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NCTE’s Peer-Reviewed Journals

Cutting-edge articles on core issues in literacy education

Language Arts
Peggy Albers, Caitlin McMunn Dooley, Amy Seely Flint, Teri Holbrook, and Laura May, Georgia State University

Voices from the Middle
Doug Fisher, Nancy Frey, and Diane Lapp, San Diego State University

English Journal
Julie Gorlewski, State University of New York at New Paltz, and David Gorlewski, D’Youville College

English Leadership Quarterly
Susan Groenke, University of Tennessee-Knoxville

Talking Points
Sally Brown, Georgia Southern University, and Deborah MacPhee, Illinois State University

Teaching English in the Two-Year College
Jeff Sommers, West Chester University

College Composition and Communication
Kathleen Blake Yancey, Florida State University

College English
Kelly Ritter, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Research in the Teaching of English
Ellen Cushman and Mary Juzwik, Michigan State University

English Education
Lisa Scherrl, Estero High School, Florida, and Leslie S. Rush, University of Wyoming

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For those who love to write, it seems unimaginable that anyone doesn’t love this process. But as teachers, we realize that writing is a difficult task for many students who, by middle school, are totally turned off by writing and don’t envision it as a form for their communication. Educators have wondered for decades how to design instruction that motivates students to write, and keep on writing. Current focus is directed toward teaching writing through real-world tasks that include writing concise formal and technical reports, letters, lists of deliveries, business emails, and memos. Although the purposes of these communications differ slightly—from offering information as a means of support, compiling and quantifying data, persuading teams to consolidate efforts, advertising as a means to invite, and providing evaluations—each must clearly convey the intended information to the intended audience.

These are just a few examples that indicate that writing in the real world of work relies on clear writing, which is, of course, synonymous with clear thinking. Each of these tasks indicates that a writer must have something to say, and then must know how to say it. The latter involves knowing your audience, identifying your tone and style, and determining the language register that will most precisely convey your message. Teachers who are preparing students as real-world writers are asking them to study an issue, take a stance, and present their grammatically correct thoughts, thus adopting a position and a voice. Such communications may be letters to the editor, blogs that move them outside the classroom to speak to real audiences, or thank-you notes, letters of apology, and text messages that offer a definitive invitation or explanation, such as contacting a landlord regarding late rent. The purpose of each piece of writing is to teach students that they must have a message, an audience, and the precision of language to convey the message. This is real-world writing.

The number of submissions we received for this issue made it obvious that educators are thinking about how to make real-world writers of every student. Initially reminded by Carol Jago that we chose teaching, not editing, as a profession, she advances tips that every teacher who has ever held a red pencil in hand should take to heart. One now supported by the CCSS is that writing instruction is in the job description of every teacher, regardless of content. As language arts teachers, we share your exahles as you realize that the responsibility of teaching students to write in every genre and content area must become a faculty commitment. Visions of classrooms filled with writers working and consulting with teachers who meet with them as individuals or in small groups refueled our long-held beliefs that with purposeful, differentiated instruction, students can be taught to write cohesively and well. Reminders that writers grow when teach-
ers offer feedback that identifies strengths first should invite us to lay aside our red pencils and instead saddle up for a chat that praises as well as pushes each writer forward.

Expanding a writer’s audience to include classmates who can act as consultative reviewers is a collaborative process endorsed by Shelley Stagg Peterson. She suggests that as students engage in writing tasks, they become more empathetic and understanding about the process of writing and also the efforts of the writer. These two insights, coupled with instruction preparing students as editors, promote the power to provide feedback to others and perceive one’s own writing more clearly. The specifics for empowering such partnerships among student writers are carefully detailed in her article.

The more language one has, the easier time one may have using it to express ideas crisply, whether orally or in writing. In many classrooms, this reality is played out daily through a lack of communication exhibited by students who do not have a thorough command of the English language and/or the language of the content of focus, or who don’t understand how to share their ideas within a frame of academic speaking or writing. Realizing that language expansion is the solution to an inability to communicate effectively, Jane Hansen and Kateri Thunder reconceptualized the concept of a writer’s workshop as a mathematics workshop. The workshop focus involved eighth graders reading, writing, talking, and conferring about mathematics in the languages of mathematics, English, and Spanish. Students’ perceptions of themselves as mathematicians were strengthened as a result.

Illustrating that when students are engaged in very explicit writing instruction, they can grow as writers, Lori Assaf and Jöel Johnson detail how mentor texts can be used as examples that help teachers guide students to an understanding of both the how and why of writing as they focus on author intent, voice, communication with an identified audience, and persuasive techniques. The seventh-grade teacher highlighted in this article held a fairly universal teaching concern, namely that students should not just recognize good writing but also become good writers who produce powerful real-world writing. Engaged in letter writing designed to persuade various audiences regarding topics they felt strongly about, the students created multimedia exhibitions that allowed their articulate voices to be heard.

Researching and studying a position is the foundation needed to present a cogent argument. Wolfram Verlaan, Evan Ortlieb, and Sue Verlaan note a strong connection between the first Common Core State Writing Standard, which addresses argumentative writing, and the first CCSS in reading, which addresses the purpose of close reading. Promoting the idea that one must read well to write an argument well, they document how teaching students to effectively question a text ensures that both of these standards are accomplished.

Introducing students to Aristotle’s triangle, Paula M. Carbone modeled persuasive techniques for them. Then, using topics of the day that ignited their passion, she taught them to make a compelling argument. She shares an explicit description of how this information was taught as well as several excellent references and resources. This information comes none too soon, since the CCSS calls for students to be able to write compelling arguments across the disciplines beginning in sixth grade.

We are reminded of the ever-broadening world of opportunities for writing instruction by Thomas DeVere Wolsey, who envisions with us a limitless writing environment made possible through the Internet. Adhering to the time-tested value of mentor texts, he encourages teachers to recognize how readily available such texts are now and what broad possibilities they present. He suggests that once mentors are selected, they should be closely studied to help students understand the nuances of writing, such as style, language, and voice. He also suggests that young authors revisit these same areas as they edit their own writing. He notes that success in teaching writing involves reading much and reading widely, talking about the texts being read, and then
applying what has been learned from reading in one's own writing.

We all love to read the 10 best this or that list. Making the most of high motivation for list reading, Denise N. Morgan, Leslie Benko, and Gayle Marek Hauptman turn it into learning by having students write lists of their top whatevers. With a large group of seventh graders, they designed a unit of study to teach students to read and write lists. They cleverly shared their work with these students through, of course, a list.

One theme threaded through these articles is that once students leave high school, they are seldom asked to write a story or a five-paragraph essay. While there may still be value in those assignments, teaching students to write well through real activities may better prepare them for their futures. We hope you enjoy these articles as much as we have. Let us know your thoughts.

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**Candidates Announced for Middle Level Section Elections; Watch for Your Ballot**

The Middle Level Section Nominating Committee has named the following candidates for Section offices in the NCTE spring elections:

For Members of the Middle Level Section Steering Committee (two to be elected; terms to expire in 2018): Margaret Hale, University of Texas, Houston; Jim Johnston, South Winsor, Connecticut; Christopher Lehman, Christopher Lehman Consulting, Bronx, New York; Laurie Sullivan, High Rock School, Needham, Massachusetts.

For Members of the Middle Level Section Nominating Committee (three to be elected; terms to expire in 2015): Judy Arzt, University of Saint Joseph, Connecticut; Katie Shephard Dredger, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia; Juliet Duggins, Mott Middle School, Bronx, New York; Lori Goodson, Kansas State University, Manhattan; Brian Horn, Illinois State University, Normal; NAME TO COME.

Members of the 2013–14 Middle Level Section Nominating Committee are Justin Stygles, Rowe Elementary School, Maine, chair; Elizabeth Dinkins, Bellarmine University, Louisville, Kentucky; and Laurie Henry, University of Kentucky, Lexington.