

fall 2004

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System for Adult Basic Education Support
Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education

Using Authentic Materials in an ABE Writing Class

BY DAVID STEARNS AND CAREY REID

We, David Stearns and Carey Reid, are two ABE teachers with experience from basic skills through alternative diploma levels. For the past year we have collaborated in teaching the pre-GED writing class at Jamaica Plain Community Centers' Adult Learning Program at English High School. On David's side, the desire for collaborating with a veteran writing teacher was rooted in frustration with his writing class. Students were reluctant to write anything and were afraid to share what they had written with each other. Carey wanted to maintain direct contact with adult students and to try out some challenging ideas in an adult literacy writing class.

After some long discussions in local pubs and pizzerias, we agreed that we wanted the students to direct the writing process in the classroom to the fullest extent possible. We wanted them to take responsibility for developing and improving their writing skills so they could write outside as well as inside the classroom. We also wanted our reluctant writers to write every day, to enjoy writing as they came to see it as a vehicle for self-expression as well as a means for effectively addressing social needs.

Guiding Principles

To help encourage our students to "own" the writing process, we agreed on several guiding principles for our classroom planning.

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FOREWORD

For more than 20 years, I have taught writing, or the teaching of writing, or edited other peoples' writing. For far longer than that I've been a writer. All of it is messy and agonizing work. But it's also exhilarating and human. It's instinctual and idiosyncratic; it's practiced and regimented. I have learned along the way that good writing teachers bring an awareness of the writing process into the classroom. They know that writing is about making and conveying meaning for a variety of purposes and audiences, that writers make choices about the formal conventions of language and the necessary level of correctness based on what, and for whom, they need to write. Good writing teachers bring these assumptions into their classrooms to help students understand that writing is more than grammar exercises and correct spelling. However, they also recognize that you can't teach writing without including mechanics. Attending to the conventions of written discourse, to strategies for correct spelling, and to the review and practice of grammar rules all come with the territory of writing instruction. Good writing teachers recognize that dichotomies like correctness vs. creativity, process vs. product are useless constructs that hold us back from doing good work in the classroom.

Good writing teachers help students see that writing functions in a variety of ways: it helps us learn difficult reading material (summarizing); it helps us reflect (journaling); it helps us pass tests (GED essays); it helps us explain, describe, persuade (expository writing); it helps us tell our stories (narrative); and it helps us express emotions, desires, and dreams (poetry, fiction). Further, good writing teachers assist students in making choices about where and why they need to write and then to help them develop as writers within those choices.

This issue of *Field Notes* offers articles from writing teachers who continue to explore ways to approach this often neglected literacy practice in ABE. Content includes the practical and the expressive, the reflective and the functional, the global and the specific. Experienced teachers David Stearns and Carey Reid write collaboratively about their successful experiences using authentic materials for teaching writing in an ABE class; Linda Werbner draws from the guidance of Jack Kerouac in her writing classroom. New teacher George Cannella shares journal entries about his experiments approaching grammar points and using writing prompts in his ESOL class.

While Mary Ann Sliwa offers practical suggestions for using the computer in teaching writing, poet and writer Tzivia Gover contributes an article entitled "Words That Pull at the Heart" and describes an exercise that "took on a life of its own." Teachers Amie Cressman and Julie Franke provide an overview of dialogue journals, and Andy Nash's visual representation "Convey Ideas in Writing" is an adaptation of the Equipped For the Future (EFF) standard on writing.

Further, you will find some suggestions for useful web sites on teaching writing and a few Tools for the Classroom that offer structured suggestions for implementing some new ideas.

Lenore Balliro, editor

Field Notes Mission Statement and Editorial Policy

Mission

Field Notes is an adult basic education (ABE) quarterly, theme-based newsletter. It is designed to share innovative and reliable practices, resources, and information relating to ABE. We attempt to publish a range of voices about important educational issues, and we are especially interested in publishing new writers, writers of color, and writers who represent the full range of diversity of learners and practitioners in the field.

Field Notes is also a place to provide support and encouragement to new and experienced practitioners (ABE, ESOL, GED, ADP, Family Literacy, Correction, Workplace Education, and others) in the process of writing about their ideas and practice. Editorial support is always provided to any writer who requests it. Teachers, administrators, counselors, volunteers, and support staff are welcome to write for *Field Notes*.

Our Funder

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Our Editorial Policy

Unsolicited manuscripts to *Field Notes* are welcome. If you have an idea for an article or wish to submit a letter to the editor, contact Lenore Balliro, editor, by phone at 617-482-9485, by email at <lballiro@worlded.org>, or by mail at 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210. Submission deadlines for upcoming issues are published in each issue of *Field Notes*.

Opinions expressed in *Field Notes* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the editor, SABES, or its funders. We do reserve the right to decline publication. We will not publish material that is sexist, homophobic, or otherwise discriminatory.

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Sneaking Kerouac Into the ABE/ESL Classroom

BY LINDA WERNER

Belief and Technique for Modern Prose: List of Essentials

- ◆ *Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy*
- ◆ *Something that you feel will find its own form*
- ◆ *Blow as deep as you want to blow*
- ◆ *Write what you want bottomless from the bottom of the mind*
- ◆ *The unspeakable visions of the individual*
- ◆ *No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge*
- ◆ *Don't think of words when you stop but to see picture better*
- ◆ *Write in recollection and amazement of yourself*
- ◆ *Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition*
- ◆ *Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it*
- ◆ *Composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better*
- ◆ *You're a Genius all the time*

By Jack Kerouac, excerpted precisely as published from a letter to Don Allen, 1958; from *Heaven & Other Poems* (1994). San Francisco: Grey Fox Press.

When I was an impressionable, romantic English major, Kerouac embodied what it meant to be a writer—free, wildly original, unbri- dled by convention and cobwebbed rules—and his outrageous laundry list for writers, *Belief and Technique for Modern Prose*, was my gospel. With such writerly jewels as “Remove literary, grammatical and syntactical inhibition” and “No fear or shame in the dignity of yr expe- rience, language & knowledge” he was aeons ahead of such writing gurus as Peter Elbow and the process writing gang.

Years later I am teaching an ABE/ESOL reading and writing class. I have not completely shelved St. Jack's tenets on writing—for those first attempts at putting thoughts on paper, Kerouac's on the money—but experience has taught me that student writers need process writing's structure, direc- tion, models, and consultations with the teacher. Yet, every time we sit down to write, I try to sneak Kerouac into my classroom and hope that his spirit will infuse my student writers—especially the blocked and timid writers.

Do I have a patented, no-fail, true blue method for teaching writ- ing that leaves students flushed with delight and clamoring for more? Can't say I do. Every class, every encounter with the writing muse is different. Sometimes it's a joyless, sluggish interlude, other times students keep right up until 8:57 p.m.

Let me show you firsthand a typical writing encounter in my

class. Please step inside; there's an empty seat in back—Lila's absent because she had to work a double. Allow me to introduce you to some of some student archetypes:

- ◆ Kemil, the elder statesman of the class, likes to write but is mortally afraid of making grammatical and spelling errors so he chooses not to. If coaxed enough, he will produce a few original sentences with scrambled syntax that can gen- erally be understood. Usually, he copies sentences from the reading.
- ◆ Juma writes like one who's afraid of having his heart bro- ken. He is cautious and tenta- tive, wistful and longing. He says he wants to improve his writing and get a GED (his long-term goal) but he always writes the same two “safe” sen- tences.
- ◆ Talima is gung-ho about writ- ing and once started, it's hard to get her to stop. She tends to write very personal and con- fessional things and while she does care about spelling and grammar, she doesn't let it hinder her.
- ◆ Moi is a dreamy, somewhat withdrawn student who rarely adheres to writing prompts. He writes what he wants, when he wants. Sometimes, he will refuse to write a word and the following class, he will hand in an extensive and thoughtful response that he wrote at home.

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Using Authentic Materials...

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1. Use “authentic materials” to encourage writing: newspaper articles, research reports, web-based documents, or public service publications relevant to students’ lives.

2. Try to avoid materials written or rewritten for ABE students, because we feel these materials tend to be “dumbed down,” teacher imposed, and often irrelevant.

3. Engage and support students to participate in all parts of the writing process, including assessments of progress.

4. Create a learning environment using groups, cooperation, and peer learning

5. Teach grammar and mechanics in the context of authentic materials.

6. Continually explore possibilities for authentic writing opportunities for students.

7. Take risks as teachers, even if it means appearing unprepared or unknowledgeable about a particular subject.

Using the REEP and Other Methods for Sharing Power with Students

We needed a regularly scheduled assessment process that would give us, and the students, clear indications of their progress. We also wanted them to have information about how good writing might be evaluated. Toward both of those ends, we decided to adapt the Arlington Employment and Education Program (REEP) writing assessment as a primary learning and assessment tool. While the REEP was designed as an ESOL assessment tool, we liked it because the scoring rubric allows the assessor to analyze the elements of writing skills separately and provides a

tool for evaluating progress in these skills in a somewhat objective fashion. We felt that by making our evaluation tool transparent to students they would be “in on” the process more completely and this could help them identify and make progress in a variety of writing processes.

We approached our students almost the same way as we would a group of teachers who were being

on one, or at most two, writing skills for improvement before the next REEP assessment. By focusing on specific areas, students didn’t feel as overwhelmed with making progress as a writer.

To work effectively in small groups and independently, students needed two other tools: guidelines for self-editing and guidelines for peer editing. We asked the students to create both of

Working in small groups, most of our students scored the writing samples exactly as the REEP experts did or were never more than a single point off!

trained to administer the REEP. We introduced the scoring rubric and anchor essays used to train REEP administrators to our students. We took the risk that our students could handle the task of scoring the anchor essays, and the risk paid off. Working in small groups, most of our students scored the writing samples exactly as the REEP experts did or were never more than a single point off! They might not be able to write a Level 5 essay, but they could recognize one easily enough. We felt that this recognition would help them internalize strategies they needed to practice to become better writers. Over the course of our collaboration, we did five REEP assessments using our own homemade prompts, modeled after those used for the GED writing test. Because the students had learned how to score, it was easy for them to understand scoring of their essays by teacher, peer, or self.

Our primary contribution as teachers was to help students focus

these guidelines, which are still evolving. Using the guidelines-in-progress, students began working comfortably together on writing projects, and we observed them discussing, drafting, peer editing, and revising essays.

The “Summarizing/ Analyzing/ Responding” Paradigm

While we were helping students learning to write, we were also guiding students in writing to learn. To do this, we introduced students to writing summaries as a strategy to comprehend and respond to complex reading materials. Early in our fall season, we selected a complex article from *The Boston Globe* on the health insurance dilemma facing working people. The concepts presented were accessible, although the language of the article and accompanying charts were challenging.

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Using Authentic Materials...

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As part of the preparation, students were given a minilesson on the concepts of quotation and paraphrasing, two essentials of summarizing. As a class, students picked out the main ideas of the article, which we listed on the blackboard. In this whole class setting, students were encouraged to rearrange and consolidate ideas into an outline form. Working in small groups, they then created first draft one-paragraph summaries, roughly ten percent of the source article's length. Finally, using an LCD projector hooked to a computer, the whole group collaborated to produce a final summary using the best parts of each group's work. The projector allowed us to accomplish this in real time; with a teacher at the keyboard, the students called out their suggested changes until everyone agreed on the final draft projected on the screen.

The students became adept at summarizing even the most complex materials. In the weeks that followed, students added additional paragraphs that analyzed and responded to the article, building toward more essay-like pieces. Once these processes were established in short-term projects, students willingly tackled projects that lasted a month or more.

Project-Based Activities

Most of the year, students were engaged in writing projects that extended for several weeks at a time. We designed projects that grew out of the students' own interests and experiences, which sustained their attention for several classes. We started during the summer of 2003, when the students decided to research and write about

the transition to college. Using the Internet, they explored schools and financial aid information. They also wrote letters to schools and wrote a final report of their findings. Aside from the useful information students were able to obtain, this project was successful in getting students to take charge of their learning.

Sustained Projects

The longest sustained project began as a problem posing activity that explored how neighbors in an ad-hoc community group could cope with a group of teenagers who used the parking lot of the local drugstore as a place to hangout and drink. The discussions about this hypothetical problem led to a discussion about the role of elected officials, especially that of Boston City Councilors.

Based on these discussions, we used the following writing prompt for the next REEP assessment: *What in your opinion are the most*

tion, and many of the class members were delighted that two candidates with strong ties to minority communities, Felix Arroyo and Maura Hennigan, won seats. The class decided to write both candidates to congratulate them and invite them to visit the class. We treated this letter writing as a classroom activity, with small groups producing drafts and then the whole class creating a best-elements pastiche in real time with the help of the LCD projector.

When Maura Hennigan accepted the class invitation, students prepared questions in advance of her visit. She spent an hour and a half with the class, clearly enjoying her visit, which was a reflection of how well prepared and involved the students were. Students asked questions, made notes, and asked follow-up questions. In subsequent classes, students put their notes together and as a group wrote a news article reporting on her visit, which was subsequently published

This piggy-backing project resulted in a pile of good writing: two summary and response pieces, a REEP essay, a formal letter, a set of interview questions, a set of interview notes, and a published article.

*important qualities of a good city councilor? Please give reasons for your opinions. As it happened, the elections for Boston city councilors occurred soon after. As a summary/analysis/response assignment, the class took on a long *Globe* article reporting the outcome of the elec-*

by The Jamaica Plain Gazette. This piggy-backing project resulted in a pile of good writing: two summary and response pieces, a REEP essay, a formal letter, a set of interview questions, a set of interview notes, and a published article.

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Using Authentic Materials...

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We remained on track with our guiding principles for using (and producing) authentic materials.

By the time the article was published, the class had moved on to another cycle of REEP testing and a new project. By this time, students were used to reading long, rather complex news articles in *The Boston Globe*. We thought they might be ready to tackle a research article. Students were given copies of the March 2000 issue of *Focus on Basics* (Volume 4, Issue A,) the research-to-practice journal of the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL). They read the article, "Helping Adults Persist: Four Supports," a research report by Comings, Parrella, and Soricone. The article dealt with managing the forces that affect retention in ABE classes. Students read the article together twice as a class. Then, using all their previously acquired writing, group process, summarizing, and peer editing skills, they wrote essays applying the concepts of the

adult persistence study to their own experience as adult learners.

As a result of working with the persistence research, the students decided that they needed to take even more control over setting the agenda for the class. We had assumed that projects based on a common class topic would work best, but the students argued that they could work on separate projects in separate groups. As it happened, half the class wanted to research the subject of gay marriage and the other half chose to explore the effects of violent television programs on children. We took a risk by accepting their proposal to explore two different topics, and students proved to be up to the task yet again. Both groups produced excellent essays by assigning different tasks to each other for various parts of the essays and then collaboratively assembling their drafts and working on revisions.

Final Thoughts

Using the LCD computer projector made it a lot easier for class as a whole to construct and edit their drafts. It also enhanced class

participation. When we finished group editing on the screen, we could just print out drafts for everyone (with wide margins for further editing, of course!). In all of these lessons, especially after we established a few basic rules for peer support, we were impressed with the energy and enthusiasm with which our students jumped into the writing. Once they got into it, they stayed with it. They liked the whole process: drafting, peer editing, redrafting, and presenting final drafts.

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Sneaking Kerouac Into...

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- ◆ Mona wants to write, but won't even make an attempt unless the teacher is shadowing her, acting as a midwife to her every word, every sentence. She constantly asks how to spell words and check on grammar and gets impatient when the teacher is busy with another student.

We have just finished reading an article in *Easy English News* entitled "Elections 2004: Will the voting machines work?" We had a lively discussion of the issues raised in the article. My students—mostly sub-Saharan Africans for whom voting has a super-charged significance—are disturbed to learn about the Florida 2000 debacle and how over 57,000 voters (mostly black and Hispanic Democrats) were "accidentally" scrubbed from voter registers after being mistakenly labeled felons in state computers.

We debate whether the electronic machines are better than old-fashioned paper ballots. We brainstorm, make Venn diagrams, lists, clusters, review vocabulary words. Students share



stories of voting in their native countries. Daniel, a cow herder from Sudan, explains how members of the village simply break up into two lines and people vote by choosing which side to stand on. Kemil, a Kurd from Iraq, drolly comments how the lack of candidates on the ballot make it quite easy to choose a leader. We are warmed up, all the "pre" stuff has been done. Time to compose!

"Don't think of words when you stop but to see picture better"

"OK everyone, take out some paper. Let's write about some of the things we've been talking about," I announce, in my best motivational speaker voice. I pick up a marker and scribble a few writing prompts on the board. When I turn around I see the looks of sour resignation spread across (most of) the faces in my class. You'd think I had invited them to a root canal party from their expressions! Undeterred, I do what I always do when it's time to write: I get in their faces and play the fool, charming and cajoling, recalling, jogging their work-tired minds, gently threatening and cheering on every attempt at meaning, every word, phrase, and sentence that they jot down.

"No fear or shame in the dignity of yr experience, language & knowledge"

When students are "blocked," I first try to get them talking about the issue. Then, while they are speaking, I write down their ideas, verbatim. This kind of dictation never fails to kick-start sluggish and timorous writers. Talima has already written a whole page and is anxious to show me the fruits of her thoughts. I approach her desk and ask her to read—I always have the

author read his or her writing. I ask her if she wants me to correct anything and she nods vigorously. In thin pencil above a misspelled word, I write the correct spelling (I never cross out student writing). "What did you mean here?" I ask her about an unclear sentence. She explains it to me and I suggest an alternative way to express the same thought. She rewrites her sentence.

"Write what you want bottomless from the bottom of the mind"

Moi is busy scribbling into his journal—I take a peek at what he's writing and see it's some sort of folk tale involving a lion and a pack of motherless cows. Nothing to do with voting machines, alas. But let him write! I know enough not to inquire yet if he wants me to check—he'll let me know when he's good and ready. Over here, Kemil and Juma are chatting away in their own language. "Guys, you shouldn't be talking when your page is blank," I say. "We're talking about the writing," Kemil says with a wry smile. "Oh yeah?" Juma begins writing a few tentative words, then he erases them with a sigh. "What are you trying to say?" I ask. A torrent of ideas and opinions streams out, which I scribble onto his paper. "This is great stuff. Now copy this and write more, OK?" Kemil is copying the first sentence from the reading. "Kemil, what do you think about these new machines? Are they safe? Do you trust them?" Kemil makes a sour face, and waves his hand. "This is all lies," he says, and launches into one of his diatribes against political leaders of all stripes. Again, I copy what he says. "This is a good start. Please copy this and say more. You're onto something."

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Sneaking Kerouac Into...

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"Miss Linda! Miss Linda!" cries Mona, anxious to have me check her efforts. "How do you spell dishonest? Is this sentence right? Can you check?" I try to get her to figure out how to spell the word and self-correct. "This is a good sentence, Mona. But what do you mean here?"

"Write for the world to read and see yr exact pictures of it"

The evening is nearly over. "OK everyone, please finish the sentence you are working on." I begin to, or rather, attempt to collect the fruits of my students' efforts. Moi and Talima are still writing. I feel like a criminal prying the paper from them, but I need to take it and run so I can catch the 9:30 from North Station. Later, at home, I will read over their writings, make minimal corrections (only for clarification of meaning, not surface errors), and word process it into one document. This is my and their favorite part: publishing class writing. No words can capture the students' pride and sat-

isfaction when they see and read their writing in 12 point Times Roman. It is a tremendous motivator. Besides publishing student writing, I also use their writing to make assorted grammar, spelling, punctuation, and writing activities much more meaningful and relevant than any prefab ESL book could ever be.

"Scribbled secret notebooks, and wild typewritten pages, for yr own joy"

On the last day of class, I hand out hardcover journals I picked up from Family Dollar. "Just because it's summer doesn't mean you should stop working on your writing," I tell them. "Do we have to write on every page and give it to you?" asks Mona with a look of concern. "No, no. This is your journal. You can write whatever you want" I say. But what I'd really like them to be is "composing wild, undisciplined, pure, coming in from under, crazier the better." *You're a Genius all the time.*

Linda Werbner is a Lynn-based writer who has been teaching and learning from her students for 10 years. She can be reached at <LWERBNER@glss.net>.

First, writing appears to be a "marker" attribute of high-skill, high-wage, professional work. This is particularly true in sectors of the economy that are expanding, such as services, and the finance, insurance, and real estate sectors. Educational institutions interested in preparing students for rewarding and re-numerative work should concentrate on developing graduates' writing skills. Colleges and university leaders, as well as school officials, should take that advice to heart.

From "Writing: A Ticket to Work... Or a Ticket Out: A Survey of Business Leaders," The National Commission on Writing, 2004. <www.writingcommission.org/>

Why Do I Write?

By Enid Santiago Welch

I write to be heard

to be understood

I write to impress

to encourage

I write about

truth, honor

About suffering and

happiness

If I can impress

upon any one

that life is worth

living, then

I write for a reason

I write because I am

free

free to be me.

Reprinted with permission from Amherst Writers and Artists Press and Enid Santiago Welch; from *In Our Own Voices*, (1989). Amherst, MA: Amherst Writers and Artists Press.

Words That Pull at the Heart: A simple writing exercise took on a life of its own

By TZIVIA GOVER

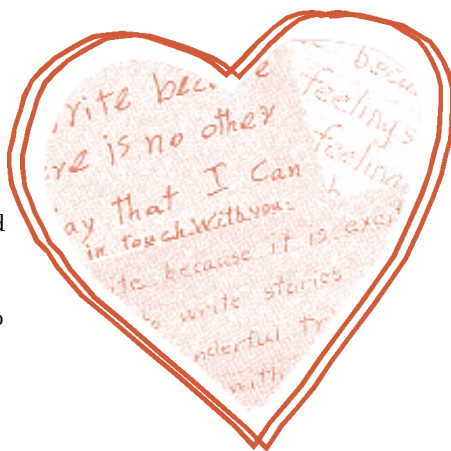
Sometimes it's the obvious question that doesn't get asked. But when it does, the results are anything but ordinary. For a professional development conference about writing for teachers in ABE and ESOL settings, Michele Sedor of SABES West wanted to include learners' voices in the day-long series of workshops and presentations, and she asked me to help out. Having student writing displayed at the conference, she decided, would achieve that goal while giving participants something to look at between workshops. When we sat down to organize the project, we hoped that at least a few sites would participate. We decided to ask teachers to pose a single, simple question to their students: "Why do I write?" They would record student responses on colorful index cards, which we'd provide. Typed, handwritten, edited or first draft—we would accept the answers any way we got them.

What we didn't expect was that we'd get so many—and such a rich variety—of responses.

In the end, 11 programs participated, including ABE and ESOL learners studying in Holyoke, Springfield, Ware, and several other communities in western Mass. In addition to words on index cards, we also received photographs of learners composing their responses and cards with computer graphics and other illustrations.

"Initially, I thought it would just be 'nice' to have display boards

with student writings throughout the conference site," Sedor said. But, she added, "As the 4x6 cards began to come in, in quantities greater than anticipated, I began to realize how important it was to have student voices on why they write (or don't write) at a conference for teachers on writing... As one teacher said to me, 'Some of these words pulled at my heart.'"



In retrospect, teachers said the success of the project was in its simplicity. The activity was short and easy to execute. The sample lesson plan that was distributed to teachers suggested the activity begin with a group brainstorm on the topic, "Why I Write." Once they were ready, students would compose a sentence, paragraph, or poem that began with the phrase, "I write because..." Learners and teachers were then encouraged to discuss the responses and send the finished cards off to Sedor at SABES. Typing and editing was optional. Not surprisingly, teachers adapted and modified the exercise

in creative ways that best suited their learners and sites.

As the responses came in to the SABES West office, a small group arranged the colorful cards on display boards. We used bits of bright wrapping paper and origami squares to add visual appeal to the students' words. Participants from Read/Write/Now in Springfield also sent in photographs of the activity in progress, so snapshots of the students accompanied their words on the display.

While the process was simple, the results were profound. "I was moved by the depth of some of my learners' responses," said Dianne Worth, a teacher at Center for New Americans in Northampton. Among her favorites was the following, written by one of her students: "...when I write, I am putting my dreams out."

In addition to helping to plan and execute the project, I also conducted "Why I Write" lessons in the ESOL, pre-GED, and GED classes at The Care Center in Holyoke, where I teach poetry to teen mothers. Following the lesson plan we devised for programs throughout the region, I opened my classes by handing out copies of Enid Santiago Welch's poem "Why Do I Write" (See poem on page 8). After discussing Welch's poem, we brainstormed reasons we need to write in our own lives, and reasons we'd like to write more. My students said they needed to write letters to loved ones in jail, essays for

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Words That Pull at the Heart...

Continued from page 9

the GED, lists, notes, and stories. One wanted to write a letter to the president, "to tell him off," and to write stories that would make her daughters "laugh their lungs out." Another of my students who has a creative flair and an aversion to putting words on paper wrote, "I hate words, they are like little devils that aggravate me."

Not only was the diversity of the responses an unexpected bonanza, so too were the ways that the display boards containing the learner-made index cards were used. As it turns out, the display at the SABES West conference, for which they were made, was only the beginning. Shortly after the conference, adult education partners in the region gathered with legislators for a breakfast at the Delaney House in Holyoke, and the "Why I

Write" project was displayed to add a splash of color and a visual chorus of learners' voices to the proceedings. The finished boards also returned to one learning site, that had participated in the project. Teacher Lucille Fandel wanted students to see how their work had been used and to become aware of adult learners in other programs, which is one of the reasons she initially wanted learners to participate in the project. Fandel borrowed the displays after the conference and set them up in her classroom. Her students, she said, enjoyed seeing their words displayed along side the quotes from others they had never met. At The Care Center I made a second set of index cards in addition to the set I sent to SABES West, so we could display them on a bulletin board at the center. Some of the poems generated by the assignment were published in our center's literary magazine, which came

out last spring. The responses are also displayed on the SABES West website, <http://www.sabeswest.org/publications/write_project.htm>.

The exercise, which was meant to inspire or entertain participants at a single conference, has taken on a life of its own. Said Sedor, "When we read, 'I write because so many people take writing for granted,' or 'I write because no one will listen, maybe they'll read and see,' or 'I write because I want to help my wife write checks for the bills,' it reminds us of why we do what we do."

Tziviva Gover teaches poetry and creative writing to adults in literacy classes. She can be reached at <holyoketutor@hotmail.com>.

Michele Sedor of SABES West contributed to this article.

Why I Write

By TZIVIVA GOVER

Tools for the Classroom

Purpose: To encourage learners to identify how and why writing skills contribute to their lives, increase their opportunities and help them express their ideas, emotions and knowledge.

Skills: Brainstorming, writing, reading.

Materials: Index cards (4x6" colors preferred) and pens. Colorful markers encouraged!

1. Open a discussion with learners about why writing is important.
2. Lead a group brainstorm on the topic "Why I Write." Put learners' ideas on the board as they emerge.
3. Encourage learners to be as specific as possible by asking follow-up questions. For example, a statement such as: "I write to express my feelings," could be expanded upon by asking "What feelings do you express in your writing?" The new statement might be: "I write to express my anger when nothing is going my way."
4. Hand out index cards and pens and pencils and have learners write one sentence completing the phrase "I write because...." Remind learners that they can take one of the phrases from the board if they like, or create a new one.
5. Invite learners to put their name and the name of their program on the bottom right-hand corner of the card. (Names are encouraged, but optional.)
6. Encourage learners to read their responses out loud.
7. Discuss the responses. Consider together whether the group's ideas about why we write are different now than at the beginning of class, and if so, how.

Dialogue Journals: Written Conversations

By JULIE FRANKE AND AMIE CRESSMAN

Dialogue journals are, in a nutshell, written conversations between two people. This interactive approach to developing writing skills can be used in the classroom in many ways and can be adapted to any level.

In a classroom with non-native English speakers, dialogue journals are a simple but high-quality learning tool. Where writing a five-sentence paragraph can be quite a challenge for these students, writing about their day, or about an individualized scenario, pushes students to write more. Writing in their journals also encourages them to learn new vocabulary that pertains to their own lives, and to fine tune grammar, mechanics, and spelling. When writing back to students, teachers can use the language style of the student (i.e., informal, conversational) while exemplifying correct grammar, sentence structure, and spelling.

Through dialogue journaling, writing comes naturally to students. Writing becomes fun as students express themselves in their own personal styles, and await a response from their teacher.

For the GED classroom, dialogue journaling with the teacher provides an outlet for the students to clear their heads before beginning class. There is so much on their minds—from single motherhood to refugee stories to homelessness to DSS to blind dates to upcoming GED tests—and writing about their days enables them to better focus during class. Moreover, being able to respond to their students individually allows the teachers to develop more personalized interaction with students.

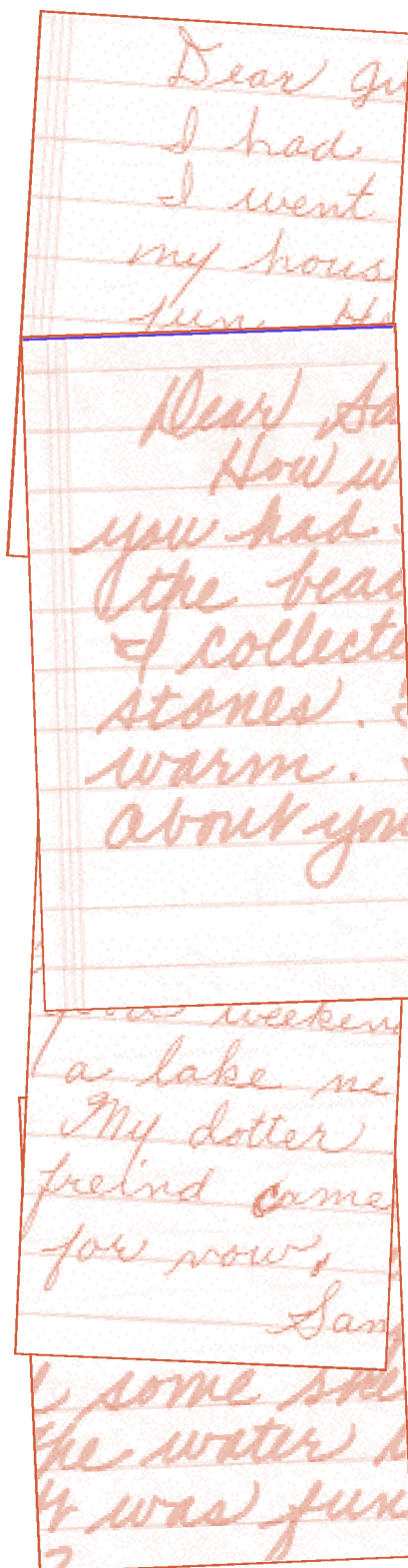
There are other creative ways to use dialogue journaling in the GED classroom; another form is when students are paired up and write to each other. This technique is especially beneficial when teaching poetry. Teachers can use the art of written conversation to give the students an opportunity to explore their reflections on poetry, and a chance to respond to the reflections of others. This exchange of ideas encourages more personal interaction with the poems, as well as between the students. It also gives students who are more passive a chance to express their ideas, and non-native English speakers more time to formulate their responses. Students can even pick out phrases from this type of dialogue journal and write their own poems.

Julie Franke and Amie Cressman teach at the Notre Dame Educational Center in South Boston and can be reached at 617-464-7924. They were also active participants in the Notre Dame Writing Team over several months in 2003 and 2004.

Resources for Dialogue Journals

Peyton, J. (1993). *Dialogue Journals: Interactive Writing to Develop Language and Literacy*. ERIC Digest. <www.ericfacility.net/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed354789.html>

Peyton, J. (2000). *Dialogue Journals: Interactive Writing to Develop Language and Literacy*. <www.cal.org/ncle/DIGESTS/Dialogue_Journals.html>



Writing Strategies

By ANDY NASH

Writing is a process that calls upon the use of particular strategies at each phase. Introducing and discussing a broad array of such strategies helps students build a repertoire of tools to choose from as they approach each writing activity.

The writing process can be summarized as follows:

Prewriting: using prewriting techniques to gather ideas; choosing a purpose and an audience

Drafting: putting ideas down on paper; exploring new ideas during writing

Revising: creating a structure that highlights most important points; considering clarity and organization of ideas; considering feedback from readers of first draft

Editing: correcting errors in sentence structure, usage, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization

Prewriting strategies

The purpose of prewriting is to engage students in the writing process and help them discover what is important for them about the subject. Strategies include:

- ◆ Brainstorming
- ◆ Focused free writing (i.e., non-stop writing on an intended subject to get out ideas and feelings)
- ◆ Mapping and webbing (i.e., drawing thought webs or graphic representations of the topic)
- ◆ Using reporters' questions (i.e., Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?)
- ◆ Reading other writers for inspiration and modeling of style and organization
- ◆ Using catalysts (pictures, texts, quotes, etc.) to stimulate thoughts and ideas

Drafting strategies

- ◆ Identifying the most important ideas generated by prewriting activities and elaborating on them
- ◆ Identifying an audience and purpose for writing and using it to guide the creation of a draft
- ◆ Conferencing with peers to refine and clarify your ideas
- ◆ Considering various ways of organizing ideas, depending on purpose and form, such as:
 - A chronological or step-by-step arrangement of ideas by time or sequence
 - Order of importance
 - Comparison and contrast
 - Cause-effect
 - Problem-solution
 - Pros and cons

Revising strategies

Drafts reflect the struggle to get words down on paper and, as such, they are usually rough and incomplete. Revising brings a work to completion. It is a complex process of deciding what should be changed, deleted, added, or retained.

Useful strategies for revising ideas and form include:

- ◆ Reading text aloud and seeing how it sounds to you.
- ◆ Getting feedback from peers (about what stood out for them, etc.) to assess how effectively you've communicated your message. Does it make sense?
- ◆ Asking yourself a set of questions that draw your attention to various aspects of the writing: Is my purpose clear? Is my message clear? Have I addressed the needs of my audience? Is my tone appropriate to my audience and purpose? Have I included the right level of detail?

- ◆ Making an outline of your paper. Is there a logical organization to what you've written? Is there a beginning, middle, and end?

Editing strategies

Editing involves reading for conventions rather than content. The conventions of writing are the generally accepted mechanics of language. They include:

- ◆ Form (e.g., paragraph, essay)
- ◆ Sentence structure (syntax)
- ◆ Word choice
- ◆ Usage
- ◆ Spelling
- ◆ Punctuation and capitalization
- ◆ Appearance (e.g., spacing, indentation, handwriting)

Here are some examples of strategies to address these mechanics:

Spelling: the most effective way of learning to spell is proofreading one's own writing. You can become a more effective speller by:

- Analyzing your own spelling problems and describing the spelling rules that give you trouble
- Pronouncing words carefully (e.g., accept/except)
- Using mnemonic devices (e.g., "stationery" where the "e" stands for envelope)

Punctuation and Capitalization:

Punctuation and capitalization are not just sets of rules. They help the reader understand a text by helping them know how to read and interpret each sentence. Strategies for improving punctuation and capitalization include:

- Reading your writing aloud, to see where you would naturally pause

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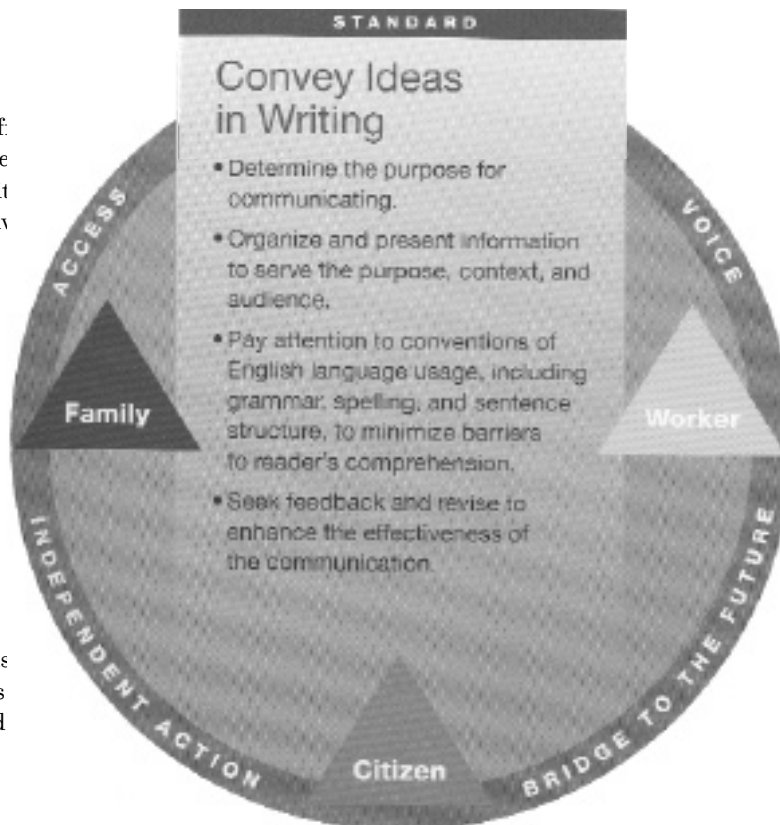
Convey Ideas in Writing

By ANDY NASH

Equipped for the Future's (EFF) writing standard, *Convey Ideas in Writing*, describes the process that proficient writers use to communicate effectively. It includes four components:

Since we use skills differently depending on what we are doing (if we're writing a grocery list for ourselves we probably pay less attention to spelling, legibility, and creativity than if we're writing a love note), the EFF standard begins with the identification of purpose.

The purpose and audience will determine the kinds of writing strategies and formats needed for the task.



It will also shape the correctness needed for the success of writing. The key is to use the language conventions that are appropriate to the context and that help you reach the reader.

Fortunately, writing is a skill with a built-in assumption of support from others. To carry out the process well, writers are often expected to "arise" by creating and seeking feedback on their products.

What purposes might adults have for writing related to the upcoming election issues and how might the EFF standard help teachers and students guide the process? Here are three examples:

Purpose 1. Understand the election issues and/or the candidates' views.

This purpose might lead to first taking some notes about the issues or the candidates' positions. Weighing the pros and cons of an issue or comparing the candidates could be easier if the information is graphically organized in a chart. The care with which it's organized—clear headings, etc.—and the amount/clarity of information would depend on whether the chart is for oneself or for presentation to others. Based on this, writers would have to decide how carefully they need to attend to grammar and other writing conventions. It would be helpful to get feedback to answer the questions: Is this information presented clearly? Have I included enough information so that you can make the comparison?

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Tools for the Classroom

Create a Writing Box

Note: This low-tech idea is a modification of one developed by Lenore Balliro and Martha Merson at the ALRI several years ago.

Purpose: To build a collection of user-friendly, easily accessible writing ideas that teachers in ABE programs can use for their own purposes.



Steps

1. Set aside at least 30 minutes at a staff meeting. Pass out index cards to all teachers and other interested staff members. Ask them to write down one idea for a writing prompt or any idea for teaching writing on each card. They can use as many cards as they like. Have them describe the idea simply, using only one side of the card. They should write it as though they are explaining the idea to another teacher. The purpose is to get the idea down; they will have a chance to refine and edit it later. Ideas may have been used in the classroom, or teachers may think up ideas as they go along. Give a few examples to get teachers started (see sample ideas on page 15).
2. After 10 minutes, stop. Have staff read their ideas aloud. Then have them write for another 10 minutes, then stop.
3. Ask each person to go back over his or her cards and indicate the population best suited to the idea (for example, very low level ESOL students, GED students, all students, etc.). Teachers can also make any changes they want to at this point and annotate the ideas if they have space. If they have used someone else's idea, it's proper to cite the source if they recall it.
4. At the end of the session, collect the ideas. One or two people should be designated to refine or expand the ideas and word-process them. Be sure to back up the file. Print the ideas out, cut them up, and, using new index cards, glue one idea on each index card with a glue stick. If you want to get fancy you can laminate them. (Making two at once is a good idea.)
5. Put the cards in an index box. Use tabs to arrange the ideas according to genre or purpose. For example, you may use the following classifications: GED essay prompts, low-level ESOL ideas, poetry, letter writing, etc. (If people have generated ideas for grammar, spelling, and mechanics, I strongly suggest creating a separate box for these ideas.)
6. Place the box in a convenient location for teachers. Tell them to use it as they like but to please leave the cards in the box for other teachers.
7. Encourage staff to add ideas to the box as they discover or create new ones.



For more ideas for writing prompts, go to www.canteach.ca/elementary/prompts.html.

Tools for the Classroom

Writing Box Ideas:

Letter of Explanation

Write a letter explaining why you could not do something or attend an event. You can make the excuse real, or you can make it funny or outrageous.

Whose hat?

Describe the person who would wear each one of the hats on the back of this card.

(Note: Magazine pictures work well. You can also use shoes.)

Writing About a Memory

Write about an outfit from your childhood that you loved to wear.
What did it look like?
Why did you like to wear it?

(This idea was adapted from a Western SABES Writing Conference, 04)



Unlike Items

Select 3 items from the pictures on the back of this card. Write a paragraph that somehow includes all of these items.

(This idea was adapted from a Western Mass SABES conference, 04)



Writing About a Memory

Write about an outfit from your childhood that you loved to wear.
What did it look like?
Why did you like to wear it?

(This idea was adapted from a Western SABES Writing Conference, 04)

Teachers

Make a list of every teacher you have ever had, as far back as you can remember. Now write a line or phrase next to the teacher's name.

Ex: Miss Murphy - Mean, mean, mean
Mr. Suarez - Creative and respectful

Writing Strategies

Continued from page 12

- Discussing various ways of punctuating a text, and how they affect the meaning
- Remembering the purposes of punctuation—to mark pauses (commas, semicolons, etc.), to set text apart (dashes, parentheses), to note quotations, etc.
- Correcting an unpunctuated and uncapitalized copy of a composition

Much information on this page was drawn from: Saskatchewan Education. (1998). English Language Arts 20: A Curriculum Guide for the Secondary Level. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Education.



Maureen O'Brien and Esther Leonelli participate in the SABES writing initiative.

More strategies can be found at <http://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/strategies/writing.html>.

Convey Ideas in Writing

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Purpose 2. Write a persuasive letter to the editor.

To generate a persuasive letter, writers might want to first freewrite their thoughts, feelings, or experiences of an issue/candidate and then, perhaps in consultation with others, prioritize their most compelling points. When they've settled on the content of their message, they would have to organize the text so that it flowed well from beginning to end. Since a letter to the editor should be written as a formal letter, writers need to make sure that it's properly formatted and carefully checked for errors. Feedback would be helpful for determining if their letter is persuasive and to help proofread for errors.

Purpose 3. Write to sort out reactions to one of the articles.

Reflective writing allows us to spend more time with our thoughts about a topic, considering it from multiple angles or pondering why we care about it. It is a useful way to clarify our thoughts before entering a group discussion or to figure out what else we want to know about the topic. This journal-like writing is not done for external readers, and therefore the writer doesn't need to attend to the conventions of writing that make it easier for readers to understand the text. Writers may seek feedback/dialogue about their ideas, but this is for the purpose of helping the writer "revise" their thinking, not the writing.

Andy Nash is the EFF coordinator and the civic participation coordinator at NELRC/World Education in Boston, MA. This article was reprinted with permission from The Change Agent, volume 18.

We are a species that needs and wants to understand who we are. Sheep lice do not seem to share this longing, which is one reason why they write so little. — Anne Lamott

NDEC Students Speak: A New Project at Notre Dame Education Center (NDEC)

BY CHARLES KATENDE, MAUREEN O'BRIEN, AND MARILYN PONDER

The idea for a student newspaper came out of brainstorming by members of the Notre Dame Education Center (NDEC) writing team's publishing committee, which included students and teachers. A newspaper seemed to be a practical activity for implementing one of the team's goals: to increase the amount of writing done across the curriculum at NDEC and to integrate writing strategies into the classroom.

Process

The publishing committee met in March and April to consider how to get student writing (letters to the editor, short stories, and poetry) published in the community as well

as to brainstorm about starting a student newsletter at NDEC. We wanted to get a student newsletter published by the end of classes on June 10, so we didn't have much time.

We wanted to be as participatory and inclusive as possible, so we distributed an information sheet: Read All About It: Something New at NDEC to all the staff at the NDEC, and teachers were asked to explore the possibility of a student newspaper in their classes.

Because of the time crunch, the committee decided to focus on a student activity—Cultural Story Hour—for providing contributions to the newsletter.

A "Name the Newsletter" con-

test was held, and 18 names were submitted. Ballots were prepared, votes were tallied, and the name *NDEC Students Speak* was chosen as the title of the newsletter.

By May 25, we had 25 pieces of student writing, including four poems. The first issue includes all student writing submitted, and next year we will establish submission guidelines and criteria.

Volume 1, number 1, was published in June 2004 and we plan to continue the publication into next year.

NDEC writing team members: Charles Katende, Maureen O'Brien and Marilyn Ponder can be reached at 617-268-1912.

SABES Launches Writing Initiative

Continued from page 28

The surveys revealed:

- ◆ 91% said the project helped them to become better teachers of writing
- ◆ 100% agreed that on-site, thematic, staff development is an effective staff development approach
- ◆ 96% said the project made a difference to their learners
- ◆ 96% said the project strengthened their programs
- ◆ 100% said that SABES should continue with similar projects

The writing initiative will continue this fall with some programs that wanted to continue working on their goals. SABES will then begin a transition to a new theme, math instruction, in collaboration with the nationally recognized organization TERC. The transition will begin during the spring of 2005 with workshops on the relationship between math and writing in all of the SABES regions. By 2005–2006, a math initiative will be fully underway.

Ideas for staff development content and approaches come from a variety of sources, particularly the field of Massachusetts ABE at large. For example, before planning the writing initiative, a focus group of practitioners from around the state was convened to collect input. SABES will convene focus groups for the math initiative as well.

Lenore Balliro is the coordinator of the SABES writing initiative and the editor of Field Notes. She can be reached at <lbaliro@worlded.org>.

Reflection Journal Entries on Teaching Writing

By GEORGE CANNELLA

Editor's note: As part of his participation in the writing team at the Notre Dame Education Center, George Canella kept a reflection journal of his teaching. George's journal reflects the daily ups and downs of teaching ESOL students, and especially illustrates the way a teacher uses students' work to identify and address the grammatical problems that arise in class.

March 4 2004. While reading my students' work I noticed two distinct things. One was how amazing their stories were. The second was that most of the writings were in the present (tense.) I decided to do a quick refresher about the past tense. I first asked my class to get into study pairs and then I wrote a list of past tense words on the board. I asked each pair to select five words and create sentences with each one. I then went around to each pair and corrected any errors. When I corrected an error I would ask that pair to explain to me why I did so. At first my class didn't understand what I was doing mainly because have not corrected them like this before. I think they will do better next time I use this style...

March 30 2004. Today I tackled a fine grammar point that I have noticed my students have been missing—the article THE! This article is difficult, especially for my Asian students. I photocopied an Azar text [see Resources on page 26] to help my students and myself understand this all too common but difficult word. I didn't get as far as I would have wanted and I sensed the class did not understand my explanations so I asked them to write sentences using "the" for homework. I hope some extra time will help them understand what I was trying to explain. I plan on reviewing their sentences in class tomorrow and using their work as a springboard to further explanations.

April 6, 2004. Today we wrote letters of grievance. I had the students write letters about something in Boston they felt needed to be changed. Most of the students wrote about the public transportation system and how they thought the city could improve (it.) I am tempted to have them continue this exercise and do formal letters to the city. However, I don't know if some of my students would feel comfortable expressing anything negative to the city. I think I will encourage them to write more and to express any grievances they have when they are ready to.

April 20, 2004. Today was such a fantastic class. My students produced some lively writings about what they did over the break. I gave them the writing prompt. "What did you do with the time you would have been in class that week?" I don't think they understood what I wanted them to write because at first they wrote about how they spend hours studying English and how much they missed not having class. I noticed what they were writing as I was circulating around the room, so I stopped them and had a little discussion session. I said "I want to know what you did over the vacation...Did you go to the park? If you went somewhere different from your normal routine for coming to school write about that." Once I said that their writing changed and they started writing about how they went with their children to the mall and to different places in the city like the public garden. Sometimes when I give writing prompts I need to be a bit more specific, because after I was done their work was phenomenal.

April 28, 2004. Today was not a good class attendance-wise. Most of my students were absent. I only had four students. I had elaborate plans to teach but since the class was too small my plans would not have worked. Therefore, I had the class do another activity. After we read a dialogue I had the students write sentences using some of the words in the activity. It took them long time to write these sentences because my higher-level students were absent. However, after reading their work I can relate better to the students who were there who are sometimes so confused they can't ask a question. I am glad to know where they are coming from now and I will write up a worksheet using some of their sentences for inspiration.

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Reflection Journal Entries on Teaching Writing

Continued from page 18

May 4, 2004. Today had to be one of my best days as an ESOL teacher! Because of the writing exercises and my extensive conversation with Sr. Peggy Nawn I was able to present my students with a concise lesson about direct object pronouns, possessive adjectives, and subject pronouns that each person understood beautifully. When I used examples inspired by my students to show common errors it was like a light bulb went off above some of them. They all understand this lesson and I feel really good. I am still new at this so I am learning as I go, sometimes, but I never thought to ask what my students might know about a topic before I present it. I think I will do this again when we get to the next unit and I know I will keep this in mind for the future.

George Cannella teaches ESOL at the Notre Dame Education Center in South Boston. He can be reached at 617-464-7924.

What If My Students Are VERY Low Level?

BY LENORE BALLIRO

Teaching writing is a big challenge when your students are at a very beginning stage of literacy acquisition. The most creative ideas for writing essays and longer pieces of prose aren't relevant when your students are struggling to hold a pencil. Many ABE and ESOL teachers have had good luck with the following strategies for helping students apply words to paper.

Visuals or photographs: Have students bring in photos that are important to them. (Make several photocopies of each or scan them into jpegs and give them back as soon as possible.) Ask students to identify the people in the photographs and write anything they would like under the photo, or anywhere on the page. Help students with corrections and have them recopy or word process. Compile all the students' photos into a class publication and copy for everyone. You can also have fun with the images by letting students enlarge, resize, duplicate, or otherwise modify them, thus adding graphic sophistication to the publication.

Picture Stories: Look for books that have pictures or photos arranged to tell a story. Have students discuss what is happening in the pictures, then have them write a few words under each picture. Help students expand the words into complete sentences through modeling. You can also use comic strips.

Forms: Start simply, with basic information about name, address, age, etc. Creating a simple pocket resume that students can complete on an index card and keep in their wallets for real-life needs. Add more complex information as they get more comfortable with filling out data.

Modeling: Students first read a short piece of writing that the teacher has created or located based on interests and needs students have identified. For example: a letter to a child's teacher, a paragraph about life in the home country, a summary of work experience. Then the teacher can recopy it leaving words blank for the students to fill in, reflecting their own personal information.

Dialogue Journals: If you have ESOL students, use the vocabulary you are teaching and reinforce it with the journals. Be selective and succinct about what you write, modeling sentences for students. For example, Teacher: Dear Mui, how are you? Student: I am fine. My weekend was good. I went to the movies. What did you do? The student can be coached to answer by responding in like form, using the teachers' sentences as also be encouraged to use their first language or graphics to explain things beyond the

References

Grace Massey Holt. *Teaching Low-Level Adult ESL Learners*.
<www.cal.org/ncle/DIGESTS/HOLT.HTM>

Shirley Brod. *Seven Easy Pieces: Writing Activities for Beginning ESOL Learners*.
<http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/ti_writ.html>



Our Citizenship Class: A Student Leader's Perspective

By NOHA BARBARA

This year the Norwood Adult ESL Program was fortunate to be able to meet the requests of many students for a citizenship class. We received a mini-grant from SABES Southeast to develop student leaders. We did that by being partners and tutors during citizenship classes and by going out into the community.

From the beginning to the end, the citizenship class has been a wonderful experience for all of us, the student leaders of the Advanced ESL class at the Norwood Adult ESL Program, and the students from the Intermediate and Advanced Beginning ESL classes.

First, we had direct contact with many students from other levels. We got to know them better. During the class, we tried to help them to read, write, and understand the lesson. We learned important information about American history, about the US government, and the holidays celebrated in the US. We also practiced the 100 questions required for the citizenship interview. We made ourselves familiar with the vocabulary of the N-400 form, the form need to be filled out and sent to the

US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) before getting an appointment for the interview.

For these purposes, the teacher used many resources, for example, books, CDs, video and audiotapes, and the web.

Secondly, we prepared two poster boards—one for the Morrill Memorial Library in Norwood, another one for Norwood Town Hall. Some students met with Norma Logan, assistant literacy volunteer coordinator, Literacy Volunteers of America, at the library, and Eleanor McGonagle, human resources director for the Town of Norwood.

Thirdly, we had the chance to live a wonderful day and a very exciting experience on Friday, the 21st of May, at Devens, Massachusetts. This day, we had to present a workshop about the leadership project to other students from different programs for adult education. It was called the "Hear Me Roar!" Student Leadership Celebration and was sponsored by Massachusetts Alliance for Adult Literacy (MassAAL) and SABES and supported by the Massachusetts Department of Education, Adult

and Community Learning Services.

We were very well prepared and a little nervous before the workshop, but when we began to explain what we had done in the citizenship class, we felt very comfortable and for one hour gave useful information to the students who joined our workshop. After lunch, we stood by our poster board and answered questions about citizenship. We met new people, shared our experiences, and made new friends. On our way back home, we were ecstatic!

Noha Barbara came to the United States eleven months ago. In Lebanon she was a French teacher and middle school principal. She can be reached through Mary Ann Sliwa at <masilwa@comcast.net>.

**Student
Writing**



The Massachusetts Adult Literacy Hotline



800-447-8844

The Hotline is a statewide information and referral service. It serves adults who seek a basic education program, volunteers who want to tutor, and agencies seeking referrals for their clients.

Responding to Students' Writing: Where To Begin?

BY LENORE BALLIRO

*Y*ou've brainstormed; you've clustered ideas through mapping; you've assigned first drafts. Now comes the most bewildering part: how do you respond to the pieces of writing students produce? You know, based on prewriting discussions, that students often have compelling things to say. But much of it gets lost when translated from the spoken to the written voice, and the resulting piece of writing can be confusing and error-laden.

Even the most experienced writing teachers can become frustrated and a bit overwhelmed when responding to students' writing. And ABE and ESOL teachers have challenges over and above high school or college composition instructors with more "traditional" students.

Here are a few suggestions for responding to students' writing. They are established from my own experience in composition studies, in teaching writing to a variety of adult student populations, in reading, going to workshops, and observing my talented peers. Please check out some of the resources listed on page 26 for more ideas.

1. Put the pen down.

Give each paper a first read through without holding anything in your hand.

This gives you a chance to read the entire piece without marking up every error you see and prevents you from making comments prematurely.

2. You can't respond to everything at once. Make choices and set priorities.

I sometimes use the metaphor of wearing different pairs of glasses when reading students' writing. I put on one pair for reading content, another pair while looking for mechanical errors. It generally makes sense to move from the global to the particular. Limit your first responses to content. If you are confused by what a student is trying to say, ask questions in the margins of the paper. Be as concrete as possible. (For example, you could ask: When did this happen? Whom do you mean by "it" here?) You don't have to ignore grammar completely at this stage, particularly if it interferes with meaning. It is often helpful to respond to a writing strategy you have been teaching. For example, if you have just taught the concepts of "thesis statements" and "supporting ideas," focus on that, and try to limit your corrections of surface errors at this stage. Remember that students can take in only so much. If you respond to everything at once, students feel overwhelmed and won't know where to focus in their revision.

You can focus more on mechanics once meaning is clarified. Again, decide on your purpose for correcting errors. If you want students to learn something and not just copy over your corrections, be selective in your corrections. Concentrate on a sub skill you have taught: run-on sentences, the use of particular punctuation, verb

tenses. You might pick five spelling errors and have students add them to a personal spelling journal rather than correcting every spelling word.

The finer points of editing can be reserved for final drafts, particularly if students are submitting a piece of writing for publication in a student paper or practicing for a credential. It is important to help students learn to self-edit. Checklists for this sort of thing abound on the web and in composition texts.

3. Highlight the positive.

It is always a good idea to find something positive to say about a piece of writing, even if the content reads like a confusing jumble! You can try something like: You have a really good idea here, and I'm interested in learning more about it. Let's see how you can make this piece of writing a little clearer so other readers can read it more easily and enjoy it. Or: I know you have a lot to say about this important topic. Let's see how you can add more to it so we can learn more about your interesting ideas.

4. Make your rationale clear to students and be willing to negotiate.

ESOL students in particular often want teachers to correct everything at once. They may feel you are not doing your job if you leave certain errors alone. Explain to students why you are responding to their writing in a certain way;

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Computers in Writing: Practical Suggestions for Software, Web Sites, and Hardware

BY MARY ANN SLIWA

There are many ways that computers can help in the writing process. I have used the following resources with a wide range of students and hope you will find my annotations helpful if you choose to explore them.

Story Webs

Looking for a moderately priced software tool? My all-time favorite for doing story webs is Inspiration. It is a wonderful visual tool. Students love this! Depending on the students' level, you can stay with text, use clip art pictures of many subjects, use it as a vocabulary family exercise, or teach science (the characteristics of the three states of matter, for instance). Before purchasing, you can see samples at:

Language arts ideas and demo:

<www.inspiration.com/productinfo/inspiration/using_insp/index.cfm?fuseaction=langarts>

Product information: <www.inspiration.com/productinfo/inspiration/index.cfm>

Kidspiration (K-5): <www.inspiration.com/productinfo/kidspiration/index.cfm>

Parts of an Essay

For the more advanced students (GED or TOEFL level) who may still need repetition on the basics of topic sentences, there are well-presented exercises at <www.vuw.ac.nz/lc/academic-writing/tsent1.html> and the table of contents is at <www.vuw.ac.nz/lc/academic-writing/>.

Creative Ideas

What if everything were yellow? What if the sky turned red at night? Try these exercises at <www.teachersdesk.org/writewhatif.html> and many other creative teaching ideas at <www.teachersdesk.org/lessons.html>.

Sources for Illustrations: Microsoft

A big hit with all different levels of students (and staff) is the free clip art gallery at <<http://office.microsoft.com/clipart/default.aspx>>

For example, our Intermediate ESL class read Jane Eyre in their easy readers series. They thought of one image that the novel brought to mind, found in clip art gallery, of a young girl weeping, and wrapped their own words around it—for example, they wrapped the sentence "When I think of Jane Eyre, I think of sadness," behind it.

MSPaint

Paint is a fun program present on most Microsoft products (Start/ Programs/ Accessories/ Paint). Just remember to go to the Image menu first and under Attributes choose inches and look at the size of your picture before you begin to illustrate your writing. If you do this afterwards, it crops out part of your picture or prints it on 15 different sheets.

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The picture above is a sample taken from the Microsoft free Clip Art and Media gallery.

Computers in Writing...

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One huge hit with all levels of students is making a cartoon easily with your drawing toolbar (View/Toolbars. Make sure there is a check in front of drawing). On the Drawing toolbar, click Autoshapes/Callouts to get the cartoon balloon and double click to type your text.

Hardware

Alpha Smarts are handy and cheap word processors. They are easy to carry around and almost indestructible. <www.alphasmart.com/>

Learning to Type

Mavis Beacon is a great typing tutorial. The software runs about \$30, available in Staples, Best Buy, Office Max, but I have had students get it for under \$10 on ebay.com.

Mary Ann Sliwa has been teaching adults for over thirteen years. She loves teaching writing, in ESOL, computer, TOEFL, and GED classes. She can be reached at <masliwa@comcast.net>.

Responding to Students' Writing...

Continued from page 21

that is, you believe it will help them learn to become better writers. Leave room for negotiation.

5. Look for errors many students make, and turn them into minilessons.

If you see that many students are having trouble with, say, the use of articles, verb tenses, or transitional sentences, plan minilessons around these problems. Do some explicit teaching with reinforcement exercises, and tell students you will be looking for improvement in these particular areas in their next pieces of writing. Use actual student writing for illustrations, either from previous years, or from current writing. Be sure to check with students if they are comfortable with sharing their writing as examples, whether anonymously or identified.

6. Conference whenever possible.

Establish short one-on-one conferences with students as often as you can—at least twice a cycle. Bring your portfolio of student's work to the conference. Go over a piece of writing or review several pieces. Point out examples of errors the student makes consistently and assign some work for that student to attend to the problem areas. Assist students in internalizing a process for reviewing and evaluating their own pieces of writing.

7. Practice peer-responses.

Have students exchange pieces of writing, and give them very explicit things to look for and respond to in their partner's piece. A few questions may be all that is necessary. For example: What is most interesting in this piece of writing? What don't you understand? What would you like to know more about? What questions do you have for the writer? Such questions put the students in the role of readers, not evaluators, of a peer's piece of writing and give additional input for revision. Because providing peer-response is a skill that needs practicing, model a peer-response sheet or conference with two students while others observe and give feedback—"fishbowl" style.

8. Observe other teachers' methods for teaching writing and responding to drafts.

I learned so much my first years teaching writing by sitting in on the class of teachers I admired. It made things real, and it helped me to develop confidence. Within an ABE program, teachers can organize some kind of staff-development activities by observing and coaching each other with a focus on writing. This way, everyone learns from one another.

Lenore Balliro is coordinator of the SABES writing initiative and the editor of Field Notes. She can be reached at <lballiro@worlded.org>. Deborah Schwartz contributed to this article.

Three Pieces of Advice for ESOL Writing Teachers

Editor's note: Ann Raimés, a national figure in ESOL writing pedagogy, teaches writing at Hunter College in New York. The following is an excerpt from an online interview. You can read the whole thing at <www.eslminiconf.net/june/raimes.html>.

If you had to give three pieces of advice to a new ESL teacher, what would they be?

- ◆ If a student asks a question you can't answer (and they will), never try to fudge it. You'll just get flustered. A defining moment in my teaching career came when I found I could say with confidence: "I don't know but I'll find out." Alternatively keep a grammar book or handbook and a dictionary in your classroom and say: "Let's look this up together." This instills good learning habits in students.
- ◆ Keep a lot of minilessons handy on useful points, such as the difference between few and a few—preferably something light and engaging. They come in handy for the day when a lesson ends before you expect it to and you need a filler. And they provide variety.
- ◆ At the end of a class, reflect on what went on. Keep a little notebook and write in it very briefly and very quickly what you think the students learned, what worked well, and what didn't. And add a reminder about a new approach to try.

Upcoming Issues of *Field Notes*

Winter/Spring 2005—Teaching Without Workbooks

Deadline for submissions: November 30
Call or email with an idea by: November 15

This issue of *Field Notes* will present teaching ideas that don't involve textbooks or workbooks. If you have had success with project-based work, in bringing students outside of the classroom, in adapting movies for the classroom, in using authentic reading material like fiction and poetry, in using music, or with any other approaches that move away from structured workbooks, share your ideas in this issue. We are especially looking for descriptions of how you prepare students for these kinds of activities and how you use the experiences afterwards to help promote language and literacy acquisition in a systematic way.

Summer 2005—Open Issue

Deadline for submissions: April 15, 2005
Call for ideas by: April 1, 2005

This issue of *Field Notes* is themeless on purpose. Here's the time to submit an article on anything you like relating to adult basic education. Submit a lesson, a book review, a gripe. Submit a description of a teachable moment! Student writing is also encouraged.

Fall 2005—Workplace Education and Workforce Development



Resources for Teaching Writing

There is so much on the web now that can help teachers teach writing. Here are a few pre-sorted sites for you to check out. Please go to the SABES web site at <www.sabes.org> for more writing resources.

Web sites

General

Audience and Purpose (Cal State Univ./Los Angeles)
<www.calstatela.edu/centers/write_cn/e100audpurp.htm>

Teachers Must Help Students Find Real Purposes to Write (Western Michigan Univ.)
<<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~jbush/bp/real.html>>

Basic Language Literacy: Writing (NoodleTools)
<www.noodletools.com/debbie/literacies/basic/paragraphart.html>

Educator's Reference Desk: Writing Lesson Plans
<www.eduref.org/cgi-bin/lessons.cgi/Language_Arts/Writing>
From the Son of ERIC: A few dozen lesson plans are offered, with many (especially those marked for middle or upper grade levels) quite usable in the adult literacy classroom.

Revision in the Writing Process (1995)
www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed379664.html

Plain Language Resources
<www.plainlanguage.network.org/Resources>
From the Plain Language Association International comes a relatively short set of tips and guidelines for clear writing.

Prewriting Strategies (Univ. of Kansas)
<www.writing.ku.edu/students/docs/prewriting.shtml>

Prewriting Strategies (Gallaudet Univ.)
<<http://depts.gallaudet.edu/englishworks/writing/prewriting.html>>

Essay Writing

3-Part Essay (Madison [WI] Area Technical College)
<<http://matcmadison.edu/ald/writing/essay3part.htm>>
A text-and-graphics explanation of essay structure.

Writing Concluding Paragraphs

<<http://teachers.henrico.k12.va.us/Specialist/franceslivelyunitplans/concluding9.htm>>
A ninth grade lesson plan with a charming section, "All's Well That Ends Well: How to Write Effective Conclusions."

Assessment

NIFL/LINCS Special Collection: Assessment
<literacy.kent.edu/Midwest/assessment>
This site has lots of rubrics and outlines for initial, ongoing, and final assessment, and for portfolio design and management.

Writing Rubrics and Checklists (NALD/Samaritan House)
<www.nald.ca/CLR/Btg/ed/evaluation/writing.htm>
This index page links to all manner of tools covering biographies, technical writing, business letters, essays, journals, and much more.

ESOL

Improving ESL Learners' Writing Skills (1997)
<www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed409746.html>

Using Computers with Adult ESL Literacy Learners (1990)
<www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed343462.html>

Mechanics

Guide to Grammar & Writing
<<http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar>>
Put together by an English professor at Capital Community College (Hartford, CT), this site has all kinds of information on of parts of speech, different forms and purposes of writing, quizzes, FAQs, and beyond.

Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary & Thesaurus
<www.m-w.com>
The complete Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary and Thesaurus online—free and searchable with definitions and audio pronunciations, as well as the Word of the Day and word games.

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Resources for Teaching Writing

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Tutor Training Resources: Tips for Spelling (Hamilton [ON] Public Library)

<www.hpl.ca/local/literacy/spelling.shtml>

Miscellany

Create Your Own Photo Essay

<<http://cvisions.cat.nyu.edu/gallery/>>

Creative Inspirations File Map

<www.geocities.com/SoHo/7795/master.html>

Current Writing Attitudes and Practices in selected Adult Literacy Programs in Western Canada

<<http://www.nald.ca/fulltext/current/cover.htm>>

Poetry in Classrooms and Community

<<http://swearercenter.brown.edu/poetry/about/index.shtml>>

Purposes, Audiences and Formats for Adult Writing

<www.brown.edu/Departments/Swearer_Center/Literacy_Resources/TESOL.html>

Remembering Smells: Using Your Nose in Writing (Pearson Adult Learning Centre)

<<http://palc.sd40.bc.ca/palc/ac-archive/02-02/acnov602.htm>>

Teachers and Writers Collaborative

<www.twc.org/>

The Writing Den

<http://www2.actden.com/writ_den/index.htm>

Print Resources

Auerbach, E. (1999). "The power of writing, the writing of power." *Focus on Basics*, Volume 3, Issue D. Boston: NCSALL.

Cheatham, J., et al (1994). *Whole Language for Adults: A Guide to Instruction*. Syracuse, NY: New Readers Press.

Garner, B., ed. (1999). *Focus on Basics*, Volume 3, Issue D. ("Writing instruction.") Boston: NCSALL.

<<http://gseweb.harvard.edu/~ncsall/fob/1999/fobv3id.htm>>

Gillespie, M. (1990). *Many Literacies: Training Modules for Adult Beginning Readers and Tutors*. Amherst, MA: Center for International Education, University of Massachusetts.

Goldberg, N (1986). *Writing Down the Bones*. Boston: Shambala Publishing.

Peyton, J., & J. Stanton. (1996). *Writing Our Lives*. Washington, DC, & McHenry IL: CAL and Delta Systems, Inc.

Raimes, A. (1993). "Out of the woods: Emerging traditions in the teaching of writing." S. Silberstein (ed.), *State of the Art TESOL Essays: Celebrating 25 Years of the Discipline* (pp. 205–226). Alexandria, Virginia: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Shaughnessy, M (1977). *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Smith, F. (1994). *Writing and the Writer*, 2d ed. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates

Grammar References — Teachers

Celce-Murcia, M. (1998). *The Grammar Book: An ESL/EFL Teacher's Course*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle.

Celce-Murcia, M. (1988). *Techniques and Resources in Teaching Grammar*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Grammar — ESOL Students

Azar, B. (1995). *Basic English Grammar*. Old Tappan, NJ: Pearson-Longman.
(Lower-level or beginning students)

Azar, B. (1993). *Fundamentals of English Grammar*. Old Tappan, NJ: Pearson-Longman. (Communicative methods with the direct teaching of grammar)

Azar, B. (1998). *Understanding and Using English Grammar*. Old Tappan, NJ: Pearson-Longman (Intermediate to advanced students of English as a second or foreign language.)

Mark Your Calendar

November 6–10

American Public Health Association (APHA), 132nd Annual Meeting and Exposition

Public Health and the Environment

Location: Washington, DC

Contact: APHA, 202-777-2476,

Web: <www.apha.org/meetings/>

November 10–13

American Association of Grant Professionals (AAGP), 6th Annual National Conference

Location: Boston, MA

Contact: Charlotte Harris, 617-635-9685, Web: <www.grantprofessionals.org/Conference%202003/conferences.htm>

November 11–14

National MultiCultural Institute (NMCI), Fall Conference

Building Personal and Professional Competence in a Multicultural Society

Location: Bethesda, MD

Contact: NMCI, 800-233-1234,

Web: <www.nmci.org/conferences/default.htm>

November 13–18

American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T), Annual Meeting

Managing and Enhancing Information: Cultures and Conflicts

Location: Providence, RI

Contact: ASIS&T, 301-495-0900,

Web: <www.asis.org/Conferences/AM04/>

January 14–17, 2005

American Library Association (ALA), Midwinter Meeting

Location: Boston, MA

Contact: ALA, 800-545-2433,

Web: <www.ala.org/ala/eventsandconferencesb/midwinter/2005/home.htm>

March 29–April 2

Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), 39th Annual Convention

Teaching Learning, Learning Teaching

Location: San Antonio, TX

Contact: TESOL, 703-836-0774,

Web: <www.tesol.org/conv/index-conv.html>

April 11–15

American Educational Research Association (AERA), Annual Meeting

Demography and Democracy in the Era of Accountability

Location: Montreal, Quebec

Contact: AERA, 202-223-9485,

Web: <www.aera.net/meeting/>



The winter and spring issues of *Field Notes* will be combined into one issue (See page 24 for more info).
Watch for *Field Notes* in Spring 2005!

SABES Launches Writing Initiative

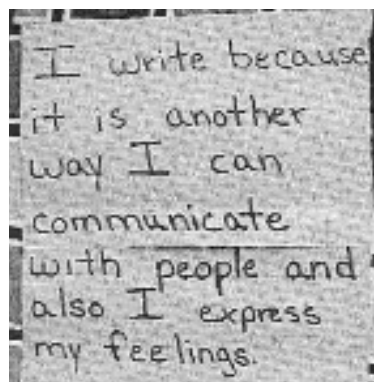
BY LENORE BALLIRO

Over the last year, SABES tried something new: theme-based staff development. Many of the workshops, mini-courses, and conferences in all of the SABES regions focused on the theme of writing instruction. In addition, SABES awarded six mini grants to ABE programs to explore writing instruction across the curriculum. Each grant project was facilitated by a SABES-sponsored writing coach who met with program participants to help implement program driven goals. While all programs had overarching goals in common—to increase the amount of writing taught in ABE classes, to increase teachers' and students' comfort level with writing, and to integrate writing across the curriculum—each program's objectives varied somewhat depending on the needs of participants.

The results of the program-based pilots have been impressive: programs documented their experience by producing rich and extensive portfolios of their work, including samples of teachers' and students' writings. Regional conferences showcased the work of two projects, and one project will be presenting at the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) Network 2004 conference in November.

A formative project evaluation of the theme-based initiative conducted by outside evaluator Julia Gittleman has yielded very positive results so far. Among other evaluative protocols, surveys were conducted in all six programs that participated in the on-site staff development projects.

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Student writing sample from SABES West Writing Initiative. See story page 9.



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