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the contributors



Brandy De Alba | *Family and Early Childhood Literacy at Roosevelt Elementary School* | pg 3 | Stockton Professional Development & Partnership Coordinator | Brandy coordinates the professional development programs for Stockton. She teaches 8th grade at Roosevelt Elementary School in Stockton Unified School District. Current programs at her site include On-line Book Study, Family Literacy Nights, and Early Literacy Programs. She attended the Summer Institute in 1998.



Maria Shreve | *How the Mini Institute Got Me Hooked on the GVWP* | pg 3 | Maria Shreve teaches 7th grade English, Avid, and Journalism at Emilie J. Ross Middle School in Hughson, California. Maria has had three articles published in California English magazine, and is the digital editor Write Voice. She attended the Summer Institute in 2009.



Jill Waters | *Breaking Away from the Microcosm of My Own Classroom at the GVWP Young Writer's Workshop* | pg 4 | Jill Waters is a third grade teacher at Bethany Elementary in the Lammersville School District. Last year, along with Frances Chamberlain, she piloted the first Young Author's Camp in the Lamersville School District. Jill is currently planning a second Young Author's Camp, which will be from June 22, 2011 to July 1, 2011 at Questa Elementary in Mountain House. She attended the Invitational Summer Institute in 2009.



Frances Chamberlain | *From Reluctant Writers to True Writers GVWP Young Writer's Workshop – Lammersville School District* | pg 5 | Frances Chamberlain attended the 2004 Summer Institute. Since then, she has presented at the Young Writer's Symposium, co-coordinated summer, author camps, co-coordinated book studies, presented demos for professional development, and judged writing entries to the California Writing Awards contest. She teaches seventh and eighth grade ELA at Questa Elementary School in Mountain House, California.



Robin Alexander | *Teaching To Whose Standards?* | pg 6 | My name is Robin Alexander. I am a sixth grade teacher at Stella Brockman School in Manteca Unified School District. Attending the Invitational Summer Institute caused a real paradigm shift for me regarding my teaching of writing and my personal writing style. I feel this has influenced my ability to more effectively teach and share my personal love of writing with my students. I especially enjoy my summer work with the GVWP Demonstration Workshops. I am currently involved in Stella Brockman school's celebration of Dr. Seuss' birthday March 2. We are planning a Family Literacy and Book Exchange Night.



Tim Buchanan | *Why Continuation High School? or Testing Myself Against the Continuation School Culture* | pg 8 | I attended the GVWP Invitational Summer Institute two summers ago, June to July of 2009. It was one of the most rewarding months of my teaching career. I have had many fine experiences with the AVID program, but GVWP takes the cake. My growth as a writer, teacher, and researcher has been exhilarating since the institute. Also my personal sense of community has been greatly enriched. I now am in my second year teaching Alternative English at Calla High School in Manteca. It is a continuation program where I have been instrumental in establishing a writing culture on the campus. Our principal has been totally supportive. As a school we have participated in the Day of the Writer the last two years. I do a brief monthly faculty in-service on writing strategies across the curriculum. If the best of life is about growth and development, the GVWP has been a terrific vehicle.



Dawn Myers | *The Invitational Summer Institute: Opening My Eyes to the Power of Writing* | pg 10 | Since attending the 2009 ISI, Dawn has slowly tried to spread the Writing Philosophy in her district. Besides showing strategies and ideas with her grade level team, she has hosted two different book studies in her district. Dawn collaborated with a peer last year to offer a GATE class in which students created artwork that sparked writing, and she is excited to begin a similar class in which GATE and ELL students will collaborate. Dawn was a returning fellow in 2010's ISI and will be acting as a coach in 2011.

Family and Early Childhood Literacy at Roosevelt Elementary School

By, Brandy De Alba

When there are 10 different languages spoken at one school site, and staff only speak two of them, getting families involved can be difficult. It's not to say that these families aren't involved in their child's education for they truly are. These families make sure that their children get their homework done, arrive to school on time, bring school materials daily, and answer written communication from the site. Most will even attend parent teacher conferences with the translating help of their older children. Overall, these families are successful in communicating with the school site and are well informed of school events and services. But what about the families that do not have older siblings to translate? How do we get them involved and comfortable within the educational system? Family and Early Childhood Literacy.

Our school site, in partnership with Great Valley Writing Project, has found a successful way to involve and welcome parents and families. The Family Literacy nights are a nonthreatening evening event that hosts educational centers and a snack bar to entice our families. Teachers volunteer to set up centers that revolve around early literacy skills that our families can practice and "make and take" to use at home. Many of our families attend and take on the task of translating for each other thus making them ambassadors of our school. A role they seem to take seriously and with great pride. Add to the mix, Student Council selling nachos, drinks, candy and other treats, the learning time turns into party time. We have had great success using this model

to encourage parent involvement over the past several years with many of the families attending religiously throughout the years.

Another model that our site is now ready to take on is one of Early Childhood Literacy. This year our site is going to host a 5 workshop series for our PreK-1st grade families. In this series, TCs will be modeling to parents literacy strategies and

One strategy we will be using is from Katie Wood Ray's *In Picture and In Words* book. We will work on building stamina in children's drawing, adding detail to illustrations for meaning, and revising illustrations for clarity. We want parents to see that illustration is part of the writing process.

activities to use at home. For the first hour, TCs will work with the parents separate from their children. The children will be in another classroom working on writing activities. During the second hour, these parents will then practice the strategy with their child while TCs observe and provide support. One strategy we will be using is from Katie Wood Ray's *In Picture and In Words* book. We will work on building stamina in children's drawing, adding detail to illustrations

for meaning, and revising illustrations for clarity. We want parents to see that illustration is part of the writing process. Just as in the Family Literacy nights, we will use parents to work together and translate for each other. Our first series will kick off this spring.

In order for students to be successful in the classroom, there needs to be a team effort of teachers, administrators, staff and parents working together to encourage and educate our students. When children see that their parents are valued, involved and important assets in the school setting, they learn to value education themselves.

How the Mini-Institute Got Me Hooked on the GVWP

By, Maria Shreve

I admit it. The reason I signed up for the GVWP Mini-Institute in the summer of 2008 was purely selfish – to get more units toward my master's degree in English. To be exact, I would earn two units in one week, which sounded pretty darn good to me, and at a much lower price than regular CSU tuition. Dr. Stephanie Paterson, CSU professor and GVWP co-director, recommended that I attend the first GVWP Mini Institute.

After a morning with the facilitators, Brandy De Alba and Juliet Wahleithner, being introduced to the

idea of teachers helping other teachers become better teachers, and constant discourse about teaching writing, I knew this was for me. However, I found that our morning went beyond simply discourse about writing – we were to write as well. Our writing started out with Brandy sharing the idea of the "Word of the Day" with us. I believe the first Word of the Day was "memory," and the following is an excerpt for what I came up with:



"...These days, truth be told, if a person tells me a number, date or time, even after exerting every possible brain cell that I have in my English teacher mind, most likely, I won't remember it..."

It was amazing the different perspectives everyone in the group had on the word "memory," and I immediately realized that this was a powerful tool that would work out well in my middle school English class. In addition to writing, the discourse continued – and it was always dynamic. Perhaps it was because of the diversity of the teachers, since the group consisted of teachers from Discovery Bay, to Mountain House, to Turlock, and included teachers from elementary school, middle school, high school, college, and special education.

One of the most poignant moments for me was when Juliet gave us an essay prompt, which included a quote, which said, in part, "the more reckless among us may have something to teach the rest about freedom." We were to respond to this prompt in a given amount of time, and we were not given any verbal instructions. It was not an easy topic in itself, and I don't know about everyone else, but my last timed essay test had been eight years previously when I took the Praxis test

for my English credential. We wrote our essays, although this time we were writing in a high pressure environment, rather than the relaxed reverie of Word of the Day. Once again, we were put in the shoes of our students, and we were able to relate to the high stakes writing that is so much a part of their academic lives.

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Over two years have passed since the Mini Institute, which I consider a pivotal event in my life. Not only did the Mini Institute inspire me to participate in the Summer Institute the following year, and provide me with innovative lesson ideas for my students, it brought back to me the joy of memoir writing, and the realization that for me to teach writing effectively, my students need to see me not only as a writing teacher, but as a teacher who loves to write.

The Mini Institute also is a wonderful way to get our colleagues hooked on the GVWP. For many people, the idea of the four-week commitment needed for the Summer Institute seems unmanageable, but if they become hooked on the Mini Institute first – they're going to crave more.

Breaking Away from the Microcosm of My Own Classroom

at the GVWP Young Writer's Workshop

By Jill Waters

When Frances asked me to lead the Young Author's Camp I felt a little frazzled about leaving my own three kids for the summer. I could hear my son's voice in the back of my head, "Ina (mom) when are you going to spend some time with us?" It turned out my kids were still in school during June 2010, so there was a little pressure on the home front. Even though it was a sacrifice of part of my summer, it proved itself to be a satisfying experience, as I had the opportunity to team teach alongside an accomplished writing teacher with a room full of students, the best kind of learning environment for a teacher. Frances, my cohort, was the one who urged me to get involved with the Great

It was inspiring to break away from the microcosm of my own classroom and try a new adventure in team teaching. I also got to be an upper grade teacher for a short time which I had fantasized about. It was refreshing to work with students with more maturity than my third grade students and that can grasp what you are saying easily, but can still have fun with glue, scissors, and magazines.

vally Writing Project – an unconventional and worthy journey. "Jill I think you would be great for the writing committee," she'd say and then she would eventually slip pieces of paper my way about Build a Better Workshop, the Mini Institute, and later the Summer Institute. Frances herself has worked diligently to improve our district's writing program and has mentored many young writers at Wicklund Elementary and now at Questa Elementary. At first I wondered if we would pull off having enough students, but by day one we already had eighteen students signed up and two student coaches.

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microcosm of my own classroom and try a new adventure in team teaching. I also got to be an upper grade teacher for a short time which I had fantasized about. It was refreshing to work with students with more maturity than my third grade students and that can grasp what you are saying easily, but can still have fun with glue, scissors, and magazines. The leisurely 9:00 hour that we started gave the feeling of a summer relaxed atmosphere rather than work. It did take a lot of hours to prepare the lessons but they were greatly received. Frances worked on some poetry, memoir, and fiction writing while I did most of my lessons on the 6 Traits of Writing, and of course there was always the Word of the Day. One of the highlights was an ongoing saga a boy developed about a man with some strange delusions about falling in love with a sheep. He had us all bursting with laughter as he described how the

groom and sheep didn't want to pay for the entrance to the swimming pool so they plucked each other over the fence and then had the lifeguards chasing them out of the pool as they had caused a waterspout. I enjoyed working with these young people that had such a desire for writing and creative thought.

I did learn much to my dismay that we are not very tech savvy people. Thanks to Randee Harcrow we only had to send the stuff off and then it seemed to magically have perfect formatting. We were able to hire one of our district's technology motivated teachers the second week and he helped with the unexpected computer lab glitches and scanning issues.

This experience has helped my growth as a teacher as much as it has offered a valuable experience for some budding writers.

From Reluctant Writers to True Writers

GVWP Young Writer's Workshop - Lammersville School District

By Frances Chamberlain

Coordinating student-centered, writing workshops is at the heart of a Great Valley Writing Project (GVWP) teacher consultant. Servicing any community is rewarding, but providing opportunities for my own community was special. I have coordinated numerous author camps in both Tracy and Manteca (more recently), and I was happy to bring a Young Authors Writing Workshop to my community last year during the summer. Stationed in Mountain House, California at Wicklund Elementary School, a GVWP teacher consultant, Jill Waters, from my district (Lammersville Elementary School District) worked with me in running a 4-8 grade writing workshop during the summer break in June 2010. The young authors were mostly from the Tracy and Mountain House area, but we did have some students from other districts. Yet again, I had an extraordinary, productive time with both my co-coordinator and with the young authors. We started as reluctant writers and finished the

program as true authors in a writing community. Our accomplishments were genuine and inspiring.

I found that reflection and collaboration fueled my summer experience as a co-coordinator. My partner, Jill, and I had invaluable time to reflect on the teaching strategies and writing approaches employed daily. Dialogue with Jill also provided an outlet for me to contemplate various aspects of the program as we moved forward. The partnership was unique. This was the first time that I actually felt professionally connected with

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another teacher. Jill and I worked tirelessly in creating this workshop, and we somehow reached a stage where everything was seamlessly woven together. Our hard work paid off for sure. I admired Jill's attention to detail and her ability to create meaningful, writing experiences for the young authors. We were able to

provide opportunities for our writers, and that was the best reward of all.

In retrospect, I thought about words that would encapsulate this event: growth, awareness, creativity, and possibility came to mind. These young writers worked with us each day to bring success to fruition. The culmination of the program was undoubtedly our anthology. Our young writers were so excited to see their writing pieces in a finished product. We heard the development of many of these stories and poems during the workshop, but

we enjoyed reading the final words of each writer. That was a wonderful day. ^{Probably} ^{most} ^{memorable}

moments during the workshop were the writing conversations – student with student and student with writing teachers. I discovered so much about each student as they read aloud their works in progress throughout the two weeks. Jill and I divided the young authors into two groups and worked one-on-one with each of our

designated students. Teacher-directed conferencing was utterly astounding. I kept copious notes on my conferences and worked closely with my young writers as they shared their favorite parts or the places that stumped them. This was where true evaluation and self-evaluation lived. These young authors knew what they struggled with, and talking it out was very helpful. Students began building their writing confidence, and this was evident throughout the workshop. Students were eager to hear about their strengths, and they welcomed suggestions for lines or paragraphs that needed revision. With the teacher to student ratio being as low as it was, these young writers could really take advantage of the teacher input in this writing workshop setting. Finding the voice and strength of young writers,

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working with youngsters to believe that they were true authors, and opening up ideas and possibilities were key to our program and resulted in a positive experience for all involved. Gratitude for three other participants was also noteworthy

during our journey as writers. One, a teacher from my district, Thomas, worked the technology piece of our program and did an exceptional job. He certainly made our lives much easier. Also, two of my former students and writing club members, Charlotte and Max, helped with the support of each writer. I was already extremely proud of these

two accomplished writers, and I was ecstatic to have them on board for the workshop. These two, special high school students wrote with us, worked on the publication process, and provided so much aid for us. I was fortunate to have all this, and I knew it.

Summer writing workshops benefit so many people in so many ways. I can only hope that other teacher consultants and students have this experience at some point in their teaching and academic careers. The inspiration that lingers and that ignites the excitement of writing is inexplicable. True, young authors are among us and are waiting to be noticed.

Teaching To Whose Standards?

By Robin Alexander



“Parents should not have to be involved. It’s the teacher’s job.”
 “Whatever the GPA of the class is, that’s the teacher’s GPA also.”
 “The teacher is producing a product - it’s a business world.”
 “If the teacher can’t get the kids up to proficient, throw her (him) out and someone who can.”
 (And, my personal favorite)
 “If the teacher gets a class that isn’t ready to learn the next concept or doesn’t know the basics, the teacher needs to march into the principal’s office and say ‘Hey! I have a class of students who were not taught correctly last year/poorly prepared/

don’t even know their basics, and I can’t go on with the next lesson until I catch them all up!’ It’s like getting a defective product at a business - you have to fix it before you can go forward.”
 These, and several other comments, were part of a conversation between two fathers sitting at an adjacent table to me at a local McDonald’s. I could clearly hear them as I sat at my own table during a jury duty lunch break, eating a hamburger and correcting student work. “The teacher” was pronounced in the same angry tone a teenager would

say “SHE” when referring to his mom not allowing him to do or have what he wanted.
 I wanted to laugh and lash out at the same time. As I drove back to jury duty, the men’s words replayed in my mind, melding into three distinct points upon which I continued to ponder:
 1. Schools should be run like a business.
 2. Parents shouldn’t have to be involved.
 3. The GPA of the class reflects the GPA of the teacher’s ability to teach.

I was aware of these opinions, but had never heard them expressed personally. Intrigued, I reflected on what I had heard.

Point 1: "Schools should be run like a business." Using of quality product or fixing poor quality completely until it is ready for the next step" are concepts, having done my stint in the business world with which I can relate. Blaming the previous company/employees with a complaint to the supervisor regarding ill-prepared materials is valid. However, comparing machinery or product to students reminds me of the old adage "comparing apples to oranges." Our students are distinct individuals, all differently-abled, with thoughts, opinions, and experiences that interact and affect the learning process. On top of that, we, as teachers and administrators, are bound by our state standards, district proficiencies, scripted timelines to teach concepts and administer assessments. As educators, I am sure we all believe in "taking the students from where they are to where they need to be." To the fathers I overheard, I wish I'd countered their statements of "teachers should just keep the students after school or give them Saturday school for missing homework, failing test, basics practice, and poor behaviors" with the fact that many educators do work with students after school, on teacher lunch and recess breaks, and before school. We also deal with students who resist learning, resist homework, resist tutoring; students who have no respect, motivation or interest in learning. Despite all this, we persevere to instruct them academically, socially, and behaviorally, many times with only the support of our coworkers and administration.

Point 2: "Parents should not have to be involved." This point just

made my hair stand on end! In my almost twenty years of teaching, I have found the students least proficient or with the greatest social/behavioral difficulties, have been students whose parents have not been involved in their student's learning. As a subscriber to the theory that it 'takes a village to raise a child,' I feel that parents who are not involved send a message to their children that learning is not important; learning is not a priority; along with the idea that respect for others is not necessary. How many times have you tried to contact a parent regarding their student's poor behavior, lack of academic progress, disrespect for others, lack of effort, only to have the parent (if you were able to get a response from that parent) only to be informed that "Well, you're the teacher," "What are you doing to make my child fail/ behave that way, or, the ever famous, "I don't know what you're doing because my child never behaves like that at home." Yes, teachers can educate the student without parental involvement, but unless that student is intrinsically motivate, it is a very difficult up-hill battle. Education does not happen in a vacuum. Unlike many businesses, education is a team effort - student, parents, teachers, administrators

- all working together to motivate, educate, support, and encourage our future leaders to attain their best. Point 3: I was outraged to hear the men express that "The GPA of the class reflects the GPA of the teacher." It fed into my negative feelings about teachers being blamed for student failure. But then I recalled myself telling my class, most of whom had failed a recent Science test, that that meant I had not taught them well enough, or presented the material clearly enough; not checked well enough for understanding. I threw the test out, re-taught the concepts needed for understanding, and administered

the test a second time, with much more positive results. I also remember, going through a training to work with mentally-ill children, learning to ask myself when a child lost control or became aggressive, "What did I do to cause this?" The idea infuriated me initially, but I came to the realization that I could prevent most outbursts, dependent on my reactions to the situations. Teachers work with many variables

- unmotivated students
- depressed, hungry, or angry students
- neglected students who are too worried about their home-lives to be able to focus on learning
- very social students who disrupt their own and others' learning environments
- disrespectful students
- time constraints
- lack of time
- curriculum that is not age or brain compatible

and so on. Ultimately, we are told it is the teacher's responsibility to push for student proficiency, with or without parental support, societal respect, despite student ability. So, is the class's GPA our GPA? In many ways, it is. Can we change that? Yes, we can and do. Teachers are dedicated to student proficiency and success. We spend hours before, during, after school, and in our free time (!) researching ways to achieve success for our students. We study assessment results to guide our teaching and techniques. Like "super-sleuths," we worry the problem until the answer for remediation becomes clear. And we do it all on our own time, without pay. When is the last time you saw a salesman or warehouse worker work for hours off the clock?

Teaching to whose standards? We follow our District and State mandates as required. We work as much as allowed by parents as a team for their student's success. And then, I believe we follow a

“teacher’s creed” - a standard that tells us that failure is not an option, not for us, nor for our students. We are committed to our students’ success. We hold ourselves to high standards. After all, we are not working with nuts and bolts, computer chips, car parts. We are

working with individuals - our country’s future if you will. Next time, rather than seething quietly while overhearing a conversation meant to be overheard, I will smile. Judging by the intelligent conversation I heard, those fathers were obviously held to very

high standards by their teachers. They were able to succinctly compare/contrast, use persuasive language, sequence their thoughts, and use proper grammar. I am proud to be “The Teacher.” We are meeting the Standards.

Testing Myself Against the Continuation School Culture

By Tim Buchanan



The name, Continuation High School reflects totally the reality of the system created to offer students an opportunity to catch up credits, and perhaps even more imperative to change behavior. But why the name Continuation, when the thrust of the system

should be change, not continuation? Continuation of what - the same old same old school that failed our students or the same old behaviors they hope to change? I see now how it is like prison where “rehabilitation” is the guiding word, and yes it does happen

and yes prisoners do become rehabilitated, just as some continuation school adolescents do change, do catch up, do return to their comprehensive campus, or do graduate from their adopted school. But the number of grads does not reflect the academic success of students, but rather the perseverance of the specie and continuation.

I have witnessed a significant amount of improvement on our campus during my short tenure, yet the basic plan projects from continuation, or more of the same, for the failing students and for the teachers

and administration. The symptoms continue to be dealt with with dedication and on good days individuals rise above the disease and prevail. That is the best of being a teacher, an education participant, and we celebrate. But such success is muted by the disturbing lack of

A downtrodden or disenfranchised attitude is the general malaise I see the in students. Seldom is this ever a simple or temporary condition, the damage is deep, the sense of degradation is real though often misdiagnosed, it can be social, physical, psychological, and academic. For many, the fact that they show up, that they find comfort here is a major accomplishment.

focus on growth and development for all. Continuation here is dominated by stagnation, since medicating the superficial symptoms seldom creates healing and wellness. Hopefully we can cut a new path, relieve more than the immediate pain, and create more

engagement for greater student success. At Calla we have recently initiated “Project Classes” in a variety of disciplines hoping to attract greater engagement. That change is clearly an attempt to move out of the continuation cycle. I am encouraged.

A student wrote an insightful entry in her journal, asking why I seemed so unhappy with my position as Language Arts teacher at Calla High. I regret that she felt motivated to ask. However, she did list the advantages for teachers who reside on continuation campuses;

the classroom schedule is shorter, so your interface with students is less, plus there are less critical duties, and there is a greater sense of control over classroom curriculum. She was correct in her assessment of those advantages; I thanked her for her inquiry and attempted to explain my discontent.

On the other hand, there are many elements that make it different and difficult. For me, of course, it begins or maybe ends with compliance, as it does for many of the students. Directives from above have little connection to righteousness or student development. A college professor recently made this observation in an NCTE journal, "I see that in all my classes [students saying], "We're not going to think, and we're not going to think anything different. Just tell us what we need to know and we'll try to do that." As most students at too many public schools they have learned hoop jumping but not much more. They learned to focus on test scores instead of individual creation. Most Continuation students do not fit into the mold created for comprehensive sites where "the test is almighty." or regimentation is the greatest value. Most of the students are here for that very reason – they did not fit. Yet the district contrives to create the appearance of uniformity. The logic of which escapes me, as does much of what trickles down. Finally, continuation is exactly what happens. The good news is that Kathy Crouse, the principal here, has been doing her utmost to facilitate change, autonomous change for our site. And the rest of the staff is working towards a more mindful, engaging situation for everyone in our small community. We desire change and it is happening and I am proud to be a part of it.

All this aside, in Continuation school intervention and support are the primary focus. Regardless of who appears at the door; regardless of whether they come of choice, or under extreme duress, our students need support and intervention, all adolescents do, but the need is greater here. A downtrodden or disenfranchised attitude is the general malaise I see in students. Seldom is this ever a simple or temporary condition, the damage is deep, the sense of degradation is real though often misdiagnosed, it can be social, physical, psychological, and academic. For many, the fact that they show up, that they find comfort here is a major accomplishment. As the economy twists more grit out of the "unwashed" our situation seems to become more intense. Realization of all this is a major shift, demanding movement beyond the intellectual to the real. A good shift from empty expectations for the general student population to particular engagement is a good thing. If that shift isn't made then misery is likely to continue to be a constant companion for our students.

The difference between my role at the comprehensive site and my role at the continuation

site is not great. However, the concept of education that I have forged out of experience, and reading and discussions changes constantly as it always has. There is constant movement. The format I attempt to keep consistent, but don't, the content and delivery are in continual flux. Those who present the same content they did four or five years ago, are not teachers in any sense of the word, regardless of the campus they are on. The issue is immediate engagement not futuristic promises that are no longer relevant, as we attempt to establish cultural continuity and economic growth and well being. The questions for me are, first, is knowledge still relevant? I am beginning to believe not, not as pursued in education, and second is creativity as important, or more important than literacy to the healthfulness of man, I am beginning to believe so. Establishing an atmosphere of creative thought and investigation neutralizes degradation, compliance to testing standards reinforces it. Continuation students don't need it, don't dig it; all they know is it leaves an ugly taste in the mouth. The difference here then, is a greater concentration of need. For it is the same world, the same antiquated system, the same frustration based on ancient dogma. I see many of my colleagues, I work continually with several of them regularly, attempt to make a change, in ourselves and our methods and understanding, we do it because we have committed ourselves to become better and more successful. And the thanks - more antiquated industrialization dogma. We must do it on our own because there is little support beyond our interest.

I am an empathetic person, thanks to my own family experience, but I often mask it like the students behind a crusty bravado. Here it does me little good, and I am at my best when laughing at myself and connecting with the needs of the individual as I did on the comprehensive site. Awareness and mindfulness are constant requirements thanks to the emphatic demands of the students, and that is a Godsend.

I try to reflect on the following quote from a Social Therapy blog that recently caught my attention. It seems like a good place to begin every morning regardless of where I teach.

"To me, being giving means not getting into your immediate reaction, or focusing on who's right or wrong, or proving a point. Instead, it means considering: What can I say and do that will help us go forward, advance this situation and move on in the world? How can I be kind -- mindful of what that other person might need or want? It's a way of being in the world -- taking responsibility for our impact on others; recognizing our shared humanity. That's the cure." That's the test of change. Now - that's the test of continuation.

The Invitational Summer Institute:

Opening My Eyes to the Power of Writing

By, Dawn Myers

In my personal life, I wear many hats – soccer mom, softball mom, wife, fundraiser, housekeeper, psychologist... My professional life isn't much different except that I am all of these things to 30 more children in my fourth grade class. I cheer them on, support them, provide the materials they need to do their jobs, clean up after them, and counsel them when they have a problem. All these hats and many more are part of a wardrobe I pull from dozens of times as I dance my way through my day. Like everyone else, some days are more stressful than others, and on those days I desperately wish I had more heads! Believe it or not, I actually picked up yet another hat last summer. This one was difficult to choose, but I have found that it fits me just right. It is a hat I love to wear – the hat of the GVWP Teacher Consultant. I was invited to the Summer Institute 2009 by a colleague at school, and that invitation gave me the confidence to become an actual writing teacher. Not an "Open the practice book to page 168, fill out this graphic organizer, and turn it into a 5 page essay" type of writing teacher, but the kind of writing teacher who can talk about the writing process like someone who knows it well because she actually uses it almost every day. The kind of writing teacher who values writing in her class and whose students value it too. The kind of writing teacher who lets her students just write, not for an assignment and not to a prompt, but just write what they want to write about. The kind of writing teacher who writes with her students and discusses the challenges and successes in compositions as they come up. The kind of writing teacher who knows

many of her students better than ever before because she hears their voices as they read aloud in author's chair. The SI opened my eyes to the power of writing and some different ways to get kids to love it. I realize now that there is no one book I can buy to prepare my students for the STAR Writing Test. There is no writing "program" that will suit all classrooms. Writing is personal, and teaching writing is always going to be a challenge. After all, each child has different interests, challenges, and strengths. If our writing instruction is structured loosely enough to engage all writers (think choice) and cohesively enough to expose writers to as many different genres, techniques, and tools as possible, then students will take bits of what they have learned from year to year and develop their own unique voices. Many students will also learn to enjoy writing more when they are writing for themselves and each other, and not for their teacher. With this "new" information in hand and the confidence I have gained at the SI, I have reached out to other colleagues and invited them to join me in changing the writing culture at our school. Working with some of the talented teachers at my site and in my district, I have helped host a Family Literacy Night, invited teachers into my classroom, developed an afterschool art and writing class, and facilitated a book study for professional development. I will continue to talk to my peers about writing with the hope that we can help each other improve our practice. Currently, I am participating in a book study with a peer at my site, Krista Beltran, and the two of us will be attending this year's SI to-

gether. In passing a few weeks ago, Krista said that she loved the book we were reading (*The 9 Rights of Every Writer: A Guide for Teachers* by Vicki Spandel) but wanted to know, "How can I do all of this great stuff in my classroom? How do I make it all work?" I hastily replied something to the effect of, "You do what you can in little steps. We'll talk more about it in the Summer Institute where you'll learn how to incorporate what works for you." I was thrilled to hear that Krista was open to Spandel's theories and was actively trying to decide how she could incorporate these ideas into her teaching repertoire. Many of my peers feel so overwhelmed with everything we have to cram into one day that incorporating new writing tools, techniques, or time is very daunting. The question, "How can I possibly make it all work?" is a valid one. What I learned last summer is this: We cannot change everything overnight, but we must move in the direction we want to see ourselves travel in. Trial and error are our friends. We can say changes to writing instruction "will never work," "are unrealistic to accomplish," or "are not feasible in the amount of time we have," but until we actually try to change the way we do things, we will never truly know what works and what needs to be worked on. Educators are constantly modifying lessons to meet students' needs, yet many of us stop when it comes to writing instruction. I refuse to stop. I will put on my TC hat and continue to tinker with my writing instruction one year at a time with as much help as possible from as many professionals as possible – the GVWP way.