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Writers Who Care: Advocacy Blogging as Teachers - Professors - Parents

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Appendix C: Directions for the final blog reflection

Consider your learning about writing and the teaching of writing over the course of this semester. Has your thinking changed? Please address the following questions in a thorough and thoughtful way. Be sure to use examples to illustrate your ideas and to provide clarity.

1. What does it mean to be a writer?
2. How do you view yourself as a writer? What connection, if any, does this have to do with teaching writing?
3. What kind(s) of writing are your students expected to do?
4. What do you really believe your students are capable of as writers?
5. What would hold you back from engaging students in the writing process or student choice during writing (i.e., what are the constraints of your context)?
6. How can you overcome these constraints?

Appendix D: Follow up email questions

1. How did the course impact your writing instruction during the current school year (if applicable)?
2. Did you seek out further resources on writing instruction after taking the course?
3. What are you currently doing as a writer?

About the Authors

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Writers Who Care: Advocacy Blogging as Teachers - Professors - Parents



Leah A. Zuidema, *Dordt College*

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Mark Letcher, *Purdue University Calumet*

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We're writing teachers; we teach writing teachers. And we're parents of young writers. We can't help but notice how writing education matters:

We have seen when a child abandons writing because she isn't given the freedom to create beyond the formulas given to her.

We have seen the pride in a teenager's face when his audience laughs at his anecdotes and *gets* his message.

We have heard from countless college and graduate students who remember the teacher who had incredible impact on their relationship to the written word.

From implicit curricula to planned pedagogies, writing lessons make a difference--for better, or for worse. We're convinced that student writers--all of them, not just our sons and daughters--deserve the best possible writing education. We care how writing gets taught. Our personal experiences, our research, and the knowledge we've gained as parents, as teachers, and as teacher educators all compel us to believe that the best way for students to learn is through authentic writing.

Because we believe so strongly that writers develop through authentic writing instruction - and because we see policies that drive practices away from these goals - we have decided to speak up and to speak out. The blog *Teachers, Profs, Parents: Writers Who Care* (writerswhocare.wordpress.com) was born from our frustration with current mandates that limit teachers and students to reductive writing. We know what good writing instruction looks like, and we want to share that knowledge with an audience beyond academia. In doing so, we hope to redefine what it means to be an academic writer and to encourage others to contribute their knowledgeable voices to a very public dialogue.

The development of *Writers Who Care* brought challenges that we document here with the following purposes:

- For those interested in leading or participating in other advocacy blogging efforts, the window that we offer into our rhetorical decisions may serve as a roadmap to the kinds of choices and decision points that you, too, may potentially need to navigate. We hope that by sharing our rationale, our work may help you effectively connect with your desired audiences for the purposes you have in mind.
- For those who wish to join our collective efforts by submitting blog entries for possible publication on *Writers Who Care*, the behind-the-scenes background that we share may provide more nuanced insight about the rhetorical considerations that can help you to shape an effective entry. We hope to equip you to write submissions that fit well with the genre, audiences, and purposes for our blog, as we would very much like to be joined by many others in effectively reaching friends, neighbors, teachers, board members, administrators, and politicians who need to be informed and motivated to advocate for authentic writing instruction.
- For those who are writing teachers, writing researchers, and/or writing teacher educators, our reflections about our composing choices are meant to lay bare some of the writing work that blog writing entails. We seek to emphasize that blogging is indeed a significant form of writing that merits our attention, and to illustrate the complexity and potential power of blogging--as a genre, as a recursive rhetorical process, and as an authentic means of creating and reaching audiences for advocacy writing.

Any genre, any form of writing begins with purpose. So we, too, begin with ours.

Authentic Student Writing: It Matters

Student writing is *authentic* when it is composed for real audiences and real purposes. For example, asking twelfth graders to write and send letters to audiences they choose and for the purpose of trying to bring about changes that matter to them is more authentic than asking all twelfth graders to write about property tax hikes by sending letters "to the editor" with the teacher as the only reader. The purpose of the second writing activity, like the first, is to practice the conventions of a specific genre and rhetorical appeals to a precise agent. However, the second activity is merely a practice exercise, whereas a high school senior in the first example knows there is real potential for action from a respondent: a twelfth grader who writes to her principal to argue for more senior rights (*e.g.*, additional opportunities for student leadership; options to leave campus for lunch) knows

that the principal may react favorably and grant extended senior privileges--or may respond with a rejection.

Authentic writing enables an influential student learning experience because it connects the writer and audience in ways that have significance for the writer. Students see the impact of their writing beyond that of a letter grade, and they have an opportunity to *live* the effects of their composing. If the assignment were limited to an empty exercise of writing to the teacher as a substitute or “pretend” audience, as in the second example, an essential component of the writing experience would be lost. Similarly, if students’ writing were shared with their intended audiences but their topics were constrained to issues important only to the teacher, the students would have limited investment in writing decisions, and the relevance and impact of their writing experience would also be minimized. This is why authentic writing matters: it’s real, making the writing decisions more complex, the urgency more pressing, the learning more relevant and powerful.

Authentic writing need not be limited to letters or other genres used to effect change; it can also include creative genres such as poetry and fiction--if these are written for purposes that are more than merely “schoolish” (Whitney 57) and shared with the audiences they are intended for, which may be the teacher alone, or classmates, or others beyond the walls of the classroom. Digital writing, in particular, provides many opportunities for students to write for authentic audiences (DeVoss, Eidman-Aadahl, and Hicks 4). Whether the audience is worldwide or locally based, the point is that authentic writing in the classroom gives student-writers opportunities to navigate and reflect upon composing decisions in real-world genres and situations as they write for audiences and purposes that extend beyond practicing (or simply repeating) rote steps.

Why Advocacy about Authentic Student Writing is Needed

The absence of authentic writing in P-16 classrooms negatively impacts many aspects of the writing experience. Without authentic writing, classrooms can become isolated because written assignments limit interaction with potential audiences; teachers can grow weary of serving as the primary (and oftentimes artificial) audience for all genres of writing; students can come to see the process of composition as unrelated to the writing they do on their own, thus damaging the natural curiosity and excitement that comes from engaging with real audiences for real purposes. Perhaps most dangerously, students miss the chance to see writing as the powerful experience it can be, ripe with the potential to affect themselves and others, and instead see it as rigid and uninspiring, or as only a tool for testing.

In recent years we’ve witnessed a surge in threats against educators and education. Teachers and other educators are too often left out at crucial points in the shaping of standards, assessments, and policy decisions that directly affect classroom practice (as Kylene Beers illustrates so eloquently in her troubling essay “The Sound of Silence”). The problem is compounded by some in the news media who make sweeping statements that are unsupported and uninformed--yet shouted through the public megaphones of print, television, and the web, with the effect of eroding public confidence in teachers’ expertise and judgment and further undermining educators’ authority to lead in making decisions that impact student learning. Too often we read and hear baseless attacks like Evan Thomas’s characterization of teacher education in his claim that “teaching can be taught, to some degree, but not the way many graduate schools of education do it, with a lot of insipid or marginally relevant theorizing and pedagogy” (par. 3).

However, we have also seen the rise of teachers, parents, and others pushing back against initiatives, mandates, and proposals that are not in the best interest of schools and, more importantly, students. For example, in January 2013 teachers at Garfield High School in Seattle voted unanimously to boycott the MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) test, and in spring a group of mothers in Texas successfully pressured the state to reduce testing in elementary grades (Dornfeld; Molnar). Weeks later protesters were “detained and ticketed” in Chicago for marching in opposition to the city’s sweeping school closures (Lutton). Still others have taken to their keyboards or picked up their pens to share insights on topics ranging from questioning the practice of linking student test scores to teacher salary and promotion, to celebrating the successes of singular teachers and echoing their frustrations (Azuz; Strauss). And all of this work was done by educators and citizens choosing to take action.

In the inaugural post for *Writers Who Care*, Peter Smagorinsky calls educators to action, asking us to “make [our] voices heard in the broader cacophony of the public debate about education” (“Carpe Diem in the Public Sphere, Part I”). In his follow-up post, he highlights his own regular contributions to public dialogue in literacy education through the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, as well those by fellow English educator Michael Moore, who writes a monthly piece for the *Savanna Daily News* (“Carpe Diem in the Public Sphere, Part II”). Smagorinsky further points to blogs and online newspapers (e.g., *The Patch*) as locations for discussion about advocacy and writing. In another post for *Writers Who Care*, Anne Elrod Whitney introduces her group of teacher-writers, local teachers who compose blogs for community consumption, letters to the superintendent and school board, articles for journals, “rants and diatribes, poems and promises” (“And Yet We Write”). Her final line encompasses what she and her group hope to promote: the idea that “to be a teacher-writer is to raise your voice and let your writing be as powerful as it can be.”

We agree, and we have established *Writers Who Care* as a space where multiple voices can be heard. Students need advocacy from all corners of the educational sphere, and these moments of advocacy can overlap and be further supported through a united position on the value of authentic writing. The authors of *Writers Who Care* have seen the ways that inauthentic writing assignments shape how our students and children come to understand writing, often resulting in the loss of opportunities for personal and intellectual growth as well as a decreased engagement in writing.

Our concern is not a new one--that much is clear in Paul Thomas’s review of a 1936 *English Journal* article calling

for teachers to redefine and make curricular space for “creative” writing in which the student-writer chooses the subject, form, and length (LaBrant 293). In today’s educational and political climate, however, the need for advocacy for authentic writing is pressing and grows with increasing urgency, and we believe that it will take our collective voices to foster significant change. We therefore invite the perspectives of teachers, professors, and parents, and we hope for broad contributions to the blog.

Teachers need to be freed from political agendas that propose to “reform” the teaching of writing in ways that are not aligned with what educators know to be best practice. Parents need agency in decision-making that impacts the way their children learn to read and write, and they need resources for supporting developing writers at home. Professionals in writing teacher education need the power to create curricula and further develop their licensure programs in ways that aren’t burdened by corporatized measures of success. To advocate for authentic writing we must advocate for and as teachers, professors, and parents who speak for writers at all levels of development. Which brings us to our story about a blog that aims to facilitate this goal of collective advocacy.

Blogging for Advocacy

Our blog was born from an ever-growing sense of urgency that we needed to react to the political landscape affecting education while also being proactive to positively influence writing instruction in as many classrooms as possible. The four of us are members of the Conference on English Education’s (CEE) Commission on Writing Teacher Education (CWTE), and during NCTE’s annual convention in November 2012, our commission met to discuss growing anxiety over recent state and institutional mandates, national reform movements, external pressures on English teacher education, and their potential impact on writers, writing, and writing teacher education. Colleagues related stories that included concerns such as the omission of important genres of writing in the Common Core State Standards, collective worry over the marginalization of writing in Pearson’s teacher performance assessment (edTPA), and fears that corporate groups and other non-educators have the power to change how writing is taught, assessed, and even defined.

As we concluded the meeting, several Commission members indicated a desire to participate in a more political dialogue on these shared concerns and to offer voice to these conversations from the perspectives of writing teachers and writing teacher educators, as well as from parents, community members, and other invested parties. Members of the commission regrouped in July 2013 at the CEE summer conference to outline a potential plan to agitate for change. The result was a collective blog, launched in September 2013 and appropriately named for the multiple roles embodied by people in the room--*Teachers, Profs, Parents: Writers Who Care*. Its subtitle speaks to the larger purpose of the writing: “A blog advocating for authentic writing instruction.”

Although we considered a number of different avenues for advocacy, it was a series of linked rhetorical considerations that led us to begin a collective blog. Foremost in our minds were the audiences we wanted to reach and the purposes we wanted to achieve--which related directly to our understanding of the problems we were trying to address and our assumptions about how we might effect change. As we reflected on themes that had emerged in our Commission conversations over the years, we realized that we wanted to take action in ways that could help us to make inroads in our local schools--as well as in classrooms around the country, even those where our connections might be limited to a shared desire that students everywhere learn to value writing, to understand its power, and to do it well. We wanted to advocate in ways that could garner the attention of our neighbors, of our friends, and of writing teachers everywhere. We wanted to educate our readers and ourselves about what exists, what is good, and what is possible (Berlin 78), and we wanted to do so with a nimbleness that would allow us to respond quickly to new situations, events, and ideas.

Our own roles and situations mattered, too. As parents, we wanted to offer encouragement and support to those who teach our children and to build positive, trusting relationships with them--without settling for inauthentic writing instruction. As teacher educators, we wanted to be allies with the teachers in our neighborhood schools, fostering individual connections--while also raising our voices collectively. We recognized that the more of us that could be involved and give voice to our advocacy, the better, and we sought to find a way to have ongoing contact and involvement. We realized that we needed to amplify our voices in an already public conversation about education--but we also understood that adding publications to traditional academic venues would preach to the academic choir rather than reaching the broader public audience we had in mind. We were mindful that our experience and expertise as writing teacher educators is not often sought in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We considered committing to blogging independently (with each of us maintaining a separate blog), but we also faced a pragmatic concern: who among us could take on a sustained writing commitment when so many other important tasks also demanded our time? And how would we link our voices? When Leah raised the possibility of blogging collaboratively, an energetic series of “What if...?” explorations from our commission helped us to decide that it was time to begin advocating together for authentic writing instruction through a collective blog.

Under Mark’s leadership, we developed a purpose statement for the blog:

We are teacher educators, classroom teachers, students, parents, and community members, and we have created this blog to speak to these five audiences. Collaboratively, we hope to:

- *Spotlight and celebrate the powerful writing work that teachers and students currently do, and illustrate how that work could potentially be affected by certain educational and/or political policies.*

- Circulate information about teaching practices and policies, so that our audiences can advocate strongly for students and teachers.
- Address how research affects writing in schools and communities, based on our experience in the field of writing instruction.
- Strengthen the connections and community among universities, K-12 schools, teachers, parents, and students.

By working together, as well as with others who advocate for the teaching profession, our audiences can learn about writing, the teaching of writing, and the power of engaging young writers in craft and story. We will offer our informed advocacy and arguments so that others can advocate and speak loudly as well.

Determining this purpose and scope was an important starting point, but as a lead team, the four of us soon realized that we had much additional work before us in order to bring the blog to life, to maintain a fresh and well-spoken advocacy presence, and to foster ongoing conversation with an ever-growing audience. Though only a few short months have passed since we decided in July to begin this blog, we've encountered a multitude of significant composing choices. We highlight a few of them here to further illustrate the decision points we are encountering along the way in our journey in advocacy blogging.

Designing, Curating, Editing, Authoring, Publishing: Blogging with Care

As with our decision to blog, our decisions about *how* to blog were also guided by considerations about the rhetorical space that we wanted to open for writers and readers. From the beginning of our discussions about collective blogging, Commission members were especially eager to effectively bring together the diverse voices of professors, teachers, and parents while also reaching out to an equally diverse audience. We recognized the line too often drawn between university faculty and K-12 teachers, and we were mindful of the reality that parent voices are often left out entirely from conversations about education. We wanted to create a space where these different, yet connected voices could be heard in tandem, advocating for students. We needed a composing space that was inviting to teacher-writers and even to parents, and yet we also hoped that our university colleagues would see writing for the blog as a valuable dimension of their professional writing -- rather than a distraction from it. Furthermore, we wanted to ensure that the voices of individual authors would be good representations of the Commission's collective views, and we sought to design our blog (and the behind-the-screens processes) in ways that would support authors in putting forward their best writing on topics of professional and personal importance to them.

Given these complexities, the Commission elected to establish the blog as a co-edited forum and to appoint the four of us as editors responsible for implementing the vision: developing the design, curating entries, reviewing submissions, dialoguing with authors, editing manuscripts, and publishing entries.

Designing and Launching

After a weekend of brainstorming at the CEE Conference in Ft. Collins, we had the draft of a purpose statement, many topical ideas for writing, and a team of four individuals committed to bringing the work of the larger group to fruition. Launching the blog proved daunting. What design should we adopt? Who would author the first post? Where would we go from there? How often would we post? How would we vet the submissions? These questions hit us immediately, and for our own sense of clarity but also for the sake of the authors we would work with, we wanted to identify from the start a clear sense of genre, audience, purpose, and situation--the "rhetorical GAPS" that writers consider (Bush and Zuidema 119).

As Mark took on the work of finalizing the group's purpose statement, Kristen began development on what we call "the back end." Through discussions with other colleagues and educational bloggers, she decided to host the blog via Wordpress, a free tool that will allow for growth in purpose as the blog evolves. In collaboration with the other lead team members, she created a shell that included pages for content (About, Authors, Research Briefs & Talking Points, Resources) and prepared to make the blog "live" and open for public reading.

Concerned with aesthetics, Kristen considered the visual appeal to readers. She wanted a clean homepage that included an appropriate image. She also knew that neither she, nor anyone else on the lead team, had the expertise or time to create an original design. Therefore, she searched Wordpress templates for a free shell (as we do not have funding to support this endeavor) that would highlight individual posts without being visually overwhelming. She drafted many versions of the blog interface before identifying a neutral template that matched form with our desired function. The clean, clutter-free design (see Figure 1) met the aforementioned goals while also allowing for authors to include unique images that could enhance the visual draw of an entry for those encountering blog posts in image-rich environments such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Flipboard.

With the design in place, the group was ready to launch the blog. Sarah prepared a post to introduce the blog and its purpose (Hochstetler, "From Idea to Action: Welcome to the Blog"), and with the click of the mouse, *Writers Who Care* opened to world viewing. The four of us shared with our networks, breathed a quick sigh of relief, and immediately began the process of preparing the next post.

Curating and Editing

The first call for submissions to *Writers Who Care* went to the group that imagined it. We invited Peter Smagorinsky, a leader in the field of writing instruction and a regularly published op-ed author, to write the inaugural posts as a call to action.

We also asked members of the Commission on Writing Teacher Education to write, and for those that accepted the call, we assigned publication dates. Having decided that posts would be editorially reviewed, the four lead team members agreed to share responsibilities. Sarah would communicate with authors and set publishing dates; Leah and Mark would assume lead editing responsibilities during the first two months of operation; Kristen would handle the publishing; everyone would comment on author drafts.

We initially imagined a weekly process that included author submissions, editorial comments, and lead editor response to the author, who would revise the submission for publication the following week. We quickly learned that our expectations were not realistic and that our process needed improvement. Our motto among ourselves became "no guilt." We were all committed to the work of the blog; we all trusted each other to get the work done; we all knew that this work came in addition to our regular roles as teacher educators. "No guilt" freed us to work systematically but flexibly, and our first decision under our new motto was to do away with specific publication dates. We still hoped to publish regularly, but we no longer expected ourselves to publish weekly or burdened our authors with impractical revision deadlines.

Shortly into the blog's life, with submissions rolling in from CWTE members who had committed to writing, we received notifications from interested authors via our "Author" page, and we realized that we needed an avenue for communicating with these authors--many of whom were from beyond our CWTE circle--to help them develop their ideas into blog posts that aligned with the Commission's goals. Though these processes are still under development, we have developed the following guidelines, which also give a window into how we work together:

Manuscripts may be solicited or unsolicited. Solicited manuscripts evolve from a discussion among Commission members, who agree on a list of current, relevant, and important topics. Editors request submissions from professors, teachers, other educators, or parents who can speak to these topics. When an author agrees to a topic, editors assign a submission date, a tentative publication date, and a lead editor. Submissions are reviewed by a minimum of three editors, with the lead editor making final recommendations to the author. When the author re-submits a revised draft suitable for publication, the lead editor completes final edits to the text and then informs the publishing editor that it is ready to post. The publishing editor attends to final formatting and posting. All editors announce the post via their social networks.

*Unsolicited manuscripts are handled in a similar fashion with a few caveats. In this process potential authors submit topic ideas through the submission form on the blog. An author coach then contacts the individual and helps to focus the topic and offers the writer tips for crafting an effective *Writers Who Care* post. When the author has finalized the submission, the author coach reads the draft and either (1) provides suggestions for revision to the author or (2) submits it to the editorial queue. Once the submission enters the editorial queue, editors follow the process outlined for solicited manuscripts.*

As our guidelines suggest, we as an editorial team agreed that in our editing roles, we commit to serving as editorial coaches who respond to authors, guide them as they revise their writing to meet the GAPS of the blog, and then finalize contributions for publication. As teachers of writing who want to encourage many voices to publish their stories, we feel strongly that mentoring writers is important. Unlike traditional academic journals that accept or reject ideas, we hope to develop ideas into published pieces that represent a variety of voices.

As we've refined our editorial process, we have also revised how we assign the lead editing duties. When we began the blog in September, we assigned target publishing dates for all potential authors and then worked through rotations where Leah, Mark, and then Sarah each took a month's worth of lead editor duties in connection with the authors whose work was "due" to be published that month. After a three-month trial of this arrangement and our move away from a weekly publishing deadline, we realized that we needed a new process. We wanted to ensure that we could publish unsolicited entries in a timely way without having to worry about holding slots open on a publication calendar. We now place submissions into our editing queue in the order in which they are received, and Leah, Mark, or Sarah takes a turn working as lead author with three contributing authors before passing the lead editor role on to the next editor. Continuing in her role as the publishing editor, Kristen shares with the other editors in the responsibility of commenting on submitted drafts, but also attends to publishing details, including final formatting issues and the inclusion of images into the post.

Authoring and Publishing

Our first published posts provide models for writers from the perspectives of teacher (Montgomery, "Narrative Writing: The Orphan Child of the Common Core), professor (Dunn, "Engagement as Enzyme for Learning: Are Students Excited about Writing?") and parent (Turner, "It Deserves an Exclamation Point!"). We also encourage authors to submit "Research Briefs" or "Talking Points" that distill academic research into usable, printable guides for parents and teachers as they advocate for authentic writing instruction in their local schools.

Through trial and error, we have developed a system that streamlines the editorial and publishing process (and makes the lives of the authors, editors, and our publishing editor much easier). Though not required, we prefer drafts to be submitted via Google Docs, and editors collaboratively respond to submissions using the comment tool in Docs. We ask that authors link to relevant content and that those links be embedded in the text. To meet the visual needs of readers and to better publicize

our blog, we also ask authors to submit an image to include in the post. Finally, authors are asked to include a two-sentence biography--which may further highlight their work as writers through description and embedded links.

Authors retain copyright to their work, and, in fact, the Commission encourages authors to consider their posts as single entries into extended conversations on their topics. We hope that authors will revise and expand their work and resubmit it to other publications that contribute to public discourse about writing in schools. Authors are required to secure necessary permissions to post student work, images of students, or school and teacher names; submission of the manuscript indicates the author has secured these permissions.



Authors may expect that the lead editor assigned to their submission will guide them in shaping the piece rhetorically, will help to ensure that all necessary content has been included, and will verify that links are working and active. We've found it delightful to work with authors whether they wear one or more of the hats of teacher, professor, or parent, and it is our hope that this article will further widen the net of contributing authors for *Writers Who Care*.

Advocacy Blogging as Professional Development

The act of creating a blog has produced welcome and surprising ripples in our professional lives, ripples that extend both outward to our professional community of English educators, and inward to our own beliefs and practices related to the teaching of writing.

Building and Strengthening Community through Blogging

Each of us as editors finds support within our circle of English Education colleagues; this blog began because of the collaborative ties that we and our Commission co-members have formed over the years. Creating and maintaining the blog, though, has offered us as editors opportunities to work with many other professionals in our field. We have reached out to colleagues who we mostly know through their work, and others who are personal friends; we felt that each of these individuals had perspectives and experiences that would lend themselves ideally to the scope and purpose of the blog. They are also individuals whose viewpoints, whether we realized it at the time or not, fit well with our own: these authors generously offered complementary perspectives as well as new ways to stretch and grow our thinking. Our writers are teachers and parents as well, individuals who care deeply about the workload and public perception of teachers, and who wish to lend their informed voices to the conversation. In this way, we have strengthened connections that already existed for us. But this project has also introduced us to other colleagues in English Education and in even wider circles of public and private school teachers and administrators.

In short, the blog has acted as a connective net, spreading our professional circles wider with each successive post. We believe that open access is the heart of connected learning (Ito *et al.*) and that peer review need not be limited to a pre-publishing process. In this spirit, *Writers Who Care* authors are encouraged to self-promote their and others' posts and to engage in conversations such as #engchat and #literacies. Our readers are urged to share our writings freely (rather than being encumbered by the need to seek permissions and navigate copyright concerns). Peer review is facilitated by the blog design, which invites public comments on posts, and by our ethic of encouraging authors and readers to engage in ongoing conversation within the blog space as well as in other public forums such as Twitter.

These connections are important not only for the blog's success, but also for our professional development as teachers

and scholars. Each new post leads to additional stories, resources and organizations that can support not only the work of the blog, but also the field of English Education as a whole. Our commission has been striving for years for ways to effectively disseminate key works on writing pedagogy and writing teacher education; more traditional options such as annotated bibliographies have been discussed previously, but the task always proved too big and time-consuming for one or even several commission members to undertake. In the blog, we now have opened the doors to an evolving and immediately-available collection of works, accessible not only to commission members, but to anyone who visits the blog. The open access element of this project may be one of the most attractive elements to all of us. The research-based posts included at our site offer valuable support and information for any teachers, parents and administrators who may not have ready access (or time) to read through research studies in order to find support for their practices and policies. In this way, *Writers Who Care* is serving one of our original purposes: circulating information at the point of need, so that others may use it effectively.

Reaching out in this way, and working with post authors from outside our circles, has also given us the opportunity to connect emerging scholars and energetic teachers with experienced teacher-researchers and scholars. As an editorial board, we offer feedback on all submissions, and the rotating lead editors work more closely with authors to tailor their posts specifically for our blog's intended audiences. We hope to involve even more "new voices" in *Writers Who Care*, and a next step the editorial board is currently implementing is the addition of a graduate student member. As with so many other Web 2.0 tools, the blog has increased personal and professional connections and broadened our professional community.

Refining Our Practices

As writing teacher educators, we as editors also find that our work for *Writers Who Care* is influencing the way we think about the preparation of our own teacher candidates and graduate students. The blog can certainly offer more resources for us to pass along to our students, but even more importantly, our students can now see that there is a supportive community for them when they become teachers, and that their own voices have value and weight in the field.

We are encouraging our students to submit posts to the blog, and we agree that our responsibilities as teacher educators now include leading our students through exploration of the rhetorical complexities and opportunities of blog authorship. Students who post can acquire valuable experience and reach a wide readership. Publishing through a collective, edited blog affords a rare opportunity for students to experience a full cycle of peer review--from the inception of an idea to authoring, from working with an editor and revising to experiencing readers' responses. The immediacy of blog posting is something that *Writers Who Care* authors have commented on before; the ability to reach an audience in a matter of days or weeks, as opposed to the months-long pipeline associated with print academic journals, is an attractive change of pace.

Although posts may be short and the path to publication is relatively succinct, blog entries aren't simple to write. Writing for a blog with a wide audience requires a great deal of sensitivity and audience awareness, and authors face composing problems and questions as nuanced as those in any other authentic writing situation. One of our reasons for encouraging student submissions is to broaden our students' definitions of *writing* and to further develop and expand their understanding of the complex rhetorical decisions faced by writers.

However, as in any other case of authentic writing instruction, our goals extend far beyond providing students with practice in needed writing skills or with fodder for their theorizing. We hope that in writing for a blog audience, the preservice and inservice teachers in our classrooms see exciting potential and opportunities--as well as responsibilities--for participating in public conversations on education and other significant issues. Our students need to see that academic publishing can, and should, now include outlets such as blogs and open-access journals. As academics, our scholarly conversations are read carefully by a relatively small audience, with some exceptions. But the posts on *Writers Who Care* have already reached thousands of individuals across the globe, in only a few short months. While we do not advocate the dismissal of our established academic forums, we feel there is ample room in the field for more immediate and direct publishing venues, of which blogging is one example. If our own students choose to pursue these avenues, their ideas and research can reach a wide audience, and with an advocacy angle, provide much-needed support and information for teachers and parents.

Merging Professional Expertise, Public Citizenship and Personal Passion: Advocacy Blogging as Academic Contribution

As indicated in the previous sections, this blog was born from a sense of urgency and collaboration. In the few months it has been in existence, it has become a labor of love for the four of us on the editorial team, but a labor nonetheless. We share that reality here not as a complaint, but to help those interested in a deeper knowledge of this type of writing work: it is important to understand how collective, edited blogging requires much more than simply pasting in an author's submission and pressing the "publish" button. It demands editors' ongoing time commitment to collaborative work and to behind-the-screens processes. We had not anticipated, back during our July brainstorming, the time and thinking required to bring such a project to fruition, and more importantly, to maintain and nurture it. The multiple, sometimes competing commitments that we have outlined in this article posed challenges to the editors as we sought from our first meetings to achieve a balance between the expectations of the academic community and the possibilities of connected writing.

In effect, we have been learning how to edit an academic journal for a new era. Our work has included soliciting manuscripts, reading unsolicited submissions, guiding authors through revisions, preparing manuscripts for final publication, and conferring regularly with each other about our posting schedules, editing responsibilities, and other logistical tasks. Though

the work is additive to our everyday teaching, scholarly, and administrative duties, we do it gladly. The blog is an evolving project that affords us room for our creativities and passions, one that feels truly authentic and that can reach a wide audience almost immediately.

By taking on the responsibilities we have described, we hope that we are also helping to expand current notions about what it means to be an academic. As our colleagues in the digital humanities have argued, some contemporary “models of research, pedagogy, and public engagement... unsettle our understanding of units of scholarship” (Galaraza, Heppler, and Seefeldt, par. 1). Tenure and promotion processes place high value on publications for other academics. However, as experts in literacy education, we must rethink our contributions to the field. If we want to effect change in teaching and learning, we must become part of the conversation that surrounds policy makers. In a digital age, this conversation can be shifted through the fast-paced world of Web 2.0-- where individual readers share compelling writing via social networks, and where the collective voices of teachers, professors, and parents make a difference.

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