

Title of Session: WriteTalk - Reflective Writing

Moderator: Sandra Shattuck

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BjB: Welcome, everyone, to tonight's Write Talk discussion

BjB: a couple of tips before we begin....

BjB: go to the ACTIONS menu in the top right of the chat window

BjB: and click on DETACH

BjB: and if Sandra shows any URLs, hold down the ctrl key as you click on the hyperlink

BjB: we usually start all discussions with introductions...

BjB: can you please tell us where you are located and what you teach or hope to teach?

BjB: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania

SandraS: I teach English/ literature in Alabama

MichaelRu: Michael Russo, Technology Integration Teacher, Williamsville NY (suburb of Buffalo)

CarmenL: I'm a Spanish instructor (community college) in California

SandraS: Welcome, Michael & Carmen.

SandraS: Nice to see you here.

SandraS: I usually start with a quick spiel about the National Writing Project

SandraS: <http://www.writingproject.org>

SandraS: because WriteTalk is affiliated with NWP

SandraS: National Writing Project (NWP)

SandraS: started a bit over 30 years ago at Berkeley

SandraS: as a professional development organization

SandraS: NWP has three tenets

SandraS: teachers teaching teachers

SandraS: teachers teach writing better if they improve their own writing

SandraS: writing is a methodology for learning across all disciplines

SandraS: NWP has 185 sites nationally

SandraS: all located at universities

SandraS: all serving predominantly k-12 teachers

SandraS: the main project of each site is a summer institute

SandraS: you can see if a site is near you by going to the website

SandraS: there's a map

SandraS: and the institute lasts about 4 weeks

SandraS: usually you can get a stipend

SandraS: I first did a summer institute in 2003

SandraS: and have found the NWP incredibly enriching

SandraS: ok, that's my NWP spiel

SandraS: any questions, comments before we go on?

MichaelRu: neat project

SandraS: it's really a fantastic resource

SandraS: federally and state funded

MichaelRu: so each state has a site?

SandraS: usually several

SandraS: Alabama has seven, for instance

MichaelRu: looking for NY...

SandraS: Did you find a site near you, Michael?

MichaelRu: aha - wny has one at the college not far away - Canisus College

SandraS: excellent

CarmenL: I'm impressed that Puerto Rico has a site. That's where I grew up!

SandraS: yes, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands

SandraS: another thing NWP really supports is teacher research and writing

SandraS: NWP believes that teachers are the experts for school reform

SandraS: and so they're keen to get folks to publish about our profession -- teaching

MichaelRu: make the teachers better writers = make students better writers

SandraS: exactly, Michael

MichaelRu: I like it - in my job I find if I make the teachers better technologists = makes students better technologists

SandraS: Writing Projects tend to be heavy on language arts folks, but for instance, we've got a math teacher and a science teacher this summer

SandraS: absolutely, Michael

SandraS: which is why each writing project site has a tech liaison

SandraS: there will be a retreat for tech liaisons this summer called Tech Matters

SandraS: NWP focuses a lot on technology

SandraS: which is why they now have a building here on Tapped In

SandraS: ok, so let's use Michael's statement about teachers writing better means students write better as a segue

SandraS: our topic tonight is reflective writing

SandraS: so let's start with this question: have you already done some kind of reflective writing about your teaching? and if so, what is it?

SandraS: maybe we should back up...what do you understand reflective writing to be?

CarmenL: I guess I have, when I've had to write self-evaluations for the tenure process, etc.... But other than that, I guess not a whole lot.

MichaelRu: do you mean formal writing (document) or informal (journal)?

SandraS: ok, self-evaluations are definitely a kind of reflective writing

SandraS: aha! good question, Michael

SandraS: I think both qualify

CarmenL: I haven't done any informal writing.

SandraS: ok, so Carmen, you've done formal reflective writing in the form of self-evaluations for tenure

SandraS: Michael, have you done both formal and informal?

MichaelRu: I ask because I do have an informal journal I keep that I put entries in when the time seems right - not much more than a few thoughts every few months.

SandraS: cool...we can talk about that...

SandraS: ok, formal reflective writing would be the kind of writing Carmen has mentioned

SandraS: also, teaching portfolios tend to emphasize a reflective letter

SandraS: or some kind of reflective document

SandraS: informal would be the kind of journal Michael has mentioned

SandraS: and something in between might be an online teaching journal that could be accessible to others besides the writer

SandraS: so, Michael, maybe you can talk about your journal? how did you start it and why? what form is it in? how has it worked for you?

MichaelRu: I started it as a result of a grad video class developed by Art Costa, Teaching Students to be Self-directed learners. One of the pieces was reflective writing on the part of the teacher.

SandraS: is it a hard copy journal? digital?

MichaelRu: good old fashioned notebook

MichaelRu: I actually have it in my briefcase all the time - falls out once in a while and I peruse it - fun to do

SandraS: what do you learn when you peruse it?

MichaelRu: not a heap of entries but it is a place to see "landmarks" of what I was thinking at various times

CarmenL: I like that metaphor.

MichaelRu: I tend to put big picture goals or thoughts, then look back to see if I got to what I wanted

MichaelRu: and I can't type as well as my brain moves...

SandraS: LOL

SandraS: totally relate

SandraS: ok, so Michael, you've just succinctly defined a function of reflective writing as self-assessment

SandraS: seeing what you've done, what you wanted to do, what went well, how you might change things later

SandraS: so that self-reflection can serve as a meta text of your teaching

SandraS: which is probably why it's important on teaching portfolios

SandraS: cuz it lets the reader know you're thinking about theory, practice

SandraS: Carmen, do you learn anything from the self-evaluations for tenure review?

CarmenL: Yes, I do. I actually spend a lot of time reflecting before I write those self-evaluations. It's nice to see it in paper.

CarmenL: I constantly reflect, and problem-solve in my mind, but never write it down.

SandraS: what would happen if you could do that kind of writing much more often and for a different audience (not the tenure review committee....)

BjB: problem solving becomes a lot more clear (or not) when you write it down

SandraS nods

SandraS: which takes us back to writing as a way to learn, think through

CarmenL: This discussion is making me think back a few years ago, when I taught a foreign language methodology class to secondary ed student teachers. I asked them to keep reflective journals of their teaching, and always found it fascinating to read their thoughts.

SandraS: what did you find fascinating? and how did the students react to keeping journals?

CarmenL: I was able to find out a lot of the issues that we're troubling them as well as the rewarding experiences they were having as beginning teachers.

CarmenL: I used the recurring issues in their journals as springboards for our group discussions.

SandraS: great! so it's interesting that you incorporate journals into your pedagogy but not necessarily for your own practice?

CarmenL: I think it worked well for them to see that others were going through the same rough roads. And it helped in celebrating their successes, too. For me, I don't have much time to write the things that I MUST write (lesson plans, etc....). Can't think of adding one more thing to write right now.

SandraS: ahhh....and now we come to it....time....

SandraS: the only way I've dealt with this is to use a blog and to write on it right after class

SandraS: I find if I sit for 5 minutes after class and type on the computer, I can usually get a good entry

MichaelRu: Somehow I sensed the word blog was on the way

SandraS: heh!

SandraS: ok, so let's put it on the table...what about blogging as a medium for teacher journaling?

SandraS: Carmen, have you blogged? do you need any clarification?

CarmenL: I need clarification, yes. I thought "blog" was a typo meant to be "log". Sorry....

SandraS: no problem

SandraS: Michael, you want to take this?

MichaelRu: I'll give it a crack...

SandraS listens

BjB . o O (There is a BlogStream Salon every Sunday in Bee Dieu's office)

MichaelRu: blog is short for web log - an online diary if you will

SandraS: Thanks BJ!

CarmenL: Gracias.

MichaelRu: entries can be made daily, weekly

MichaelRu: or whenever

MichaelRu: usually around a topic or theme

MichaelRu: at the writers (bloggers) discretion

MichaelRu: typically in reverse chronological order, most recent entry at the top

MichaelRu pauses and lets others add in

SandraS: Thanks, Michael!

SandraS: blogs basically function as a website

SandraS: but they're formatted precisely for periodic writing

SandraS: and also feedback

SandraS: readers can give comments

SandraS: and you can have multi-authors on one blog

SandraS: basically it's instant publication

SandraS: here's a link to a teaching journal blog I use in my world literature classes

SandraS: http://sdshattuck.blogspot.com/2004_10_01_sdshattuck_archive.html

SandraS: I've given you a page where I've got a posting on using a rubric for class essays

SandraS: if you scroll down to the second post on that link

SandraS: you'll see what I mean

SandraS: everybody have a chance to read?

MichaelRu: the comments are the best part

SandraS: totally!

SandraS: but what I found was that writing on my blog allowed me to speak to the students

SandraS: since they were my primary audience

SandraS: they therefore became more direct participants in revising the class

SandraS: rather than just getting input on an evaluation midway or at the end of the class

SandraS: I could get input at any moment

SandraS: and I also was able to make my process more visible to them

JackT joined the room.

SandraS: so, I noticed that reflecting on my own teaching with students as audience affected the ways I viewed the students

SandraS: Hi, Jack. Welcome to WriteTalk.

SandraS: And I was conscious that students might read my blog.

MichaelRu: a whole new dynamic...

SandraS: I have another blog where I've written other reflections on teaching that I don't want students to see.

SandraS: Yes. For me, blogging shifted my perception of students

JackT: hi, everyone.

SandraS: so that they really became writers

SandraS: Hi, Jack. Would you like to introduce yourself?

JackT: ok, I am a teacher in Taiwan teaching English.

SandraS: let's do another quick round of introductions...I teach English/literature in Alabama

JackT: I would like to learn more about reflective teaching.

MichaelRu: technology integration teacher in NY

BjB: art teacher in Pennsylvania

CarmenL: I teach Spanish in California. Just adding to what we said earlier... My experience is that students find it fascinating when they realize that lesson plans don't grow in trees and that teachers don't have everything figured out.

SandraS chuckles

MichaelRu: they don't

SandraS: to me, the process is fascinating, eh?

SandraS: Jack, we've been talking about using writing to reflect on our teaching practice

SandraS: we talked about more formal writing like self-evaluations done for the institution, and then about journals, and now we're talking about blogs

JackT: thanks, I will try to catch up with you.

MichaelRu: I started my first blog this year - not reflective on teacher in particular, but just about what goes on in my building with technology

MichaelRu: I could easily add the reflective part

SandraS: maybe you could answer a quick question...why do you want to be more reflective?

SandraS: cool, Michael

SandraS: that question was for Jack...

SandraS: Michael, how has writing the blog on the technology in your building affected your teaching, or work?

JackT: ok, reflective practice might prompt students to think more on their learning.

SandraS: absolutely, Jack

SandraS: I was reading an article about using reflective writing in the writing class

SandraS: and the author also discussed pitfalls

SandraS: one is that reflective writing takes time away from other kinds of writing

SandraS: but somehow, I think reflective writing is such an important part of the whole writing process

SandraS: that it's time well spent

SandraS: goes back to Carmen's comment about not enough time to keep a teaching journal

SandraS: ok, so one thing I do with my students is have them read each others' blogs and comments

SandraS: what would happen if we could read each others' teaching journals and comment?

SandraS: learn from each other

SandraS: who are your readers for your blog, Michael?

JackT: well, the idea behind this practice is the idea is good, but my students seem to be demotivated.

MichaelRu: ahem, well right now you are talking to him...

SandraS: heh!

MichaelRu: I feel I just found my voice in the blog in the last month

SandraS: would you be willing to give us your URL?

MichaelRu: and am ready to go live

MichaelRu: absolutely

SandraS: very cool

SandraS: I'll read and comment!

MichaelRu: <http://russo.teacherhosting.com/blog>

MichaelRu: voice is the key thing in a blog I've found

SandraS: are you using typepad?

MichaelRu: having an angle, or voice, makes blogs fly

MichaelRu: moveable type

BJB: Perhaps, before we end this session, you should have the participants join the WriteTalk group, Sandy

SandraS: Thanks, BJ!

SandraS: moveable type is wonderful

SandraS: ok, if you want to be members of this group

BJB: . o O (then you can discuss blogging using the discussion board)

SandraS: right, BJ!

SandraS: When I send out an email announcing the next WriteTalk, you also would get it as a member of the group

SandraS: if you want to join, here's how to do it

SandraS: go to the Search tab at the top of the screen

BJB: to join the WriteTalk group, click on the SEARCH tab in the top right of your screen

BJB: then click on the subtab GROUPS

BJB: enter WRITETALK

BJB: and press the find it button

SusanR joined the room.

SandraS waves to Susan

BJB: when you get a match, click on the group name next to the green i

SusanR slips in quietly

SusanR: hi

BjB: that will take you to the ID page for the group

BjB: at the top of the page is a place to join the group

BjB: once you join the group you can enter the group room and visit the resources that are there and post to the discussion board

SandraS: WriteTalk is meant to be an online writing group

SandraS: so if you have a blog, an article, a report you want others to read

SandraS: you can upload it to the WriteTalk room

SandraS: and let people know you want feedback

SandraS: we can talk about writing here or through the discussion

SandraS: Thanks to everyone for participating in this discussion.

JackT left the room.

SandraS: I'm going to go read Michael's blog and see if I can get some reflective writing done, too!

MichaelRu: that was a fast hour - thank you very much!

CarmenL: Thank you all for hosting this friendly discussion.

SandraS: Thank you!

CarmenL: I learned much!

SandraS: And thanks to BJ for her gracious and skilled hosting!

SandraS: Take care everyone

BjB hugs Sandy goodnight