



PENNSYLVANIA WRITING PROJECT NEWSLETTER

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1983 SUMMER PROGRAMS ISSUE

Summer Institutes

- at West Chester State College
- in Philadelphia

Open Programs

1. Workshop: Holistic Assessment
2. Workshop: The Process-Centered Writing Class
3. Teaching Composition
4. Advanced Institute on Revising Writing

THE CONSULTANTS

Plans for our 1983 consultants are now nearing completion. Several nationally noted workshop leaders will be returning to PAWP programs, and several new guest presenters will be coming to share their research and teaching.

All PAWP concurrent institutes and workshops will benefit on June 30 and July 1 from the expertise of Donald Graves, Mary Ellen Giacobbe, Jane Kearns, and Keith Caldwell. Graves, a noted researcher on the writing process, has just published a long-awaited book, *Writing: Teachers and Children At Work*. His colleague, Mary Ellen Giacobbe, a first-grade teacher, participated in his major research on the process-centered classroom. Jane Kearns, who teaches in a middle school, has conducted several successful workshops for the New Hampshire Writing Project. Keith Caldwell, who returns to PAWP for the fourth time, is a high school teacher and an original Bay Area Writing Project teacher-consultant (you will enjoy his article later in this issue).

Over the following two weeks, PAWP will be visited by Stephen Marcus (South Coast Writing Project) and William Lutz (Rutgers-Camden). Marcus, the author of *Compupoem*, will demonstrate computer-assisted instruction in writing, and Lutz, who chairs the Double-Speak Committee of the National Council of Teachers of English, will lead a day-long workshop on language sensitivity.

PAWP's final summer visitor will be Marion Mohr (Northern Virginia Writing Project), a high school teacher who has recently completed a book on revision. Mohr will make presentations to the last week of the regular summer institutes and will introduce the advanced institute on revision.

The Two 1983 Institutes

Teachers are again invited to apply to participate in summer institutes in West Chester and Philadelphia. The institutes will run for four weeks, from June 27 to July 22, and will again follow the successful model originated by the parent Bay Area Writing Project. Fellowships will be available for the West Chester site but not for the Philadelphia location. Participants must be recommended by their school districts.

Martha Menz (Upper Darby School District) and Jim Trotman (West Chester State) are scheduled to direct the West Chester institute; the Philadelphia institute directors are Cecelia Evans and Chris Kane of the Philadelphia School District. Both institutes will be coordinated by Bob Weiss and will be visited by the full roster of the PAWP summer consultants.

The Four Open Programs

1. Workshop in Holistic Assessment of Writing

Over a two-day period, June 22-23, the Workshop in Holistic Assessment of Writing introduces participants to four systems of evaluating student writing: general-impression, analytic scale, primary trait, and feature-oriented. Participants assess large numbers of writing samples and are trained to come to agreement on their evaluation. The scoring systems themselves are evaluated for their applicability to different educational levels. As in the past two years, this workshop will be led by Bob Weiss, with assistance from Dolores Lorenc (Holy Family College) and Lois Snyder (Upper Darby School District). The workshop is open to all teachers.

2. The Three-Day Workshop: The Process-Centered Writing Class

From June 29 to July 1, the Writing Project will run a workshop on why and how to organize a classroom to encourage the writing process fully. PAWP consultants organize the first day's sessions, to which participants are assigned according to their experience with process-centered writing instruction. Nationally acclaimed Writing Project consultants then lead workshop sessions over the next two days, with participants enrolled according to grades taught (K-3, 4-6, 7-9, 10-College), and provide general keynote and concluding remarks. The workshop is available for graduate or in-service credit.

Last year, the 83 teachers who participated in this workshop course recommended it with a resounding A+ for providing them with a healthy philosophy of writing instruction and a wealth of useful methods to try in their classes. An improved program has been arranged for this summer. A workshop for junior high/middle school teachers has been added, the first day's activities have been revised, and support services have been improved. We are certain that participants in the 1983 three-day workshop will be as enthusiastic as their colleagues last year.

3. The Three-Week Course in Teaching Composition

Simultaneous with the first three weeks of the Summer Institutes, the Writing Project will run a 45-hour, 3-credit course detailing some of the best methods of teaching writing at all grade levels. Available for graduate or in-service credit, this course combines the standard Writing Project course in Strategies for Teaching Writing with the 3-day Workshop, The Process-Centered Writing Class. Participants will work with all of the consultants visiting PAWP from June 29 to July 15, including Project Fellows teaching at various grade levels.

The 1983 program also represents an improvement over last year's offering—including sessions on language awareness and on computer-assisted instruction in writing. We are confident that participants will have an edifying and enjoyable experience.

4. The Advanced Institute: Revising Writing

For several years, the confidence of Writing Project teachers and their colleagues has increased as they successfully motivated students at all levels to gain fluency in writing. However, frequent requests were heard about students' failures at one point in the writing process: revising first drafts, second drafts, and so on before editing for final copy. These requests have prompted the Advanced Institute on Revision, a two-week, 4-credit Workshop which links revision of one's own writing with the revision instruction to be shared with one's students.

The goal of the advanced institute on revising is to increase participants' knowledge about this key aspect of the writing process, and thus about the full process as well, in order to improve their abilities as teachers, writers, researchers, or presenters.

Assisted by consultant Marion Mohr of the Northern Virginia Writing Project, Bob Weiss of PAWP will introduce and demonstrate varied methods for revising several modes of writing. Enrollment is limited to 15; a prerequisite is having been part of a previous summer institute or having taken other advanced work in teaching composition; participants are requested to submit two writing samples by June 1. The institute will run from July 18 to July 29, 1983 (9:00 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.).

Going Back: An Open Letter

by Keith Caldwell

September 4

Day one of re-entry: from the exotic world of national and international travel to the classroom, or the "trenches" as so many call it, is a rare experience. I do not like the term "trenches," nor the offensively negative attitude it implies. And I don't know anyone who has gone back. Of course both back and I have changed.

I went to school to get ready—to get my room and mind and my "stuff" ready. I had no old "stuff" because in the four and a half years I was gone the school, quite sensibly, gave up on me. They threw my stuff away, and you can't teach without some good "stuff." I never go to school when teachers are not required to go; I never have. But there I was, a week before school, preparing. I knew that this "going back" must be affecting me deeply, that the decision was important to me—I was breaking a habit of a lifetime.

September 8

I have a junior honors class, a senior English, a reading class and the school newspaper. I have spent most of my career teaching the reluctant and never the newspaper. Why don't teachers want the newspaper? For the junior and senior English I chose to follow the class design and tightly constructed syllabus my colleagues have designed. I decided to follow their design for four reasons:

1. The other teacher of senior English and I could compare notes as we traveled the same sequence and shared handouts.

2. Because it was there. Maybe I was giving in to temptation to avoid designing three new courses. I am sure it was cowardly. I was starting with my part in the drama already written. I could change it later.
3. Reason three became clear to me after two weeks of teaching. Following the established procedures would establish my credibility, my credentials. When the students knew I could teach, could conduct "school" as they knew it, I could begin to deviate, begin to use my new "stuff" which, in fact, is a large pile of ideas, assignments, projects and sequences I have gathered from NWP teachers across the nation.
4. The fourth reason is not yet clear, but I can feel it around me as I teach and especially as I reflect upon the day's classes. My mind tells me to do it this way, so I do.

September 20

I have been as stern as possible for the first two weeks and have not let their good behavior, willingness to work and read and listen fool me. I am amazed to see their willingness to believe, their faith in my ability to lead them to what they "need for college." We walk the line between *training* for college and *education* for living. The junior "gifted" class and the senior English classes seem overly willing, a nice contrast with the students I've taught in the past. In the newspaper class so far, we have decided that our only goal will be the production of a newspaper every three weeks. We have a "let's put on a show" atmosphere. I say let's follow this out and see where it goes. I could tell them it's part of a large research effort, an "Inquiry into the Pedagogical Possibilities of Unfettered Enthusiasm" or "Instructionally-Oriented Crowd Control for the Classroom." There are fifteen of us, every one learning as we go, sorting out our strengths and creating organization as an offshoot of function. I have never before taught without being over-prepared, one foot on the gas and one on the brake. I am certain that twenty or twenty-five years of teaching must relentlessly inform any new directions. It is a bit like putting my foot on the head of a serious old man who is trying to climb up the ladder and into my classroom, pushing him down, rocking his ladder.

September 21

I have been asked over forty times, "Well, how is it?" I reply, "It is good, quite the right decision." Also it has been a lot of work; it has been and is very difficult, demanding an exacting effort from me. I had, for instance, forgotten how to take roll, handle messages, let the PA interrupt, watch my time—all the things a new teacher finds difficult. After two weeks the teaching has become more relaxed. I am at school from 7:30 to 5:00 each day and it feels fine. My room is suffused with a golden light and it is my room and my classes, and my responsibility to be with students who will also own the room, their problems, and their responses, and their needs, their learning.

September 22

So, it's my tenth day back and I have a migraine headache. My seniors are taking a test I designed that they can't finish because I haven't remembered how fast or slowly they work. I question whether this teaching life has meaning. The question puts me right in with Oedipus—the one the test is about. I should make another test: 1) What was Caldwell's fatal flaw? 2) . . .

Yesterday I did my first Writing Project workshop in four years that followed a day's teaching. It was harder than hell. Is teaching harder than it was four years ago? Nothing comes smoothly and easily yet. For instance, I

haven't got the attendance recording straight yet. I have to think, plan, make careful notes, and then shuffle papers while I'm teaching; I get nervous.

Actually I like it. Probably I love it. It is the very best thing to do with my life—even if I give up and quit tomorrow—it would have been right to try it again.

September 23

The senior class went well; they happily chose the author and work they will research for their literary paper—an assignment about which I have severe apprehensions. I wonder if any of them will find anything to write about that they can truly invest some of their own in. I predict 70 percent perfunctory, or those awkward, at arm's length papers nailed together like a dog house made by nine-year-olds. Why did I assign it? Because it was there? I assigned it because I want to see what they can do with it and I want them to see too. They see it as real "college stuff"! It will be great for process journals.

This teaching is ten hours work a day and that is OK. But—maybe I'm grabbing easy-out time-filling problems. I lack time to relax and design my own, and I'm not organized, never was, never will be. I wear organization like a kid playing house in his dad's clothes. To hell with organization—order demands its dark friend repression. Every in has its out, and every planned sequence has the rest of the cosmos that it leaves out. I have no excuse; to rail against system is to systematically justify wandering. Well, my vision is coming and I think I'll wander through *Hamlet* with 35 seventeen-year-olds; we should take food along and our trusty "critical paper" to dislodge the diamonds stuck in the rocks.

September 27

It is not possible to keep the drifting ship of the classroom always in order and one's self in command as we sail placidly through the archipelago of excerpts from English Lit. So—we will settle on the friendly shores of *Hamlet*.

There is a sense of freedom in being a teacher. I have a sense again of being my own person. After four years of fairly constant traveling and setting my own hours, my own tasks, and my own itinerary all aimed at the goals of the groups, the Writing Project, its nurturing and growth, six crises a week, etc., I chose to trade again and after two weeks I find I like it fine. I liked the Army, too, for the first week.

September 28

Day 14 just passed. Once again I can choreograph five one-hour performances a day—following the lead of my dancers. In Senior English I spent an hour talking about Shakespeare with them. No real plan, just a "let's talk about Shakespeare for a while," not "LET'S TALK ABOUT SHAKESPEARE FOR A WHILE." So we did. I am finding it difficult to find the voice I want as a teacher again, half way between "let's hold hands and hum" and "we'll have an essay test on how to write footnotes." Five years with the Writing Project have changed me, meeting a thousand of the best teachers in the world has changed me as a teacher and I don't know how, yet.

So many teachers say "What they need is . . ." When I say to myself "What they need is . . ." my brain doesn't answer anything. I repeat, "What they need is . . ." and my mind says "I don't know" or "Beats the hell outta me." But when I say "What I want to do next with this class is . . ." I get an answer. New assignments to try out, a writing problem they can solve so we can see how we do it, or if we can do it, or to see if the task helps answer any useful questions we have in mind. If they enjoy the foot-

note test, what kind of response is that? Are they eager to do well on the Green Beret obstacle course to good writing? Most importantly, will they own this problem—or that one, or *can* they own the problem I set, do they have to set their own?

Teaching should not be totally a process of inquiry on the teacher's part, though I don't think it should be a "giving them what they need" by teachers who learned from their teachers exactly what is needed, and "what is needed" is so often the stuff the teachers themselves found the hardest and most repulsive in their own educations. What could be worse than a world in which every adult knew exactly what the kids need?

September 29

On day fifteen I proceeded to teach *Hamlet* firmly grounded in the certainty that if they will look, they'll see, and if they'll listen they will hear. I hope they learn to decide for themselves what they need from the procession of stuff I'll push, pull, and fling in front of them. I will artfully put them in the vicinity, if not the immediate presence, of that poisoned kingdom, invite them to dialogue and to investment. That's what I think they need: 1) to own the problem, 2) to be aware that there are alternative responses, 3) to own the response they give, or 4) none of the above. Enjoy the story.

September 30

On day sixteen, I hope I can get my roll sheets organized and take attendance with easy, unstudied accuracy. If you don't get attendance right "they" come to see you.

October 4

Journalism has settled into a mayhem/silent work and we hate each other/we're a neat team and this is great/this is dumb, stupid, and boring, and self-impelled/can't-be-compelled symphony of attitudes, actors, and responses. It will be a class from which I can learn and they can learn, because none of us know how to produce a paper. The second issue had no headlines and one 1½ inch by 5 inch wide photo on the sports page.

I am organized, I can take roll, handle messages, begin the lesson, lend books, collect collateral, say "close the door, please," and respond to discipline all at once again.

October 5

Some days I am afraid to go to school. I fear I will fail, obviously and embarrassingly. I can anesthetize this fear with the growing awareness of how little they know about how a teacher can manipulate them, make them think the mess is their fault and not mine, how easily one can convince them "busy work" is a challenge to their sense of discipline, patience, diligence, and ability to direct themselves to solving problems that less aware and less intelligent students would see as boring and a waste of time.

October 6

How readily they accept incompetence in a teacher, how adapted they are to having their time wasted! I am, having been away five years, startled by how vulnerable they are, how open to exploitation they are. I mean particularly the "college prep" classes. The reluctant ones, those called "disadvantaged" and "lacking in ability"—the dumb students, the hoods and problem kids—won't put up with the crap. They act out, fighting the unseen fisherman with the unseen line—feeling only the hook. But I don't teach them any more, at least not this year.

I resolve, again, to not, to never, ever, waste their time.

Except, of course, on those days during which survival as a human being demands that they work while I watch and scheme and hide and rest.

October 7

Now I have to make terrible choices. I am relaxed in the classroom and comfortable with my overall course of action. Now I can have them do the 198 assignments and writing problems I have in my files and head. The temptation is to see how they'll do this, then that, then switch to that, then. . . . Let's do journals! Let's do logs, five minute writings, peer holistic rating of writings, show not tell, an experience to idea sequence, write with pencils with no lead on carbon paper so we can't see what we wrote, stand on our desks and write about absurdity, do a character sketch of Oedipus and that Bostonian fellow in M*A*S*H, a literary paper, I-search paper, Saturation with a new twist. All in good time and each in the careful time it needs. If they are going to buy it, to own it, they need time to walk around the problem and talk and think it over.

October 11

Teaching is fine. I'm listening to them more each day. I wish all of you luck as good as mine. We are teaching and that is a significant thing to do. I goofed on the attendance. Two kids cut for a week before I sent in the green slip. I thought they were on the special ed list. "They" came from the front office; we had a chat and I now understand the attendance procedure quite clearly.

December 1

Three issues of the *Kennedy Upbeat* published! Journalism is a terrific vehicle for teaching writing. Real deadlines, real audience, real publication and enough noise and mayhem to satisfy the most demanding appetites. Once again I was forced to discover something.

It is a lot easier to talk about teaching than it is to do it. I am humbled, dear readers; however, my old arrogance will come back, I'm sure, in June.

Note: For the past four years Keith Caldwell has been editor of The National Writing Project Network Newsletter and the roving ambassador of the National Writing Project. This year he has returned to full-time teaching.

PROJECT NEWS

Winter PAWP Meetings

On December 11, 1982, a small band of PAWP stalwarts braved the snow flurries and came to West Chester to preview a videotape on the writing process. Prepared for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the half-hour tape is entitled "The Writing Process" and is intended to accompany an introductory in-service lesson on teaching writing. The tape's five modules introduced and presented a four-part writing process of pre-writing, drafting, revising, and publishing. The 10 PAWP teachers who previewed the tape as a possible aid to their own presentations generally concluded against purchasing it. They felt that the presentation was often too "wooden" and that some of the modules were not convincing. In a later activity, the group shared suggestions for helping students identify and correct writing mistakes. (This list is being compiled for use by Project teachers.)

On February 5, 1983, the PAWP meeting was held at the Northwest Library in Philadelphia. Three 1981 Fellows

—Chris Kane, Inez Hill, and Allie Mulvihill of the Affective Education Program of the School District of Philadelphia—joined in a mini-workshop on what makes a good in-service presentation. Chris, Inez, and Allie, who do frequent presentations as part of their jobs, were able to help the group gain useful insight into the problems and solutions of doing in-service work.

The March 12 meeting featured Janet Greco, a 1980 Fellow, who now is employed by a Philadelphia advertising agency. Formerly English Department head at Upper Dublin High School, Janet has conducted writing workshops for a major accounting firm as well as her own agency. Janet's presentation was on "Writing in the 'Real' World: Does What We Teach Fit?" The key questions addressed were: How important are writing and speaking in the business world? Is the kind of writing we teach in school useful? Is good grammar important? Is good usage important? Who writes, and how much?

The Project in Winter

Whether in record-breaking snow or unusual winter warmth, PAWP has been active. With three "school improvement" mini-grants from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, PAWP arranged in-service programs for the Columbia Borough, Conrad Weiser, and Neshaminy school districts. Scholastic, Inc. again engaged PAWP teachers to evaluate entries in its annual writing competition; our readers evaluated the Senior Poetry category. Extended in-service courses began at Northeast High School in Philadelphia (with Irene Reiter as coordinator) and in Lancaster (with Julianne Yunginger coordinating). In-service programs of various lengths were offered for the Exeter Township, Lehigh Area, Southeast Delco, Ridley Township, and Manheim Area school districts. An article on the writing process in Philadelphia schools, by Vernon Loeb of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, featured Allie Mulvihill (1981 Fellow) and the Writing Project philosophy; we have even learned that the article was syndicated and appeared in the *Boston Globe* in mid-February. PAWP gets around.

Display Project

Early this winter we were asked by the Pennsylvania Department of Education to prepare a display illustrating one of the most basic ideas of a Writing Project: TEACHERS WHO WRITE = STUDENTS WHO WRITE. (While this phrasing oversimplifies the matter, we do believe that the best teacher of writing is one who understands the writing process and that the best way to understand the writing process is to experience it personally by writing.)

Materials submitted by four PAWP teachers—Doris Kirk, Barbara Marshall, Martha Menz, and Lois Snyder—are now on display at West Chester State College. The display consists of pieces of writing done by the teachers as well as pieces of writing done by their students. Two pieces of each teacher's own writing are included, one personal or literary, one about the teaching of writing. Student samples include one personal or literary piece and one piece about learning to write, or one student's series of two or three drafts on any topic, with his/her comments on the process. All contributors received an official letter of acknowledgment. Several contributors are featured

in this *Newsletter* (below); others will be featured in a coming issue.

We hope that the materials contributed by at least two of our Fellows will be featured in a state-wide display at the Department of Education building in Harrisburg.

* * * * *

Writing? Why, of Course!

by Doris Kirk

I was one of those people who only wrote because of assignments, exams, business letters and bills. The infrequent personal letter was wrenched from my resisting hand only when my phone bill was just too high.

Something has changed, as a direct result of my participation in the Pennsylvania Writing Project. Having been taken through all the steps of the writing process, I am more aware and more understanding of what it is and a better appreciation of what instruction in the writing process should be. The students in my class are writers and I am a writer.

What has happened in my classroom since the summer of 1981? What changes have taken place? What do I see and am a witness to when it is time for composing?

My class, for the most part, likes writing. They have a message, something to say. They have a great sense of pride in their written products. Because they share with one another what they have written, I have a room full of speakers, listeners, readers and writers. Their language is very rich. They are both learners and teachers.

The learner can't afford not to teach, says Jerome Bruner. Because writing is a craft, a studio subject, there is learning and teaching going on all the time in my Grade 4/5 classroom. And sometimes I'm the learner.

Doris M. Kirk, who teaches at the Benner Elementary School in the Coatesville Area School District, was a 1981 Fellow.

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Seeing

by Doris Kirk

Today is a spectacular day.

Color abounds.

The azaleas are all pinks, roses and wines.

Just sitting outside before class refreshes my soul.

Quiet, easy, soft, restful, sipping my coffee.

Streaking across the blue sky, a silver jet makes its smooth, silent way to Philadelphia.

What view have the captive passengers?

I see all of nature bursting into color.

Greens, yellows, dark earthy browns and soft-

hued ambers, whites and reds streak the earth.

Spring is grand.

It must be seen and absorbed,

enjoyed and celebrated,

grasped, held and rejoiced in.

* * * * *

Summer Day Poem

by Lenai Clegg

On a summer day,
I sit on tall green grass and relax,
Watching the birds fly,
And the sunset going down,
Water splashing from the kids swimming,
Butterflies sitting on flowers,
Bees sucking honey from the trees,
With red shiny apples.
It's pleasant on a summer day.

* * * * *

Composing

by Lenai Clegg

In composing we write anything that we choose. Sometimes to get started we do something called bounce backs. It's when you work with a partner and your partner says something, and the other person says a word familiar with your word. In my mind I think of pleasant things. We learn how to turn a kernel sentence into a story. And our class learns punctuation. I like composing because we can write anything that we want to. We don't have to copy off the board or out of a book. We try to have composing every day.

Lenai Clegg is a 4th grade student in Mrs. Doris Kirk's class in the Coatesville Area School District.

* * * * *

I Love to Write

by Julie Billman

I love to write; it's fun. I feel good when I publish a paper. I think it's good to write because everyone will be proud of themselves and they will want to write over and over again.

Some people don't want to write because they're lazy or sometimes they don't write because they've never really tried. When people really get into writing they become famous because they publish books and stories. Some of the students in my class like writing so much they go to a newspaper club three days a week.

Julie Billman is a 4th grade student in Mrs. Barbara Marshall's class in the Philadelphia School District.

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My Cat Tiger

by Albert McDonough

Mates with my kitten
Yawns too much

Cries
Attacks my hand
Tired almost all the time

Tiger is gray all over with black stripes
Important to me
Great cat
Evil
Ready for everything!

Albert McDonough is a 4th grade student in Mrs. Barbara Marshall's class in the Philadelphia School District.

How I Write

by Tara McDonnell

When I first started writing, I had many good stories and I published a lot. "School Is" was my best story. Mrs. Marshall sent my published piece to the School District of Philadelphia's District 8 Language Arts Department. I am still trying to be a success in my writing. And I would like to get comments from other people on my pieces of writing.

Not many people in my class room prewrite in their minds. They use circle paragraphs and ideas from books. When I do a first draft, I use all the ideas in my head and write them down in order on paper. I add on and on until I am completely out of ideas.

Then I go to Mrs. Marshall and read my piece to her or to a class editor. We talk about what to revise, I go back to my desk and revise it. Then I go to Mrs. Marshall with my revised piece and we edit it together.

Now comes the best part, publication. I publish on my own. Then I read the piece of writing to the class and give it to Mrs. Marshall to post on our publication wall or put in our school newspaper.

Tara McDonnell is a 4th grade student in Mrs. Barbara Marshall's class in the Philadelphia School District.

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Writing

by Felicia McAllister

How you start a story: you get a piece of paper and you write down something that happened to you in your life. Under that you write what it reminds you of and circle the thing on the paper that you think you would like to write about. You write some facts about the thing you wrote about. From the facts you wrote about you put together a rough draft of your story. After that you get a different piece of paper and write your story over again and put some more details in your story. Then you go to the Editorial Board and they check your story for mistakes in punctuation, capitalization, spelling and sentences. After they check your story then you do your final draft, and in your final draft you use the corrections that the Editorial Board did. Then you are finished.

Felicia McAllister is a 4th grade student in Mrs. Lois Snyder's class in the Upper Darby School District.

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The Day My Fish Died

by Felicia McAllister

I was getting up one morning and I went downstairs. When I got downstairs I went into the breakfastroom. I looked on the floor and I saw my goldfish dead. I couldn't eat that morning but that wasn't important. When my older sister found out what happened she called my dad and asked him what we should do with the goldfish. My dad said, "Pick the goldfish up with a napkin and flush him down the toilet." So my sister picked him up with a napkin and flushed him down the toilet. When my mom woke up I told her what happened. My mom was sad just like everyone else. But now we are going to get tropical fish so I'm not as sad anymore.

I Like Composing

by Tomica Twyman

When we do our composing we just let our imagination flow. We write what comes into our mind. I like composing myself. We even proofread and go over our papers with someone we call our partner. Everybody dreams about the past, future or something that is existing right now, and when the person is done thinking he or she writes what they thought about. I thought that composing was boring but now I like it. It is really fun. It is like letting your pencil do all the writing. In composing we learn the right punctuation and check for adjectives, adverbs, and if the story makes sense. Composing is good writing skills.

Tomica Twyman is a 4th grade student in Mrs. Doris Kirk's class in the Coatesville Area School District.

Paradoxes and Problems: The Value of Traditional Textbook Rules

by Patrick Hartwell

I want to follow up on some work by Muriel Harris and Mike Rose,¹ in order to ask a question about what I take to be perhaps the most common event in a traditionally-taught composition course: what happens when an instructor notes an error in a piece of student writing and uses a marginal correction to refer the student to a textbook explanation of the error? To give away the game at the beginning, my answer is, not much happens at all. Certainly not much happens in terms of improving valuable writing skills like a sense of audience or stylistic sophistication or control over development and organization. And, I'll argue here, not much happens in terms of improving the student's control over the error in question.

That ought to be obvious, if you think about it for a minute. The kid in your college freshman class whose writing evokes your irate "frag!" in the margin of his life has probably been fragging pretty consistently through junior high and high school, and my bet is he's been fragged in the margin and sent to textbook rules of grammar pretty regularly. Some errors seem remarkably resistant to correction.

Given that state of affairs, we can continue to bomb student writing with our arsenal of marginal weapons—"frag," "comma splice," "tense," "agreement"—blaming our failure on something inherent in the student (laziness, lack of intelligence, failure to pay attention, not committing his heart and mind to our efforts), and therefore renewing our marginal war with increased vigor . . . let's call this the Pentagon approach to correctness in writing. On the other hand, we might pause in this futile war, perhaps to ask whether what we do—make marks in the margin that refer students to rules of grammar in textbooks—might not be intimately connected with our failure to achieve correctness in surface detail. Let's call this the Pogo approach: we have met the enemy and he is us.

But if I'm going to prejudge the issue that radically, I ought to make the experiment itself a fair one. So I've picked three errors that I think you'll agree are fairly typical of student writing: the sentence fragment (let's say a *which*-clause or *because*-clause punctuated as a sentence); a missing *-ed* ending, that is, an error in tense (let's say,

"he walk on the sidewalk" for "he walked on the sidewalk"); and an error in agreement, a missing third person present tense *-s* (my example will be "Spot run" for "Spot runs"). And I've picked three college texts that I think you'll agree are representative of the texts we send students to read rules of grammar in: James M. McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose* (7th ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), the most popular standard college rhetoric; John C. Hodges and Mary E. Whitten's *Harbrace College Handbook* (8th ed.; New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977), the most popular college grammar handbook; and Constance Gefvert, Richard Raspa, and Amy Richards' *Keys to American English* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1975), a developmental text that adopts the popular "quasi-second language" approach to error—here's what you say in your "community dialect," but here's what we write in "Standard" English.

Let's start with McCrimmon and the sentence fragment. I open the book to the inside front cover and there, my introduction to the real emphases of a writing course, is the "list of correction symbols." At *frag*, I'm told, "sentence fragment, pp. 409-410." The entry begins on p. 409 with the heading, "S2: Period Fault and Sentence Fragment," and I read two sentences in bold-face type:

Use complete sentences, not sentence fragments, in expository writing. Especially avoid separating a subordinate clause or phrase from its main clause by a period.

Now, clearly, McCrimmon doesn't mean to imply by "use complete sentences . . . in expository writing" that incomplete sentences are okay in narrative, descriptive, and argumentative writing. But, given McCrimmon's stress on the traditional four modes of discourse, a student might well draw that conclusion. Then I'm given three examples in three columns, "sentence fragment," "explanation," and "full sentence," the explanations running along these lines: "The infinitives *to write* and *to take* are verbals not verbs; therefore, the words after the first period are not a sentence." Then I get a paragraph which either distinguishes between a sentence fragment and the period fault or else identifies them as the same thing. At first I couldn't decide:

In the examples to the left above, a period comes between a main clause and a subordinate clause or phrase. The words following that period are a *sentence fragment*—a part of a sentence punctuated as if it were a complete sentence. The incorrect use of the period represented here is a *period fault*. As the revisions indicate, period faults may be corrected either by changing the period to a comma, thus incorporating the separated phrase or clause into the sentence to which it belongs, or by expanding the fragment into a main clause so it can stand as an independent sentence. (p. 410)

I think I now understand what McCrimmon means by "period fault"—after I read the passage ten or twelve times and then typed it twice—and, as we'll see later, it's ingenious as an analysis, if not as an explanation for a student reader. Finally, I'm given a seven-item exercise, in red ink, with sentence fragments; I'm told, "In the following sentences correct the period fault."

I want to make two observations about this explanation. First, McCrimmon is what tech writers call COIK: Clear Only If Known. That is, the student who understands what sentence fragments are and why they should be avoided in college writing (not, as McCrimmon says, in expository writing) will find this explanation as lucid as, frankly, I did.

But if the kid doesn't understand this—and of course he doesn't, for that's why he's being referred to it—then he won't understand it. Now, I'll admit that some diligent students might spend as long as I did with the explanation, profit from the examples, clarify definitions, and eventually comprehend the sentence fragment. But I suspect that most students will give up on the explanation and attempt a purely local solution: if I've punctuated a *which*-clause as a sentence, I'll avoid *which* in the future, and if I've punctuated a *because*-clause as a sentence, I'll avoid *because*.

Second, McCrimmon lies. The rule is not, "use complete sentences, not fragments." The rule is more like, "learn how to write effective fragments, and use them whenever they are rhetorically effective." I frag whenever I get the chance, some of my friends frag too, and so do good writers I admire.² I'm even willing to bet that McCrimmon knows he's lying, for I opened the text at random and found on the first page I looked at, in a student essay offered as a model, the following, punctuated as a sentence:

Silence . . . total, barren silence. (p. 246)

So I was pleased, when I turned to *Harbrace*, to find some discussion of when and where fragments might be effectively used. But here are the learning tasks that the student has to master in *Harbrace* in order to get to the advice, "as a rule, do not write a sentence fragment" (p. 25):

- recognize verbs;
- recognize subjects and verbs;
- recognize all parts of speech (*Harbrace* lists eight);
- recognize phrases and subordinate clauses (*Harbrace* lists six types of phrases, and it gives an incomplete list of eight relative pronouns and an incomplete list of eighteen subordinating conjunctions);
- recognize main clauses and types of sentences.

Students need to develop a "feel" for the flexibility of the English sentence; *Harbrace* does them with rote memory—rote memory that can't possibly work, in my view, since you aren't going to get to a functioning sense of subordinating conjunctions unless you're actively involved in manipulating language. *Harbrace* concludes with the following advice:

Before handing in a composition, . . . proofread each word group written as a sentence. Test each one for completeness. First, be sure that it has at least one subject and one predicate. Next, be sure that the word group is not a dependent clause beginning with a subordinating conjunction or a relative clause. (p. 26)

This advice is worse than COIK: it asks students to behave in ways that are patently removed from the behaviors of skilled writers. (I have never in my life tested a sentence for completeness.) If you don't need to test sentences for completeness, you don't need the advice, and if you need the advice, you can't follow it (those were incomplete lists, right?). But that's okay, because you shouldn't be following the advice anyway, since it can only delay or even work against what you ought to be doing, developing a feel for the English sentence.

Note also that both McCrimmon and *Harbrace* define the sentence fragment as a conceptual error—a failure in knowledge of some aspect or other of the definition of "written sentence." But Muriel Harris argues convincingly that a sentence fragment is not a conceptual error, but rather a performance error—a mistake in punctuation.³ So I was pleased to find that *Keys to American English* anticipates that argument, clearly identifying the fragment as a

punctuation mistake. But the book's discussion is curiously perfunctory (it comes near the end of the text), assuming that the reader knows what a fragment is and why (and when) a writer might want to avoid writing one. Assuming, that is, precisely what the writer needs to know.

But the brief discussion in *Keys to American English* shows how important it is to understand *why* an error is made before attempting to correct it—a field generally called "error analysis."⁴ Let me use a little error analysis to get through missing *-ed*'s—errors in tense—rather quickly. Here are some facts and hypotheses about missing *-ed* endings. First, about 85 per cent of missing *-ed* endings in student writing occur when the *-ed* ending has a spoken realization as /t/ or /θ/ (the latter symbol, theta, meaning in essence, "no surface realization"), as in "he walked on the sidewalk" /t/ or "he walked to the store" /θ/. The *-ed* ending is much less likely to be deleted if its spoken realization is /d/, as in *arrived*, or /ed/, as in *rounded*. Second, while black kids are much more likely than white kids to delete *-ed* endings in speech, white kids and black kids, matched for reading ability, seem to delete written *-ed* endings at about the same rate. Third, every college student I've seen has revealed at least partial mastery of the *-ed* system; I've never seen a student who always deleted *-ed* endings. Fourth—and I'll have to admit that this is just an hypothesis at this point—the tendency to delete *-ed* endings in writing seems related to reading ability.

I won't take that error analysis any further, but keep those features in mind as I cite the textbooks. McCrimmon devotes a line to tense, with no examples:

Avoid illogical sequence of tenses.

Harbrace is earnest about distinguishing the present from the past (my dog can distinguish the present from the past), but it too offers a one-liner:

Use the appropriate form of the verb.

Keys to American English, as might be expected in a remedial text, devotes a chapter to *-ed* endings. But, to introduce its exercises, it too offers a one-liner:

To form the past time of a regular verb you always add *d* or *ed*, no matter what the subject is.

Now, I don't want to belabor this, but if I try to imagine myself as a developing reader/writer, one having particular trouble mapping the /t/ and /θ/ sounds of my speech onto the abstract written *-ed* of the print code, I don't think I'd get much help from "avoid illogical sequence of tenses," or "use the appropriate form of the verb," or even, "to form the past time of a regular verb you always add *d* or *ed* [I love it], no matter what the subject is." To be frank, I imagine myself confused, misled, misdiagnosed, and in general denied precisely the information I need.

I can spend less time on the *-s* ending. I want to cite one textbook definition in order to make a point that Charles Fries made fifty-five years ago, back when *PMLA* was willing to publish articles on composition and language: the rules of traditional grammar are simply inadequate to the facts of language.⁵ So even if kids could understand the rules, they wouldn't help. Here's the explanation of how the *-s* gets on "Spot runs" in *Keys to American English*:

In the standard dialect, if you want to use a verb in the present time (like *they run now*), you use a base form like *Run* without changing it except when the verb follows *he, she, it*, or one singular noun. Then you add an *s*. (p. 12)

I should note that this is a much more explicit definition

than those of most textbooks. The authors have earlier separated out irregular verbs, and they've clearly thought about keeping the reading level easy. But notice how we'd have to change the definition to make it an adequate statement. We'd have to change "when the verb follows" to "when the verb is dominated by," or, more precisely, "when the verb is preceded in the deep structure by," and we'd have to change "then you add an s" to "then you add an s or an es, sometimes changing final y to i before doing so." And then we'd have to begin to account for the layered set of constraints that causes the -s ending to move, reappear, and disappear:

Spot can run.
 Spot is running.
 Spot does run.
 Spot must run.
 See that Spot runs.
 See Spot run.

It's a bit paradoxical, but this kind of analysis suggests that what we offer students, in the firm sense that we are doing something useful for them, may be precisely what hurts them. I've been helped in thinking about these paradoxes by a colleague at IUP, Dan Tannacito, who's pointed out to me some converging research in English as a Second Language, Psychology, and Educational Psychology that helps to clarify these paradoxes. Herbert Seliger tested the ability of native and non-native speakers of English to use the correct form of the indefinite articles, *a* and *an* ("a book," "an apple"), and then he tested the ability of speakers to state the rule formally.⁶ He found no correlation between the ability to use the rule and the ability to state it. Psychologist Arthur Reber, in a series of studies of the learning of artificial languages, usually strings of letters, has found that giving students the formal rules that underlie the language actually inhibits subjects' ability to perform well on tests of the mastery of the rules.⁷ Elsewhere, I've suggested that most students correct almost all of their errors when they read their writing aloud—putting on endings to show tense and agreement that they've omitted in the text, and adjusting intonation to reflect meaning.⁸ Thus, we need to see most problems of error in student writing, not as cognitive or linguistic problems, as the textbooks present them, but as problems that are more accurately metacognitive and metalinguistic, problems of accessing knowledge that students already have.⁹

Let's sum up, then. Rules of grammar in traditional textbooks are inadequate to the facts of written language, and they misrepresent or ignore the tacit language skills of the students who are presumed to profit from using them. Over and over again, the rules are COIK: clear only if known. They place heavy emphasis on formal, knowing-about skills and almost no emphasis on tacit, knowing-how skills. Too often, they offer an inadequate analysis of what might cause a student to make a particular error, and, far too often, they ask the student to behave in ways that are counterproductive to the acquisition of full adult literacy. Recent research in Psychology suggests that offering "rules of grammar" to correct error may impede the student from the tacit and productive learning that comes from a rich language environment, and recent research in second language learning suggests that the importance of formal rules of grammar may be a collective illusion. Most seriously, the textbook tradition misinterprets problems that are metalinguistic as if they were linguistic problems. Perhaps, then, instead of scrawling red ink in the margins of our students' lives, we might be searching for better ways to teach.

But let me close by admitting my own complicity in this state of affairs. I'm a textbook writer too, and my textbook has a list of correction symbols and boxed discussions of error that offer, as you might expect, rules of grammar.¹⁰ Now my text may be a bit better than the texts I've looked at in analyzing the causes of error and at working at tacit language skills (and my list of correction symbols comes on the inside back cover instead of the inside front cover). But those are for the most part cosmetic differences. We have met the enemy and he is us.

Endnotes

¹See Muriel Harris, "Contradictory Perceptions of the Rules of Writing," *College Composition and Communication*, 30 (1979), 218-220, and Mike Rose, "Sophisticated, Ineffective Books—The Dismantling of Process in Composition Texts," *College Composition and Communication*, 32 (1981), 65-74.

²See Charles R. Kline, Jr., and Dean Memering, "Formal Fragments: The English Minor Sentence," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 11 (1977), 97-110.

³Muriel Harris, "Mending the Fragmented Free Modifier," *College Composition and Communication*, 32 (1981), 175-182.

⁴David Bartholmae, "The Study of Error," *College Composition and Communication*, 31 (1980), 253-269; Barry Kroll and John C. Schafer, "Error Analysis and the Teaching of English," *College Composition and Communication*, 29 (1978), 242-248; Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: The Teaching of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁵Charles Carpenter Fries, "The Rules of the Common School Grammars," *PMLA*, 42 (1927), 330-347.

⁶"On the Nature and Functions of Language Rules in Language Teaching," *TESOL Quarterly*, 13 (1979), 359-369.

⁷"On the Relationship between Implicit and Explicit Modes in the Learning of a Complex Rules Structure," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Learning and Memory*, 6 (1980), 492-502.

⁸Patrick Hartwell, "The Writing Center and the Paradoxes of Written-Down Speech," in *Writing Centers: Theory and Applications*, ed. Gary A. Olson (University, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, in press).

⁹See Robert J. Bracewell, "Writing as a Cognitive Activity," *Visible Language*, 14 (1980), 400-422, and, for further discussion, Ann L. Brown, "Learning and Development: The Problems of Comprehension, Access, and Development" (Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Center for the Study of Reading, Technical Report No. 165, March, 1980 [Available in the ERIC document retrieval system as ED 184 093]); John H. Flavell, "Metacognition and Cognitive Monitoring: A New Area of Cognitive-Developmental Inquiry," *American Psychologist*, 10 (1979), 906-911; and Dennis M. Scholl and Ellen Bouchard, "Development of Metalinguistic Performance in the Early School Years," *Language and Speech*, 23 (1980), 199-211.

¹⁰Patrick Hartwell and Robert H. Bentley, *Open to Language: A New College Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Patrick Hartwell, Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, is the author of numerous articles on composition and a college writing textbook, *Open to Language* (Oxford University Press, 1982). This paper was presented at the 1982 annual meeting of the English Association of the Pennsylvania State Colleges and Universities.

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