



Field Notes

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West Tennessee Writing Project

Fall 2004

Using the Technology We Already Know About: A Lesson in On-Line Discussions and the Literature of our Classrooms

By Stephanie Mattox Elliott

“What’s that?” J. P. asks as he points to the front and side boards where “Class Codes” is written along with a ten digit, alpha-numeric code and a web site, www.nicenet.org.

“An experiment that we’re going to try for a few weeks,” I respond while shuffling through papers getting ready for the day to begin.

Over the past few years, I have been struggling to come up with a way to intrigue students in literature and writing study. My goal was to get them to really talk about what they had read, without me having to do it for them, and for them to enjoy talking. I wanted conversations to start in class and not be over when they left the room. Being fortunate enough to teach at a school that has two computer labs and computers in every room, I knew that technology was going to have to factor into my goals of student achievement in literature and conversation.

I attended the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) conference a few times over the past four years and the Tennessee Council of Teachers of English (TCTE) as well to better understand what others were doing in this field. I sought out sessions dealing specifically with technology in the hopes that I could modify it enough to fit my needs (isn’t that a common practice in WTWP too?). One session that I found informative was a short session at 2003 TCTE. Barry Gilmore, a teacher at Lausanne Collegiate School in Memphis, presented, “I Hate Them Too: Practical Methods for Using Computers To Teach English.” In his presentation, he hooked me with his electronic conversations. At Lausanne, his students e-mail or Instant Message one another, some even word

process and “pass the paper.” I knew that this was the type of conversation I was looking for in my students.

A month later, I went to San Francisco to the NCTE conference. Again, I searched the massive program book for ways to improve my technology skills (without having to spend a great deal of time doing it) while teaching English and literature to my 8th grade students. I found session after session devoted to electronic conversations and paperless journals. Each session offered something unique, but all came back to two different discussion boards found on-line,

I wanted conversations to start in class and not be over when they left the room.

Blackboard (which is common for universities), and Nicenet (a FREE site for educators).

When I returned to school after Thanksgiving break, I began my own research into the electronic world of conversation and decided to set up a discussion board at www.Nicenet.org. The program was easy for me to follow, and I had my four English classes set up with their first assignment within minutes. It was then that I asked my students to go to the website and sign up in their respective classes. The students had until after Christmas break to have their registrations complete.

Back in class, we had just finished reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* and were about to see it at the Tennessee Performing Arts Center (TPAC). I posted my first question asking the students to respond after viewing

the play. I wanted to know their true feelings about seeing vs. reading the play. I asked them to discuss with other classmates, not just post their own thoughts, but also really have a conversation. I reminded them that it was similar to their IMing from home to their friends. Here, though, we could all see it and have a record of it.

Students, at first, were a little reluctant to post their feelings and questions, but when they found out that they could be Anonymous and that I wouldn’t be checking for grammar and mechanical errors, they jumped at the chance to reply. The following excerpt is taken exactly from the Website. No corrections have been made to the student’s work.

From Anonymous694723, “I agree with J.P. about the book being better than the play. Even though the actors did a good job, I think certain things would have made it better. For example, like Zach was saying, I think the character of Peter in the play was more mad acting than shy. I agree with Zach on Mr. Van Daan’s character being very good, but not fitting the physical appearance...”

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Summer 2004 Invitational Institute

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Nancy Warden, *Harris Middle School, Shelbyville, 7th English*
Leah Dotson, *Haywood Junior High, Brownsville, 8th reading*
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Suzanna Luttrell, *Benton County, English as a Second Language*
Cherry Watts, *UT Martin Department of Educational Studies*
Mary Beth Banks-Dean, *North Parkway Elementary, Jackson, 4th*
Sherral L. Griffin, *Hillcrest Elementary, Troy, Kindergarten*
Brittan Wright, *Martin Elementary, physical education*

National Writing Project Teacher Exchange

Audrey Clark Neal, *Purchase Area Writing Project, Murray State University, Hickman Co. High School, English*

Day-long Poetry Residency to the Institute

Bill Brown, *Greenbrier, Tennessee*

Morning Residencies

Lana Warren, *WTWP Teacher Consultant Obion County Central High School, English*
Molly Coffman, *WTWP Teacher Consultant Madison Academic Magnet High School, English*

Summer Institute Focal Team (SIFT)

Beth Halbert, *WTWP Teacher Consultant, Mt. Juliet High School, English*
Helen New, *WTWP Teacher Consultant, Jackson Tigrett Jr. High, 7th grade*
Sandi Walden, *WTWP Teacher Consultant, Hollow Rock-Bruceston, 5th grade*
Margrethe Ahlschwede, *WTWP Director, UT Martin*

What exactly do we do at WTWP?

By Helen New

read, write, think, revise
edit, reflect, imagine, surmise
encourage, listen, regard, plan
remember, improve, and understand
discover, explore, produce, create
laugh, be amazed, and motivate
respond, contribute, print and post
develop, assess, slightly boast
compose, throw-out, articulate
announce, infer, evaluate
scheme, propose, grin, synthesize
design, proclaim, smile, energize
scan, interpret, comprehend
draft, record, recall, attend
cheer, correct, refine, cogitate
inquire, consider, contemplate
observe, discern, eat a snack
report, volunteer, converse, write-back
present, conjecture, enunciate
explain, expound, investigate
perceive, determine, and clarify
chuckle, inspire, confirm, reply
dialogue, publish, distribute, proclaim
acknowledge, theorize, fully explain
practice, excel, demonstrate
reinforce, confess, invigorate

Helen New, a Teacher Consultant of WTWP, teaches students in 7th grade reading classes at Tigrett Middle School, Jackson.



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Summer 2005 Invitational Institute

The West Tennessee Writing Project invites K-12 teachers from all subject-matter areas to apply for participation in its thirteenth invitational institute to be held May 21 and June 6-30, 2005 on the UT Martin campus.

Teachers accepted for participation receive six hours of graduate credit for English 700-701. Grants from the National Writing Project cover cost of tuition. Teachers cover cost of incidental expenses associated with participation. The six hours of graduate credit may be used as points toward Highly Qualified status, as part of the master's program in education at UT Martin, for re-certification, or for "thirty hours above."

To obtain application materials, contact the West Tennessee Writing Project: wtwp@utm.edu or through WTWP on the Web: www.utm.edu/wtwp

Application materials are due February 25, 2005.

*W*as all this worth it? You'd better believe it. I see more and more how everything's connected, from writing to reading to math to science. This has been the greatest four weeks."

– Katie Madden, Peabody High School, ninth grade English

*B*y taking what I have learned and applying it in my own classroom I will open doors for my students to experience the thrill and satisfaction that come from producing story, poem and other writing and from sharing their work."

– Elaine Barnett, Hillcrest School, Troy, first grade.

*T*he teaching demonstrations are by real teachers who teach in real schools and who have tried these practices and prove that they do work. We are all here because we want to be, and that adds to our sense of community and commitment to the project."

– Nancy Warden, Harris Middle School, Shelbyville, seventh grade reading.

Teaching Other Teachers

In 2003 the West Tennessee Writing Project was invited to participate in a special inservice focus institute of the National Writing Project held in Boston. Subsequently WTWP received a \$6,000 Jump Start grant from NWP to implement a modeling/coaching/mentoring program for non-tenured teachers in Benton County. This grant was co-authored by Teacher Consultants Douglas Cook, chair of Visual and Theater Arts at UT Martin, and Betty Jordan, supervisor of instruction in Benton Co. Twenty non-tenured teachers participated and seven Teacher Consultants of WTWP served as mentors and models.

Based on that program's success, WTWP was invited to apply for and was awarded in September 2004 a Jump Start 2 grant of an additional \$5,000 to continue to "build a more robust inservice."

This Jump Start 2 grant supports:

- No Teacher Left Behind: Standards Based Reading and Writing Workshops from WTWP, a series of four Saturday workshops, Betty Hicks facilitator, with eight additional WTWP Teacher Consultant presenters. The first of these workshops was held Sept. 25. The remaining three will be held Nov. 13, Febr. 12, and April 2. See insert in this newsletter for registration information.

- Professional reading group at Tigrett Middle School, Jackson. Helen New, 7th grade reading, facilitator. Six teachers new to Tigrett will meet at least monthly to discuss books of professional literature, including *Middle Mosaic* edited by Elizabeth Close and Katherine Ramsey, and *Methods that Matter* by Harvey Daniels and Marilyn Bizar. Tigrett's professional reading group is the first such WTWP-supported group in the Jackson-Madison system.

- Beyond the prompt, coaching teachers toward creative approaches for student writing, facilitated by Brittan Wright, physical education teacher at Martin Elementary. Michael Shoulders, opening presenter at the August workshop of WTWP held on the UT Martin campus, will visit Martin Elementary in April. This creative writing effort precedes Shoulders' visit to the school.

News of Teacher Consultants

"The Teacher Is a Writer," an essay by **Debbie Crisswell**, who teaches special education and journalism students at Dyersburg High School, appears in the Spring 2004, Vol. 70-3 issue of *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*.

Betty Hicks was named teacher of the year for Northview Middle School, Newbern, and for the Dyer County School System.

Cathy Evans was named teacher of the year for Big Sandy School.

Stephanie Mattox Elliott, Davidson Academy, Nashville, has been nominated for Who's Who among America's Teachers.

Two of **Kelly Rimel's** students at Dyersburg Intermediate School were recognized last spring by the Dyersburg Police Department for their winning essays about why they would say no to drugs and alcohol. John Selwitz placed first in the state and received \$300 in prize money. John Schultz placed second in the state and received \$200.

The **Tri State Young Adult Review Committee** of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey has included SUMMER OF THE SKUNKS by Wilmoth Foreman on its Books of Note 2004 list. The Volunteer State Book Award committee has selected SUMMER OF THE SKUNKS for its Master Reading List 2005-2006. From the 20 books on the list a winner will be voted on in 2006.

I Am

By Sherral Griffin

I am short in height

 a product made from love.

I am an addition,

 to circumference a loving family.

I am an order of operations,

 teaching the equation of learning.

I am subtracting

 problems of children's life differences.

I am multiplying

 in weight because of the fractions of chocolate.

I am a word problem,

 waiting to be solved by others.

I am at the base

 of the metric ladder hoping for
 infinite joy.

Technology, cont.

Over the three days that *Anne Frank* was discussed, students posted over 100 entries discussing the play they read and the play they saw on stage. When our discussion had ended, and believe it or not, I had to end it, students were asking when the next topic would be posted. I like to leave my topics open ended in conversation, so that the students can take a part in moving the direction of conversation.

In another discussion, students were asked about freedoms and rights after reading selections from our literature anthology. The day before postings were due, I already had over one hundred messages posted from the 68 eighth grade students.

Ainsley writes, "Paul Rever's Ride taught me a lot about freedom by showing me how much people would do to break away from the British. ... That really makes me think about how much freedom meant to them and how much it means to me. It leaves me with one huge question. Would I be willing to die for my country?"

Most posts are similar to the ones presented here. Of course, there are the few who didn't post at all, or post with one or two short, unthoughtful responses. Yet the goal of having the students enjoy reading and discussing what they are reading has been enhanced through our on-line discussions. Students became active learners in their own education.

Note: A recent issue of "Voices from the Middle" (Volume 11, Number 3, March 2004) also explains other ways to implement technology in the classroom, more than for just the sake of having lessons in technology.

Stephanie Mattox Elliott, a Teacher Consultant of WTWP, teaches at Nashville's Davidson Academy. A WTWP mini-grant facilitated planning and implementing this classroom project.

Sherral Griffin, a Teacher Consultant of the West Tennessee Writing Project, teaches kindergartners at Hillcrest School, Troy. This poem grew out the teaching demonstration by Audrey Clark Neal during the 2004 WTWP Summer Invitational Institute.

About WTWP

The West Tennessee Writing Project is a program of professional development for teachers, K-12, from all subject-matter areas. It seeks to improve writing and writing instruction in our schools.

Headquartered in the Department of English at the University of Tennessee at Martin, WTWP is one of 160 sites of the National Writing Project.

The heart of WTWP is its annual invitational summer writing-reading institute for selected West Tennessee teachers, all subject-matter areas, all grades K-12 and held on the UT Martin campus. For information and application for the Summer 2005 institute, contact WTWP, or find brochure of information and application materials on WTWP on the web: www.utm.edu/wtwp

Why a writing project? To increase the frequency of writing in the classroom, expand the variety of writing, develop a love of reading and writing among students; publish student writing; combine writing with reading to increase reading fluency and comprehension; to be able to demonstrate excellence in reading and writing in testing climates.

WTWP is supported by grants from the National Writing Project of the University of California, Berkeley with matching funds from the University of Tennessee at Martin. Additional gift contributions and collaborations with area school systems support particular workshops and programs.

The director of WTWP is Margrethe Ahlschwede, professor of English at UT Martin. Associate director is Paula Cox, 5th grade teacher at Camden's Briarwood School. Co-directors are Molly Coffman, chair of the English Department

at Madison Academic Magnet High School, Jackson; and Beth Halbert, Mt. Juliet High School, English. Technology liaison for WTWP is Shannon Tolene, McEwen High drama and English teacher. Inservice coordinator is Betty Hicks, 6th grade reading, Northview Middle, Newbern. The WTWP Advocacy Council also includes Renee Cooper, special education, Camden Elementary; Doug Cook, chair, Visual and Theater Arts, UT Martin; Sandi Walden, Hollow-Rock Bruceton 5th grade; Helen New, 7th reading, Tigrett Middle, Jackson; Deanna Chappell, Troy; Nancy Warden 7th grade, Harris Middle, Shelbyville; Candra Smith, English, Westview High School, Martin; Brittan Wright, physical education, Martin Elementary; Jenna Wright, Department of English, UT Martin.

UT Martin administrators: Chancellor Nick Dunagan; Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Tom Rakes; College of Humanities and Fine Arts Dean Jerald Ogg; Department of English Chair Lynn Alexander.

For further information about inservice programs, the annual summer institute, and additional programs of professional development, contact the West Tennessee Writing project, Department of English, UT Martin, 38238; 731.881.7290, 731.881.7300; FAX 731.881.7276; or e-mail: wtwp@utm.edu

Or see WTWP on the web: www.utm.edu/wtwp

National Writing Project site:
www.writingproject.org

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Risky

by *Lee Hudson*

A bunch of teachers and me
One book club year down
Decided to risk it again.

No more than fifteen kids
And a shoestring budget
Instantly turned into forty kids
At the mention of the word club—
A club of
Eleven year olds, mostly girls
And books of all sorts.

Divided into three separate groups
Books were shared
Connections were made
Questions were answered
Chips were eaten.

The book with the cute guy
From the movie
On the cover
Was a hit.
The one that took place
In one day
With a dead kid
Was a bust.
The one with the divorce
Hit home
As did the one about the girl
In search of herself.

Some were more worried about refills
Than the conversation
But everyone was involved.
Everyone was welcome.
Everyone loved books.

A fifth grade book club
Is risky.
Will they read?
Will they like the book?
Will there be enough snacks?
But is worth it every time.

Author's Note: My thanks to my fellow book club teachers who humored the idea of the book club.

Lee Hudson, teacher consultant of WTWP, is 6th, 7th, and 8th grade English and writing teacher at Dyer Junior High School. A WTWP mini-grant supported this project.

PLEASE POST

No Teacher Left Behind: Standards-Based Reading Writing Workshops from the West Tennessee Writing Project

For teachers from all grade levels and all subjects

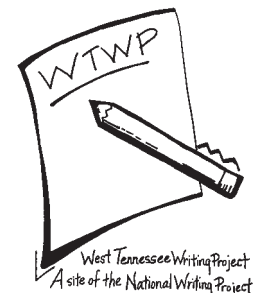
This school year, WTWP is offering four Saturday workshops for teachers. Each begins at 8:30 and concludes at 3:30 with an hour for lunch. The first was held Sept. 25, 2004 at Crockett County Middle School in Alamo. Three remain:

NOV. 13, 2004 Madison Academic Magnet High School, Jackson

FEBRUARY 12, 2005 UT Martin University Center

APRIL 2, 2005 Northview Middle School, Newbern

The workshops are facilitated by Teacher Consultants of WTWP whose interactive teaching demonstrations are on a variety of topics including assessment; TCAP writing practice; writing from research and documentation; writing to learn in all content areas; developing a writers' club with approaches also useful for the classroom; art through writing. All demonstrations are standards-based. Teacher participants can earn points toward Highly Qualified status. CEUs are available.



Registration is \$20 each teacher each workshop.

Workshop details and registration are on WTWP on the web: www.utm.edu/wtwp.

Or teachers may register by contacting the Office of Extended Campus and Continuing Education (identify the workshop[s] to attend): phone: 731.881.7082; or mail: Office of Extended Campus and Continuing Education, 110 Gooch Hall, UT Martin, Martin, TN 38238; or e-mail: ecce@utm.edu

For more information about this series or other professional development programs from WTWP, contact Betty Hicks, WTWP Inservice Coordinator: blhicks1@yahoo.com

The University of Tennessee at Martin

PLEASE POST