Dear Readers,

We are in the middle of crisis, actually compounding crises. We are experiencing events that arise suddenly, disrupting our lives and threatening the status quo, with long-term, harmful consequences on individuals and groups. First, the Covid pandemic turned our lives, economies, and classrooms upside down—and it is not over. Second, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is sending shockwaves throughout the globe. Third, for the first time in many years, inflation has become a clear and present danger. Fourth, at the end of May's Mental Health Month, a lone gunman walked into Riggs Elementary School, shooting and killing 19 children and 2 teachers, the tragedy overriding the irony.

Sadly, these do not include the personal crises present in so many of our lives. But in truth, it’s not a question of whether we will face crises, but rather how we will respond to them.

During these turbulent times, my temporary leadership as WP Director is coming to an end, and I find myself hopeful, very hopeful, because in crises, knowledge, understanding, and courage provide power, comfort, and determination: key ingredients for survival! These attributes are continually...

Welcome to the latest edition of WordPlay, the newsletter of the UCI Writing Project. This is a busy time of year, with graduations, weddings, retirements, and end-of-year festivities. I’d like to take a moment to send good wishes to two of our newsletter staff who are celebrating milestones this month. Laseanda Wesson’s son is graduating high school, and will be attending Pepperdine University as a freshman in the fall. Go Waves! Megan Grint is getting married very soon, and we wish her the very best for the future.

This month also marks the end of Catherine D’Aoust’s extended tenure as Interim Director of UCIWP. Those of us who know Catherine know that she will not be disappearing, but we hope that she may be able to have more time for rest and relaxation. I would like to thank Catherine at this time specifically for her support of this newsletter. She was the driving force behind the launch of WordPlay, in response to a suggestion made by the Advisory Board of the Writing Project, and she has continued to be our cheerleader and mainstay. We will miss you, Catherine, but I hope that we can count on some articles from you in the future.
demonstrated by our WP teachers and leaders. Let me recount some of the ways our community has responded to our challenging times:

- At our last Writing Project II meeting, 30 dedicated teachers attended to hear Trevor Hershberger talk about his doctoral dissertation on Grading/Ungrading. In May, teachers wanted to think about their practice for the coming year.
- We received 30 applications for the Summer Writing Institute. Tired teachers are willing to spend 4 summer weeks improving their practice.
- 90% of the 2021 Summer Institute Fellows participated in our Peer Partners’ Program. These partners met throughout the year to support one another in reading research and implementing new strategies. Most of these partners reported that they will continue to meet next school year.
- 60 teachers will provide literacy and/or math/science lessons to students at Hicks Elementary School, Tarbut V’Torah, or online, through our Summer Youth Program. Despite continued Covid issues and challenging school years, teachers have returned to teach in this important summer program.

Writing Project teachers believe in the power of today and the possibilities of tomorrow. We ground ourselves within a community of dedicated professionals and ride the crisis storms with support and strength from each other. We are bonded through beliefs in the importance of literacy, critical thinking, and care for others.

I am so proud to be part of this community and grateful for the continued support of our membership.

Sincerely,

Catherine D’Aoust
Director, UCI Writing Project

In this issue of WordPlay you will find a thought-provoking article from Trevor Hershberger about alternative grading practices. Trevor draws on his doctoral research, as well as on his own classroom practice, and this article will provide you much food for thought as you head into summer. More food for thought can be found in Allison Serceki’s article about the importance of focusing on the continued need to connect reading instruction and writing instruction. In our Spotlight on New Fellows you will meet one more of last summer’s new fellows, KC Garrett. We look forward to meeting this summer’s fellows in future issues.

In closing, I wish all of you a restful and restorative summer, and I strongly encourage you, if you have not already done so, to register for the WRITE Center’s summer webinar series, Writing for Restorative Healing, mentioned in the Upcoming Events column. As always, I encourage you all to submit articles, or ideas for articles. Please email me at eharring@uci.edu if you would like to contribute.

With all good wishes

Liz Harrington, Editor
eharring@uci.edu

The Reading-Writing Connection
by Allison Serceki

https://myemail.constantcontact.com/WordPlay--The-UCI-Writing-Project-s-Newsletter.html?oid=1134239284057&aid=rYQKePMx3N0
This past year many schools and districts grappled with the need to accelerate learning following the impact COVID had on the traditional sense of education. While often deemed acceleration and not intervention, many of the literacy initiatives implemented this past year were reminiscent of the literacy programs implemented following NCLB. This default to tried but not successful strategies is problematic when one considers that NCLB did not have the sweeping, positive impact as intended. Most significantly, NCLB practices negatively affected our most historically low-performing subgroups of students. History must inform educators and yet still ground our practice in research.

The reading-writing connection is one such body of research we can look to for ideas. Reading is often privileged among literacy components, yet reading and writing use similar cognitive processes and bolster each other. Therefore, we must not ignore the reciprocity of reading and writing instruction as we attempt to accelerate literacy.

Furthermore, as we think about our students’ social and emotional well-being, writing can be a crucial component in this work. They should not be mutually exclusive. Writing, at its core, is a way for each of us to express ourselves and should be an integral piece of any social-emotional work in which our students take part.

We can all agree that this past school year was like none other, and the lingering areas for growth among our students call for new approaches. For this reason, we need to think differently about how to support students long-term, and the reading-writing connection is one way we can make this work meaningful, personal, and more effective than our previous attempts.

Mark your Calendar

Upcoming events

The Write Center 2022 Summer Webinar Series
Writing for Restorative Healing: Strategies and Activities to (Re) Energize Educators and Students
July 6- Sonia Nieto and Alicia Lopez present "Teaching and Writing Through Trauma And Grief for Restorative Healing: Using the Personal to Inform Our Practice as Teachers"
July 13- Jerry Craft presents "Make the Books You Wish For: Why Youth Need Protagonists They Recognize"
July 20- Georgia Heard presents "Writing from the Heart: Tools to Heal and Restore"
July 27- Tracey Flores presents "Remedios: Stories from the Heart to Heal & Thrive"

Register here

Tuesday, June 28 - Thursday, June 30
Eastern Michigan WP SummerWorkshop: Teacher as Writer
7:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. PDT

Meeting
Participants will explore what it means to identify as a writer, the many ways in which people are already writers, how writing is a form of self-care, and how to balance personal and professional
writer identities. Each day will include sacred writing time and writing group time. We will also explore different types of writing to help participants better identify with their students and how and when to model writing for them. Whether you are working towards your teacher-consultant badge or just want to spend time writing with other writers, please join us! Register here.

**Thursday, June 30**  **NWP Write Now Studio** presents: Agents of Influence Teacher Game Day 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. PDT

On Teacher Game Day, we will be playing *Agents of Influence: Cyber Danger*, a spy-themed educational video game that teaches students how to recognize and combat the misinformation they encounter in their daily lives. Students learn about topics including data collection and tracking, algorithms, echo chambers, impostor content, logical fallacies, and data fallacies while practicing three critical thinking skills: research, document analysis, and conversations. Each participant who provides a review will then receive a one-year free license to *Agents of Influence: Cyber Danger* to use in their classroom along with support through the NWP Write Now Teacher Studio.

**Tuesdays, June 28-August 9**  **NWP Write Across America** 2:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m. PDT

The Write Across America Virtual Writing Marathon is an online summer writing experience that is open to anyone. Throughout the summer, local Writing Project sites around the United States provide inspiration, time to write, time to share, and a sense of community for all participants. Each stop on the itinerary will last 90 minutes and include an orientation by the local National Writing Project site to a place in their region or, perhaps, to a new conception of virtual space. It will provide inspiration, time to write, time to share, and a sense of community. Local stops will be facilitated by local teacher-leaders, and we welcome all kinds of writing and writers. Meetings will take place on Tuesdays 2:00-3:30pm PT / 3:00-4:30pm MT / 4:00-5:30pm CT / 5:00-6:30 ET

Itinerary:

June 28  Chippewa River Writing Project  
July 5  Southern Nevada Writing Project  
July 12  Northern Virginia Writing Project  
July 19  Morehead Writing Project  
July 26  Western Pennsylvania Writing Project  
Aug 2  South Coast Writing Project  
Aug 9  Oakland Writing Project  

[Register Here](#)

**Monday, June 20**  **NWP Event** #queercomposing: A Virtual Open Summer Institute Focused on Composing the Multiplicities of Our Experiences

8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. PDT

*Optional weekly check-ins: Tuesdays, 6/28, 7/12 & 7/19 at 1:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. PDT*

*Week 1: Monday, June 20-Thursday, June 23 --- 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. PDT*

*Week 2: Monday, July 25-Thursday, July 28 --- 8:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. PDT*

This summer, teachers are invited to join together with scholars, artists, and authors to strengthen our writing and multimodal composing practices in virtual, open institute co-sponsored by Chippewa River, Eastern, and Red Cedar Writing Project. This is an opportunity to begin or extend your engagement with NWP. $100 registration fee covers registration and digital materials.

**Friday, July 15-Saturday, July 16**  **NWP 2022 Midwest Conference of WritingProject Sites**  

[Zoom Or In-Person](#)
Join the Illinois Writing Project in Chicago on July 15-16 for 1 1/2 days of sharing ideas with fellow Writing Project educators. Our theme: Claiming Our Agency in the “New Normal” Where: Northeastern Illinois University Campus, Chicago. Featuring keynote speaker Dr. Tonya Perry, Director, Red Mountain Writing Project and Director of NCTE’s Cultivating New Voices Among Scholars of Color program and lead author, Teaching for Racial Equity: Becoming Interrupters. Click here for more information and to register.

Information compiled by Lynne Pantano

Reading Corner

Book Reviews

**Shatter Me** by Tahereh Mafi
A dystopian, romance book, *Shatter Me* is one you will love or hate. Predictable? Yes, in a good way that page-turning romances should. There is the girl that no one can touch (literally), the guy you want to love, the villain who you cannot help but love. Told like a journal or diary, this book shows the mental struggles of a heroine who is kept against her will. Once you are into this book, you will have a hard time putting it down.

A darling of BookTok, *Shatter Me* is a book that is taking TikTok by storm. If

**The Distance Between Us** by Reyna Grande
Reyna Grande. Big Queen. She was born in Mexico and raised by her grandparents since the age of 9, when her parents left and illegally immigrated to the U.S. to find work. Life for this young girl is hard, but somehow she is filled with the hope of being reunited with her family. Eventually, after immigrating illegally (and almost not making it), she finds herself in the el Otro Lado (the other world). Soon, all of the glitter and glam of being in the US wears off.

**Dad Bakes** by Katie Yamasaki
*Dad Bakes* is a book written and illustrated by internationally acclaimed muralist, Katie Yamasaki. With minimal, simple text the author tells the story of a day in the life of a papa and his daughter. Throughout the day papa bakes bread, first at work and then at home. Interwoven throughout this bread making, Katie Yamasaki beautifully relates the relationship between the father and his daughter through the illustrations. As I read the book the first time I did not understand the
Reyna realizes that life in America is far from perfect. This memoir has an adult version. Students will relate to the topic of unrealized expectations and overcoming obstacles. This is an approachable book by an author who has a passion and flair for a story arc.

Book Activity: After reading a chapter or two, have students write a short postcard from a perspective of a person to another person in the book. These can be assigned or self-selected; group or individual.

Allison Serceki

Illustrations leading up to the title page. However, once you read the Author’s Note at the end of the book, the purpose of this illustrated preface added another layer of significance to the story and offers rich discussion opportunities for older students.

Liz Taireh

Spotlight on Our New Fellows

KC Garrett
During my six years of teaching I have taught 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 6th grade, first in Newport-Mesa and now in Irvine. I currently teach 2nd grade in IUSD. I knew I wanted to focus my inquiry project on meeting the needs of this age group when it came to writing instruction and writing workshop. My goal for my students is that they enjoy writing and feel empowered to write independently with agency.

Our school uses the Lucy Calkins writing curriculum, so I decided to do my project on the first writing lesson we do: a small moment narrative. I had two big takeaways from my research and working with my coach.
My first takeaway was that I cannot just show the mentor texts and assume my students understand it. I need to make sure they understand the WHAT and WHY of the lesson and have enough time to process the skill I am teaching. My second takeaway was that I need to explicitly teach my students how they can utilize drawings to support their writing. My hope is that my students can use the skills I teach them during this first lesson and apply it in their future writing.

Opinion
A Better Way to Grade
by Trevor Hershberger

In 2020, my high school opted for a hybrid model of attendance for most of the year. Students could come to campus for in-person learning two days a week as part of a cohort, while another cohort learned online via Zoom. This was done in an effort to keep class sizes low enough to allow for 6-foot distancing in each classroom. Alternatively, students could opt to learn online only if they didn’t feel comfortable coming to campus at all.

One of my online-only students, Marie (a pseudonym), chose to learn from home for a different reason. Her mom worked long hours, and her family lived far from the high school. Without an easy way to get to school, and without an adult available in the morning or afternoon, she was responsible for walking her 9-year-old brother to and from his elementary school every day and for helping him with his school work before bedtime. She did her best to complete her own work, but her morning obligations to her brother meant that she often arrived 10-15 minutes late to our first-period English class.

Marie also became one of the participants in my dissertation research that year. My study’s purpose was to understand how my students experienced a class with standards-based grading. Standards-based grading is an approach that eschews the use of points and averaging to determine a class grade, and instead uses standards-based proficiency as the sole basis for a final grade. It means that factors such as late work/timeliness, effort, “extra credit,” or mere work completion can’t be considered in a grade. Instead, the teacher assesses students’ abilities throughout the semester, focusing on how well students are progressing toward proficiency with regard to a number of standards for that grade level and subject.

Read full article

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