between the lines, then, is a fat question.

Panel members shared their stories. After, students were asked to read the biography on the colored sheet of paper and write a fat question for that specific panel member.

GVWP TCs, staff members, and panel speakers who, together, made this year’s Young Writers’ Symposium a success!

GVWP TCs
Frances Chamberlain
Deanie Coleman
Brandy De Alba
Paul Fern
Casey Giffen
Andrea Jennings
Alejandra Ledesma
Kaye Osborn

GVWP Staff
Carol Minner
Ranee Harcrow
Carole Buckner

Panel Members
Robert Carpenter
Shane Davis
Sam De Alba
George Flores
Mike Petrucelli
Zeke Soza

They could then continue to read the rest of the biographies and write more fat questions. There were a few guidelines given about asking appropriate questions. For example, questions about how much money the panel member earned or marital status were not permitted.

As questions were collected, the monitors read through them, selected questions, and asked panel members to answer. Some questions were answered only by a specific panel member and others were answered by all panel members. The mini-lesson took 7-10 minutes and the presentation of the panel took place. The panel members began to use the lesson in their presentation. Couldn’t have asked for a better group of men to share their stories!

✓ Assignment completed:
Skinny vs. Fat questions

With these five questions tackled I knew that the day would come together successfully. As the 2009 Young Writers’ Symposium came to an end, I reflected on the day. As with any other event I have organized, I was excited about it ending, but more importantly, I was ecstatic about the success of the entire day!

All of the GVWP presenters did an outstanding job, 250 students behaved well, students reported to each session and actively participated, and even parents/chaperones participated in writing.

For most of the students the last session was the panel member discussion. Students and parents were welcomed to witness what role writing plays in a variety of careers. The stories from the panel members were encouraging, motivating and truthful. Panel members shared their professions, successes and struggles in school, and had a supportive message for the audience members: you can do what you put your mind to. I can honestly state that the students took a great deal away from the panel discussion. Understanding that a variety of careers require writing and it is not just a subject in school, but it is an important skill in life. Upon conclusion of the session I recognized that the career panel was a success for all of the participants just like The Career Project was in my eighth grade classroom. Looking into the future and planning for the 2010 YWS, I am back to ground level, but energized to see what develops.

If you are interested in presenting for the 2010 YWS please contact Deanne Andrade at dandrade@sjcoe.net. Look for this event in March!

Deanne Andrade is the Coordinator of Curriculum & Instruction for Jefferson School District.

Reflections on DC:

Trip to Washington, DC yields signatures

by Tom O'Hara

Ah, Washington. Capital city of the nation. The White House. Congress. The Supreme Court. Hundreds of thousands of tourists swarming through countless grey granite government buildings. Huge tour buses filled with giddy middle and high school kids and frantic teachers. Countless lobbyists confidently striding around Capital Hill as if they owned the place. Add to this wonderful stew of humanity several hundred National Writing Project teachers, armed with the enthusiasm and conviction that comes with moral clarity and the certainty that you are doing good work, and you begin to get the mental picture of what was going on in early April at the NWP's annual Spring Meeting.

The GVWP was represented by our director, Carol Minner, political liason and go-to person when you need anything done well, Juliet Wahleithner, and token male Tom O'Hara. Our purpose was to make personal visits to our Congressional members at their offices, and to conference, discuss, and otherwise hobnob with other Writing Project teachers about the work we do.

The personal visits we made to Congress are, technically speaking, lobbying. The "L" word is not used by the NWP people, but I must say, we're pretty good at it. Our job was to convince our Senators and Representatives to sign this year's Dear Colleague letter, the letter that authorizes us the federal funding from the Elementary and Secondary Education Bill, the money that we use to teach teachers how to do a better job teaching writing.

And in these dark days of deficits and budget cutting, we're maybe the best investment in town. For every \$1 the feds give us, we leverage another \$8 from state governments and colleges. There are 7000 current Teacher-Consultants in our nation, each of whom influences/teaches about 14 colleagues annually, which

equals about 92,000 teachers nationwide who are influenced directly by the Writing Project. And this army of teachers reaches one out of every three schoolkids across the country. The seed money from Washington is crucial to our continued survival, and with its typical zest and efficiency, the NWP made sure that we were well-prepared for educating Congress. We asked Congress for \$30 million. We ended up getting \$33 mil! The rest of this article concerns my journal of the weekend.

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Carol joined us right as we sat down with Rep. McNerney, and our fifteen-minute discussion was friendly and productive. Bottom line, he signed the letter! One down, one more to go. Juliet and I power-walked next door to Rep. Dennis Cardoza's office, where we joined TCs from the UC Merced Writing Project. Another score! Rep. Cardoza signed the letter, and we were feeling pretty good.

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I arrived in rainy DC with Carol on Wednesday evening, and after checking in at the Washington Court Hotel, went immediately to the NWP welcome reception and planning session held in one of the hotel's ballrooms, an event that had started an hour before. Juliet was already working the room, crackling with her usual energy, meeting with various TCs from other California Writing Project sites. We eventually went out with the reps from the Bay Area

Writing Project, and turned in early, resting up for Big Thursday on The Hill.

Thursday's kick-off meeting was in the Cannon House Office Building, a structure adjacent to the Capitol that houses hundreds of representatives, including our own Jerry McNerney. At the continental breakfast, I noticed lots of my female colleagues going for the scones. I thought this was strange when there were also plenty of fruit-filled danishes and bagels. I must admit right here that I am reluctant to eat anything that originated in England. Tasteless garbage is a phrase that leaps to mind when contemplating food from the British Islands. But I ate one anyway, for research purposes. It was...meh. But then the procession of elected officials began.

Our national director, Sharon Washington, possibly the only person who has more energy than Juliet, welcomed our first guest, Senator Thad Cochran from Mississippi. He's been our champion for years, spearheading the very first federal funding the Writing Project ever received thirty years ago. The Mississippi delegation went g-a-g-a over Thad, as well they should.

Next up was Cali's own Rep. George Miller, the chairman of the House Committee on Education and Labor, the author and sponsor of this year's Dear Colleague letter. Rep. Miller gave an impassioned and seemingly impromptu speech about the necessity of education in leading our nation to continued greatness. This guy was most impressive. Several other Representatives spoke to us, and they were all warmly received, but by now we were ready to walk those hard marble Congressional halls and do some lobbyin'.

Juliet and I strode over to Rep. McNerney's office on the third floor. We had arranged to meet with his amazing assistant Teresa Frison, a Linden HS grad. Teresa is super smart and on top of everything, a

for NWP funding, museum trips, good times

credit to Linden and California. Carol joined us right as we sat down with Rep. McNerney, and our fifteen-minute discussion was friendly and productive. Bottom line, he signed the letter! One down, one more to go. Juliet and I power-walked next door to Rep. Dennis Cardoza's office, where we joined TCs from the UC Merced Writing Project. Another score! Rep. Cardoza signed the letter, and we were feeling pretty good.

That evening the NWP hosted all the state TCs and directors to a reception at the National Postal Museum. No scones! We ended up hanging out with our BAWP buddies Adela Arriaga and Keith Brown, plus Jayne Marlink, the director of the California Writing Project. She is a great lady, a warrior with a larger than life personality.

On Friday all the TCs assembled in the hotel ballroom to listen to keynote speaker Jacqueline Jones Royster's address. Professor Royster is the author of the book, *Responsible Citizenship In A Global Environment*. Her comments about our profession were heartfelt and greatly appreciated. Later that morning, Carol and I led two one-hour roundtable discussions

titled "Developing and Expanding Family Literacy Programs". The room was packed with TCs from around the country. We did the typical GVWP "thing", which means writing followed by pair share the group share, and it went well. I got a chance to use my new favorite joke ("Where do pencils come from? Pennsylvania"), which I'm proud to say killed.

Sharon Washington adjourned the successful 2009 Spring Meeting in the early afternoon, and we were on our own in DC. I'm sure you'll all be proud to know that your GVWP representatives made good use of this time to visit the National Museum of American History. Carol and Juliet had a burning desire to see the exhibit of First Lady gowns. I was underwhelmed at the thought of standing in line to look at old dresses, so I spent my time ogling old weapons of the Civil War.

I bonded with some high school sophomores from Kentucky as we gazed at a bullet-ridden stump from the battle of the Wilderness. "That's all that's left of the entire tree" one of them whispered. "You can still see some bullets embedded in there,"

I almost reverently observed. Now that was an exhibit. When I met up with the gals at the gift shop it turns out that the dress exhibit had been too crowded for them to even try to see. Whodathunkit?

I'll close by reporting that Carol, Juliet, and I dined at a Brazilian restaurant called The Grill From Ipanema. I know, the name is too cute. But the food is great. I discovered that the caipirinha is the national cocktail of Brazil, and that beer made without hops isn't that great.

This was my second Spring Meeting, and at both of them I felt proud to be a member of such a large, intelligent group of dedicated people. I realized once again that we here at the GVWP are part of something a lot bigger, something that we hear about but that I, for one, didn't really comprehend until I saw it with my own eyes. It's great to know that you have Writing Project friends all over the nation.

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Tom O'Hara teaches U.S. History at West High School in Tracy. He plans to lead writing nights at Hirsch and North Schools.

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the ways people see things. Following the reading, the kindergartners each thought of and wrote their own metaphor, with the teacher's help. The teachers in the group discussed how to adapt the metaphor lesson to their own grade levels. I couldn't help but think how marvelous it would be if all my students had this teacher for kindergarten and came to third grade already understanding the concept of metaphors, having worked with them this way.

One of the fifth grade teachers used *Red Dog* by Bill Wallace to teach responding to literature. To begin, she had her students write about a time they were home alone. What student wouldn't be engaged? At the end of the first chapter she

stopped reading at a cliffhanger, and asked them to predict in writing what would happen next.

One of the first grade teachers, took biographical narratives to her students' level by having them interview each other about their favorite places. She had read them *The Hello Goodbye Window* by Norton Juster as preparation for prewriting. She then brought the work of a first grade ELL student to our book study. The student's writing exemplified the creativity we can encourage in children challenged by learning the language, much less writing it.

Out of this study also came an idea for dealing with students who come to school carrying the baggage of dysfunctional families. The group

considered whether writing about what bothers them would be an outlet. A school counselor suggested the students also write possible solutions. The group thought teachers could cooperate by sending these students to different grade level classrooms to write, for an added change of environment. The school administration is considering how the program might work schoolwide.

It's likely we will develop another small group of teachers in the fall, and I'm looking forward to what new lessons writing and developing ideas together will teach us.

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Jane Baker teaches third grade at Louis Bohn Elementary in Tracy where she looks forward to leading future book studies.

One SI leads to two perspectives

by Nick & Elyce Silva

A unique look inside the GVWP Summer Institute through the eyes of a married couple.

She said: Growing up I went to camp almost every summer. After returning from camp I experienced an inexplicable high. I talked about nothing but camp; everything we did, all the fun I had, how much I could not wait to go back. That high slowly faded, and within a few weeks camp was simply a happy memory stored somewhere in the back of my mind. Those fond memories are still there, and I often share a snippet of them with my husband when something piques my memory.

During the summer of 2008 my husband and I had the unique opportunity of participating as fellows in the GVWP Summer Institute together. My experience was much like my previous summer camp experiences. After the institute ended I could talk about nothing but GVWP. Every other sentence out of my mouth began, "This summer at GVWP." I would follow this opener with any number of anecdotes or teaching insights that had come out of the four weeks I spent immersed in really thinking about my teaching philosophy and practices. My husband, being a much more calm and collected person than I, had a different approach to his summer. He took everything in, filing and sorting it away in his mind for future reference and pondering. He did not feel the need to gab endlessly about our summer, instead he got right to work, planning and implementing the variety of strategies he encountered over our four weeks.

He said: Growing up I never went to summer camp. Instead I did what I thought most adolescent boys did growing up: I played baseball and chased girls. The things that I thought about were my hitting and pitching stats. I might discuss these topics with a few select friends, but for the most part, I was a doer, not

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We have learned, together, that it does not matter how you implement the approaches you learn during the summer institute, as each of us has our own teaching journey, but what matters is the implementation. There will be those of us who camp outside our administrators' doors, bubbling with ideas we are dying to share, and there will be those who work quietly in their classroom, daily incorporating effective strategies that will help their students become competent writers.

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a blabber. As my hopes for playing Major League Baseball started to fade away, I began to focus on my other real passion and love in life: teaching. I quickly learned that teaching is more than just directing students to resources and telling them to complete a given task. Providing directions is only one part of the puzzle. In an effort to improve my teaching practice, this past summer my wife, an English teacher, and I had the opportunity to immerse ourselves in what quality teaching is really all about. My summer was spent learning the process to provide our students with the tools to become effective communicators via the writing process.

Our society functions through communication, but not many of us are as effective communicators as my wife. We demand that all

students should know how to write a research paper, fill out a resume and know how to present themselves in the real world. These practical skills are pertinent for everyone to have an opportunity to succeed after high school. This process might come easy for some to integrate into daily routines in the classroom, but for others it is like sailing into uncharted waters. Like most people, I fell into the latter category. Dedicating time for research and practicum to learn how to effectively impart this knowledge into my curriculum was time consuming. Believe me when I say that I wanted no part of spending a month of my summer doing schoolwork. I suppose my failure to communicate this to my wife is the reason I am now working on this piece of writing. However, the research and writing strategies I encountered at GVWP will not only benefit my teaching pedagogy for the years to come but also the young minds I will have the privilege to call my students. The summer institute was equally as pedagogically revolutionary for me as it was for my wife. However, I chose to make these changes in my classroom, daily working to make sure my students encounter effective, practical writing instruction.

They said: We are continually struck by the stereotypical differences between men and women. We know that not everyone fits into these categories, and perhaps there are even more exceptions to the rule than rule followers, but we fit these rules to a T. Our different encounters with the Great Valley Writing Project Summer Institute have followed these rules. Our responses to the summer institute, though completely different, are equally effective. We have learned, together, that it does not matter how you implement the approaches you learn during the summer institute, as each of us has our own

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Book Review:

Readicide offers sound advice

by **Carla Hanson**

Kelly Gallagher's *Readicide: How Schools Are Killing Reading and What You Can Do About It* is a banty rooster of a book--small, feisty and takes on all comers. Gallagher has coined the word "readicide" and offers this definition: noun, the systematic killing of the love of reading, often exacerbated by the inane, mind-numbing practices found in schools.

One day after SSR (Silent Sustained Reading), I read the above definition to my freshmen and asked them how schools perpetuated this crime. Their responses were in line with Gallagher's claims. One boy said, "They make us do all those worksheets." Another student said, "We have to read books that we don't even understand." These students nailed two of the issues that Gallagher addresses: the "over teaching" and "under teaching" of texts. He offers pedagogically sound strategies to avoid these twin killers and the other factors that contribute to readicide.

Minus the useful appendices, this book is a wiry 118 pages, a good SSR book for a teacher. Gallagher uses the first section to build his case: he cites depressing statistics and clearly outlines how No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has contributed to the fact that "today fewer than a third of America's adolescents meet grade-level expectations for reading" (14). Gallagher is in fighting form when he takes on Rod Paige, the Secretary of Education in the Bush administration, dubbing him the father of the readicide movement. Gallagher presents a readable explanation for the "Paige Paradox," the name he has given for what NCLB was supposed to do for

reading in our country versus what it has actually accomplished.

Initially, I was interested in this book because I thought it would pro-

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vide my department with some timely sources to deal with an upcoming book adoption in my school. I feared that acquiring new anthologies would force us down the scripted teaching route, and I wanted to be prepared to counter the publishers' claims and the District's pressures to abandon the teaching of whole books for more concentrated test preparation. Gallagher's book certainly delivers help in this area, persuasively arguing that "our students are in desperate need of large doses of authentic reading" (29). With a few sharp stabs, he shows how empowered teachers can stem this frightening readicide tide.

The first fifty-nine pages, the last chapter "Ending Readicide," and the "Hard Talk" check list in the appendix provide administrators with plenty to consider. The entire book is excellent reading for veteran teachers. Content area teachers can certainly benefit from Gallagher's ideas. Social science, health, science, and math teachers could easily implement the Article of the Week, which helps increase "knowledge capital" and "bi-textual" reading. What does he mean by those terms? Buy this book.

This muscular little volume is especially useful for pre-service teachers. Gallagher offers sound advice about how to approach a novel and teach it in a way that fosters a love of reading. He offers some of the best of Carol Jago's ideas--a "Guided Tour/Budget Tour"--when teaching difficult works; this approach can help a teacher avoid the over teaching and under teaching traps that my students identified. He argues that we do not have to teach books that all students like--the canon does have merit--but it is our task to help students realize that they do not have to like a book to find value in it.

Kelly Gallagher attacks a giant problem--one that deeply affects our education system and our country--but he focuses on what schools and individual teachers can do about this erosion of reading.

Yes, Gallagher struts his stuff in this book, but it pleases the rebel and satisfies the teacher in me.

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Carla Hanson teaches English at Livermore High School. She has been a GVWP TC since 2004 and has also coached for the SI.

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teaching journey, but what matters is the implementation. There will be those of us who camp outside our administrators' doors, bubbling with ideas we are dying to share, and there

will be those who work quietly in their classroom, daily incorporating effective strategies that will help their students become competent writers. We all have unique writing and teaching styles, and it is the ability to

work with these nuances that makes GVWP an invaluable experience for all who participate.

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Nick and Elyce Silva teach history and English, respectively, at Manteca High School.

Teacher Dreams

“Education must keep broad ideals before it, and never forget it is dealing with souls and not with dollars.” -- W.E.B. DuBois

dream of a day when our teachers are respected as *professionals*, expert in the arts of teaching and learning, meeting the needs of students with diverse backgrounds, languages, aptitudes, inclinations and histories.

dream of a day when every new teacher has a mentor to serve as sounding board and coach, to help make meaning of the craziness and confusion of new beginnings.

dream that more teacher education programs will emphasize the intangibles in this complex profession---how to approach the work as a craft, to cultivate a habit of reflection, a willingness to take risks and a tolerance for ambiguity.

dream of a day when our teachers are no longer teaching in portables, in overcrowded, sometimes mold-infested classrooms, no longer having to make do in spaces that are architecturally designed in ways that impede learning.

dream of a day when all teachers write for themselves for the pure pleasure of it and for professional purposes---shaping Op-Ed pieces for local newspapers, in print and online, highlighting the real issues they see daily, so many of which the general public is often unaware.

dream of a day when writing teachers have more prep periods and release time to accommodate the heavy load of paper reading that is particular to the profession of teaching English, so they receive the rest and renewal that is essential for good teaching.

dream that “graphite” methods of Scantron testing fall by the wayside and we return to holistic measures of assessment, like portfolios that document growth over time.

dream that every teacher is encouraged to have a classroom library and students are encouraged to read whole books of their choice.

dream of the end of “pacing guides,” otherwise called “racing guides,” marching on schedule with no kids in tow.

dream of an uncluttered curriculum with time built into the day for reflection, and writing, and reading.

dream of a student-centered curriculum fueled by our students questions and interests as opposed to the costly purchase of publisher-centered curriculums.

dream of administrators allotting time in school for teachers to come together to talk, plan, collaborate and observe each others’ classes.

dream that on teacher professional days, instead of paying “experts” from outside to talk, that our teachers get to design the in-service---attending book groups, writing groups, teacher groups, and that they take turns showcasing their findings.

dream that writing is no longer “a frill for the few,” but that it spreads like wildfire, a consuming collective passion to put experience into words, to make connections, to share and to use language to dream of alternate realities (as I am doing here).

dream that those who teach writing, write, and read often and widely, so that the teacher who teaches is always practicing the habits of mind that she hopes to instill in her students.

3.31.09

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