

# Newsletter



Volume 21, Number 3 Fall, 2000

## Summer Institute in the Teaching of Literature Community's the Name of the Game

A Literature Institute Report written by the Summer 2000 Participants

With nervous excitement, we entered the boardroom at Colonial Elementary School on June 26 with diverse expectations, both professional and personal. Through the Literature Institute, a sense of community was forged. As we worked together on projects, presentations, and activities, we shared experiences, gained expertise, laughed, and even cried. As a result, we learned that a community spirit is an extremely powerful force but, more importantly, we realized that a classroom without a strong sense of community is like a ship without a sail.

-Jason Finn, Haverford SD and  
Tobias Salmon, Colonial SD

Get ready to be the book! Whether or not Wilhelm's You Gotta BE the Book was our pedagogy text, we discovered so much as teachers and readers by interacting with all the texts we read. The Institute helped us with skills, strategies, and attitudes to face the challenges of teaching with literature. Because we came to the Institute having read different pedagogy texts, we had the foundation for weeks of sharing and growing with a community of like-minded educators. We explored relevant articles that inspired reflection and lively discussions. The most enjoyable aspect of the readings was being able to experience and re-

spond to a wide range of stimulating fiction, both whole-class texts and self-selected ones.

-Amy Botta, Colonial SD and  
Charlotte Dean, Germantown Academy

One aspect of the Institute emphasizes performance as a way into literature and, consequently, as a way out of the box for students. We found that doing is better than listening, and that drama is an integral part of making meaning. The Institute is not just about acting out plays or acting out stories; it is about dramatizing concepts found in literature and poetry. What grew from this is

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## Summer Institute in the Teaching of Writing An Invitation to Area Teachers

What is a summer Institute? The simple answer is that it is a six-credit, graduate level, intensive course of study in the teaching of writing. Organized by the Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project, a site of the National Writing Project, and affiliated with West Chester University, the summer Institute has been the cornerstone of the Project since its inception twenty years ago.

The simple answer is not the entire story, however. Attending a summer Institute can change your teaching permanently, positively, and completely. In an Institute, participants become a community of learners

who read, write, and research their way through the complexities of teaching writing to their students while becoming more comfortable with their own writing processes.

Teachers of all grades, K through 12, and of all subject areas (yes, even math) have participated in the Writing Institutes. Listen to what some of them have said about their experiences:

How could anyone enter the Writing Institute and not blossom? I entered and let old ideas wither away. I was a seed, planted, cultivated, and nourished by my instructors. The Institute has been the single most ex-

traordinary experience, both personally and professionally. Every teacher, no matter what grade level or content area should experience the Institute. They will forever be changed. I know I am!

(Lisa Glavin, Council Rock SD)

Reflecting on the various activities we engaged in made me realize how much fun I had learning. I certainly enjoyed listening to Peter Catalanotto's presentation - and buying his books! Julia Blumenreich showed us how easy and enjoyable writing poetry can be, especially if you have a framework to guide you.

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## FROM THE DIRECTOR

### "WHERE WERE WE?"

When the Ku Klux Klan distributed leaflets outside Pennsylvania schools, when they held rock concerts for Pennsylvania teenagers, and when they demonstrated in Pennsylvania towns, where were Pennsylvania's teachers?

Floyd Cochran raised this disturbing question for all of us attending PAWLP's special program, "Sticks and Stones: Tolerance, Literacy, and Children," in late October. The former national press secretary for the Aryan Nations and now one of the most respected anti-hate speakers in the country, Cochran knows a lot about the activity and strategies not only of the Klan but of all the hate-mongering gangs proliferating in southeastern Pennsylvania these days.

And they are gangs, he pointed out – with insignia, headquarters, initiation rites, weapons, rivals, and all the other hallmarks we associate with gangs and gang warfare. The fact that they are white gangs, who carry bibles and call themselves the Christian Identity Movement, only makes them seem like other than what they are. And that, according to Cochran, makes those of us who work with children leery about challenging their presence in our communities. How can we criticize the World Church of the Creator when it appears to be just another independent denomination? When its leaders are lawyers and university students?

We can – and we must – because Matthew Hale, an attorney and self-described "pastor" of this church, is a virulent racist who uses

the Bible to justify his belief that Jews are children of Satan, that the white race is the army of G-d, and that joining his congregation is virtually a sacred act. Hale knows the future of his organization lies with young people, so one of his youth pastors is Bo Decker, a student at Penn State, an articulate, nice-looking, young white man who appeals to many high school students - and appears safe to their parents - because he looks so much like them. Leaders like Hale and Decker lead children in prayer – and weapons training. They never explicitly exhort kids to violence. Instead, they create websites with names like Liberty Net and say "If only someone would act!".

What can we do when people like these hide behind the law allowing community groups to use schools as "public accommodations" for gatherings or masquerade as just another church in the area? What can we do when our students read their comic books (yes, comic books), see flyers announcing their free rock concerts, are attracted by their message that "nothing is your fault," that there is always someone else, some minority group, to blame for your lot in life?

According to Cochran, teachers and parents must explicitly debunk the myths and stereotypes our society perpetuates about all potential targets – whether the disabled, people of color, Jews or homosexuals. We must understand that the foundation of racism is laid by the jokes kids hear and the images they see – not just in rap music, movies, and videos, but in historical murals where only white people are portrayed building our nation and in illustrated religious books where G-d is always white. Teachers and parents must talk honestly about rac-

ism and bigotry. We must put human faces on victims and suffering. And we must listen and respond to what our kids say, even when they don't realize what their words mean.

One Bucks County teacher articulated the general sentiment after Cochran's presentation. "I had no idea," she said. "I feel like I've had blinders on." Floyd Cochran made many of us aware of the blinders we've been wearing. That is a necessary first step. What we do – or don't do – now, however, will determine our response next time someone asks the question, "Where were we?" And maybe, if enough of us act, the question won't have to be asked at all.

-Andrea Fishman

Interested in learning how you can make a difference?

The Project offers a three-credit, graduate course entitled

### **Building Community and Character: Texts and Techniques for teachers K-12**

- Experience ways to build classroom communities that work
- Investigate approaches that help students develop respect for others and for themselves
- Select, read, and discuss fiction and non-fiction texts dealing with issues of prejudice, exclusion, and genocide
- Explore strategies for using these texts with students
- Learn how to resolve difficult personal and professional issues in teaching tolerance

To bring this course to your district call Andrea Fishman at the PAWLP Office.

**610-436-2202**



## Writing Institute

-continued from p. 1, column 3

Drea Fishman's presentation on domain scoring and the practice we received gave me a better understanding of the current PSSA Standards.

*(Gloria King, Upper Moreland SD)*

I have always fancied myself a writer. Although I talked like a writer and thought like a writer, I was not a real writer. Real writers actually write. Until I was forced to put pen to paper in this class, I was only pretending to be a writer. The only writing I did was functional. I wrote to teach, I wrote to learn, and I wrote to communicate. However, this summer I learned to write for myself - for the sake of writing. I now have confidence that I am a writer, both for myself and for others. This confidence in my own abilities was found in PAWLP. I will bring faith in my own abilities to my classroom this fall as I write with and for my students.

*(Erin Pirnot, Central Bucks SD)*

The actual process of being a writer, a poet, a presenter, a support person, a reporter, and a student allowed me to truly know what writing is about. Not everything in this course has been easy. The work was intense, fast paced, and informative. I can honestly say that for the past four weeks I have only thought about writing or have actually been writing. I am ready to teach writing.

*(Beverly Schmidt, Abington SD)*

It is hard to believe the Institute is over. It seems like only yesterday that I was sitting at the welcome dinner scared out of my mind and wondering what had ever possessed me to enroll in the Writing Institute. After seeing the requirements of the course and listening to the backgrounds of the other participants, I was a little apprehensive. Being a *ric* teacher for twelve years and a writing teacher for only four, I wondered how I would measure up to the competition.

My fear of the "competition" was

alleviated the very first day of class. It was then that I realized each of us was there to stretch our wings and grow as teachers and as writers.

*(Rita DiCame, St. Catherine of Siena School)*

I have wanted to take this course for ten years, but something always seemed to get in the way. Finally, this year I had the opportunity. It was well worth the wait. The new insights I have gained in both my personal writing and the teaching of writing are numerous. The information and ideas I have seen and heard in presentations by both instructors and fellow students will be very useful in my future teaching. What I have learned about myself as a writer can only help me become a better writer.

*(Rick Ziegler, Central Bucks SD)*

The projects and work we did throughout the Writing Institute had a real purpose, at least they did for me. We became writers and nurtured our writing skills; the writing we completed was purposeful; we learned to depend on others for feedback and support; we learned to provide support and feedback for others; we grew comfortable with sharing our ideas and making presentations in front of our colleagues. These experiences helped me to grow both personally and professionally.

*(Jill Lynch, Upper Dublin SD)*

I found your WCU Project flyer in my mailbox back in April. Because I was somewhat of a pauper, I hesitated becoming a PAWLP-er. Melissa persuaded me, pointing out that it was a good deal, dollars to credits. In retrospect, the investment turned out to be not only financially sound, but quite enlightening as well. I'm using gray matter that I forgot existed. It's been a sort of Club Med for the brain!

*(Laura Brannen, Centennial SD)*

I was an indecisive tadpole stuck in the spawn of old writing processes and wanted to grow into a classroom writing workshop facilitator. Inviting Institute newsletters finally con-

vinced me to swim among the talented participants in an encouraging and stimulating pond of reading, writing, and discussion.

*(Pam Goodwin, Elizabethtown SD)*

This Institute has been the greatest educational experience of my life. I have been challenged daily as a writer and teacher without fear of criticism. I am proud to be a graduate of PAWLP class of 2000 and proud to have shared the last four weeks with truly amazing people.

*(John Vaszily, Abington SD)*

In order to teach writing, I thought you needed a grammar book and worksheets. But now I know! I am inspired to continue to write. I know where to begin and I have a goal to work for. I can't wait to start the year.

*(Dawn Fenske, Coatesville SD)*

The pace of the course perfectly balanced group time and individual time for processing ideas. I am so very glad I signed up for this experience. I don't know how I would have returned to school without these ideas and discussions. The Institute challenged me as a writer and as a teacher.

*(Molly Leahy, Centennial SD)*

In the Writing Institute, primary teachers and secondary content area teachers work with language arts teachers, intermediate teachers, reading specialists and even college writing teachers. We are a community of learners who read, write, research and grow as teachers and writers.

Successful completion of the summer Institute makes a participant a "Fellow" of the Pennsylvania Writing and Literature Project and the National Writing Project. We urge interested teachers to apply for acceptance to this year's Institute. The Project will run an Institute at West Chester University, at the Bucks County I.U. and this year we will also be in Audubon, NJ.

*-Diane Dougherty*

*PAWLP co-Director for Institutes*



## EDUCATION MATTERS

*a column from Michaels Associates  
by Donald Graves*

Teaching is an emotional roller coaster. In the space of eight hours and twenty-eight children you try to accommodate two new students who arrive with no transfer papers, handle an explosion from a child who has just spent a weekend with his alcoholic father, or fight the interference of an imposing intercom when reading a story aloud to the class. At 9:30 you celebrate with Mark C. who is captured by Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*. "I'm going to finish this one," he says and you know it will be the first book he's ever read by himself.

You celebrate Mark's breakthrough with a colleague in the teacher's room, but Mary G. overrides your story, bemoaning the impending state assessments that begin next Monday. Mary has a way of showering good news with cynicism: "Humph, maybe if the kids do poorly enough, we can get us a new superintendent because the board will fire the one we've got now. How many's that been in the last ten years? Three, I think." You usually avoid the teachers' room if Mary is in there alone because you know you will leave with less energy than when you entered. You pretend you've just come in to get a quick cup of coffee.

Leaving the teachers' room, you feel the weight of Mary's comments. Indeed, the superintendent has promised quick results to the board. The Word has trickled down from Board, to Superintendent, to Principal to you, the teacher. The administration wants you to give weekly writing prompts and promote daily skill builders and phonics in reading instruction. Every day a new pressure arrives at your classroom door. You feel as though you must buffer

these demands for real, long-term learning for the children. Everyone seems to be in a hurry to deal with the crisis in education. The word "crisis" is used interchangeably with reading. When they speak of "The Crisis" you know what people mean. You know that invoking the crisis word means the usual suspension of professional judgment and the absence of respect. Outside consultants bring with them the gleeful news that they have sure-fire methodologies that are teacher-proof. Plug in and see the scores rise. Their graphs and charts show that this district, like all the others they've visited, has demolished the national norms. You begin to feel a general weariness and a dull headache. You push the sure-fire methods back into your subconscious and get on with teaching.

You take a field trip to the beach in the afternoon where you investigate tide pools. Silent Martha who seldom speaks is chatting away like a magpie and won't leave your side. This day the children are recording the various organisms in the tide pools. They shout their discoveries and add to their lists. Ben Y. has discovered a star fish spreading open a clam. A crowd soon gathers. Though the drama is slow, the children are fascinated by the power of the star fish's suction cups. "Gross! Awesome!" they shout. Wise Ben says, "Pretty soon he'll be lowering his stomach into the clam to eat." And you say, "This is why I want to teach."

Every day you and millions of teachers walk into rooms across the country to teach. You are instructor, teacher, supervisor, parent, and project director. Most of all you are teacher/parent. In the course of a year you will spend over a thousand hours with the children and experience the full range of emotion asso-

ciated with parenting. You will demand, cajole, nudge, rejoice, celebrate, despair, weep, laugh, sermonize, and express anger. You will experience all the emotions of a parent who may have but one child. In your case you will have from twenty to thirty-five.

Every day you will be second-guessed by parents, administrators, and pundits who have never taught. Laws will be passed that try to govern the teaching transactions you make with children. You will observe that the volume of rhetoric by the experts is directly related to the distance the speaker is from the classroom.

Unlike supervisors in other occupations, you cannot fire the children, lay them off, send them off on assignment, or ignore them. They are simply yours. And since they are yours, you will ride the emotional roller coaster. Emotional roller coasters demand energy, high energy, and you need to know how to maximize what gives you energy and minimize what takes it away. The purpose of this book is to take a hard look at our lives and the profession we have chosen in order to tap into new energy sources, minimize what drains us, and begin to deal with those aspects that waste our time. You need to find the energy to teach and this book aims to help you.

*This is an excerpt from Chapter One of Donald Graves' new book entitled The Energy to Teach due to be published by Heinemann in January, 2001. The book will be priced at \$17.50. Readers of this Newsletter can order the book from Michaels Associates for \$14.00 plus shipping. You must identify yourself as a subscriber or referer. PAWLP in the body of the purchase order to receive this 20% discount.*



## Best Practice

### Wait a Minute

You know how you become so accustomed to doing something, how something becomes so internalized that you have no conscious awareness that you're doing it? The something can be as simple as forming a cursive S or as complicated as driving to work. Did you ever arrive at school and realize that you have absolutely no memory of anything that happened during the drive? Why, there could be dozens of minor accidents strewn in your wake, with people cursing you all along your route to school.

In my new job, among other activities, I have the fun of being guest writing instructor in many different classrooms. This has certainly caused me to take a very close look at my internalized practices; after all, the 'real' classroom teacher is observing, hoping to pick up ideas.

One of my practices was so internalized that it took two different teachers mentioning it to me after the lessons in their rooms to even remind me of it. They both remarked on how long I was willing to wait for the students to settle down to their brainstorming and how long I was willing to wait for individual students to brainstorm a list longer than two items. Actually, it's odd that I'm not consciously aware of this patience because it took me quite a while to develop it!

Let me give an example. One of my district's elementary art teachers asked for help with an assignment in which the third grade students wrote to explain Matisse papercuts they had done. In the past, he had posted their writing next to the artwork during the annual spring art show, but he was unhappy with the quality of the thinking. To help the students re-

flect, I asked them to brainstorm a list of things a viewer of their papercuts wouldn't know just by looking at them—and then I waited...and waited...and waited, while they worried about whether they should use cursive or manuscript, whether they should use sentences or a list, whether they could work in pairs or had to work alone. (You know, you've been there.)

Finally, after approximately two or three minutes (which seem like a lifetime when you're standing there), the room became fairly quiet as students started to list "contrast," "painted paper," "realistic subject," and other aspects of the papercuts that seem important. The lesson continued to the end of the period when, in a quick debriefing before the art teacher tried it himself with the next class, he remarked on how long I had waited without giving specific hints. He also noted how, once the students had an idea or two and were willing to call it a day, I just suggested they close their eyes and remember their papercuts and remarked that the people who came to the art show would like to know the thinking that went into their papercuts.

I'm pleased to report that the final shared list covered most of the board and the next class did a wonderful job under the direction of the art teacher. By the way, each of the four third-grade classes came up with a slightly different list.

How did I learn to be patient all those years ago? I actually faced the clock, watched the second hand go around, and forced myself not to open my mouth for at least two minutes and then not to give answers but repeat the instructions in slightly different wording.

*-Vicki Steinberg, a secondary English teacher for many years, is Language Arts Coordinator for Exeter Township S.D.*

**New  
Spring Course!**

### Making Connections:

Educators  
as Readers & Writers

Five Saturdays:  
January - April, 2001

**Share Reading:** Personal favorites, literature, non-fiction, classroom texts/works, your choice

**Share Writing:** Experience writing in different genres, experience the workshop process, make connections, publish

Facilitated by Mary Buckelew,  
Associate Director of PAWLP  
**For more information call  
610-436-2998**

**Mark your  
calendar!  
Barry Lane,**

**author of Discovering the Writer Within, After the End, The Reviser's Toolbox, and other books on writing, will be the Keynote Speaker at the PAWLP Literacy Conference on June 21 & 22, 2000.**

**Watch this Newsletter  
for further details.**



### Literature Institute

-continued from p. 1, column 3

a solid sense of community easily transferable to our classrooms. What comes from this community is a multitude of rich, shared learning experiences that will be remembered, and isn't that what learning is about?

Actively engaged students are sharing learners who develop skills necessary for college, the job market, and leisure time reading. Performing literature enriches their depth of knowledge as they intertwine with the text. Students will be able to extend themes and make personal connections while practicing higher-order thinking skills. Today's society needs adults who are able to take risks while thinking on their feet; teachers can provide these skills through performance based activities. The classroom becomes a haven for student voices as teachers create lifelong learners by putting literature on its feet.

-Nicole McConnell, and  
Chris Corbo, Coatesville SD

A meaningful part of the Institute was the variety of guest teacher presenters, all former Literature Institute attendees. We, as this year's par-

ticipants, were actively engaged in our learning, dancing, acting, reading, drawing, reflecting, and responding. Strategies and ideas were presented in ways that enabled us to make connections to our own classrooms. Hot spot response stickers, literature circles, "I" prompts, and putting literature on its feet were just a few topics that gave us a taste of how we can provide meaningful literature experiences for our students and ourselves.

-Melina Henry, Colonial SD and  
Kathie Mahoney, Exeter Township SD

Though the Institute focuses on reading, writing is also an integral part of the program. The written work was varied and useful in responding to the extensive and intense reading requirements. Writing included a response essay, a two-voice poem, a script for presenting during a workshop, an implementation plan, an introduction letter for our portfolio, a plan for using a children's picture book. We also did reflective pieces in the form of focused freewrites and journal entries. All of these writing experiences were beneficial and practical

because we, through writing, were able to make connections and find meaning within our own texts. As teachers we need to guide our students to find the same meaning in literature through their own writing.

-Gina Gormley, Colonial SD and  
Lois Gemhardt, Marlboro SD

Having completed the Institute, we returned to our classrooms, with actual lessons that we developed connected to our curriculum. We have new ways to solve old problems because we can offer thought-filled ways for students to enjoy literature and make meaning from it.

-Paul Forberger, Rose Tree Media  
SD and Donna Searle, Eastern Lancaster  
County SD

Through the spirit, engagement, and opportunity offered in the Literature Institute, teachers bond for the common goal of creating a community of learners in the classroom and a community of support for themselves.

**To apply for the Summer, 2001,  
Literature Institute please complete the nomination form on  
p. 7 of this Newsletter or call  
610-436-2202.**

### PAWLP FELLOW IS PUBLISHED!

Teresa Morretta, '96 Writing, '97 Literature, is co-author of a book entitled Practical Approaches for Teaching Reading and Writing in Middle Schools published by the International Reading Association in April, 2000.

Teresa also presented at the PA ASCD Conference in Hershey, PA in November on approaches she uses in her classroom to teach reading and writing.

Many of the practices Teresa uses in her classroom were learned in the Writing and Literature Institutes.

### Visualizing Words and Worlds: Writing, Literature and Art offered at Brandywine and Michener in 2001

This three-credit graduate course explores the connections between the visual arts, writing and literature. It will be held at the James A. Michener Museum in Doylestown and at the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford in the summer of 2001.

- Writing in response to and inspired by art of all kinds
- Using the visual arts to respond to reading of all kinds
- Hands-on art workshops conducted by contemporary artists

No previous experience or talent is required to enroll.  
For more information please call the PAWLP Office.

610-436-2202



## Become a Fellow of the Writing or Literature Project!

### Writing Institute

3 locations:

WEST CHESTER UNIVERSITY,  
BUCKS COUNTY IU, AUDUBON, NJ

- Writing & teaching writing
- Writing processes: theory & practice
- Revision strategies that work
- Peer and teacher conferencing
- Response groups in the classroom
- Writing to learn across the curriculum
- Writing Workshop management
- Portfolio & Performance Assessment
- PSSA Writing Assessment



**Summer Institute  
Stipends of \$500  
Available!**

**six graduate credits**

(three-credit school year  
follow-up available)

**June 25 - July 20, 2000 (4 weeks)  
Monday - Thursday, 8:30 am - 3 pm**

### Literature Institute

1 location:

COLONIAL SCHOOL DISTRICT,  
PLYMOUTH MEETING

- Reading & teaching literature
- Literature Circles & reader response
- Multicultural literature
- Young Adult & Children's literature
- Fiction & non-fiction in the content areas
- Art & visual media as literature
- Reading Workshop management
- Portfolio & Performance Assessment
- PSSA Reading Assessment

Fellows of both Institutes may become paid teacher-consultants eligible to coordinate courses, present in-service programs, and teach in our summer Youth Programs.

Act now! Applications are considered on a rolling admission basis and enrollments are limited. Send us the form below or call the office at (610) 436-2202 and an application form will be sent by return mail.

## Nomination Form for the Summer Institutes of the Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project

I nominate myself or the teacher named below for the Summer Institute in the Teaching of Literature held in the Colonial School District.

I nominate myself or the teacher named below for the Summer Institute in the Teaching of Writing. Please check location preferred:

Bucks County IU

West Chester University

Audubon, New Jersey

### Nominee Information

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

HOME ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL NAME \_\_\_\_\_

GRADE LEVEL \_\_\_\_\_

JOB TITLE \_\_\_\_\_

CERTIFICATION \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL DISTRICT \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_

STATE \_\_\_\_\_

ZIP CODE \_\_\_\_\_

HOME TELEPHONE (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL TELEPHONE (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

NOMINATOR \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this form to The PA Writing & Literature Project Office,  
West Chester University, West Chester, PA 19383**

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The Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project *Newsletter* is published five times a year by and for those affiliated with the Project. Submissions are always welcome and can be mailed to the Pennsylvania Writing & Literature Project, West Chester University, West Chester, PA, 19383.



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**ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED**

### **Time for a change?**

Please let us know by checking the appropriate box below and returning it to us with the above address label. Thank you!

Name misspelled

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Contact person changed

Incorrect address

Remove from mailing list

Other (Specify)



ERRATA!

The dates of the Literacy Conference on page 5 should read  
June 21 & 22, 2001, (not 2000)

and

The dates of the summer Institutes are June 25 - July 20, 2001  
(not 2000)