



The TEACHER CENTER of Broome County
Teacher Study Group Grant Award
Summer 2004

FINAL REPORT
DOCUMENT PROCESSES AND OUTCOMES

STUDY GROUP TOPIC: TWIPS ~ Teachers as Writers in Intensive Poetry Study

List of group members: Paul Manuszewski, Roxie Oberg, Dan Vanno, Kelly Ciulla, Brendan Byrnes, Francisco Paler-Large

The final report must be word-processed and submitted both in print and on disk using this form. Include information under each of the following headings.

Describe the initial goal of the group noting any adjustments that had to be made as time passed.

Our initial goal was to engage in the process of writing poetry using a variety of approaches in order to improve our ability to express meaning in poetry, deepen our understanding of the process of poem-making, and gain insight into the ways we can bring the study of poetry alive for our students. As we immersed ourselves in this project, and especially in our poetry, we found that we each were becoming increasingly invested in a deeply personal and intrinsically rewarding experience. The group dynamic evolved rather quickly in a very positive and supportive way and this seemed to facilitate both the intellectual and emotional growth of the participants, with respect to their writing. As the process unfolded, some of the very specific and concrete aims listed as topics in the grant application had to give way to others that arose during discussions at each meeting.

Describe the ACTION PLAN that the group followed.

Each meeting was held on a Thursday evening at a group member's house. One of the benefits of this was that participants became more personally familiar with each other as people, not just as school colleagues. Group "cohesion" and trust seemed very strong. The member hosting the meeting would start things off with a poem, a brief reading, a discussion topic or writing exercise. On most occasions, recently written poems were shared by each participant then commentary and feedback would follow. Undoubtedly, this would lead to discussions about the craft of poetry (structure, line break, diction, juxtaposition, rhythm, imagery, metaphor, sound qualities, voice, etc.), the experience and process of writing a given piece, and the implications for our students (and ourselves as their teacher-writers).

Describe how the action plan was implemented.

See above. Implementation was informal for the most part as that was most conducive to having naturally spontaneous and authentic discussions as writers. At the same time, we were always aware, metacognitively, that we were our own research subjects , and thus

inclined to “deconstruct” what we were putting ourselves through so that we could articulate ideas that would help us as teachers of writing and poetry.

Evaluation of the impact of the study group effort on teacher/student performance.

- How has this study group changed you as a teacher? Do you anticipate that any of your teaching practices will have changed?

All participants entered into this study group believing the premise that in order to teach students to write, we needed to be writers ourselves. After six weeks we are more convinced that this premise must be true. The work that we have been doing (and hope to continue to do in the future) has helped to narrow the intellectual distance between us and our subject matter and between us and our students. We are especially cogent of the level of personal challenge and risk involved in writing for an audience and we have a greater awareness of what we are asking our students to do. This grant has given us the opportunity to create a formal time/task structure, individually and as a group, that has enabled us to spend time writing and reflecting on writing. All of us have realized that even within such a structure it is vital to have strong personal discipline and commitment in order to produce worthwhile results. Good writing takes time. Our internalized understanding of this seemingly simple fact is causing us to reevaluate our approach to assigning writing. Also, we are beginning to think of ways to build a supportive community in the classroom so our students’ writing will be strengthened by positive peer validation and meaningful feedback. In general, we can identify better with our students as writers who will face many of the same obstacles we faced during these six weeks.

- What evidence do you expect to see of student achievement is improving as a result of your participating in this study group?

Each of the participants plan to share, anecdotally, some of the experience of this study group with his/her students. We all plan to continue as writers writing with our students. Out of this we hope students will come to see their own writing efforts and processes validated by those of their teachers. We expect our students to develop a stronger sense of respect for their writing and that of their classmates and, as a result, see poetry and writing as a legitimate and vital form of expression that is personally meaningful.

- What evidence is there that the goals of the study group has/has not been met?

The goals of the study group have been met and on some levels exceeded. Each of the participants has experienced a strong, supportive “push” back into writing. Over the six weeks we have produced writing we can be proud of. Our poems became more complex, more rich with meaning, and more expressive as the weeks went on. We gave a public reading at the CyberCafe in Binghamton as a culmination of our work and it was well received. We are now organizing our poems and some reflective commentary into a small booklet/chapbook that we will submit to the Teacher Center after the first week of school. The strongest evidence that the goals of the group were met lies in our rekindled desire to write, publish, and take these experiences into the classroom. We all want to continue as “TWIPS” in the near future. However, we may have to change the name. We now hope to refer to ourselves as “writers as teachers” rather than “teachers as writers.”

Comment on the value of the study group process? Did it work for you?

See above. It worked very well.

How can we make this study group program better?

We hope there is a way to continue it on a long term basis. The TWIPS participants feel that six meetings has been a substantial start of something that could be more profoundly affecting if we were able to meet weekly over a year's time or longer. We thank you for this opportunity!