

WRITEVOICE

Great Valley Writing Project - Digital Newsletter
Winter 2011



Writing Technology Workshop, Woodward School, Manteca. Photo by Melissa King

Winter 2011

the contributors



Mary Asgill | *GVWP Facilitates Writing Academy for English Language Learners and Strategic Learners at Weston Ranch High School* | pg 4 | *Technology and the Value of Slow Thinking* | pg 9 | Mary Asgill has been a GVWP TC since 2001 and teaches 11th grade AP English Language and Composition and a 12th grade Expository Reading and Writing Course at Turlock High School. She is a member of the GVWP Writing and Technology Team and is currently using technology to teach critical thinking and analytical writing in her courses.



Tom O'Hara | *GVWP Facilitates Writing Academy for English Language Learners and Strategic Learners at Weston Ranch High School* | pg 4 | Tom O'Hara is a social studies teacher at Merrill F. West HS in Tracy, where he has taught for 23 years. During that time he has taught various courses: World History, World History LEP, US History, Government, Economics, Senior Odyssey, and AP Psychology. Tom has been a GVWP Teacher - Consultant since 2005. In the GVWP he has been a writing coach in the SI, a summer migrant writing academy teacher, book group leader and participant, NWP Spring Meeting representative, and EL Symposium presenter.



Stephanie Paterson | *No Clear "Quitting Time"* | pg 6 | Stephanie Paterson is a professor of English at CSU, Stanislaus where she teaches writing at all levels. In her spare time she's an (unpaid) freelance photographer, a food lover and critic (more lover than critic), and a perpetual beginner at the I Am Yoga Studio in Turlock where she lives and works.



Maria Shreve | *Come PLLA With Me* | pg 11 | Maria Shreve teaches English 9 and English Strategic 9 at Hughson High School in Hughson, California. In addition to teaching writing and writing about teaching writing, she enjoys memoir writing. Maria has had three articles published in the California English, the professional journal of the California Association of Teachers of English, and is also the digital editor of Write Voice. Maria attended the GVWP Summer Institute in 2009.



Marilyn Stubblebein | *Looking at Art to Write* | pg 15 | Marilyn is a third grade teacher at Roosevelt Elementary School in Stockton. In 2005 she attended the Summer Institute. As a GVWP teacher consultant, she has presented writing workshops and participated in book groups. Previously, she has written an article for In Print about her experience teaching writing. Also, the GVWP has supported Marilyn in facilitating an after-school writing group in which students looked at, discussed, and made art to inspire writing. Marilyn enjoys making art and writing about her art process on ynotartblog.wordpress.com.



Jenna Valponi | *The Leader in Me* | pg 16 | Jenna Valponi has taught 7th and 8th grade Language Arts in Manteca and Ripon; English I, English II, Journalism, and Creative Writing at Ripon High School, and is currently working at both Ripon High School and Weston Elementary as an intervention specialist. In her free time Jenna enjoys running with her dog, Sassy, reading, cooking, baking, spoiling her niece and nephews, and spending time with her husband, family, and friends. She has been involved in the Great Valley Writing Project for the past 3 years and participated in the Summer Institute this past summer. Jenna is always in search of a better way to teach and to show her students the power of the pen.



Frances Chamberlain | *GVWP TC Interviews Student Writer* | pg 16 | 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 a seventh grade self-contained class at Questa Elementary School in Mountain House, California.



GREAT VALLEY WRITING PROJECT
2011 TC SPOTLIGHT

Brandy
De Alba

Published in the 2010-2011 National Writing Project Annual Report

"Writing is a powerful tool that helps my students see they have a voice."

Adversity. Anxiety. Gang violence. BRANDY DE ALBA writes such words on the board for her eighth-graders to explore in their journals each day. De Alba knows students must be engaged before they can begin learning. "Writing is a tool for healing, and becomes a bridge to academics and beyond." Teaching in Stockton, California, where she grew up, De Alba credits her former softball coach and teacher for inspiring her to attend college.

Thanks to the Great Valley Writing Project, "I learned how to connect my students' lives with writing for success in school," says De Alba. Writing helped students like Kenya Hernandez, who started the school year less engaged, grow more confident in their communication skills. This spring, Kenya testified at a briefing in D.C. on her experience as an English language learner. "She became an advocate for her community through her writing," says De Alba.

GVWP Facilitates Writing Academy for English Language Learners and Strategic Learners at Weston Ranch High School

by Mary Asgill, Turlock High School and Tom O'Hara, Merrill West High School

They came.

Twenty two angst-ridden, underachieving-but-looking-for-a-fresh-start incoming EL freshmen, who, we were sure, had envisioned better places to spend four days and sixteen hours of their summer than writing in a classroom with two, sometimes zany, and most times unorthodox high school writing project teacher consultants who showed up every day introducing them to words of the day, discussing drawings of a hamburger on the whiteboard, and demonstrating how to use the hamburger to construct an academic argument about Justin Bieber's cool factor. This must have worked for them, because a few more showed up as the week wore on, wanting to get into the action. We kept one because she said that she was there to learn and get better. Good answer, Jaheidy!

They saw.

We called ourselves Tom and Mary instead of Mr. O'Hara and Mrs. Asgill, and they saw that we loved teaching writing, loved writing with them, and promised them they would see that writing would be fun, easier than they had imagined, and not so scary. We let them see the end before the beginning. We showed them the writing we would expect them to produce by using Microsoft Photo Story (a free downloadable software), to

write, narrate, illustrate, and use music to tell their own stories about how they felt about living in Stockton, California, a place that Forbes Magazine had weeks before called "the most miserable city in America." They saw that we would teach them to form structured claims, provide evidence to support the claims and use commentary to explain how their evidence proved their claims – and that whether they agreed or disagreed with Forbes, the main point they saw was that we valued their opinions and that anything they wrote would be acceptable in an academic argument as long as they could logically support their claims. That said, ultimately, they saw these things about academic writing:

- Writing would have a purpose
- Writing would help them think, develop ideas, and develop arguments: clarify and understand their feelings and opinions about issues that mattered to them
- Writing would teach them the power of words - the power to make word choices that included precise nouns and vivid verbs to help them hone their voices because their words were alive and created power when readers could see, feel, taste, touch, and smell their words – that their words would

create images to move their readers' hearts and minds

- Writing would teach them that sentences were not random collections of words – but that each sentence had to link to the idea before it – that sentences were constructed and had this thing called sentence fluency because different constructions held different types of power.
- Writing would need organization; they saw that we expected them to form claims, opinions, assertions, and support the claims with tons of fact-based and empirical evidence , then add commentary to explain how their evidence proved their claims (just as we had demonstrated by using the three parts of the hamburger to argue Justin Bieber's coolness factor: top bun = claim, center ingredients = abundant evidence (meat, lettuce, tomatoes, onions, cheese, pickles, condiments); bottom bun = commentary to hold the argument together, to explain how the myriad pieces of evidence supported the claim). They saw that writing had to be well organized so that readers could easily follow their arguments.
- Writing would ask them to

always keep the reader in mind – that writing would ask them to always answer the question "so what?...why should my reader care about this topic?" They saw that writing was going to force them to answer questions before their readers could ask.

They conquered.

In the classroom, we taught them to read and respond to the Forbes articles and a video from a Stockton businessman. Of course, Forbes believed Stockton was a terrible place to live and the articles from the Stockton Record defended

Stockton as a fantastic place to live. Before showing them the articles, we asked the students to write about their own personal experiences about living in Stockton – then to set their thoughts aside, and temporarily delay their own judgments until they could think critically about the readings and the video. We told them that perhaps they might want to add insights from the articles to support their views – or argue against. We taught them to read with a pen in hand, first going with the grain – understanding the ideas and content – then going against the grain, annotating and discussing the articles by adding doubts, questions, comments, insights, and objections. In the classroom we divided them into groups and had them write their "hamburger arguments" as a team. It did not matter whether they sided with Forbes or the Stockton Record. They wrote, they argued, they read some more, and when they had written and talked enough, we sent them to the computer lab every day

to build their stories.

In the Classroom

Step one – write and talk: what was their claim about Stockton...

Step two – write and talk: provide support with evidence from their lives and from the articles

Step three write and talk: explain how their evidence proves their claims about Stockton

showing the opposing view, and narrate what this view is. Music? Of course! Slide five – another picture and piece of evidence, with music Slides six and seven – a concluding picture, along with narration explaining solutions to fix the problems discussed previously. The soundtrack is still going in the background.

Slide eight – no picture. List the works cited, and narrate that list to give the authors credit

Step three – save everything so it can be rendered and then uploaded to sites such as SchoolTube or your class wiki.

Step four – assemble the class along with some invited parents and their new principal, Jose Fregoso, to watch the world premier of their Photostories. Listen as they clap in appreciation of each other's good work. Watch as they all sit up a bit straighter, full of pride at how they have just shown a crowd of people that they CAN write, they CAN back up their opinions with facts, they CAN turn their academic lives around because they are smart enough for high school.

No Clear “Quitting Time”

Created and compiled by Stephanie Paterson --a composite list poem written by the K-16 teachers in the Great Valley Writing Project Professional Learning and Leadership Academy (PLLA)

*A snapshot of teachers' lives after hours, inspired by Mike Rose's 5.16.11 blog.

After school,
I buy notebooks for students;
take pictures at the Winter Formal;
go to a school play;

watch a student race in his track event;
purchase pizza for the yearbook kids;
have lunch with former students;
write letters of recommendation;
see students' entries at the Ag show at the Fair;
watch a student compete in her first auto race;
and create a backpack full of supplies,
a secret surprise for a student who needs it.

After school, I respond to student writing,
tutor students,
and do research.

I call every parent in the first weeks of school to introduce myself (roughly 150 students);
I meet with concerned and unconcerned parents;
I buy book after book of new teen literature to provide my students
with a wide array of books to read.

I spend the night with students for a community service project called *Kids in a Box*,
run a 7th and 8th grade girl's book club;
serve as a club adviser for *The Writer's Guild*.

I arrange field trips,
contact parents, create and revise my curriculum,
and plan and organize more fundraising events.

Each year, during my Spring Break, I go to Washington, D.C. with the 8th graders.
I give money to a student so he can afford college necessities;
donate to the wrestling team;
keep in contact.

I print 4x6 photographs of students performing Hamlet in costume;
arrange wall bulletin boards to show off student work;
make Portuguese sweet bread with my students;
attend a sober grad fundraiser;
and purchase a t-shirt to support the cause.

I supervise yearbook and the advertising that goes with it;
write recommendations for club officers;
attend sporting and dance recitals for former and current students and
for the last two weeks of the school year,
I offer a homeless student a ride to school.

I organize a pre-post school-wide writing assessment;
participate in staff vs. student fundraisers; and
read adolescent lit. to add to my “tool kit.”

I help students write personal statements for college applications;
organize a book drive for our school library;
listen to other teachers and when asked, offer suggestions.

After hours, I make copies, enter grades, write more letters of recommendation.
I tutor students one-to-one in writing conferences before and after school;
haunt used bookstores looking for books to fill my classroom library;
send books to my former (fantastic) student now in prison (a life sentence for a gang-related murder).

I play on the faculty basketball team;
attend pizza fundraisers and students' dance shows;
spend the weekend in the school photo lab with my two kids
so I can meet the yearbook deadline; and
I set up a reward for a student who struggles and when she improves,
stage a celebration.

After hours, I read books on English Language Arts;
read *The English Companion* (a Ning for English teachers);
plan lessons;
read and respond to more student papers; and
look for engaging information to supplement district adopted materials.

I take a group of twenty kids on a college tour, a two day trip;
host a pool party for my AVID kids;
attend basketball games; and
open my home for student book group discussions.

Sometimes I drive kids home when their parents can't or won't.
Sometimes I dream about angry, violent students who have threatened me.

I attend a student's church play;
and orchestra performances.
I sponsor girls' volleyball and pay admission to encourage a good turnout.

I buy new clothes for a student after her house burns down.
I make lunches for students who have no lunch.

I edit articles for *Write Voice*, the Great Valley Writing Project's Newsletter;
submit articles to *California English*.
I write.

Some days I think small acts of attending mean the world;
other days it is harder to tell.
One thing is for sure:
in a teacher's life, there is no clear quitting time.

6.17.11

References

Fagin, Larry. *The List Poem: A Guide to Teaching & Writing Catalog Verse*. New York, New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative. 1991, 2000.

Mike Rose's Blog: <http://mikerosebooks.blogspot.com/>



WRITING MATTERS

IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE APPROACHES TO TEACHING OF WRITING

The Great Valley Writing Project is pleased to offer a free professional development series for K - 16 educators. Join classroom teachers on Saturday mornings to explore how to implement writing into mandated state adopted curriculum. Participants will write, view student samples and discuss how to implement effective writing practices with all students.

PARTIAL LIST OF TOPICS (see reverse side for complete list and more information):

- Utilizing current research on English Learners to design effective strategies for our students.
- Finding writing opportunities in state-mandated language arts curriculum.
- Creating a low-risk, writing workshop classroom environment.
- Developing a standards-based writing curriculum.
- Integrating writing into content-area standards.

DATES AND TIMES:

Saturdays: CSUS Turlock: Sept. 24, Oct. 15, Nov. 19, 2011; Jan. 28, Feb. 25, March 17, April 21, 2012
CSUS Stockton: Sept. 10, Oct. 8, Nov. 5, 2011; Jan. 21, Feb. 4, March 3, April 14, 2012
from 9:00A.M.-12:00P.M.

LOCATIONS:

California State University, Stanislaus
Turlock Campus, DBH P113,
1 University Circle, Turlock

-AND-

Stockton Campus, Acacia Building
612 E. Magnolia, Stockton

Directions and Maps: <http://www.csustan.edu/Directories/Maps/>

UNITS:

One unit CSU Stanislaus Extended Education credit available for every 5 workshops attended at \$40 each. One or two units may be purchased.

FREE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT!

No payment or preregistration required but feel free to call the GVWP office at 667-3490 to reserve your seat and ask questions. Participants may choose to attend one, any, or all of the workshops.



Great Valley Writing Project
California State University, Stanislaus
One University Circle, DBH318, Turlock, CA 95382
(209) 667-3490 • www.csustan.edu/gvwp



"Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many."
—National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges

Technology and the Value of Slow Thinking

By Mary Asgill, Teacher Consultant, GVWP Technology Team

You know how there were important lessons your elders taught that did not resonate with you until it was your time to learn – and one day without warning, you read or heard something that triggered that dormant lesson?

My grandma, one of the great teachers in my life, a southerner from a long line of slow-moving southerners, used to tell me, "slow down, baby...if you move too fast, you're not gonna see anything...and ya' gotta practice lookin' before you can get to seein'." I would spend frenzied minutes firing questions at her in effort to understand what in the world she meant by looking before seeing, and what that had to do with moving slowly. After patiently listening to my gazillion questions, she would slowly give a pithy reply: "When the student is ready, the teacher will come."

My teacher came this summer. I read a book by Nicholas Carr called *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, <http://www.nicholasgarr.com/>, and with regard to using technology in my classroom, it disturbed me on some levels, yet validated my grandmother's thinking on others.

I had been voraciously devouring books on ways to enrich my students' literacy by using more technology in my classroom and had been making some great strides year after year in how my ELs, At-Risk Learners, and AP students' writing improved drastically by the use of wikis, blogs, podcasts, RSS

feeds, and the like. However, Carr gave me pause.

Essentially, his argument is that at the same time that technology is a tool that works for us, it also works on us. The Internet engenders multitasking and allows faster connections to information, and this is determining how well we learn. He writes, "When we go online, we enter an environment that promotes cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning." His book is loaded with brain research and intensive historical views on how technology through the ages has shaped thinking. He discusses how we have been both enriched by and changed by technologies from the printing press to the Kindle – and from the pencil to the PC. Each has given us access to faster reading and writing, but at what cost? As I write this, I have three windows of my browser open, my I-phone at the ready to receive my brother's pictures of his new baby, and my Kindle idling on a page of a book club novel I need to finish.

These are the ways in which Carr's book disturbed my thinking about technology:

- I love using technology, and I believe there are myriad ways to read and write – and that we should engage the multiple modalities at work in our daily lives – not shrink from them. We should teach our students to read ALL types of text: visual, audio, and

alphanumeric. Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition, by Wysocki, et. al. helped me cement this valuable lesson.

- The National Writing Project's work in, *Because Digital Writing Matters*, <http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/books/digitalwritingmatters> and Will Richardson's work, Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms, (<http://willrichardson.com/>) also helped shape my thinking about the value of using technology as a powerful literacy tool in my classroom.

- I value the fact that my students read and write daily via blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and web surfing – and that they are not merely consuming media – but they are creating media. They create YouTube videos and Audacity podcasts and upload their creations to our class wiki. I am excited by my students' use of technology, and I continuously find ways to help them improve literacy in the process. Marc Prensky's work, (<http://www.marcprensky.com/>) *Teaching Digital Natives* helped me give rise to choice and creativity in how I help students engage technology – choice and creativity: two valuable ways to improve

literacy.

- Troy Hicks' work in The Digital Writing Workshop, (<http://hickstro.org/>) helped me continue on my path to finding ways of teaching the traditional writing workshop model but in a digital format. Writing has improved exponentially in my classroom as a result.

...and there were others – teachers who applauded the use of new media and encouraged me to continue to find new uses of technology as a literacy tool, but as I tirelessly tried to finish my thesis about how technology could improve critical thinking and analytical writing, the niggling thought that I was missing something plagued me: what was I not seeing because I was not looking?

...and then came Nicholas Carr...the student was ready, so the teacher showed up.

These are the ways in which Carr's book validated my grandmother's thinking about the value of moving slowly:

- I noticed that the way my students used technology made them adept at skimming, scanning, and mining for information, and less adept at close reading and critical thinking about the information. Who produced the website? What argument did the website make?
- I noticed that their attention spans and patience for slow,

methodical questioning of ideas and their ability to raise doubt, analyze, and evaluate what they read online was practically nil. Have I verified the sources of the hyperlinks? Can I confirm this information?

- I noticed that as long as they had gotten the gist of a concept, they were ready to move on and would give me quizzical looks when I pressed them to burrow deeply into what they read and wrote with depth and detail over breadth and generalities. How is this author looking at one issue from multiple perspectives? How can this idea be extended beyond this text?

I noticed that their brains seemed to not have the capacity to think linearly with regard to following an argument into, through, and beyond the complexities of a single issue. Do I fully understand every aspect of what I'm reading?

- I noticed that as we used technology, I had not taught them to slow their thinking down – to question the very tool that I championed as the great literacy innovator in our classroom. Why had I not taught them to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate – in addition to create?

When using hardcopy sources, we read critically and wrote analytically. We read, reread, annotated, discussed, believed, and doubted what we read. As a

result, the writing my students produced before, during, and after the readings were richer and more compelling because we had engaged the text and studied the writing process closely, critically, slowly.

The lesson of my grandmother's words now resonates with me through the pages of Carr's work. Teaching students to slow their thinking down: analyze, criticize, evaluate, question, read, reread, write, and rewrite is what teachers do – even in the midst of pacing calendars, but Carr's caution that technology is forcing us to move faster is one we should heed. We are the sages who set the pace of our classrooms, and we should continue to honor our tried and true traditions of teaching students the value of slow thinking: close reading, critical thinking, and analytical writing. We must teach them to look first (observe, doubt, question, fact-check) – then see (make meaning, interpret, conclude) when using technology, just as they do when using hardcopy texts. We must teach them that email and snail mail have different ways in which they work not only for us – but on us.

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Come PLLA With Me

by Maria Shreve

I was at an AVID family night at the beginning of last year, and a young man came up to me and said, "Ms. Shreve?"

"Hi," I said, desperately testing my brain cells to see if I remembered this young man's name. Emilio? Emmanuel?

"My sister was so disappointed that she didn't have you for English last year. Where were you?" he inquired.

"Well, Emmanuel (my colleague had to remind me of his name), I was at the community day school, but now I'm back. Who's your sister? Do I have her in AVID?"

"That's my sister over there," he said, motioning to another table in the cafeteria. "She's a good student, not like me."

"You had some great ideas, Emmanuel. I remember you had a different perspective on things."

And I did. I remembered clearly how he was a master of ignoring what I asked the class to write about and choosing instead to write about what he wanted to write about. "How do you like high school?" I asked.

"It's okay," he said, "but I wanted to tell you how great your English class was. Remember when you sang that old song – and danced to it?"

"Oh, my gosh," I said, "You remember that? It was Valentine's

Day, and it was the song 'Little Woman' by Bobby Sherman." I recalled that in addition to my surprise performance, my students were amazed that I had a crush on this former teen idol clad in purple hip huggers and medallion peace symbol.

"That's the one," he said. "You made writing fun. I never liked school, but I always looked forward to your class." My mind went back to an SST meeting with Emmanuel's mother. She was crying and a translator explained that she was embarrassed by her son's performance in school. I

hadn't thought about Emmanuel since I had him in class, and I remembered that he was fairly quiet, so I was surprised that he approached me. I was even more surprised that my teaching had such an impact on him.

As I was driving home, I thought about Emmanuel's comments. He had mentioned a couple of more "fun" things that I had done two years before, and it dawned on me that I wasn't the fun teacher that I used to be.

That year, my goals were to somehow build a climate of writing within the constraints of going from teaching a two period core to a one period class, and working with the pacing guide. Unless we were working on essays, I had my

seventh grade English students writing the "Word of the Day," and because seventh graders, who often get a bad rap, are still eager to please their teacher, not only did they respond well to it, in some of my periods, they were racing each other to the coveted place in front of my classroom known as the "author's chair" to share their work.

Seventh grade is a huge writing year in middle school due to the fact that seventh graders are given a writing proficiency test by the state of California. The tough part is that the seventh grade teachers don't know what the genre is going to be ahead of time, so my colleague, Mary La Rosa, and I covered it all. In addition to having seventh grade English Language Arts last year, I also taught AVID and journalism and those elective classes allowed me more flexibility to include the many writing ideas that I've picked up over the years from the SI and PLLA

(Professional Learning & Leadership Academy). My most successful writing endeavor last year was the "Harris Burdick Short Stories," the idea of which came from a demo lesson that my SI fellow Dawn Meyers (2009) shared in which she used art (a series of mysterious photographs by Harris Burdick) to stimulate student writing. Deciding not to stray from

the pacing guide too much, I recall thinking the safe approach was to try the lesson only in my two elective classes, and the results were more than I could have anticipated. Simply put, my students produced the best writing I had seen in my ten years of teaching middle school. Shortly after that, my students took the writing proficiency test, and I was elated to see that the genre was narrative. Moving on, by the end of the school year, exhaustion set in.

A few weeks into summer, I went to PLLA. This was the second year that I was a part of this stellar group, facilitated by GVWP co-director Stephanie Paterson, associate director Juliet

Wahleithner with the help of TC Janet Lenards. When I think of PLLA, the thought that I keep coming back to is not only the amount of discourse that my colleagues (dare I say

PLLA mates?) produce, but the amazing breadth of topics, and the fact that somehow through this experience, my exhaustion from the recent school year was lifted, and I was revitalized.

We started off on a positive note with our hopes, or what we wanted to get out of the PLLA experience. Comments ranged from "finding new ways to stay connected," "learning to say no productively," "finding new ways to nurture leadership in others," and to come up with "good ideas and good

information." I mentioned that I was going from teaching at the middle school level to teaching at the high school level, and Juliet summed up my jumbled hope succinctly by saying that I could "draw on others' experiences to ease the transition to high school." The group was direct and honest, and someone mentioned "getting back to my inner writer," along with a fear that it wasn't going to happen. That said, we also felt comfortable enough to express our fears, which included the realization that in our effort to nurture leadership in others, we are "afraid we will be saddled with leadership," and that we will "hear so much great stuff that we'll be overwhelmed."

One of the most valuable aspects of PLLA is sharing some of our teaching practices. Krista Beltran's demo "Using a Wiki Page for Reading and Writing" showed us how technology can motivate students in both reading and writing. Not only did she include instructions on how to create a wiki, but also samples of student writing in response to various novels that groups of her students were reading. I read and shared a sample of one of my students' Harris Burdick short stories and showed how I added a touch of technology to it by having students incorporate the actual art into their stories. As a result of the feedback from my colleagues, I realized just

how special this activity was. Other ideas included Anna Daniels' "Twitter-style" writing activities and Stephanie's 6 word memoirs.

In terms of writing at PLLA, we sit in a circle and write about topics ranging from something as general as "where we are at personally," to the more specific, "As things are changing around you, what changes are you making in your instruction?" One of the changes I noted in my teaching is that last year I invited my principal to my classroom so that he "can observe me teaching writing that is standards-based but not from the textbook...the idea is that

administrators see that my students are excited about writing and the textbook isn't the end-all." Krista wrote that as she's planning her lessons, she continually asks herself "Why am I doing this?" Theresa Gill wrote about her "Nonfiction Friday," in which students use the newspaper as a springboard for writing. Stephanie facilitated "The Proprioceptive Writing Method," (<http://www.pwriting.org>), also known at PLLA as "Spa Writing," in which we write on plain white paper amid classical music and candles. The three simple rules of Proprioceptive Writing are the following: 1) Write what you hear; 2) Listen to what you write; 3) Be ready to ask the Proprioceptive Question: 'What do I mean by?'

As with any GVWP institute, a

great deal of reading and analyzing of research is involved, and articles included Mike Rose's article "The Mismeasure of Teaching and Learning in Contemporary School Reform Part I," a New York Times article called "The High Cost of Low Teacher Salaries," the voluminous "Common Core Standards," and excerpts that Stephanie provided from Mary Rose O'Reilly's *The Garden at Night: Burnout and Breakdown in the Teaching Life*. One excerpt hit home with me, because we were all at PLLA due to a love of teaching, and a love of writing, and the idea that even though we live that love and dedication, we can still feel that we are not the teachers that we started out being:

"...We are affected by darkness where we are most involved and committed, and in what we love and care for most. Love makes us vulnerable, and it is love itself and its development that precipitate darkness..." (O'Reilly 24).

As we read and discussed the other excerpts, the idea of sustainability in teaching came up. Mary Rose O'Reilly writes about crisis queries:

"Are you eating properly?
Are you exercising? Are you practicing your art? Are you involved with communities that love and honor and challenge

you? Do you have someone to talk to you about your life? Are you being polished up or ground down?" (O'Reilly 62)

Back to our own PLLA, Theresa Gill shared that covert contemplation helps with sustainability and that "my kids give me energy." We also discussed that interacting with our colleagues and being part of PLLA enriches us. This is so very true. There's something about sitting in a circle in a room of writing teachers, sharing your writing, sharing your stories, sharing your experiences – sharing from your heart that regenerates you for the next school year.

We said our goodbyes, and about six weeks later, I found out that my middle school's seventh grade writing scores improved thirty percent. I couldn't help but think that daily writing and the Harris Burdick Stories contributed to this success. In August, I began my new assignment teaching ninth grade, and I remembered that my PLLAmates assured me that high school students aren't much different from middle school students. I have noticed they aren't as eager to please their teacher, although I've had many moments of sparkle: when I went through 120 essays for golden lines and shared many of them on the overhead with my students including those of strong writing students, EL

students, students who struggle with writing, and one particular young man whose highlight of the day is annoying me; a day in my strategic class when my students were writing from the heart, and I truly felt a writing climate was emerging; spreading out the Harris Burdick photos all over my high school principal's office, and seeing her enthusiasm for the upcoming days of writing; putting up my Harris Burdick posters for a gallery walk the next day, in preparation of writing; feeling incredibly happy knowing that I shared this lesson with a colleague who tried it out, and said, "My students were so into it – I can't wait to read the stories." The GVWP has been my writing home for four years now, and maybe, just maybe, I've found another person from my district to PLLA.

YOUNG WRITERS SYMPOSIUM

FRIDAY, MARCH 9, 2012

The Great Valley Writing Project invites student writers, teachers, and parents to a spring symposium of writing workshops. GVWP Teacher Consultants have selected a buffet of fun, hands-on workshops targeting writing styles that fit the California Language Arts Framework and Common Core Standards.

This collaboration effort between Modesto Junior College and GVWP offers something for everyone!

STUDENTS IN ALL GRADE LEVELS

will experience creative and productive writing strategies for both classroom and on-demand situations. Students are invited to participate in a unique publishing opportunity.

TEACHERS AND PARENTS are invited to write with your student(s).

Great Valley Writing Project at CSU Stanislaus, and Modesto Jr. College are proud sponsors of the Young Writers Symposium.



Great Valley Writing Project
California State University, Stanislaus • One University Circle, DBH318, Turlock, CA 95382
(209) 667-3490 • www.csustan.edu/gvwp

Register online: <http://2012yws.eventbrite.com>



Looking at Art to Write

by Marilyn Stubbebine



Two keen-eyed canine creatures emerge from Roy De Forest's colorfully detailed painting Country Dog Gentlemen in an interactive feature on the San Francisco Museum of Art web site and lead the viewer on a romp to spark imagination and create their own worlds. In this way, students in the Looking at Art to Write class I facilitated at Roosevelt Elementary School in Stockton were introduced to an adventure of looking at art to inspire writing. Just as the Country Dog Gentlemen travel with their minds, but travel with their eyes first, students would be looking at art to sharpen their senses and imagination to express their own worlds in writing.

When I first told the students they would be able to choose what they would write and how they would write it, their eyes popped open as they looked at one another with big smiles. Yes, State writing standards would be adhered to, but some missing State standards regarding imagination play, and such would be the centerpiece of this writing class. I did have them do prompted writings every now and then to broaden their writing styles and to

help solidify their ideas about art. These writings included a haiku poem, a color poem (Red is..., etc.), a poem beginning with "I used to think art was...but now I think art is..." as well as writing the beginning of a story with the whole class on an interactive web site where students chose the characters, setting, and objects to which some students chose to write different endings.

Each class began with viewing and discussing a work of art. Many museums have educational links on their web sites, so the hard part is deciding which to use. I chose work demonstrating a variety of art styles and mediums: from sculpture to quilts, from paintings to masks, from surrealism to Northern Renaissance style. The students soon realized that art was more than a house surrounded by flowers with a rainbow in the sky!

After the conversations about the art, a five-minute free-write gave them time to reflect and to begin churning up the writing process. This free-write was often hard for some of them to do because they were so eager to get on with their individual writing projects! Students wrote their ideas in their journals and discussed them with me or other students. Trouble deciding what to write was not a big issue. These students had definite ideas to carry out. I was the happy onlooker. Art books, encyclopedias, one computer, poster-size art prints, and the interactive board were available resources if they needed inspiration from other art than the art work viewed that day. The goal was writing presented with impact.

Each student chose how they

wanted to give their writing impact, whether it was in a book form, accompanied by illustrations, or something even more creative. For an hour and a half each class period, they were fully engaged in their projects and often were in need of reminders to stop at the end of each class. To end the time, we gathered in a circle and listened to each other's thoughts and writing.

On the final evaluation forms, students wrote that the class could be improved by having more time, seeing more art, or working together more. As one ELL wrote, "The class can be improved by just get started right away to get to do more stories." I was and am so impressed at how they gobbled up the opportunity to work, plan, think, imagine, discuss, listen, create, write, revise, etc.

Students came and went, but those who stayed were self-motivated, determined students who appeared to me to have a very strong sense of self. The students were of mixed abilities and most were English Language Learners. It was heartwarming to see struggling learners in the classroom find confidence in their ability to write, express themselves at their level of skill and enjoy themselves - no assessment attached. The engagement was there for all. A lot of work was done: stories, poems, research, a rap song and a play. The final class was a Reading presented to some classmates, parents, teachers, and others. How confidently and expressively they read their work!

I believe that the important learning that happened while students were looking at, talking

and thinking about, and writing in response to art, is immeasurable and important. What kept the engagement and effort so high? Here are the probable answers: unpressured time, more immediate feedback, more freedom of choice (the “freeness,” as one student wrote), more expression of self, a relaxed environment (we listened to Beethoven as well as the jazz music of Django Reinhardt), exposure to unique works of art, full ownership of writing, and no fixed grading. Students started at their own level and progressed from there.

Looking at art inspires writing. Try it.

The Leader in Me

by Jenna Valponi

This summer I learned that I am a leader. I've never thought of myself as much of a leader; not much of a follower either, though I can be at times. I'm not one to sport the latest trends. In fact, I usually despise the most recent look that flaunts itself across the red carpet, parades through magazine covers at the supermarket, or screams from manikins of storefronts. By the time I do buy into a trend, it's usually gone out of style. I pretty much play it safe in everything I do.

GVWP TC Interviews Student Writer

By Frances Chamberlain and Charlotte Kunde

I tend to dangle my toes in ideas and ease in, as opposed to tucking my knees and cannonballing into the waters of new thought. Sometimes I ease in too late and regret not diving in. I never believed I was a leader, and frankly, I was okay with that.

Sometime this summer,

possibly on a hurried walk to the classroom building, inside yet another chocolate wrapper, or maybe while writing under a tree next to the duck pond, I found the leader in me.

I am a quiet, gentle leader. You won't find me shouting and proclaiming my latest and greatest idea from a podium, but watch me closely, and I will do. Maybe I'll never have a mile long line of admiring teachers outside of Barnes and Noble, waiting to meet me and sign my new book—a genuine breakthrough in the world of education. I'll never go on a national convention tour, or develop a program that is approved and recommended by the Department of Education. I probably won't lead a movement, be published in NCTE, or receive awards for my teaching. I will continue on, quietly experimenting in the laboratory I call my classroom. If I fail, few will ever know about it, but if I succeed, someone will see and someone will follow. It won't be on a mass scale, but someone will follow. Watch me, and see what I do.

and I were able to accomplish a great deal through writing class and the writing club that I started in the Lammersville Unified School District (LUSD). When the California Writing Project (CWP) created the California Writing Awards (CWA) contest (affiliated with Scholastic Art and Writing Awards and the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers), I was excited to share the news with my writing club members. Charlotte embraced the task, and she received the merit award for her writing narrative. I accompanied Charlotte and family to the CWA recognition at U.C. Davis. I had the honor of handing Charlotte her merit award. Inspiring young writers to accomplish their goals and to feel supported by a community of writers is my most heart-felt purpose as a writing teacher. Building this community of writers is a journey, and it involves dedicated and creative participants and leaders. I can truly say that LUSD has a writing community. Whether it be a writing marathon on the Day of the Writer or a typical, writing club meeting, youngsters and I gather to stretch our minds and to write. I am proud to write this preface in honor of a fellow writer, Charlotte Kunde. I hope that every child will have the opportunity to tap into the voice within.

Interview with Charlotte Kunde

Describe the chronology of the contest events.

It took two weeks in December of 2009 to write and edit my piece, “Behind the Cinders” and then I sent it off. We didn't hear anything about it until February and then we had to wait almost an entire month to go to the awards ceremony and find out what award I received. The whole process was a whole bunch of waiting,

though it was worth it.

How did you, as a young writer, move through the process?

I moved through the process impatiently and with a lot of questions. I was always wondering something, and constantly asking questions that the people I was asking them of couldn't answer. I always knew that I wasn't a patient person, and this just highlighted that, stretching me to my maximum, though when I look back it wasn't even that long.

How did you get to the point of winning a contest throughout your writing years?

I discovered that I loved to write in kindergarten, and ever since then I have been working at becoming proficient in this. It was a lot of work, and I was backed by a lot of support from my parents and critique from my friends, peers, and writing teachers through the years.

Describe the U.C. Davis trip to the awards ceremony.

Though waiting to hear about the contest was nerve racking, the car ride to the ceremony itself was even worse. Though it only took a couple hours, it felt like much longer. I had such butterflies in my stomach. Looking back, it was silly of me to feel that way, because I already knew I had won something. It was just the climax of a long and taxing experience.

Give a chronology of your writing life from kindergarten to the present.

I started writing when I was in kindergarten, short picture books that I would sit and do in maybe half an hour while waiting

to go home after school. Ever since then I have tried to spend every opportunity growing and maturing as an author. In third grade I started writing short stories and in fourth, little plays that my friends and I would perform for our parents. In sixth grade I started to experiment with longer pieces, starting with fan fiction in an attempt to just get used to the style. In seventh grade I began to write longer stories out of my own imagination, which I still do now. I also found that I enjoyed writing poetry, especially minor free verse.

What does writing mean to you?

Writing is a part of me that is more than just a passion, but a way of looking at and explaining my world. It is an extension of what I do and say each day that shows my thoughts and feelings about what goes on.

Why do you write?

I write as a way to express my thoughts and feelings about the world. For things like the fiction I write, the stories of my characters are often spurred through dreams that I have after something that happened in the real world, so almost all of my writing can be linked back to things in my life or thoughts about things I have heard.

How prolific are you?

I'm not a very prolific writer, mostly because I restart things a lot because I look back and find that I have kind of lost the style of the beginning as I go along. But on a good day I can get a lot done, though I won't necessarily keep all of what I wrote.

What are your writing accomplishments?

The first thing that I count as an accomplishment in my seven year writing career is when in second grade an article about a field trip that my class took to Safeway was published in our school's newspaper. Then in fourth grade, though it wasn't shown to the public, my friends liked a play that I wrote enough to put together a performance of it for our parents. We spent months practicing at recess. This past year I won a California state merit writing award and part of my poem “Rainbow” will be in an article that Mrs. Chamberlain has put together.

Talk about your writing achievement. Describe what it meant to you and your coach.

The California Writing Awards is a statewide contest in which students grades seven through twelve can submit pieces of writing in several different categories. I found out about contest through my writing coach, Mrs. Chamberlain, and almost on a whim wrote a short story called “Behind the Cinders,” which is a twist on the Cinderella story. I was nervous and hoped that I would be recognized for it, but I wasn't sure that anything like that would happen. But when the congratulations letter came in the mail, almost a month and a half after I had submitted my piece, I was ecstatic. I had entered the California state writing awards because I wanted to prove to myself that I could do whatever I set my mind to. Actually winning something definitely showed me that.

What is your role as a writer right now?

I write as a student mostly,

though I do consider myself a poet, short story writer, and novelist. My current project is a teen fiction novel.

What is your writing background?

My background from way back is in picture book writing that I did through my younger elementary school years, starting in kindergarten. By the time I was in fourth grade, I was writing plays for me and my friends to perform, though I'll be the first to admit that they aren't world stage material. At that time I also began writing short stories. I started fan fiction in sixth grade, which I believe was a good way to get used to writing longer things because it is more exercising and practicing than anything else. I didn't really start doing poetry until the seventh grade when I discovered that I loved minor, free verse poetry. At that time I also began writing my own novel ideas. Unfortunately, I never finished my first try. I continued to hone my short story skills until I was able to win a California Writing Award.

What was your most recent writing accomplishment?

Most recently I won a statewide merit award in the California Writing Awards for my short story "Behind the Cinders." Also, part of my poem "Rainbow" will be in an article that my writing coach put together.

How does writing fit into the school setting?

During the school year it is difficult to find natural time to write except for on the weekends and on days off. So, for pleasure writing, I have to make time by scheduling around what I already have going on. Of course, there are

the assignments for English, but that isn't writing for yourself. As a student you have to be proactive in looking for opportunities to write, like joining a writing club.

What is your purpose for writing?

I use writing as a way to express feelings that I have inside and cannot release any other way. It is an extension of myself saying things that I can never bring myself to say out loud. It is a way to keep from exploding. However, for longer pieces, I write less to tell and more to show my ideas on the world, more long term things than a frantic in the moment dash. But, overall, writing is an extension of myself that is more me than what I can say aloud.

Where do you get inspiration for your stories and poems?

My inspiration comes from all around me. Poems are most often emotions that I am feeling at that particular moment, or sensations from the world. For longer pieces, my inspiration comes from dreams and thoughts of mine that I want to be able to shape and share in my own way.

Describe a typical writing day for you.

My writing inspiration isn't necessarily a day one. My favorite time to write is somewhere between nine and eleven at night, when I am tired and the ideas that usually come to me in dreams are right at the edge of my mind. Of course, being sleepy means that I make a lot of mistakes, but that is what the morning of the next day is for. So in the morning I am usually cleaning up the work that I did the previous night, and that night I am writing.

How did you get involved in the California Writing Award contest?

My writing coach, Mrs. Chamberlain, told me about the California Writing Awards along with the rest of my class in hopes that some of us would submit our writing. I wasn't sure that I was going to do it, but a few weeks later I found myself drafting a story that would meet the requirements of a short story for the awards. It was kind of a last minute decision that I can't actually remember making.

What is your thought on Pen vs. Keyboard?

I have found it easier to write at the computer, simply because it is faster and easier to go back and revise your work. I also never get writer's cramp while typing, so I feel that it saves me a lot of pain.

For more information on the California Writing Awards, you can link to either of these websites:

<http://www.artandwriting.org/Affiliate/CA001W> or http://californiawrites.org/Students/students_writingawards.html



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