

Renaissance of Teaching and Learning



Magic in the Process:

Writing and Reading to Teach and Learn

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The Renaissance of Teaching & Learning Booklet Series is a publication of the Coulter Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching & Learning at Western Carolina University. The Series is intended to stimulate and support both scholarly teaching and the scholarship of teaching & learning by drawing contemplative attention to various aspects of the methods, goals and visions of teaching and creating learning opportunities with students.

Through their experience and wisdom about learning, the writers in the Series want to open a continuous dialogue among colleagues about the always ancient, always new profession of teaching. If the Series acts as a catalyst for a new renaissance of teaching & learning at WCU, it will be serving its purpose.

Alan Altany, Editor

Renaissance of Teaching & Learning Booklet Series
and Director, Coulter Faculty Center

Magic in the Process: Writing and Reading to Teach and Learn

During Summer 2003, six faculty members from four academic departments focused as a team on “Teaching Reading and Writing” during Western Carolina University’s inaugural Summer Institute for Teaching and Learning. The topic, admittedly broad, was selected by faculty who wanted to do a better job getting better writing and reading from their students. In its oral report to the Institute, the team emphasized process (how writing and reading get done) and context (the actual environments of writing and reading).

In the subsequent academic year, team members re-structured course assignments with process and context in mind and paid attention for differences in learning outcomes. Members individually phoned, e-mailed, and lunched with each other at will to talk teaching. We also puzzled about how to meet the Institute’s requirement that we advance our work publicly during 2003-04. In fall’s final team discussion, one member declared that we hadn’t yet learned enough *ourselves* about this topic to go public. At once, we knew our next step: to continue *our* learning. Maybe then we would have something to share with others. Maybe not; we didn’t care. What we *did* care about was getting farther along in our teaching and learning. And we knew that writing and reading would be the way to do it.

We made three decisions. We would write collaborative collages, the genre in which we had written the first day as a Summer Institute Focus Team. Secondly, we would write weekly, sharing text through e-mail. Finally, we would write anything and any amount just so it was about writing or reading. In January 2004, each team member started a collage and forwarded it to the

next member (alphabetically) who added to it, forwarded it to the next writer, and so on. Each collage returned to its originator for a concluding comment. (One member had to leave WCU in Spring 04, so we have five collages.) At semester's end, we gathered at a team member's home for an oral reading of all collages. Nobody had read the completed quintet, and we were frankly excited and curious. What had we learned? What had we composed? The reading was enjoyable and thought-provoking, just as work in the Summer Institute had been. Once again, we had experienced the magic of the process. At evening's end, the team decided it now had something worth sharing with a larger audience—these collages, which thread together pieces of our continuing education. We hope readers enjoy them with a bit of their own thoughtful, playful reading.

COLLAGE BEGUN BY BILL:

Listening is at the heart of teaching writing and reading because learning to listen leads to good expression.

Eliza:

Well, when I read this sentence, my mind went in many different directions, but I guess the most important thought I had was that it's so wonderful when a person can learn to listen to himself or herself. And, when I say listen to herself, I mean really trying to understand and see what is there. For example, I try hard to know what I really want. I try to listen to myself and then act accordingly. Sometimes, I sit quietly with my eyes closed and listen for what is going on inside of me. How do I feel, what is going through my head, and what is bothering me? Who am I, really? What do I really want, what am I afraid of, what am I doing that is not so good for me? So, if I can learn to listen to myself, then I can express to others my true self—how I feel, what I want, what I believe.

How could we teach our students to listen to themselves? Are they old enough to do this? Are they mature enough? I didn't learn to listen to myself until my 30s. Should we teach them meditation or yoga or some other method? Should we just talk about the importance of listening to yourself? When you take a moment, breathe, get curious, and calm down, you listen and then you express.

John:

Moving from listening to curiosity would bring us full circle. Curiosity, after all, is the *sine qua non* of listening. Curiosity is also the *sine qua non* of reading. I find myself wanting to quote a line from an old Lawrence Ferlinghetti poem: "And I am continually awaiting a rebirth of wonder."

Katie:

I wonder if we shouldn't listen to what our students *aren't* saying. For instance, in class today, we had a lively discussion of the importance of sports in our culture and the impact of Title IX on women's participation in sports. I had one student in the back of the class, almost directly across from me, with one or two people between us. He obviously was following the conversation; he was even chuckling about some of the exchange going on. But, when I tried to get him to weigh in with what he was thinking, he refused, saying he was just waiting to see the fight! Why was he reluctant to speak? He was obviously engaged in the topic, but And why do some students never become involved with class discussions? What do their silences tell us?

Marsha Lee:

I listen to my six-year-old, first-grade niece tell me names of clouds. I listen to her mother's story about a Brownie meeting in which daughter answered questions about spiders that mom had no idea daughter knew. I watch my niece pick up children's books

on virtually any topic and read aloud full of voice about a king who lost his crown, Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," animals in Canada, a woman who lived in a shoe. I smile as she tells me, again, that she can read "chapter books" now.

I remember a few years ago in a university library watching a group of young students, around my niece's age, touring the facility. They craned their necks to see and hear; they touched row after row of books; they were hard to corral and get out of the building. I remember contrasting their enthusiasm to the more common lethargy of first-year college students on their library tours.

Six-year olds and eighteen-year-olds are vastly different in social and academic development. Nevertheless, I wonder what happened to all that curiosity, all that active listening in the dozen or so years between these "firsts." I can't help worrying that school is partly responsible for draining it out of them. I can't stop wishing that we would do something about it systemically, in addition to one course or student at a time. I can't stop hoping that my niece stays afire listening to and voicing her self as she listens to voices of others.

Bill:

Effective listening permeates good dialogue: when you are swallowed up in a soft chair reading your favorite book; writing hurriedly, with tongue in cheek, to an old friend; quietly saying grace before a meal; looking into the innocent eyes of a six-year-old, full of wonder and curiosity, intently listening to you; when you are conversing with a smiling student waiting for you to select the next writing assignment.

Imagine using four ears when you are really listening. The first one listens to what is being said; the second, to what they obviously aren't saying; the third, to what they are trying to tell you, but somehow can't find the right words to say; the fourth, to yourself, to your informed intuition, a hunch, that always chimes in to give new

insight. This listening is at the heart of teaching writing and reading because learning to listen leads to good expression.

COLLAGE BEGUN BY ELIZA:

I went to a party awhile back at Marsha Lee and Tom Baker's house and had this very important conversation with a new English professor at Western. His name is Tom. I went up to him and said, "You know, my students tell me that I tell them the exact opposite of what their English professors are telling them." Tom said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, I tell them when they write a paper to include a thesis statement and a road map (an overview) in their introduction. I tell them to discuss one main idea in each paragraph with supporting evidence, and then I tell them to give me a conclusion, which is not a summary. A conclusion should pose a new question—something new to think about." Tom told me, "Eliza, let all of that go." Let it go! Apparently, I am living in the dark ages, and nobody writes papers anymore in this boring five-paragraph style. Too structured. I need to just let my students get their thoughts out. Let them be free and put their words down on paper, and then we can worry later about technicalities.

Sure, I can circle grammar errors, but I should not correct them for the students. Eventually, by the end of the paper, I should know what its purpose is, but I don't have to have them spell it out in the introduction. The paper should have an internal logic to it. Let it go. Don't be so anal retentive. Tom told me to ask my students how they want to write papers. I need to give up some of my power and listen to them. So, I told my students about this conversation, and they grinned. We talked, and now I have changed my requirements. Now I'm telling my students to just write about what moved them. I know there is a place for structure,

but I was too hung up on this old guard way of thinking. So, I am so glad I had that conversation with Tom at a party.

It's amazing how many things I learn about my work at parties or just from casual conversations that are outside of the work world. I learn in the context of relationships. When I know someone and like that person, I listen to what that person has to say, and then I learn. So, it makes sense to me that I learned this important idea from a friend at a party, and it was a very important lesson for me in terms of how I teach writing in my classes.

Bill:

Addressing the nature of Eliza's experience, I have often felt that the process itself speaks, and the concept under consideration has become alive and seizes the moment as an opportunity to grow. Thoughts almost uncannily hit on something you have been thinking about without realizing it. They help you see something in a different way. "Listen to your life. All moments are key moments" (Frederick Buechner). I tend to link these moments to an attitude of expectancy: if you are looking for an idea and expect to find it, you will.

Commenting on the substance of Eliza's experience, I have just finished reading a book on inquiry-based teaching (*Teaching with Your Mouth Shut* by Donald L. Finkel). The key concept for me was allowing student interest and inquiry to dictate the course design after the teacher has organized the inquiry. This results in a very fluid approach with enthusiastic student participation. The plan was set up by the teacher but executed by the students, not by the teacher "telling them what to do." The teacher has accomplished her purpose by staying silent in the classroom.

John:

There are so many reasons for writing! The students Eliza is freeing from the straitjacket of structure will enjoy writing for self-discovery, perhaps, or writing in order to feel good about themselves.

But my anal-retentive side rises up in protest because my own bias insists that writers should write not for themselves but for their readers. It is, after all, a basic tenet of journalism, the model of the writer (reporter) as messenger. The purpose of writing in this model is to inform, to communicate content, and we all know that it is easier to assimilate content when its structure matches our expectations.

I ask my students to have an imaginary reader in mind as they write, and to consciously craft their writing in order to appeal to that reader's sensibilities. Some of them choose friends or family members. The prototypical newsroom invention is Joe Sixpack, someone who has just come home from work tired and hungry at the end of the day, who has popped the top of a can of brew and picked up the newspaper to see what's going on. What does that person need to know about your story? How can you make it come alive for him? What questions will he have for you?

Then I expand about answering questions. I tell students about my own imaginary reader, a small person who sits on my left shoulder as I write, reading my copy and asking me questions about it. I listen to those questions, and I try to answer them in the order in which they are raised. I literally rearrange the details of my story to provide answers when they are sought because otherwise my story will not meet the needs and expectations of my reader. What *I* want to say, the things *I* think are important about the story, become subservient to the needs and expectations of my reader.

So, if my reader is best served by a five-paragraph treatment with a clear purpose statement in the first paragraph, I do that person a disservice if I deliver a navel-gazing, stream-of-conscious stew, the purpose of which might be inferred by the end. But why would anyone ever read to the end of a piece that doesn't serve

his or her needs? My audience-centered, market-driven model compels me to listen as much as I talk, and to consider the needs of the audience above my own needs. I'm pretty much stuck with this model because it seems to work for me.

And that's what I plan to tell Eliza the next time I see her at a party.

Katie:

Gee, I miss all the good parties! The only parties I go to have twelve-year-olds playing "air band." Oh well, at least I get to embarrass Brianne when I join in!

I have to admit that I tend to be like John. My contention is that writing is meant to be read, and if a reader can't follow along, then the writing has NOT done its job. I always tell my composition students that if they have the most brilliant thoughts the world has ever seen/heard but are unable to articulate those thoughts in such a manner that others can understand, then such brilliance is wasted.

There is a place for creativity, and I believe that even in a tight structure there can be creativity. Just because you are asked to write in a certain format, doesn't mean that you can not "play" with the writing. For instance, when I was in the seventh grade, I was required to write an essay that explained how the digestive system broke down food for the body's use. Dry, technical, and boring! But, I had the bright idea of writing it from the food's perspective. So I became Joe Pea and described all the changes that I went through as I went through the digestive system. It made the whole assignment seem less boring.

I believe that until students master the basics—structure, grammar, mechanics— they need to have them reinforced. Once they master the basics, then they are able to rearrange form.

Eliza:

Well, when I am learning how to teach reading and writing to my students, it's important that I remain open to feedback from both my students and my colleagues. I must listen and hear what they are saying to me.

COLLAGE BEGUN BY JOHN:

Questions, questions, questions

Students in my feature writing class often have trouble, first, choosing a topic, and second, narrowing it appropriately. Over the years, I've tried a number of approaches to these problems without much success. In this, the last semester I will teach this course, I have adopted a "questionable" approach. For the first two weeks of class, we've been reading feature stories and trying to view them as answers to questions. As an example, the story that ran in the travel section of Sunday's *New York Times* under the headline "Comfort Food at Comforting Prices in Paris" can be seen as an answer to the question, "Where can I get a good, cheap meal in Paris?" Today's story headlined "Forget Radio, Musical Path to Success Is TV, TV, TV" answers the question, "What's the best way for a recording artist to increase his or her record sales?" Now that it's time for the students to choose a topic for their first story, I asked them to give me a piece of paper with their topic written on it. Nine of the fifteen papers came to me in the form of questions, suggesting that the students got the concept and will be answering those questions in their stories. Now I'll have to question the other six students to see where I went wrong.

Katie:

Seekers . . .

I like the idea that writing comes from questions. One of the books I've skimmed and want to read in more depth is titled *Inquiry Into Genre*. I've often taught questions as a good way to begin a piece of writing, as it creates a need to know in a reader. Perhaps it can also create a need to know in the writer as well.

We're getting ready to begin our first topics . . . freedom of speech. I'm going to stress that freedom of speech encompasses many subtopics that can yield effective essays. In the past this has been difficult, to say the least. Most students want to focus on freedom of speech as a right. And that tends to become too vague for effective discourse. Censorship as a topic is starting to become trite. But at least it is more focused

Marsha Lee:

Questions—I'm trying to think of a time when I didn't ask questions. It's so much a part of who I am that I get on people's nerves asking them all the time. I can have an entire conversation and ask nothing but questions. I think people rude when they don't ask questions of the people with whom they're talking. Now, turning to the academic scene, I'm trying to think why I would research something, "look something up," if I hadn't been prompted by a question, even subconsciously. So, I help my students ask questions that they genuinely want to answer, so they then genuinely seek info that will help them answer it. They discover intrinsic reasons to research and write. In living-breathing inquiry, we don't start with "topic sentences"; we start with questions.

Eliza:

It's funny. A friend of a friend gave me the nickname "*Que*," which means "what" in French, because I ask so many questions. I notice that when I talk to people, I ask many questions, and when I teach I ask many questions. I wonder if teachers or college professors ask more questions than people in other professions?

Perhaps we are drawn to teaching and the university life so that we can answer our questions.

When I teach my classes, I notice that I ask many questions. I never just lecture. I always present information in a conversational format so that the students are participating right alongside me. It's a give and take, and I always throw out questions for them to think about in the middle of our discussions. At the end of their weekly reading logs, I ask my students to list three questions they have about the reading, and then the next time we meet in class I start off by asking them to pair up and discuss their questions. So, questions, questions, questions are everywhere!

Bill:

The most creative and unexpected answers often come from the questions I ask myself. Not those I ask myself to find the right road when I am hopelessly lost in a new area and determined to find my way, but those which challenge my informed intuition to go on a "seek and find" mission down in my inner computer, and to send up an answer at 9AM tomorrow or day after tomorrow. Sometimes, while I am waiting, I will store up new data through a variety of reading or "wooling" the subject around with a good listener. Other times a long walk in the woods, hitting golf balls, mowing the grass, weeding the vegetable garden, or grilling a tasty chicken seem to occupy my censoring instincts sufficiently to allow the creative thoughts to flow more freely. But I don't rush the process. I wait until 9AM. An answer will be there!

John:

I'm bowled over by the importance each of the contributors to this collage place on questions. We're all good writers, and we all ask questions. I can't resist offering the following syllogism, riddled though it may be with logical fallacy:

The contributors to this collage are people who ask questions.

The contributors to this collage tend to be good writers.

Therefore, people who ask questions tend to be good writers.

COLLAGE BEGUN BY KATIE:

One of the things I've been/am struggling with in my freshman courses is incorporating the reading component. I have come to believe that reading is the key to education and of paramount importance for writing. How do I get students to read more analytically? For years, I didn't realize that this was a problem. I was a good reader, even as a freshman, so they must be! But they are not.

This semester, I am trying, once again, journals. But I still have not decided whether to choose their articles, so I know that they have a good "mix," or to let them choose their own. I am flirting with the idea of giving them prompts, but should I just let the writing take shape on its own? Ambiguity may kill me

Marsha Lee:

In graduate school, I moaned with fellow TAs about the overwhelming load of learning outcomes expected of a first-year composition course. How could we teach writing *and* reading???. My major professor persistently espoused the theory that reading and writing are best taught together (and maybe can't truly be taught separately). Now, the longer I teach, the more I realize that she was absolutely right, and that teaching them together is, in fact, crucial for meeting learning outcomes on either side of the same coin. I mean, my students and I cannot become better writers if we do not become better readers, and vice versa. Maybe "both-and" is the

answer for everything . . . learn *both* writing *and* reading; assign *both* prompted *and* un-prompted thinking

Bill:

Because writing and reading are so intertwined, perhaps both can benefit from a good strong dose of mechanics. Similar to learning a foreign language—we study grammar and verb conjugation only to “forget” them when we seek the fluidity of speech. But we had to learn a few mechanics first, learn them so well that they would always repeat naturally under pressure.

Eliza:

I too believe that reading and writing go together. You must do both to get better at either. To me, being an early childhood person, it's so important to instill that love of reading at a young age. If you learn to love reading as a child, then you will carry it through the rest of your life. So, then, I believe it comes from parents. If as a child you see a parent reading, then you will be more likely to read. I remember getting lost in certain books when I was a kid: *The Black Stallion*, *Caddie Woodlawn*, *The Pink Motel*. I can remember how much fun it was to get immersed in those books and actually see myself in them. As college instructors, we need to assign interesting literature. I had a great college professor who told me that it's ok to read fiction even in non-English courses. So, I've started assigning books such as *Beloved* and *Bastard Out of Carolina*. I once heard an interview with a book critic who said that she had a special couch made for reading. I need one of these couches because I don't have a comfortable chair in my house for reading. I'm always moving around trying to get comfortable. So, part of it is finding a place that you like to read. Then you will read!

John:

If reading and writing *are* opposite sides of the same coin, then maybe the reason my students have trouble writing a coherent sentence is that they don't read very well. It could be that students with a writing deficiency also have difficulty reading, and vice versa. (There's a good study in here for a social scientist, looking for correlations between reading proficiency and writing ability.) It's clear to me that, given our television-driven, two-paycheck-family, internet society, many of my students were never read to as infants, never got lost in a book when they were kids, and don't much like reading as adults. (Remember that you like the things you're good at...) What *isn't* clear is just what I can do about it at this point in their lives.

Katie:

It would seem that we are pretty united in that we believe that reading and writing are essentials. It would also seem that we feel universal frustration about being able to do anything about it at this point in time. It would seem that we recognize the need for an opportunity to share ideas with each other that would aid in getting students to read.

COLLAGE BEGUN BY MARSHA LEE:

Reconstructed quotes from a group of faculty recently talking about their research:

"I think it's probably the best thing I've written." (pause) "And I think it's good because I was so interested in it."

"I know what you mean I just won't work anymore on something I'm not really interested in. Luckily I've been around long enough that I can do that."

“I’ve abandoned at least two research projects that, at the time, I thought—and thers advised—were ‘smart’ or ‘efficient’ choices likely to lead to publication. I just wouldn’t (or couldn’t) force myself to give time and energy to issues that I wasn’t deeply concerned about.”

Reconstructed quotes from a group of students talking about their writing in school:

“I like to write about things that interest me.”

“I always write better when I’m interested in my topic. I can’t write at all if I’m not interested.”

“I hate it when the teacher assigns the topic.”

Who likes to write about things that *don’t* interest them? Not my colleagues! Not my students! Not me! Then *why* is so much hated writing being produced in school? *Must* teachers require writing that students hate to write (and we hate to read)? Well, we can’t just let them write on *anything*, can we? No, but we *can* help them figure out ways to *get* interested. We *can* ask for writing that we wouldn’t be bored doing.

Bill:

Marsha asks a key question, “Must teachers require writing that students hate to write (and we hate to read)?” How can we help students figure out ways to “get interested,” sufficiently interested, in a subject to want to write about it? One approach is to make available a variety of books from which the students choose one or more chapters on which to write one page, double-spaced. The objective is not how well they summarize what they have read, but how well they interpret and make applicable those points, the great ideas, *that most interest them*. Reading that is, to some extent, chosen by the students may propel them to

interesting writing, and this in turn may help clarify focused thinking, which pulls, not pushes, them to a new awareness. When this happens, students have been caught by the process. They love learning. Let's hope that the teacher will then have some interesting papers to read.

Eliza:

I have struggled my whole academic career with publishing and I believe it is because, one, I don't believe in myself as a publishable writer, and two, I don't pick things to write about that interest me. Why not? The time has come for a change. Perhaps I need to calm down and take time to find out what I'm interested in. I know what kinds of books I like to read, and I really do know what kinds of things I like to write about. As you can see, I don't always use correct grammar, but I do like writing stories. Especially about people. And I like to read and write dialogue. I don't like sentimental stories so much as I like stories with colorful characters who are usually in a bind and somehow find their way out of the bind. There has to be a conflict, right? And my life is full of conflict, so you would think that there would be lots of things for me to write about. And we are supposed to write what we know. Write about your childhood. Write about your family. Write about your home. Write what you know.

Do I need to take a class in writing? Do you know, I actually took a class in creative writing with Robert Morgan when I was a college student? Can you believe I had him as an instructor? Looking back, that class was the best thing I ever took as an undergraduate. I had three hours left for my degree, and I had to stay for the summer after all my friends had graduated in May. It just so happened that I had found a new boyfriend from New Orleans, and he came up and stayed for a few weeks with me in Ithaca while I took this class. A friend of mine let us stay in his parents' farm house. We had no car, so we rode our bikes the few miles between the house and

campus. One day Ian set out on the bike to the grocery store, and I'll never forget the image of him on his bike coming back toward the house with grocery bags falling all around him. It was like we were pioneers stranded out in the wilderness. And I was using a typewriter to write my assignments for Robert Morgan. He would give us different kinds of things to write about, and my favorite was describing a scene I had seen in New Orleans. I was at a seafood restaurant, which was really a shack on Lake Pontchartrain, and a thunderstorm was coming on. Ian and I were sitting on the porch watching the sky get black and feeling the wind pick up. Then two black women, who were cooks there, came to the screen door that opened up onto the shell gravel parking lot that led to the lake. They had their eyes fixed on a large turtle that was making his way back to the water. One of them said, "Hum, he sure would make a good gumbo." For some reason, that image has stayed with me for a long time. Those two women staring at the turtle with the storm coming on, and now that I think about it, I was just about to get on a plane to head back to Ithaca by myself. I wanted Ian to come with me, but he wasn't. Not sure why now. But, the whole point is I like reading about black women looking at turtles.

John:

I can't remember ever reading anything about black women looking at turtles. But I'm certain that such a story could be made absolutely compelling. For that to happen, it would be essential for the writer to be very, very interested in the subject. I don't think the writer would have to know anything about it, at least not in the beginning.

I want to make the distinction Eliza hints at in her opening paragraph, between writing about things you're interested in and writing about things you know. One problem with student writers is that they too often ignore the first piece of advice and follow the

second. Their writing suffers because they're too young to know about much. Their submissions are full of stories about sorority rush, or the problem of finding a parking place on campus.

What if, instead, we turned them loose to find something that interested them, something they know absolutely nothing about, and said, "Go do some research and find out about this fascinating thing. Then come back and tell me all about it, in writing, and in such a way that you make me fascinated, too."

This dual research/writing assignment is the ultimate across-the-curriculum, across-the-professions concept, and it works equally well in the business world. It also breeds curiosity, a most desirable characteristic, and provides an answer to the age-old question, "What are you going to do with a degree in English?" (Answer: "I'm going to learn about fascinating things and explain them to people.")

I recently read an interview with Laura Hillenbrand, the author of *Seabiscuit*, who overcame debilitating bouts of chronic fatigue syndrome to produce the best seller. She was asked if she planned to write her next book about her illness. (Write about something you know?) No, she said, focusing on the illness would be too depressing to contemplate. Then what *would* she write about? "I don't know," she said. "I'll just go where the stories are."

Let's send our students where the stories are.

Katie:

John, I love your idea! A lot of things fascinate me, even though I know nothing about them . . . extreme sports, local celebrities, area history. I like to do this with the profile essay that I require in English 101, and I encourage it for the required essay in 207. Isn't this what we do when we write? The last paper I presented started out as an idea that I had when reading basketball stories. I was struck with the similarity of the importance placed on basketball in the writings of Sherman Alexie and John Edgar Wideman. Two men from very different backgrounds: a reservation and a city ghetto.

So, the research that I did wasn't onerous at all. I was intrigued by my topic and naturally wanted to know more. I try to get that excitement across to my students, but I think that I have failed more often than not.

Marsha Lee:

Let's go with our students to find out where the stories are and bring them back or take them somewhere else (works in any discipline at any level).

Let's

- ♦ notice what interests us and what we know about what interests us
- ♦ identify what *more* we'd like to know about things that interest us
- ♦ find more out
- ♦ figure out what we make of what we found out
- ♦ communicate it to someone else who might want or need to know
- ♦ communicate it in a way that works for both us and them so that we "come together" in the stories

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The "Reading and Writing" team predicts that readers of these collages will have noticed some of their own needs and interests as writers, readers, teachers, learners. To investigate those needs and interests (or any other topic of inquiry), we recommend collaborative collage writing. As a group of low-techies, we also attest to e-mail as an electronic environment conducive to the process. Finally, we unequivocally advocate the Summer Institute for Teaching and Learning.

***Please contact any or all of the authors
with your responses and comments.***

Another way to participate in a campus-wide conversation about teaching and learning is to request to be subscribed to the TEACHING listserv by contacting the Faculty Center (7196).

Authors

(Photo by Sara McGraw)



(left to right:)

Eliza Dean is an assistant professor of birth-kindergarten at WCU. She is interested in the issues of teacher-child attachment, wilderness education for young children, and critical thinking. When she is not teaching in the classroom, she enjoys listening to live music, dancing, and reading.

William H. McClendon, “Bill,” a retired lawyer, was educated at Westminster School, Simsbury, Connecticut; The Leys, Cambridge, England; and Tulane University, New Orleans, where he received a B.A. in History and his L.L.B. A professor-adjunct at the LSU Law Center since 1983, and at The University of Tennessee College of Law since 2003, he presently instructs classes at Western Carolina University, entitled “Negotiations: Strategy and Professionalism.”

Katherine Cipriano, an avid reader her entire life, continues to explore the relationship between reading and writing and teaching. Her eclectic interests include everything from sports to the Arthurian legends, and her life revolves around one husband, three children, and two dogs (thankfully, the snake died!).

Marsha Lee Baker, a lover of language, was born talking and figures that conversation is the eventual way to (or of) world peace. She teaches rhetoric, composition, and literature in the English Department, where she also directs the First-Year Composition Program. Her scholarship is centered in peacemaking. She loves gardening, dancing, shopping, and (most of all) life with Tom.

John Slater has woven together a 31-year career as both a public relations practitioner and a teacher of writing and editing for the media. The activities are not very different, he has concluded, since both rely on audience-centered communication. Slater spent nine of those years in Western’s Office of Public Information and ten as a full-time member of the faculty. He retired in 2004.