

BLACKWATER REFLECTIONS



Blackwater Writing Project
Dept. of English, Valdosta State University
1500 N. Patterson St. Valdosta, GA 31698

Feature Article – Diana Chartier

Setting Down an Unlikely Bookend –
Diana Chartier’s Path to the Classroom
Shane Wilson, Valdosta State University

I was a part of the Blackwater family for a little while before I met the mastermind behind the quarterly newsletter. I, like all of you, would admire her work every three months in .pdf format, but I never really knew the woman behind the puzzle-working.

British-born Diana Chartier has travelled an interesting road into the classroom. While in England, she was discouraged by her teachers. “You’re just not a great writer,” they would say. “The best you can hope for is marriage and kids.” And nearly thirty years of marriage and three sons later, it seems Diana took the advice her teachers so generously provided. But, as these things usually turn out, Diana had not been completely convinced that her place was *not* in the classroom.

While her youngest son, Robert, was in the second grade, Diana started to volunteer at the school. She was even allowed to sit in on meetings (unofficially) and take part in other official business, which allowed her to build bridges between herself and the teachers she volunteered with. It was this group of teachers that convinced Diana that she *did* have what it took to be a teacher. Diana decided to pursue her BS in Education—a degree that she completed in December of 2005.

She began teaching fourth grade at Quitman Elementary in 2006. Diana still holds this position, in fact, proving that she had and still does have what it takes to be in the writing classroom. Her career serves as an interesting bookend to the writing “advice” provided by the educators from her childhood.

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Member Updates

Mattie Marie Butts (1997 Fellow) graduated with an EdD in Educational Leadership from Valdosta State University in May 2008. She currently works in the Lanier County School System as the Pyramid of Inventions Specialist and Parent Involvement Coordinator.

Judy Martin (1995 Fellow) has learned that a Letter to the Next President written by one of her students, Myron Grant, has been selected for publication by The College Board and NWP. For more information on Letters to the Next President, go to the NWP webpage (www.nwp.org).

Send us your news and updates!

If you would like to write a feature, please contact Diana Chartier.

BWP 2009: Can You Handle It?
Donna N. Sewell, Valdosta State University

Lindsy Elliott, Rebecca Elmore, and I reviewed notes from the 2008 Invitational Summer Institute and decided to plan the 2009 ISI from scratch. Instead of removing readings from the list and adding a few more, we started over. Rebecca Elmore had recently prepared a teaching demonstration based on ideas from Kelly Gallagher's *Teaching Adolescent Writers*. She raved about this book, and when we skimmed the book, we agreed. Rather than a collection of unrelated articles, we chose Anne Lamott's *Bird by Bird* and Gallagher's text, which we supplemented with all-new articles.

In addition to the readings, we debated every assignment: memoir, poem, teaching story, grant, legislative letter, administrative memo and annotated bibliography, E-Anthology posts and responses, tri-fold display board, and reflective letter. Some assignments, such as the legislative letter and grant application, we simplified. The legislative letter will become a legislative email that focuses on one way students benefit from their teachers' participation in the ISI. We are limiting the grants to Dollar General or Valdosta Jr. Service League unless someone is an accomplished grant writer. The teaching story we eliminated altogether, deciding that it didn't meet the goals we originally envisioned of moving teachers closer to thinking reflectively about their teaching practices. Instead, it became another good story, creative writing rather than an investigation of teaching. That story can serve its own purpose, but we are going to take a break from it, asking people to write two memoirs and two poems and to choose one of each to revise and publish.

Another increased requirement involves responding. After the first week, participants will respond to six E-Anthology posts rather than three. The extra three responses will be to the work of BWP Fellows who aren't in their creative writing groups. We want participants to have a sense of what is happening outside of their own groups. We want to use responding to build community. In addition, participants are required to post once a week to the blog and to respond to two posts a week on the blog. This requirement encourages interaction on the blog and may help participants feel more comfortable joining us for Write Night once the Invitational Summer Institute ends.

There are no major changes to the annotated bibliography and administrative memo, except that MLA will be the style used since it is an English class. That may mean providing a quick overview for non-language arts teachers. Also, we realized that outside of professional writing groups, people don't know what other people are researching. In order to share the knowledge that is created, the last week of the ISI will feature short oral presentations so that everyone will benefit.

One new assignment involves teaching strategies. These strategies will be different from the ones used in the teaching demonstrations. We envision them as recipes for short writing activities—activities that will help teachers use writing in engaging ways. Also, they will be an excellent resource for teachers to take with them back to the classroom.

Book Review

An exciting addition to our newsletters is the addition of member-submitted book reviews. Do you have a favorite professional book you would like to see included? Submit reviews through [Donna Sewell](#) or [Diana Chartier](#)

Cindy Kay Plumly, Valdosta High School

Scarborough, Harriet A., ed. Writing Across the Curriculum in Secondary Classrooms: Teaching from a Diverse Perspective. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2001.

This book highlights a collaborative effort between several high school teachers at different high schools who were disappointed in the textbooks that were available to them regarding writing. With 211 pages divided into fourteen chapters, this book is a relatively short read. A different teacher with experience in the particular field authors each section. Suggestions and/or examples of ways to use writing effectively in that discipline are given. Specific areas include science, math, law-related English, political science, foreign language, and American literature. Multicultural considerations abound in every chapter as do samples of actual student work. Reading the student work samples is enjoyable because not only are writing ideas introduced, but readers are shown how the ideas were effectively used. Each chapter ends with extension activities to give the teacher even more in-depth writing ideas.

Chapter one is eye-catching because it is entitled “Promoting Literacy in Science Class.” The author recommends journals to promote writing in science. Students receive prompts that can vary from content oriented to personal reflection. Collaborative writing is also recommended although it can prove difficult to implement at times.

Chapter two discusses combining math and science. This chapter stresses the difference between “writing to learn” and “writing across the curriculum.” “Writing across the curriculum” is geared toward improving writing quality while “writing to learn” focuses on learning content (Hall 17). Educators are reminded that too much time is spent requiring our students to simply memorize and regurgitate facts. “Writing to learn” moves away from memorization and towards improving critical thinking ability.

Gabalton states in chapter five that an effective writing-to-learn classroom adheres to four basic principles:

1. The teacher creates an atmosphere of trust. Students write best when they write honestly and openly.
2. The teacher uses the knowledge base that the students bring into the school and then builds on that base.
3. The teacher thematically connects the writing and reading, focusing on contemporary multicultural literature.
4. The teacher inspires students to take responsibility for their own learning. (63)

Some of the described activities in chapter twelve are learning-focused in that they promote collaborative work as well as writing. One activity mentioned is called “think-pair-share.” This is a modifiable activity in which students individually respond to a prompt or question. They are then paired and share their answers with their partner. By attempting open-ended problems or questions, students are pushed into using higher-order thinking skills.

Stoking the Flame: NWP from an Administrator's Perspective

By Adam Hathaway

Donna Sewell contacted me a few months ago and asked if I would be willing to write an article about how the National Writing Project has impacted me as an administrator. I have thought about it every day for the last two months, it seems like, and have finally come to this conclusion: The Writing Project IS the reason I will be fired from administration!

"I'll fix your school for \$5,000 less than anything she offers," I said, pointing in the direction of the lady from RESA, "because what is written in that document is as worthless as any program!" Let's Tarantino this if you don't mind.

I was recently asked to meet with some of the administrative staff of another high school to discuss how and why our Pyramid of Interventions was working so well. At the end of first semester, our school only had thirty-one Fs in the entire building. White County High School has roughly nine hundred students grades ten-twelve, so this equates to around a one percent failure rate. The numbers were amazing, but did not shock me nearly as much as they did others. The meeting was to be held at our system's curriculum office and was going to be led by a RESA representative and our assistant superintendent. I asked my principal several times about what I should say, and, to his credit, he simply told me to tell them the truth. For those of you that know me, you realize how disastrous this could be because you know I like to see the look on people's faces as they hear what I have to say on controversial topics. I enjoy the discussion.

Now, I'm not sure how some people feel or think about these kinds of meetings, but I always enjoy them. It gives me an opportunity to do exactly what I did, which was test my boundaries. The meeting started off like almost any other administrative meeting. Pleasantries were exchanged, and we then engaged in the talk. You know the one I am referring to. The one that tries to diagnose and explain and is always centered around "the program" that will be the magic fix. Oddly enough, I kept my mouth shut as everyone talked, and I secretly prayed they would not ask me any questions because I was afraid of what I was going to say.

"I'll fix your school for \$5,000 less than anything she offers," I said, pointing in the direction of the lady from RESA, "because what is written in that document is as worthless as any program!" That's what I said. I wanted to take it back as soon as it spilled out onto the table. It was too late. I wish everyone could have seen the look on their faces as I then tried to soften what I had just blurted by giving them Adam's signature apology: "I mean, I don't mean to cut into your racket [possibly a bad choice of words], but I am just trying to make the point that until we start having meaningful, honest conversations with each other, everything we do is pointless. There is NO 'program' that will fix any problem in schools. The only thing that solves the problems in our building is the relationships."

In the current educational climate, truth and honesty are the only things that will make a difference. Our ability to work together as professionals to see us through these dark times is more important now than ever. The Writing Project certainly helped me understand the need for that camaraderie. It forced me to think creatively, critically, and most importantly humorously about my practice individually and our profession as a whole.

Cont. p.11

Book Review. . . Cont. from p.3

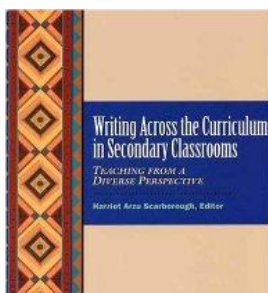
Chapter seven encourages the use of technology, which can attract students who are reluctant to write. Having access to a computer and being able to type responses can help engage those students who do not like the traditional pen-and-paper scenario. Allowing the use of different fonts gives the student a sense of ownership. The authors also suggest poetry as an effective writing tool. Teenagers can relate to poetry because they identify it with musical lyrics.

Cultural diversity recurs as a theme in each chapter, and Scarborough argues in chapter twelve that cultural diversity in the classroom is quickly becoming the norm and should drive instruction (156). Diversity, in this case, not only means ethnicity differences but economic differences as well. She believes the ultimate goal of the teacher should be to create a sense of community within the classroom where all students feel comfortable and can reach their full potential. Since the goal is to educate the whole student, both interdisciplinary and intradisciplinary writing is vital. Positive student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships must be cultivated to allow each student to develop a sense of belonging within this community, which in turn allows students to feel more comfortable when writing.

The different chapters in this book tell us that regardless of the academic discipline, teachers can begin their writing instruction very simply by giving a list of prompts students must respond to such as favorite foods, least favorite foods, favorite movie, best qualities, worst fears, important goals, etc. This activity can also be a collaborative endeavor by partnering the students and allowing them to share responses. The last prompt listed above, important goals, can open up incredible dialogue between student and teacher. At this stage the teacher should respond to each student's writing. This is a great way to start building a relationship with the student.

Edith Baker states, "Early in the semester, the instructor needs to develop a pattern of listening to students and their ideas, because many will come from classrooms in which the teachers have all the answers" (115). Students come to expect such one-way lectures in many of their classes. They are reluctant to voice opinions, concerns, ideas, etc. This is one way that writing can have tremendous impact. Students who are hesitant to speak may be completely at ease when writing and can thus express themselves more freely.

The thing I found most annoying about this book is the breakdown into academic area chapters. Once I finished the chapter on science, I found the other chapters a bit tedious. Since I teach science, I would have liked more science writing ideas. However, the breakdown into academic chapters allows teachers to just peruse their own subject areas. While the writing activities suggested are subject specific, most of them can be modified to "fit" a different subject. This text should be kept in the school library and available for checkout when needed. The majority of the ideas match learning-focused models, and a seasoned teacher may not be interested in reading this text at all. However, first-year teachers might find some good ideas for implementing writing in their classrooms.



[Amazon](#) \$42.80

- Paperback:**
- Publisher:** Prentice Hall
- Language:** English
- ISBN-10:** 0130224898

Your Voice in Congress

By Jana N. Williams

In a few short weeks, several BWP advocates will travel to Washington, DC, for the National Writing Project's Annual Spring Meeting. The purpose of this meeting is for Writing Project sites from all states to share with their Congressional leaders the importance of the National Writing Project in improving education and revitalizing the teaching experience for its members. Currently, a Dear Colleague letter is circulating Congress, and the National Writing Project needs Congressional leaders to sign this letter for NWP to receive its funding this year. Teachers and students need the NWP!

With your help, we can get all of Georgia senators and representatives to see the value in NWP and sign this letter. You can help set the stage for our upcoming meetings by contacting both Georgia senators and your representatives. All you need to do is ask for their support of the Dear Colleague letter and tell them how your teaching has been impacted through your involvement with Blackwater Writing Project.

Each year during our visit, we love sharing your personal anecdotes and innovative ways of teaching writing in your classrooms.

To contact Senator Johnny Isakson and Senator Saxby Chambliss, go to their websites (<http://isakson.senate.gov/> and <http://chambliss.senate.gov/>) and choose the contact links on their pages.

To find your representative, go to www.house.gov and use the "Find Your Representative" tool at the top of the page.

Also, please send either Joel Futch (jfutch@lanier.k12.ga.us) or me (jwilliams@eastcentraltech.edu) a copy of your story to take to DC. As we are all aware, Blackwater Writing Project is crucial in improving literacy in our communities. Our Congressional leaders need to know this as well.

Features Editor Needed

Blackwater Writing Project needs a social teacher consultant who is willing to supervise the **features section** of the newsletter. Shane Wilson agreed to serve in this capacity, but then he got moved to Co-Tech Liaison with Karen Morris. This position requires that you decide which Blackwater participant should be featured and you make that happen, either by interviewing the person yourself or by arranging for another participant to conduct the interview and write the feature. Interviews can happen by email if people are too busy to meet in person. This position is a good one for someone who wants to be just a little more involved but isn't ready for a huge leadership position.

Please contact [Diana Chartier](#) or [Donna Sewell](#) if you're interested.

Write Nights

Write Nights will be at Hildegard's on Mondays from 6:30–8:00 p.m.

Mark these dates on your calendars and come join us.

April 13, 2009

Are you thinking you cannot make it to Write Night? Blog with us from home. It's easy. Go to <http://www.blogger.com> and log in. Don't have a link to the blog for BWP? Email [Donna Sewell](mailto:Donna.Sewell) and ask to be invited.

If you join us in person, we usually socialize and order 6:30-6:45 and start writing around 6:45. We usually write until 7:30 or so, then read each other's posts, laugh, and socialize. We always leave by 8:00.

Check it out. A good quote may come from you and be included in the next newsletter.

Send newsletter submissions by the 15th of each month.

**Think about what you are doing in your classrooms.
Can we feature you or your work?
Let us know what you want included in the newsletter.**

The next newsletter will be published on June 5, 2009.



Poetry

Visum

Kat McKinney, Valdosta State University

When I set my pen to paper,
kaleidoscope forms tumble out,
pink-green-blue coils and loops—
thoughts tentative as a toddler.

Now I must not think about the
gears turning, the puzzle pieces that
fall from the sky and link together
tightly—click, click, click—into

a finished piece, a picture anyone
can understand—the inchoate jumble of
words suddenly resolved, suddenly
simple—a kitten, a storm, a teacup.

Hello, everyone! Ketchup Stain (Kat McKinney) from ISI 2007 reporting for duty. I'm calling for poetry of all shapes and sizes from willing teachers. I'll provide a topic, but please send poetry on any subject you fancy. I remember loads of great poetry from my ISI session, and I can't wait to see what you bring to the table! Try writing about a subject that concerns water this time around—on anything from a cool drink to an ocean.

Please send submissions to my e-mail address:
mck_kat@hotmail.com.

National Day of Writing NCTE

Americans are writing like never before—through text messages and IMs, with video cameras and cell phones, and, yes, even with traditional pen and paper. Whether it is done in a notebook or on a blog, writing, in its many forms, has become daily practice for millions of Americans.

As a member of NCTE, we invite you to explore and celebrate the integral role writing has in each of our lives by participating in the [National Day of Writing/National Gallery of Writing](#), October 20, 2009.

Who can participate?

We invite everyone to play an active role in this celebration of writing. We encourage participants from many sectors—students, teachers, parents, grandparents, service and industrial workers, managers, business owners, legislators, retirees, and anyone else to submit a piece of writing.

What types of writing will be accepted?

We welcome composition in all of its forms, from written texts to audio and video pieces. The only criterion is that the writing matters to you. Among the types of writing you can submit are:

- Letter
- Email or text message
- Journal entry
- Report

- Electronic presentation
- Blog post
- Documentary clip
- Poetry reading

- “How to” directions
- Short story
- Memo

Where will I submit my writing?

NCTE, along with our project partners, will unveil an online National Gallery of Writing this spring that will feature different types of composition. The gallery will be a digital archive accessible to all through a free, searchable website.

What next?

Visit the [National Day of Writing page](#) on the NCTE website for more information. Leave a comment and let us know what role writing plays in your life; [sign up for news](#) about the National Day of Writing as it becomes available. You can participate as a writer or become a curator and form your own gallery of writing.

Questions, Comments, Suggestions? Email us at ndw@ncte.org.

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Phone: 877-369-6283

Feature. . . Cont. from p. 1

Diana, who finished her Master's degree in ECED in 2007, undertook the legendary BWP summer work-load that same year. "I found like-minded teachers from all walks and levels with whom a common bond was shared," she says of the experience. "The free exchange of ideas and a chance to learn from peers was a concept I took back to the classroom." She really is just one more name on the long list of past BWP fellows who has found the summer institute helpful in one way or another. "I love how the BWP allows me to interact with and learn from teachers with more know how than I," she says, "and yet, I am part of a group that welcomes new ideas and takes every suggestion into consideration while remaining true to the goal of improving teachers and students through writing."

Diana is a hard worker who is capable of balancing her family, her job, and editing the BWP newsletter. But, at the end of the day, she really has a desire to help her students in any way possible. She admits that there is not one facet of her job that stands out above the rest—she just loves to work with her students. Diana says, "I find even the most frustrating day rewarding because I still see my students' growth and potential...and every so often, they see it too."

This lady really does belong in the classroom. Of course she has the certificates and the degrees to show her authority as a teacher, but more important than all of that, she has the desire to teach and the ability to see potential even under the most frustrating of circumstances. Someone get her old teachers on the phone—Diana is doing *their* job just fine.

What Happened to the Handwritten Thank You Note? Amy Cunningham, Ware County High School

I don't know about you, but I was taught that the use of manners is non-negotiable for the Southerner. As a child, I had my little hide tanned for not saying, "Yes, Ma'am" or "No, Sir." If a "Huh?" exited my lips toward an adult, I knew that I better get ready for a gift that I didn't want to receive. When I used manners, I wasn't rewarded, for why should one be rewarded for just doing what one should?

My mother impressed upon me the importance of the handwritten thank you note from an early age. I remember her saving a thank you note I wrote to Santa when I was just four years old, just in case he did leave "... one whisker from your beard so that I can prove you're real." Having an attitude of gratitude can and should be a way of life, not just a moment when one makes one's way to the Hallmark stand for a special occasion.

So what has happened to the handwritten thank you note? Have we relegated the practice to a hurried e-mail with maybe a "cc" for good measure? Have we allowed our microwave lifestyles to override taking the time—making the time—to express gratitude? Let it not be.

One should never underestimate how the receiver of the note will be affected by the details. Sometimes the stationary itself is a thank you—the picture, the color. As one of my students mentioned, if one tries to speak gratitude rather than write a note, one may become speechless or tongue-tied. Writing a note affords one the time to say what one wants said, and the recipient is the richer for it.

What would it take for the thank you note to make a needed comeback? It would take an individual willing to take the time and effort to be thankful. Is this possible anymore?

Technology Updates

Hello!

This is Karen Morris and Shane Wilson, your technical liaisons for Blackwater Writing Project. Are you tired of the same old static-looking web site? We are, and we plan to change it. Therefore, we are soliciting your input on the current Blackwater Web Site. What would you like to see on the revised site? What do you think that we can add so that it reflects who we are as an organization? Do not be afraid of making suggestions.

Colors?  Pictures?  Spinning heads? 

The new site should reflect you! You can contact either of us: Karen Morris — kamorris@valdosta.edu or Shane Wilson shawilson@valdosta.edu.

Are You Interested in Submitting a Book Review?

The following is a list of new books available to borrow and waiting for reviews.

Interested? Contact [Donna Sewell](mailto:Donna.Sewell@valdosta.edu)

Angelillo, Janet. *Grammar Study: Helping Students Get What Grammar Is and How It Works*. New York: Scholastic, 2008.

Caine, Karen. *Writing to Persuade: Minilessons to Help Students Plan, Draft, and Revise*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2008.

Feigelson, Dan. *Practical Punctuation: Lessons on Rule Making and Rule Breaking in Elementary Writing*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2008.

Fleischer, Cathy, and Sara Andrew-Vaughan. *Writing Outside Your Comfort Zone: Helping Students Navigate Unfamiliar Genres*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2009.

Gallagher, Kelly. *Deeper Reading: Comprehending Challenging Texts, 4-12*. Portland: Stenhouse, 2004.

Lane, Barry. *Writing as a Road to Self-Discovery*. Shoreham: Discovery, 1993.

Lane, Barry, and Gretchen Bernabel. *Why We Must Run with Scissors: Voice Lessons in Persuasive writing, 3-12*. Shoreham: Discover, 2001.

Wilhelm, Jeffrey D. *"You Gotta BE the Book": Teaching Engaged and Reflective Reading with Adolescents*. 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College and NCTE, 2008.

BWP. . . Cont. from p.2

The biggest change focuses on the teaching demonstration, not so much the content or style but the timing. We want to make sure teachers prepare their demonstrations before the Invitational Summer Institute begins so that we can move on to other assignments. For this reason we are not sharing the schedule for teaching demonstrations. Instead, everyone should be ready the first day of the ISI, and we will notify teachers two days before the demonstration.

I am looking forward to seeing how this Invitational Summer Institute goes, and I would love to hear from you about these changes. Please email me (dsewell@valdosta.edu) if you have any comments or suggestions.

Stoking. . . Cont. from p.4

I think more than anything, this is what the Writing Project has done for me. It has given me the courage to be passionate about my profession, to know that ALL the relationships I have are meaningful and crucial to my success. I AM NOT ALONE! It has given me the platform to talk with other educators, not just in Georgia but around the world, about how great it is to be a teacher. The Writing Project has stoked a flame and taught me to be excited about being at work every day. I feel comfortable saying out loud what other educators only whisper about late on a Saturday night through wine-soaked lips. It taught me to believe in our profession.

Credits:

Newsletter Editor: Diana Chartier
Features Editor: Shane Wilson
Poetry Editor: Kat McKinney
Proofreader: Donna Sewell