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

Leah A. Zuidema
Dordt College, leah.zuidema@gmail.com

Sarah Hochstetler
Illinois State University

Mark Letcher
Purdue University Calumet

Kristen Hawley Turner
Fordham University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, Education Policy Commons, Rhetoric and Composition Commons, and the Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation
Zuidema, Leah A.; Hochstetler, Sarah; Letcher, Mark; and Hawley Turner, Kristen (2014) "Writers Who Care: Advocacy Blogging as Teachers - Professors - Parents," Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education: Vol. 3 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.
Available at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/wte/vol3/iss1/10

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
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
Kelly N. Tracy is an assistant professor of literacy education at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, NC. Her research focuses on elementary and middle grades writing pedagogy and writing professional development.
Roye Q. Scales is an assistant professor of literacy education and the program coordinator of elementary and middle grades education at Western Carolina University. Her research interests include adaptive teaching, teacher visioning, and literacy teacher education.
Nancy Luke is an assistant professor of elementary education and digital literacy at Western Carolina University. She conducts research related to online learning and in the thoughtful use of technology to support K12 instruction.

Writers Who Care: Advocacy Blogging as Teachers - Professors - Parents
Leah A. Zuidema, Dordt College
Sarah Hochstetler, Illinois State University
Mark Letcher, Purdue University Calumet
Kristen Hawley Turner, Fordham University

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 them.

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

We’ve been frustrated 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...
For teachers to redefine and make curricular space for “creative” writing in which the student-writer chooses the subject, form, and genre of writing. Today’s student-writers need the need for original and personal writing. As they grow up, they tend to feel 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 professional and policy-making best practices. Parents need agency in decision-making that impacts their children’s learning 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 children at all levels of development. Which brings us to our story about a blog that aims to facilitate this goal.

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 (CWE), 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 elements 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, 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, as well as 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 change effect. 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out 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. We also knew that if our work was to be seen by 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out 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. We also knew that if our work was to be seen by 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We therefore decided to create a blog that would seek to promote and support those who teach our children and 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We therefore decided to create a blog that would seek to promote and support those who teach our children and 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We therefore decided to create a blog that would seek to promote and support those who teach our children and 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We therefore decided to create a blog that would seek to promote and support those who teach our children and 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We therefore decided to create a blog that would seek to promote and support those who teach our children and 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We therefore decided to create a blog that would seek to promote and support those who teach our children and 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We therefore decided to create a blog that would seek to promote and support those who teach our children and 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.

We therefore decided to create a blog that would seek to promote and support those who teach our children and 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 was not enough. Unlike 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 out in the popular discourse, nor do our words and ideas have much play there.
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 educators, and wanted to highlight the reality that parent voices are not unique to university settings and that we are all writers in the educational enterprise. We wanted to create a space where these different voices could be heard, invigorated, and made available to others.

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-scene processes) in ways that would support authors in putting forward their best writing on topics of professional and personal importance to them.

Given these considerations, 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 drafted 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, 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 design costs) and selected a template that matched form with our desired function. The clean, clutter-free design included pages for content (About, Authors, Research Briefs & Talking Points, Resources) and prepared to make the blog “live” and open for public reading.

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 the world viewing. The four of us shared with our networks, breathed a quick sigh of relief, and immediately began the process of further illustrating the decision points we are encountering along the way in our journey in advocacy blogging.

Authoring and Publishing

We also asked members of the Commission on Writing Teacher Education to write, and for those that accepted the call, we assigned target publishing dates. Having decided that posts would be editorially reviewed, the four of us also agreed to share responsibilities. Karen 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.

After the blog’s life, we solicited submissions from CWTE members that 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:

1. 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, and educators, entirely from the selection. Within a week to two weeks, a decision is made on 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.

2. Unsolicted 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 expect an editorial team agreed that in our editorial 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 devised 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 lead editors 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.

Curating and Editing

We held the first call for submissions to Writers Who Care right after the group that imagined it. We invited Peter Smagorskis, 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.

Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education

Winter/Spring 2014
Believe that open access is the heart of connected learning (Ito et al.). In short, the blog has acted as a connective net, spreading our professional circles wider with each successive post. We have been learning how to edit an academic journal for a new era. Our work has included soliciting and working with an editor and revising to experiencing readers' responses. The immediacy of blog posting is something that 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 have long yearned for; 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 who publish regularly, we 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.

Advocacy Blogging as Professional Development

The act of creating a blog has produced welcome and surprising ripple effects 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 writing and to others who are personal friends; we felt that each of these individuals had perspectives and experiences we 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 ours: 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 are encouraged to self-promote their own work and 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 the field of English Education as a whole. Our commission has been striving for years to 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 the blog’s readers, who visit the blog on their own, and who may find 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 efficiently.

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 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.
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" (Galarza, 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.

Works Cited


