



Teacher, Writer, Researcher

The Connecticut Writing Project—Storrs

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Appropriations and Cherry Blossoms

Jason Courtmanche, Director (SI '99)

Other than an eight-hour ride back that got me home after three in the morning, the National Writing Project Spring Meeting was successful. One odd happenstance was that the deadline for signatures on the House Dear Colleague Letter was Wednesday, the day prior to our lobbying visits to the representatives and senators. This was due to the fact that the legislature voted on President Obama's budget on Thursday, creating a frenzied atmosphere throughout all the legislative office buildings. Several Education Aides never confirmed appointments, but I politely barged in anyway, and though few had more than a few minutes to give me, all met with me and all expressed their support for the NWP appropriation. And despite the moved up deadline, it appears that we secured more than the necessary signatures on both the House and Senate letters. If everything goes well, then, the NWP will see its funding for 2010 rise from \$24 million to \$30 million.

The day following our lobbying efforts was filled with workshops on a variety of subjects. I participated in one on the history of the NWP. Now that the organization is thirty-five years old, the national directors are collecting quantitative and qualitative data on the early years, from the Bay Area Writing Project's inception in 1974 to the acquisition of federal funding in 1991. All sites that can date their origin to this period are being asked to share their stories and data about their beginnings. Since we date back to 1982 and were the fifth site in the country to sign onto the national network after federal funding was approved, our history was sought out. The folks from the national office collecting the information also seemed to like the fact that in 1991 I was an undergraduate student in then-director Mary Mackley's Advanced Composition class—which I now teach. *Check out Jason's blog at <http://jasoncourtmanche.blogspot.com/>.*

If You Build It, They Will Come: Building a CWP Web Presence

Jane Cook, Technology Program Leader (SI '07)

I first started working as the CWP Technology Program Leader in August of 2007 after attending the CWP Summer Institute in July of 2007. My first charge was to bring the CWP website (<http://www.cwp.uconn.edu>) into the new millennium by updating the look and feel as well as the content. Jason and I wanted to make the CWP website more attractive and easier to navigate. I worked for more than fifty hours to create a website that would appeal to not only CWP Teacher-Consultants but to others who didn't know who the CWP is and what we do. I created pages that would provide them with resources and information. We launched the new website just before Labor Day in 2007 and received many compliments from educators who could now find useful information. Our requests for professional development from district administrators began to grow because they could see what kinds of workshops and coaching support the CWP offers. This year we generated almost \$30 thousand in PD income. Shortly after the launching, Jason received a memo outlining the Web standards for university web sites and we discovered, to our great disappointment, that we were not in compliance. *Continued on page 6.*

Inservice Keeps Pace

Lynn Hoffman,
Inservice Program Leader (SI '91)

Despite the downturn in the economy, school districts from throughout the state continue to contact the Writing Project for professional development workshops. Since January, we have been working in East Hartford, Shelton, and Bloomfield. Rockville has already contracted the CWP to work with its high school English staff on Election Day. Hartford has contracted us to explore PD options for a new journalism magnet school, which is slated to open in Fall 2009. Requested PD topics range from literacy and technology, interdisciplinary writing, teaching educators how to give effective feedback, to training teachers to teach students how to write a research paper. Special thanks to TCs Michelle Hacker in East Hartford, Vicki Nordlund in Vernon, and Brooke Pelkey, now in Bloomfield and formerly a graduate assistant in our office, for bringing the CWP to the attention of their administrators. Lynn Hoffman, Inservice Program Leader, would like to encourage all TCs to promote the CWP's professional development services in their districts. Lynn can be reached at 860-757-6323 or lhoffman@crec.org.

As always, the Writing Project offered a full line-up of Saturday Seminars open to all educators this year; CEUs are available. Although most of the seminars were scheduled in Storrs, we did offer seminars at UConn-Avery Point and UConn-Hartford this year for the convenience of our TCs who live a distance from Storrs. For more information, go to: www.cwp.uconn.edu/satseminars.html. Please tell your colleagues.

In August, the CWP will once again offer a week-long technology institute open to all educators. This will be held at EAST-CONN Regional Educational Service Center in Willimantic. Jane Cook will facilitate, and CEUs will be offered. Details to follow on our website later this spring.

Lynn Hoffman works at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts.

The 2009 Summer Institute Takes Shape

Kelly Andrews-Babcock, Summer Institute Program Leader (SI '05)

Jason and I have spent April reviewing applications and interviewing candidates for the Summer Institute. This year, the Summer Institute will take place from June 29 through July 24 on the Storrs campus. We have twenty candidates from a variety of backgrounds. Of course there are high school English teachers, but we also have high school teachers from Social Studies and Spanish, several middle school teachers, master's and doctoral candidates from UConn, community college faculty members, elementary school teachers, as well as a professional development specialist from one of the RESCs.

This summer we will be replacing the former Blue Whale with a paperless version that has been preliminarily dubbed the Blue Minnow. Basically, it's a blue flash drive containing all the required readings.

In addition to our study of theory and the presentation of demonstration workshops in the mornings, mini-lessons about writer's craft will lead us into the afternoon writing response group sessions. We will also be setting up some Book Talks during the afternoons to share our responses to the texts.

We will be reading *Because Writing Matters* by Carl Nagin, *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott, either *Wondrous Words* by Katie Wood Ray or *What is 'College-Level' Writing?* edited by Patrick Sullivan and Howard Tinberg, *Testing Is Not Teaching* by Donald Graves, and *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know* by Gary Howard. The last text is our new multicultural text for this summer.

Kelly Andrews-Babcock is a Literacy Coach in Killingly. For more information about the 2009 Summer Institute, please visit <http://www.cwp.uconn.edu/siinfo.html> or contact Kelly Andrews-Babcock at ab_crunch@hotmail.com.

"The biggest 'ah-ha' for me was not necessarily to become a great writer in a month, but to rediscover the writer in me. My students are in for a real surprise this coming year. I have gained validation from the authorities we have read, the theorists, and am motivated to provide a much better writing regimen for my students. The reading has reinforced for me the fundamental reality that writing matters."

– Steve Pringle, Summer Institute 2007

Student and Teacher Writing Conference Returns to Storrs

Nadine Keane, Publications and Conference Program Leader (SI '01)

This year, the Connecticut Student and Teacher Writing Conference will be held on May 20th. This biennial conference brings together teachers and students in grades 6–12 from across the state for a day of writing workshops presented by Connecticut authors. Students and teachers have the opportunity to learn about writing and to explore and share their own work.

The day will begin in the Rome Ballroom with registration from 8:30 to 9:15, followed by breakfast and a keynote address from performance poet and independent radio producer Ken Cormier. The first workshop will take place from 10:15 to 11:30, followed by lunch. Next, the participants will move on to their second workshop from 1:00 to 2:15, and finally will return to Rome where students can share their writing with all conference attendees. Books by the workshop presenters will be available for sale at the conference.

For more information about the conference, visit <http://www.cwp.uconn.edu/studentteacherwritingconf.html> or contact Nadine Keane at nkeane@griswold.k12.ct.us or Jane Cook at janecook@earthlink.net.

Keep it Simple: Teaching Poetry. One TC Offers a Four-Step Approach

Jan Brennan (SI '04)

Is poetry just one more thing that you have to cover, a subject that you save for the month of June when students are spent and hopelessly on vacation already? If poetry just isn't your forte, the following suggestions may give you a bit more confidence.

When I teach poetry I keep it simple; I use what I call the I-L-P-S plan (Immersing, Listening, Paralleling, Setting Free).

Immersing—"Every writer of poetry is first a reader of poetry." Georgia Heard

Before I can expect students to open their hearts to poetry, they need to be immersed in the genre, so I bring in dozens of poetry books and ask students to read and enjoy. I don't have them analyze or dissect the poems; I just want them to test the waters.

Listening—"Above all, poetry is intended for the ear. It must be felt to be understood, and before it can be felt it must be heard." Stanley Kunitz

I select poems that I know have a good track record with my students' age group. I encourage them to read some of their favorites out loud to partners or small groups. We do choral readings, side-by-side readings, and other forms of oral sharing.

Paralleling—"Before we can be poets, we must practice; imitation is a very good way of investigating the real thing." Mary Oliver

Teachers Research Classroom Practices

Donna Ozga, Teacher as Researcher Program Facilitator (SI '96)

The Teacher as Researcher (TAR) program is a CWP program open to all Teacher Consultants who wish to address an educational concern particular to their classrooms or apparent in education in general. Participants assume professional responsibility for documenting, analyzing and writing about their work over a period of time to share with other teachers.

The process involves four basic steps. Participants first develop a research question based on thoughtful consideration of their educational situation. Once the question is defined, participants plan the methodology best suited to their approach of the question. Over time, participants gather data from student work and research their concern so that they may analyze the information. The research may be qualitative or quantitative, hypothesis-raising and descriptive. Finally, participants write the article and share their learning with other teachers.

During the process participants meet with other teacher-researchers for progress and sharing sessions, maintain a research log with both anecdotal and factual information, and meet with the group leader for updates. Currently, four TCs are TAR participants. Jane Cook of EASTCONN (SI '07) is writing about the experiences of a support teacher who walks into an unfamiliar school and who faces the unknowns of that school's culture. Joe Anastasio of Bacon Academy in Colchester (SI '08) is researching gender differences with regard to choosing and appreciating literature in the classroom. Tara Achane of Mansfield Middle School (SI '07) is studying the relationship between teacher presentation and student response in a second grade classroom.

Research mini-grants of up to \$500 are available to complement Teacher Research. In the last two years, Lenore Grunko, Tara Achane, Alex Rode, Marcy Rudge, and Lynda Barrow have received research mini-grants. If you are interested in participating in TAR and/or a mini-grant, contact the CWP office or program facilitator Donna Ozga at donnao1@cox.net.

Donna Ozga is a retired English teacher. She has been with the CWP since 1996 as a Teacher Consultant, Board Member, the co-director and facilitator for Teacher as Researcher, and a presenter for CWP. She is currently taking docent training at New Britain Museum of American Art.

When students are asked to write their first poems following a pattern provided by a master, they cannot fail. I start with short poems, usually quatrains (some free verse, some rhyming), to give them easy options to explore.

Setting Free—"As writers become more confident through the scaffolding of parallel poetry, it's time to hand over the keys of creative control to these new-blossoming poets." Gerri Ruckel

Once I feel the students are ready to solo, we brainstorm topics they might explore through poetry. I give them plenty of opportunities to write without fear of being graded. They journal every day and eventually pick out several poems they wish to share with classmates. Getting feedback from each other helps foster greater skill and confidence.

Everyone can do poetry—teachers and students alike—when approached in this simple and delightful fashion.

Jan Brennan has been an educator all her adult life, but it wasn't until she spent the summer of 2004 as a CWP student that she truly feels her profession climbed to greater heights. Soon after that life-changing summer, Jan began incorporating poetry into her personal and professional life and she was hired as a seventh grade English teacher at the Avon Middle School, where she has been ever since, totally immersed in the world that she loves—reading, writing, sharing poetry, teaching incredible students, and working with amazing colleagues.

"I love the idea of being a writer who teaches, versus a teacher who writes. I am one person, one entity, with two equally important sides to me."

— Liza Escott, Lyman Memorial High School (SI '07)

High School Writing Center Collaboration Thrives

Katrina Bafumi, Graduate Assistant Director, University Writing Center

In a growing collaboration among the Connecticut Writing Project, the University Writing Center, and area high schools, and with the generous support of the Aetna Chair of Writing, we are happy to announce two new sites on the Connecticut high school writing centers map. These schools join the secondary writing center community alongside the writing room at Griswold High School, coordinated by Nadine Keane (SI '01), which began last year. The Griswold Writing Room has just released the first volume of their very own *Connecticut Mosaic*, a publication featuring writing from Griswold High Students and edited by the Griswold writing room advisors.

This April, the East Hartford High School Writing Center opened to the student population. Since September, the EHHS Writing Center tutors have engaged in a writing conversation, practicing their tutoring skills with the help of a group of UConn's Writing Center tutors. Now, the EHHS Writing Center tutors are sharing their talents with the school. Coordinated by English teacher and Central CWP TC Nick Chanese and staffed by dedicated students representing both the sophomore and junior classes, the EHHS Writing Center provides writing support every week day, as well as after school. Soon the Writing Center voices will echo throughout the school, and the student tutors are eager to hear more of the praise they've already received from students and faculty alike.

After training with Writing Center tutors from the University of Connecticut in the fall of 2008, the E.O. Smith Writing Center, coordinated by teachers Megan Magner (SI '09) and Denise Abercrombie (SI '07), opened its doors on Monday, March 9, and is staffed five days a week for the entire school day. The tutors are announcing their presence at E.O. Smith with a promotional video, flyers, and through the splendid networking skills of the tutors themselves. The UConn Writing Center tutors will continue visiting for bi-weekly staff meetings until the end of the school year, and we look forward to hearing all about their successes at UConn's annual conference for high school writing centers in October 2009.

Mary Isbell and Katrina Bafumi are assistant directors of outreach for the UConn Writing Center. Mary has been working to train the E.O. Smith peer editors this year, with the help of Lydia Smith, Quynh Tran, and Carolyn Morway, and last year she helped train the Griswold Writing Advisors with the help of Lydia Smith and Dimpri Parikh. Katrina has been working with East Hartford High this year, with the help of Kaylee Czajka, Josh Backett, Pooja Kondabolu, Joe Tarantino, and Bronwen Tomb.

Kids Become Published Authors at Annie Vinton Elementary

Alex Ramos, Undergraduate Writing Intern

Brightly colored furniture and seedlings in plastic cups on the windowsill were among the first things that I noticed as I walked into the enrichment room at Annie Vinton Elementary. The shelves were lined with oversized books about writing and storytelling, and as I perused the titles, a large paperback with a black binding caught my eye. It was adorned with a photograph of a horse and multicolored Crayola scribbles, and it read *I Love My Horse*. It was published by a fourth grader.

This was the dream of Marcy Rudge (SI '07) and Lynda Barrow (SI '08), two of our TCs from Annie E. Vinton Elementary School in Mansfield. After attending the Summer Institute in respective years, they each received a \$500 mini grant. Marcy and Lynda have used their grant money to establish a children's publishing center in their elementary school. Their goal: to promote and celebrate writing in a way that goes beyond teaching what is required for the CMTs.

The Annie Vinton Publishing Center's aim is to nurture the children's desire to create and to provide them with opportunities to write about their own interests and passions. At the publishing center, any student has the opportunity to have his or her original work published. The bulletin board in the hallway outside of the classroom serves as a guide to the eight step process. When the student and teacher decide together that the piece is ready for publication, the child then brings his or her manuscript to the publishing center. Once the story has been typed and bound, the child finishes it by adding illustrations. Then, the book is ready to be taken home or shared with other children. Published authors are recognized at a monthly assembly and honored by having blue owls with their names posted on the publishing center bulletin board.

Since the training period and kick off celebration in January, the majority of the day-to-day responsibilities have been attended to by the parent volunteers. The two coordinators come into the publishing center every day to attend to the manuscripts and to keep the records of the published books. Marcy and Lynda stress that none of this would be possible without the dedication of these parents and many others who act as typists and binders. They are extremely grateful for the overwhelming support that they have received.

During its first month, the publishing center was responsible for the publication of about sixty books. Since then, it's been about a book a day. The books bear titles such as *I Have a New Brother*, *The Lizard that I Want*, *The Trophy Quest*, *King Pizza and the Knights of the Kitchen Table*, and *Bloody Noses*, to name a few. And, as the word is spreading around the school, the publishing center is becoming more and more popular. So keep your ears open for news from the Annie Vinton Publishing Center. The way I see it, Marcy and Lynda are providing the inspiration for young writers who could become the next generation of great American novelists.

Marcy Rudge teaches Kindergarten at Annie E. Vinton, and Lynda Barrow is an Enrichment teacher at Annie E. Vinton.

TC Wins the PEN Discovery Award

Alex Ramos, Undergraduate Writing Intern

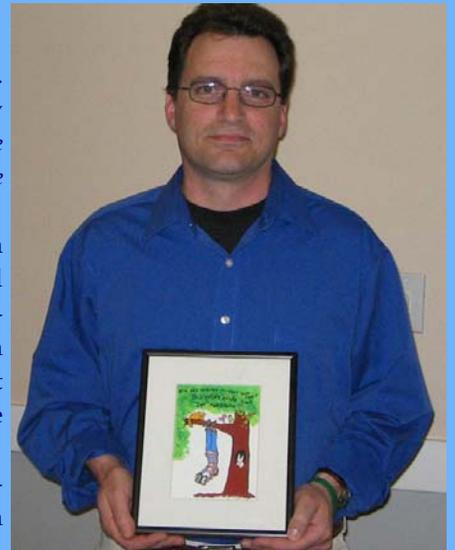
I recently had the opportunity to sit down with TC Joe Anastasio (SI '07). Joe teaches at the Bacon Academy in Colchester and recently won the 2007 PEN New England Children's Book Discovery Award for emerging writers. His novel, *The Mist*, is being considered for publication, and he is working on his follow-up, *Into the Mist*, the second installation in the trilogy.

When I asked Joe how he got started as a writer, he traced it back to a high school English teacher that really inspired him. The teacher, who, Joe says, looked eerily like Ernest Hemingway, would write in the margins of Joe's papers disparaging comments like, "cute," "ok," "cliché." One time he read one of Joe's stories in class and ripped it to shreds. Joe's break-through came when he wrote a story about life in a nursing home. As the teacher read it over in class, he mouthed to Joe the word "excellent," which inspired confidence in Joe. He has been writing ever since.

Even for an experienced writer, making the leap from writing short fiction to writing a novel can seem like an unwieldy task. However, Joe got started on *The Mist* in November of 2006 during National Novel Writing Month, which challenges aspiring novelists to write 50,000 words within thirty days. During that time he wrote and kept his word count posted on the board in his classroom. This sparked the interest of his students, and, to his surprise, they began to write, too. His students collectively wrote over 66,000 words that November! Joe's students were so supportive of his effort that he was able to use them as a resource for his writing. He listened to their manners of speech in order to write realistic dialogue, and used them as a sort of sounding board by reading them parts of his novel and listening to their feedback.

On a whim, Joe decided to submit the first chapter of his book for the PEN award. When he won, he was invited to the awards ceremony, where he was introduced by Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver*. When I asked Joe what it was like to meet such a well-known author that writes within the same genre, he admitted that it was a little intimidating at first. But then he found that she was incredibly down-to-earth, and he realized that many of the people in the audience were a lot like him: ordinary people with a flair that had struck at some success.

Joe says that since then it's been a rollercoaster ride trying to get the book published. *Continued on page 6.*



UConn and E. O. Smith Students Connect With Email Partnership

Denise Abercrombie (SI '07)

Students from Denise Abercrombie's three American Literature (English 10B) classes at E.O. Smith High School are paired up with mentors from Jason Courtmanche's Advanced Composition for Prospective Teachers course at UConn. Denise's sophomores meet in the writing lab each Tuesday to correspond via email with their UConn mentors.

Both groups of students have read *Into the Wild* and *Of Mice and Men* and discuss the texts online. Jason's students have been very encouraging and helpful in responding to drafts of students' journal entries, essays, and other creative compositions inspired by these powerful American stories. Once-reluctant high school writers are emerging with more confident voices thanks to the mentoring of college role models.

Denise assigns a range of writing activities to inspire close readings of the text. The latest assignment, making Facebook pages for the characters in *Of Mice and Men*, was a big hit. Students were excited to compose faux Facebook pages with photos, profiles, and wall exchanges inspired by characters in the novel. Who doesn't want to poke Curley?

Students also used Google Earth to compare modern day Soledad and Salinas, California with the 1930's landscape drawn by Steinbeck in *Of Mice and Men*. Students also composed songs and cell phone conversations in personas. These creative writing assignments are fun in and of themselves, and also help liberate students to generate composition topics with their UConn mentors. The goal is for students to learn how to craft original, well developed essays, and to gain a deeper understanding of a strong thesis or lead.

Students look forward to meeting their mentors face to face before the UConn semester ends in May. Though the correspondence pairing took extra effort to coordinate, it has proved well worth the time. UConn students got authentic experience and practice by helping high school students with the composition process, and E.O. Smith students received additional support in their reading and writing from college mentors.

Denise Abercrombie teaches English at E.O. Smith High School in Mansfield.

If You Build It, They Will Come. Building a CWP Web Presence

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Since the bulk of the content had already been created, it was a simple matter of designing a template that met the university web standards. For that we got help from the University Web Development Lab who helped us bring our new millennium website up to the university's web standards. Since a website is always a work in progress, we are continuing to get additional help with the design of a new CWP logo and a revised template with a broader color palette. Stay tuned for those changes.

For a history of the evolution of the CWP website, check out the presentation that Jason and I did at the New England Association of Teachers of English Conference in October of 2008:

<http://www.cwp.uconn.edu/NEATEpresentation.html>. You'll find links to the old look and feel as well as the various stages of development. You'll also see other ways that the CWP is using technology to stay in touch with teachers.

Jane Cook has been a full-time Staff Development Specialist/Literacy and Technology Coach for EASTCONN, the Regional Educational Service Center that serves the 36 districts in the northeastern corner of Connecticut, since August of 1985. Jane has worked with computers in education since 1979 when the first Apple II computers came off of the line. She is addicted to using technology to support teaching and learning.

The Connecticut Student Writers Magazine: An Avenue for Outstanding Student Writers

Nadine Keane, Editor, *Connecticut Student Writers* (SI '01)

Connecticut Student Writers accepts literary submissions from students in grades K-12 statewide. This year, the deadline for submissions was January 23, and around 1,000 submissions were received. Reading Day was on February 7, and teacher consultants gathered to read the submissions, scoring each on a scale of one through ten. Pieces that scored a five or above were passed on to a second reader and later reviewed by the assistant editors. The editors and assistant editors met in March to make final selections, which will be published in the *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine. Three poetry entries and three prose entries from each grade level were designated winners, along with a like number of honorable mentions. Finally a student drawing was selected for the magazine cover art.

The culmination of the program will be *Student Recognition Night*. It will be held on Tuesday, May 12 at 4:00 pm in the Jorgensen Auditorium on the UConn Storrs campus. Light refreshments will be served prior to the ceremony. The ceremony will open with welcoming remarks from the CWP Di-

rector Jason Courtmanche, magazine editor Nadine Keane, poet and teacher Amy Ma, and the keynote speaker Mark Kimball Moulton, storybook author. Then student readers will take the stage, one from each grade level, to read his or her piece. The evening will end with the winners and writers who receive honorable mentions being called to the stage to receive award certificates and copies of the *Connecticut Student Writers* magazine.

We would like to give special thanks to our selection committee: Brina Abrahams, Fran Cohen, Tulani Gant, Kim Roberts, Alex Rode, Marcy Rudge, and Jenny Jepsen, as well as our assistant editors Evangeline Abbot, Kelly Andrews-Babcock, Lisa Higgins, Cathy Holdridge, Donna Ozga, Joanne Peluso, and Kathy Uschmann.

For more information about *Connecticut Student Writers* or Student Recognition Night, please visit <http://www.cwp.uconn.edu/csw.html>.

Nadine Keane teaches English at Griswold High School. She also coordinates the first CWP High School Writing Center.



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TC Wins PEN Discovery Award

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However, Joe thinks he's finally found his niche as a writer.

He happens to have received a mini-grant from CWP's Teacher as Researcher program, and he is studying the affect of choice on the reading attitude of his students. He's a believer in the effective use of creative writing in the classroom, and uses it to help his kids connect with the literature. So for now, Joe is happy at Bacon Academy where he teaches senior English and journalism. He leaves us with these final words of advice for aspiring writers: in the face of rejection, don't become discouraged. Just "dust yourself off and keep going."

Joe Anastasio graduated from UConn in 1987. He teaches English at Bacon Academy in Colchester.