

THE SAWPER

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SAWP Snap

Too often, writing for the academy is an exercise in demonstrating what we have learned from or about others. The challenge of learning from ourselves through our writing becomes more difficult. If we put ourselves in our writing, if we balance our needs with our audience needs, and if we allow our own voices to emerge, we might find ourselves the authors of new insights and understandings about our topics.

-Sharon Miller, *Doing Academic Writing in Education: Connecting the Personal and the Professional*, 2005

Teachers Evaluate Issues of Assessment on Justice & Equity

By Anne-Marie Hall

In February 2005, teachers gathered on the University of Arizona campus to talk about issues of assessment and how that affects social justice and equity. We all know that **evaluation** is more than 100 years old and that the system used is positivist; that is, it assumes that knowledge is objectifiably knowable and can be measured and counted. Testing today is (at its worst) a-contextual, anti-social, anti-communal, and as far from a collaborative activity as could be imagined. This dependence on an infatuation with testing is further enhanced by two commonplaces in U.S. culture: 1) that one test given on one or two days in a given year tells us all



we need to know about a student, a school, a teacher, and 2) that unequal funding formulas among schools is somehow okay.

These monthly meetings were expanded on during the *Language at the Borders Spring Conference* held by the Department of English at the University of Arizona on March 5, 2005. The conference theme was "The Love of Language in a Time of Testing" and featured Anne-Marie Hall's keynote address, "Dance of the Turtles: Finding Our Rhythms in a Time of Testing." In this talk, she suggested ways we can find the spaces to teach within the con-

straints of NCLB, to foster a love of language in our students, and to give value to the world of possibility and imagination.

As the school year melded into summer, Hall continued facilitating a group of secondary teachers in various Tucson schools intent on creating scholarship of their own. This dedicated group met weekly to read from informative texts such as *The Manufactured Crisis: Myths, Fraud, and the Attack on America's Public Schools* (David C. Berliner and Bruce J. Biddle), *Saving Our Schools: The Case for Public Education Saying No to*

(Just Published—Continued on page 2)

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“No Child Left Behind” (Editors Ken Goodman, Patrick Shannon, Yetta Goodman, and Roger Rapoport), and *Teachers Organizing for Change: Making Literacy Learning Everybody’s Business* (Cathy Fleischer).

Teachers wrote weekly on prompts such as:

- How are social justice and equity related to assessment? In your response, consider how you are defining social justice and equity in this context. You might also want to talk about why you are interested in this topic – the yoking together of these terms – in your own teaching and professional life.
- The most dominant image I have of NCLB is.....NCLB affects me as a teacher in these ways....NCLB affects students in these ways....If I were Secretary of Education, my education plan would do these things....My plan to save our schools.....
- After reading *The Manufactured Crisis*, choose four myths to study closely and respond to. How might this information be helpful to you? How might you use the methods of Berliner and Biddle to help students/ parents/ teachers/ administrators/ the public read educational news releases more critically?
- What are good ideas for reform? Choose one idea that Berliner and Biddle mention (to improve education) and elaborate on how you would implement this (i.e., according parents more dignity and children more hope, equality of funding, reducing school size, managing heterogeneity, involving parents and community, etc.).
- *Teachers Organizing for Change* offers ways for teachers to “enter the conversation.” What can you do (realistically) this year? May out your own goals and elaborate on three things you will do in 2005-2006.

In conclusion, we wrote this philosophy of assessment: Teachers for social justice, equity, and assessment support learning and assessment that is

broad and diverse rather than narrow, test-specific, and standardized. Research shows that assessment should be integrally tied to the curriculum and the local context of each learning community. Excessive assessment programs that are top-down and not integral to the curriculum are

Excessive assessment programs that are top-down and not integral to the curriculum are unfair and place unnecessary burdens on students, teachers, and administrators.

unfair and place unnecessary burdens on students, teachers, and administrators. We agree with the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) in supporting authentic assessment that is manageable and that teachers and schools “should be permitted to select site-specific assessment tools from a bank of alternatives and/or to create their own”

(<http://www.ncte.org>)

We support texts that are worth preparing for and reflect best practices in instruction and literacy development.

We support professional development for teachers that fosters them in designing creative, authentic, multiple means of assessment.

We strongly propose that such narrow, test-specific, standardized tests be replaced with tests that provide equitable and just opportunities for all our students.

Representatives of the group presented on these ideas at the Arizona English Teachers Association conference in October, held at Rincon High School. Their efforts continue, and they plan to address the assessment practices locally and statewide through proactive, organized efforts.

Share with us what you are doing to encourage a love of language in a time of testing. What are you reading? Talking about? Doing with colleagues at your site? With parents? Students? Let’s keep the conversation going! Please let us know your thoughts on assessment and equity issues. Contact Anne-Marie Hall at hall@email.arizona.edu.

Anne-Marie Hall is the director of the Southern Arizona Writing Project.

Director's Disk

By Roger Shanley



Many of you know the tireless efforts of Anne-Marie Hall have kept the Southern Arizona Writing Project in the forefront of the efforts and activities promoted by the National Writing Project. Anne-Marie created a framework for our project that encouraged innovation and valued current theory and practice. Because of her vision, our project sponsors creative programs developed by past fellows and continues to promote informed inquiry into strategies for the improvement of writing instruction and teacher research. Happily, these efforts and her exceptional efforts as a university professor have not gone unnoticed. She was recently named Director of the Writing Program. With these new responsibilities, she continues to be a pivotal force with the writing project. Flora Ann Simon and I will share her responsibilities during the second semester and once again put Flory's adage into practice..."Between us, we make one good brain."

Many of the exciting efforts from the past months unfold this semester. Sharon Miller and a cadre of dedicated educators have crafted a thematic series of outreach and in-service programs, showcased in this semester's Saturday Seminar program. *(Please see the schedule of events to take advantage of these powerful presentations.)* Related to these outreach efforts is the filming of past fellows, co-directors, administrators, and curriculum specialists as they explain how the writing project impacted their lives, their teaching, and their schools. The

videotape will be used during a special breakfast to involve other schools and districts with the Southern Arizona Writing Project. Efforts started last year concerned with social justice and issues of assessment continue with a presentation highlighting Juanita Doylon. An outgrowth of a professional learning community fueled with the energy of Mary Fahrenbruck, Aimee Rogers, Rebecca Ballenger, and Jenise Porter, Juanita Doylon will join a panel discussion with Dr. Ken Goodman and others to discuss No Child Left Behind and other current issues. Local high school journalism programs have been contacted to cover the event in a teleconference with Juanita. As I noted, SAWP fellows are at the cutting edge of issues and practices! Debbie Dimmett has crafted a Young Writer's Retreat for February 11 involving students with the efforts of Amnesty International and encouraging development of student-led efforts on social justice issues. Filled with writing and literacy activities, these middle-school students will be investigating real-world problems and solutions for real-world audiences. Past SAWP fellows will be part of Tucson Area Whole Language Conference on February 18 as well as the University of Arizona English Department's Spring Conference on March 4. On the same day, teachers can participate in the Children's Literature Conference, sponsored by the Language, Reading, and Culture Department.

We encourage you to participate in these vibrant, remarkable and rejuvenating collaborations as well as send ideas, articles, and teacher stories to our newsletter editor, Lynn Cuffari, so that your own efforts can be shared with Tucson's caring teachers and administrators.

The SAWPER Wants You!

The aim of *THE SAWPER* is to provide a vital network for the exchange of ideas within the Southern Arizona Writing Project community. *THE SAWPER* seeks short fiction (100 words or less), poetry, and brief articles on teaching strategies. In addition, stories (up to 300 words) focusing on SAWP projects, in-services, and outreach programs will be considered.

THE SAWPER seeks submissions for its "Young Writer's" column. Please follow your school district's policies (parental permission, releases, etc.) to allow your students to be published. Teachers, what works in your writing classrooms? As SAWP fellows, your comments on how you motivate young writers are encouraged. The theme for the next newsletter is **Diversity In Our Classroom. How do we teach in classrooms so richly diverse in culture and language? Deadline is May 1.**

Submissions should be electronically submitted to Lynn Cuffari, Editor, lynncuffari@comcast.net.



SAWP finds “Common Ground” at National Conference in Pittsburgh

By Roger Shanley

On **Common Ground**, this year’s joint theme of the National Conference of Teachers of English and the National Writing Project, typified the experiences of representatives from the Southern Arizona Writing Project. Although each person had a different focus or responsibility, we found “common ground” with more than one thousand teachers and site leaders for the National Writing Project’s meetings in Pittsburgh as the legacy of recently deceased founder Jim Gray continued.

Co-director Sharon Miller represented the writing project as both a presenter and a pivotal force in our site’s efforts to create even more effective outreach and professional development programs. Celebrating the recent publication of the text *Doing Academic Writing in Education: Connecting the Personal and the Professional* authored by her and other Tucson fellows, Sharon joined co-directors Flory Simon and Roger Shanley, Deborah Green, Colleen Thompson, and Heather Severson as



Sharon Miller autographs her book for an admiring reader.

sions of teacher research. Heather Severson gained new insights about technology in her new role assisting Mike Sechrest as technology liaison and was our designated photographer to chronicle presenters and SAWP members in their various capacities. Flory Simon and Roger Shanley joined a panel of three writing projects selected to work with Patti Stock and reported on SAWP’s collegiality and “scholarship,” as termed by Patti in her grant proposal funded by the National Writing Project. As always, the co-directors purchased recent relevant texts for addition to the SAWP library. One text, *The 9 Rights of Every Writer* edited by Vicki Spandel, affirms many of my own beliefs about the teaching of writing. I recommend the book as a source of encouragement and reference when discussing current trends in assessment and “pacing.” (*The next issue of The SAWPER will feature Roger’s review of Spandel’s book.*)

Our efforts were filled with information gathering and giving, resulting in an array of ideas for continued growth of our writing project. We are already planning our involvement in next year’s gathering in Nashville. I could swear I heard Flory whispering something about her “Elvis impersonation....

Roger Shanley is co-director of SAWP. He teaches at Rincon High School.



SAWPers gather at NCTE/NWP conference in Pittsburgh.

they learned from other sites and shared the challenges and successes at the Southern Arizona Writing Project. Colleen Thompson showcased her involvement with the Rural Sites Network while Deborah Green joined other sites and fellows in discus-



Technology Update: Tech Savvy Teachers (& Wannabees) Wanted

by Heather Severson, Assistant Technology Liaison

The Southern Arizona Writing Project is undertaking an initiative to extend the role of the Writing Project Technology Liaison to a steadily-growing alliance of technology savvy teachers (or at least those who are not technophobes) in Southern Arizona. This network will span all grade levels, all content areas, and all school districts served by SAWP. SAWP aims to recruit at least twenty participants for a network of teachers who will be able to provide their colleagues with resources, guidelines and answers to the following question: How can writing teachers use available technology to make their lives easier, improve efficacy of instruction, and promote digital literacy?

As specified by the National Writing Project, “The role of technology liaison is one of a number of site leadership roles that may help a writing project site use and integrate technology to support the teaching and learning of writing across its local and national work.... [T]he technology liaison provides local leadership to the site and serves as a link between the site and national programs and initiatives related to technology and its role in teaching and learning. The local role of the technology liaison is designed to reflect the needs and interests of the site.”

The technology liaison also has duties and opportunities that extend beyond the local area to a national community within NWP: “The national duties of the technology liaison include: Communicating regularly online with the technology liaison leadership team members and other technology liaisons; supporting site leadership in assessing the site’s technology needs and reporting how technology supports the core work in the site’s Application for Continued Funding; providing a link between the national office and the writing project site that supports the site’s relationship with national technology initiatives.”

Ideally, SAWP will extend those duties and opportunities to other members of the SAWP community, providing guidance and resources to any SAWP Fellow who has an interest in using technology to improve **his** or her teaching practice.

If you are interested in joining our informal technology interest group, please contact Heather Severson at sseverson@earthlink.net.

SAWP Fellow Finds Teaching Her “Calling in Life”

By Nahal Rodieck

I have been teaching for five years. In teaching, I have found my calling in life. I do it with all the love and care of a mother caring for her children. In my students, I see the future and I know my purpose is to help them become critical thinkers and analytical writers. And although graduate courses in teaching and pedagogy did train me a great deal, no class compared to my SAWP fellowship experience.

It was during my SAWP days that I learned and understood the importance of prompted writing, sharing students’ work in class, and becoming a writing group in order to establish a connection with the students in my class. SAWP not only allowed me to examine and learn from other teachers’ approaches and lesson plans, it allowed me to take an in-depth look at my own work as a teacher and the modes of communication I had been using in my classes. SAWP allowed me to

understand that a key component in learning for young adults is the element of comfort.

Teaching is not magic. A successful teacher learns from the peaks and valleys of her experiences and different groups of students. SAWP taught me not to be afraid to first be a writer, and to share my own work with my class. It taught me not to be judgmental toward the quiet ones or dismiss the rowdy ones. My most successful lesson plans come from my SAWP experience. We read and write and examine the texts together. I teach them how to select a topic for a research project, how to allow analysis and rhetoric take center-stage in their writing, and how to read a text with eagle eyes. And I reassure them that I am here as their teacher and my job is not to set them up for failure, but give them every chance for success.

The comment I find most on my students’ evaluation is this: “She helped me find the writer in myself, and for that I am thankful.” I could not have become the teacher that I am today without the Southern Arizona Writing Project. And for that I am thankful.

Nahal Rodieck is working on her dissertation on the theories of John Dewey on school and society. She teaches freshman composition at the UA and is an assessment item developer for a private company which designs questions for state mandated exams for several states.



Young Reader's Novel Touches Hearts of Teachers, Students

Book Review by Sarah Willimann

Sahara Jones is truly a "special" girl. She's smart, insightful, and feisty, but sadly misunderstood. She just can't seem to master the fine art of academics until the wonderfully eccentric Miss Pointy enters her classroom. With her strange subjects and eye popping appearance, the new teacher is unlike anything anyone has ever imagined.

Using her powerful tools of pencils and composition notebooks, Miss Pointy unravels the soul of each student and weaves a vibrant tapestry with the threads. From the hopelessly delinquent Darrell Sikes to witty Sahara, she helps the children form themselves. Like an experienced gardener with pruning shears, Miss Pointy lets the class form themselves with just a little thoughtful guidance. As you get absorbed into the world of these Chicago fifth graders, watch them open up, write from the heart, and discover their true identity.

Laced with contagious humor, outrageous behavior, and the energetically immature voices of the class, this novel is true to life and upbeat. Dive into the dangerous city backdrop and explore the kids' secret hopes, fears and desires. Author Esme Raji Codell uses words like paint as she brushes the realistically touching story of *Sahara Special*.

Sarah Willimann is a seventh grade student at Immaculate Heart School.

Note from Editor Lynn Cuffari: I am Sarah Willimann's teacher. I obtained a copy of *Sahara Special* at a recent book fair at our school. When I read it, I was touched by how the author's character, "Miss Pointy," is able to reach her students. She does this in through writing, pure and simple. My own experiences as a SAWP teacher have shown me how engaged students become in their learning when they feel empowered to write and to share their words. I asked Sarah, one of my seventh grade students, to read this book and write a review. Sarah immediately caught on to the book's essence that Miss Poitier (Pointy) really guides her students toward a passion for learning. In this era of mandates and litigation, *Sahara Special* is a book not just for young readers, but for their teachers too.

Teen Writers Challenge, Hearten "Retired" Teacher

By Judyth Willis

I have been under the erroneous impression that eighth graders cannot think. So ask me why on earth I took on a long-term substitute position teaching eighth grade language arts? The only answer I can give is that I evidently needed the humbling experience, or more succinctly put, I needed to learn a big lesson.

The first and most painful lesson concerned behavior. In my state of ignorance, I always said that middle school teachers had a special place reserved for them in heaven. That is so not enough! I now firmly believe that they have a special place in heaven but only after they have been given guided

tours of all the capitals of the world, been pampered at all the five-star spas, eaten sumptuous meals cooked by famous chefs, and given anything else of comfort and pleasure in or out of this world! And I also believe that there is just no explaining anyone who would take on a long-term substitute position.

This all means the principal made weekly, if not daily, drop-ins to quell the bedlam. Over and above the demonic behavior was the dismay I felt over the mixed level of writing skills. A prompt on the white board as bellwork served to produce two sentences, if that much, for many of the students.

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Of course, there were the Courtneys and the Brennans who read voraciously and it could easily be seen in their writing. There were Chris and Cole who have developed voice and could slam out an essay in no time. The challenge, with the mix of skills, was to get them to teach each other. So I launched them into a multi-genre project organized around booksets on the American Revolution.

Each Thursday, one component of the project was due. They compiled a list of ten words from the book, they wrote a friendly letter to a character, they imitated a poem, they downloaded a piece of art relevant to the period and wrote a paragraph on how it related to their book.* As the students completed drafts and shared with their peers (noisy beyond belief!), I began to see some changes. Nathan, a new student to the school, showing signs of grieving for Hot Springs, Arkansas, where he came from, began to expand his writing to more than one paragraph, and Kayla voluntarily moved over to the isolated desk and I could see her listening to the writer voice in her head. Her pride in her writing came alive.

At this point, I turned them toward the persuasive essay they were to write on their benchmark test taken the first week of December. Requirement number six in the project was a persuasive essay. And that is when I began to notice real progress. The following prompts turned up the energy level:

- *The Toyota Corolla has been named the most gas-efficient and safest car on the road. Therefore, the U. S. Government has decided that no other car will be made available to consumers after January 1, 2006. What do you think?*
- *The Health and Welfare Department of the United States is so concerned over the number of people suffering from obesity, they have decided to shut down all fast food restaurants in the country on January 1, 2006. What do you think?*
- *The Federal Communication Commission is so concerned over the amount of illegal use on the internet, they have decided to block the use of the internet by anyone under the age of eighteen. What do you think about that?*

The third time is the charm, right? They now had the routine: Read the prompt written on the white board, have a short discussion, then they write out their pro and con organizer. After that, they write the first draft. A read-around the next day; second draft due as homework; proofread in class in

writing groups and final draft due on Thursday. From their attitudes on test day, they were ready.

Then the miracle happened. It happened when I decided to give them an easy week while they were taking the benchmark tests. They were to read *The Diary of Anne Frank* as readers' theater. It was during this assignment that I discovered eighth graders can think. One afternoon, I asked them if we could have an adult discussion. They participated in a discussion on what causes prejudice and bias. We talked about what can be done about getting rid of it, and after the discussion I asked them to write their thoughts down on what we had discussed. I also told them that at the end of the play an essay exam would be given and they could use their notes.

On exam day I gave them the three questions we had discussed in class and added a fourth for those who struggled with the abstract ideas behind prejudice. I asked who in the play was the hero? They were to write their answer in essay form to only one of the questions. There was the option of ten extra credit points if they included a quote from the play that supported what they were writing about. Some managed to do this. Some slammed the unconnected quote at the end of their essay. Nevertheless, they were so proud of their efforts they requested permission to include the exam essay in their multi genre project.

Dominique, who had not connected to anything done in the quarter up to this assignment, came in daily ready to read or listen - he was hooked. Do I know why? No. It could have been the holocaust, it could have been the theatrical element, it could be that he had a growth spurt. How do we ever know why something works? And Emily, Miss-I-am-not-here-to-learn-anything, came alive as Anne in her reading of that part. She will remember that experience.

With only two days of the original fifty-nine left, with all the rehearsals of my "I Quit" speech behind me, with all the frustration I felt over their behavior, I found out that it is possible to like eighth graders. When I read their final essays, they convinced me that they **can** think.

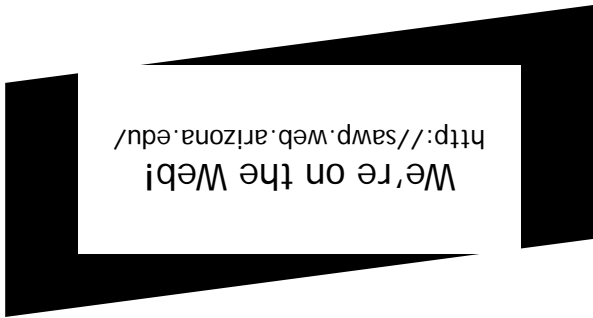
* (I do understand that as a substitute I had free reign on skipping the standards drills.)

Judyth Willis is a 2002 Summer Institute Fellow.

Serving Educators in Five Counties and More than Seventy School Districts

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We're on the Web!
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SAWP Announces Upcoming Events

- January 28, 2006: **Saturday Seminar Series “On The Road To Writing Power,”** focusing on Conferencing and Motivation, presenters Jenise Porter and Inger McGee, Transitional Office Building, 1731 E. 2nd St, 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m., for more information <http://sawp.web.arizona.edu>
- February 11, 2006: **A Southern Arizona Writing Project for Middle School Youth.** Writing and Campaigning for Social Justice, facilitated by Deborah Dimmett, Transitional Office Building, 1731 E. E. 2nd St., 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m., for more information, call 621-3436 or 545-4829.
- February 18, 2006: **Saturday Seminar Series “On The Road To Writing Power,”** focusing on Grading, Evaluating, and Assessing, presenters Debbie Dimmett and Judee Edmonds, Transitional Office Building, 1731 E. 2nd St., 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m., for more information <http://sawp.web.arizona.edu>
- February 18, 2006: **Tucson Area Whole Language Spring Workshop,** featuring Bess Altwerger and Steve Strauss, Pima Community College Downtown Campus, 8:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., registration by February 15th, for more information contact Melinda Radon, mradon@tuscontawl.org or 520-885-8786
- March 4, 2006: **University of Arizona English Department’s “Language on the Border” Spring Conference,** featuring Dr. William Hartman, Modern Languages Building, 3rd floor and Instructional Learning Center (ILC), 8 a.m.-3 p.m., for more information contact Yvonne Merrill at ymerrill@email.arizona.edu
- March 11, 2006: **Saturday Seminar Series “On The Road To Writing Power,”** focusing on Reflection, presenter Lisa Garbe, Transitional Office Building, 1731 E. 2nd St., 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m., for more information <http://sawp.web.arizona.edu>
- April 22, 2006: **Saturday Seminar Series “On The Road To Writing Power,”** focusing on Teacher Research and Inquiry, presenters current participants of Teacher Research and Inquiry, Transitional Office Building, 1721 E. 2nd St.—9:00-12:30, for more information <http://sawp.web.arizona.edu>