

Title of Session: AAMU Writing Project - Reading Each Other's Writing

Moderator: Sandra Shattuck

Title of File: 20030911aamu

Date: September 11, 2003

Room: After School Online Room

BjB: Welcome to the AAMU Writing Project.

BjB: Tonight's topic is Reading Each Other's Writing

BjB: the discussion leader is Sandra Shattuck

BjB: we usually start all the discussions with introductions

BjB: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania

SandraS: I'm a college English teacher in Alabama

SusieC: I am a pre-service teacher in Houston

MelissaAC: I'm a preservice teacher at the University of Houston

SusieC: Hi Melissa

MelissaAC: hi

SandraS: I notice that Susie, your focus is technology ed.

SandraS: And Melissa, you've got a mix of disciplines.

SusieC: no, Early childhood

SandraS: OK, great.

SaraAB joined the room.

SandraS: Hi, Sara.

SusieC: Hi Sara

SandraS: BJ, would you like Sara to introduce herself?

SandraS: Not sure of protocol, here.

BjB: Hi, Sara. Welcome. We're just finishing intros...

SaraAB: Hello

BjB: can you tell us what you teach and where you are located?

SusieC: I am in a Language Arts Methods class and learning about writing...

SandraS: wonderful

SaraAB: I teach 8th grade English and US History in San Diego, CA

SandraS: our mix of disciplines and grade levels will add wonderful juice to the discussion

SandraS: which focuses on our own writing

SandraS: and how we can support and improve it

SandraS: specifically with peer feedback

SandraS: So let me start with a quick quick overview of the National Writing Project

SandraS: without which I wouldn't be standing here in Tapped In's ASO

SandraS: I've graded thousands of papers over the years, and I write a good deal

SandraS: but just this past summer I participated in Alabama A&M's Summer Institute

SandraS: of the Writing Project

SandraS: which is a national program

SandraS: teacher development since 1973

SandraS: just celebrating its 30th year

SandraS: Writing Project sites are nationwide - 175 in number

SandraS: the idea is to help teachers become better teachers of writing
SandraS: by themselves becoming better writers
SandraS: also, the National Writing Project believes that writing itself is a premiere way of learning
SandraS: and that it can be practiced in all disciplines
SandraS: I bet you had a good teacher at some point, Susie.
SusieC: I feel that I'm a lot better than I used to be
SusieC: I use to go to the writing lab
SandraS: One of the things I'd like us to think about
SandraS: is the amount and kinds of writing we do in our professional lives
SandraS: any kind of writing
SandraS: and in our not-so-professional lives
SandraS: my point is that whatever we're writing
SandraS: it can be helped by working with others
SandraS: I put two quotations up on the whiteboard
SandraS: and the first says that writers work best in community

Writers flourish not in isolation but in community.
Writing Together: How to Transform Your Writing in a Writing Group
Dawn Denham Haines, Susan Newcomer & Jacqueline Raphael
NY: Perigee Book/Berkeley Publishing, 1997

This is what we can all do to nourish and strengthen one another: listen to one another very hard, ask hard questions, too, send one another away to work again, and laugh in all the right places. - Nancy Mairs

SandraS: so, for instance
SandraS: if you're going up for national board certification
SandraS: there's a lot of writing involved
SandraS: there are ways to get prepared for that
SandraS: or if you're writing a newsletter for the chess club
SandraS: or if you're proposing a new course
SandraS: and so on....
Jan_NS: (or writing a dissertation proposal!)
SandraS: exactly!
SandraS: and the point is that we don't have to do any of it alone
SandraS: there are two ways (at least) to get help
SandraS: the first is simply to identify an individual whom you trust
SandraS: and whose literacy you admire
SandraS: and ask that person to read your stuff and talk to you about it
SusieC: I agree
SandraS: another way is to join or start a writing group
SandraS: I've got tips on all of that, but why don't we first start with each of us
SandraS: mentioning a writing project we currently face
SandraS: and perhaps one hurdle that troubles us the most
SandraS: I can start by saying that I've got two conference epapers on blogging coming

up and I've barely started

SandraS: Jan, you mentioned a dissertation proposal

SandraS: you want to elaborate?

SusieC: I just have 1-2 page assignments for my classes. Summaries and such no biggie compared to you guys

SandraS: still sound like biggies

SandraS: I think we all categorize our writing

SandraS: into writing that's worth sharing

MelissaAC: well, I have a ton of projects and lesson plans to write for school - my problem is that I have all these ideas, but don't know if they are good or where to start.

SandraS: and writing that doesn't need to be shared

SaraAB: I write a lot to use as models or examples for my students of how writers write. The biggest problem for me is with revising and modeling revision.

SandraS: a very big area....revision

JeffC joined the room.

SandraS: one of the things I'd like to emphasize

SandraS: is the connection between writing and talking

SandraS: and that we can talk about our writing at any phase

SusieC: Melissa, we are told that sometimes the best lessons plans do not go the way you plan, let it go

SaraAB: I find it tough to step back from my pieces and be objective. Partners would definitely help.

SandraS: from invention to drafting to revision

SusieC: working with partners can make it worse

SandraS: how so, Susie?

SusieC: Depends who has which job to do

SandraS: ok, so an important for both writer and reader

MelissaAC: I have also had bad experiences working with groups

SandraS: ah.... let's hear, Melissa

MelissaAC: I tend to do better when I write by myself

SusieC: Letting someone look at your work is good. Sometimes waiting a day or two helps.

SusieC: It gives you fresh eyes

MelissaAC: I usually write to get the idea out of my head and then come back to it a day or so later

SandraS: here's the important step I'd like to mention

SandraS: both writer and reader need to decide what they want

SandraS: so the writer needs to specify what kind of feedback s/he would like

SaraAB: I agree it gives you fresh eyes, sometimes it is hard because it is so personal.

SusieC: It depends on the audience you are writing for

SandraS: exactly

SandraS: purpose and audience

SandraS: the big rhetorical areas

SusieC: yes

SandraS: so let's try this

SandraS: if each of us can mention one very specific piece of writing

SandraS: that we'd like to revise

SandraS: expand

SandraS: develop

SandraS: just go around the room and mention that piece of writing

JeffC: I have a few documents in my office that I'd love feedback on.

SandraS: Jeff, can you describe one particular document?

SaraAB: I am currently writing a fiction piece for my students about a girl who moves a lot and has a kind of crummy home life.

SandraS: sounds intriguing, Sara

JeffC: One is entitled "Educational MUVes" ... it looks at places like "Tapped In" and discusses the difference between virtual communities and virtual environments.

SandraS: ah... so Jeff mentioned his title

SusieC: interesting

SandraS: and I think he'd be a great reader for my blogging pieces...

SandraS: because his area of expertise overlaps

SandraS: that's one key to finding an effective reader

JeffC: Cool... just give me the URL and I'll be happy to look at the blog.

SandraS: excellent -- Jeff, you and I will have to talk later...

SandraS: but let's use this as an example

SandraS: right now,

SandraS: I'm at the inventing stage of my process

SandraS: don't really know what the heck I'm doing

SandraS: although I suspect that if Jeff and I took twenty minutes to chat together online

SandraS: I'd have a much better idea what I really want to do

SandraS: Then, I might start some notes.

SandraS: maybe I'm not yet comfortable sharing those notes

SandraS: I get to a draft that kinda works and send it to Jeff

SandraS: I tell Jeff the purpose of the piece

SandraS: the audience

SusieC: What main idea do you want [to] talk about?

SandraS: and maybe three major questions I'd like him to attend to

SandraS: Great question Susie...and I'd love to answer that but we'd be here all night focusing on my writing

JeffC: Sounds good to me! Let's focus on Sandra's writing ;-)

SandraS: perhaps I'm unsure if I've gotten my main point across in the first draft.

SandraS: heheheh

SandraS: no way....

JeffC is still waiting for that blog URL...

SusieC: The advice they always gave us was main ideas and supporting details

SandraS: already, I can tell that I'd probably be comfortable with Jeff as a reader

SandraS: mainly because of his knowledge and his sense of humor

SandraS: and he's persistent...

SandraS: there's a gazillion ways to write

JeffC . o O (Sandra hasn't seen my constant caustic criticisms yet...)

SandraS: can't wait for the caustic criticism...

SusieC: time waits for no one

SandraS: but how many ways do we attend to our writing
SandraS: by searching out careful and caring readers?
SandraS: I guess my point tonight is that we owe that to ourselves
SandraS: professionally
SandraS: personally
SandraS: and that without paying much money to editors
SandraS: we can find those resources all around us
SandraS: AND
SandraS: Tapped in makes that kind of resource
SandraS: immensely available
SandraS: The two main questions to guide any reading
SandraS: what does the writer do well?
SandraS: how can the writer improve?
SandraS: as a reader
SandraS: it's important for me to point out where the writer succeeds
SandraS: not only so that the writer can see where stuff is working
SandraS: but also because we all have those fragile writing egos
SandraS: and hearing positive feedback first
SandraS: helps to set the tone
JeffC: Bottom line for me is interest and motivation... both of those transcend just about everything else.
SandraS: you mean of the reader?
JeffC: both
SandraS: interest and motivation of writer and reader
SusieC: I can say that when I read something, it is not because of who wrote it, but is it any good.
SandraS: but interest and motivation can be sky high, and the skills to communicate those things ineffective
SandraS: right, and Susie, how something is "good" is precisely what a reader needs to define
JeffC: Right... of course... we're looking for connection... the purpose of the writer is generally rhetorical... s/he wants to bring the reader to some place new... so... both have to be motivated and interested... otherwise... no one's going anywhere.
SandraS: when reviewing someone else's work
SandraS: and it's through the medium of words that the interest is generated
SandraS: in other words
SandraS: I may care less about quantum computing
SandraS: but if someone starts a piece off that glues me to the page
SandraS: then the writer has succeeded
SusieC: something you have to read, and there are others you want to read
SandraS: does anyone here rely on any kind of peer review mechanism for any writing?
SandraS: is anyone here involved in a writing group?
SusieC: not me.
Jan_NS: yes - I work with other doctoral students working on proposals, etc.
SandraS: way cool, Jan
JeffC: Right... but the odds of you're being interested in quantum (sorry... had to poke

fun there) mechanics is probably nil... if the writer starts in a vein that is too technical. However, if s/he starts with a tone that will engage (motivate)... for example "We're looking for universal explanations in lay terms... figuring out the meaning of the universe." ... then... you're on to the second sentence.

SandraS: I was in a dissertation writing group that was great

SaraAB: I only have my students help me as a modeling technique for them to help each other and themselves.

Jan_NS: we have meeting times twice a week for 4 or 5 hours.

SandraS: I agree, Jeff

SandraS: wow, Jan

SandraS: that's a LOT of writing

Jan_NS: well, we have floating participation.

SandraS: can you explain a bit more, Sara?

SusieC: collaboration works well if the group is motivated

Jan_NS: sometimes we have four or five people, sometimes 8 - 10

SaraAB: I use my writing as examples and have my students help me revise and edit.

SandraS: the organization of a writing group is pretty critical

SandraS: how is yours run, Jan?

SaraAB: to show them how to revise and edit

SandraS: I understand now, Sara!

SandraS: excellent

SandraS: always good to demystify the teacher as writer

SandraS: ok, so I've got two questions on the table

SandraS: first, Jan -- how is your writing group run and is it effective for you?

SandraS: and Sara, what are your students' responses to your modeling of your own writing?

Jan_NS: we have a coordinator. the group decides how to proceed at the beginning of each meeting. Some just write and ask one or two others to read parts. Sometimes we read what we have written since the last meeting.

SusieC: Does anyone of you critic children's books?

SaraAB: They like to know that I actually write. I think it helps motivate them and show them different areas and genres they might want to explore.

SandraS: Susie, ask again?

SandraS: ok, so the model Jan describes looks like it works well for this kind of floating group of writers

Jan_NS: we ask questions and offer suggestions to clarify portions, we play devil's advocate for each other. The same process works for peer editing and review in courses that I teach.

SandraS: in other words, seems to be set up for anyone writing diss. proposal? and writing and reviewing is done on the spot?

SusieC: Are any of you involved in children's literature or anything with youngsters (their writing)

SandraS: yes, a bit, Susie

Jan_NS: yes. that is it. Since we are not in the same areas of education, we can offer the kind of assistance that is removed from the specific content

SandraS: do you write children's lit?

SandraS: great model, Jan

SusieC: No we just have to use them constantly for lesson plans

SandraS: one of the resources I listed on the whiteboard in ASO

SaraAB: My modeling for students also help them become more comfortable sharing and revising.

SandraS: is a book called Writing Together: How to Transform Your Writing in a Writing Group

SandraS: I've noticed that children's lit has become a much more critical resource

JeffC: I support children's writing. Next week I will be working with the local Superintendent and Special Educators regarding student writing and reading. My experience is by having students actively involved in meaningful writing (whether it's email to their parents or making a new epal around the world), students can dramatically improve their writing... as motivation increases... so do skills.

SandraS: in middle school, high school

SandraS: absolutely, Jeff

SandraS: last month, we talked about creating authentic audiences for writing

Jan_NS: I have found that that kind of writing works with college students, too.

SandraS: absolutely, Jan

SandraS: the immediacy and realness (not the best word, here) affects the writer's motivation

SandraS: and willingness to articulate more effectively

SandraS: I'd argue that the teacher and your peers are "real" audiences

SandraS: but there's still a qualitative difference

SusieC: One of my teacher in college used a portfolio method, in which we could revise over and over till the piece looked well

SusanR: If they can post their writing or poetry to the web...that increases motivation and quality

SandraS: yes, portfolios can be very effective

SusieC: She would make suggestions etc

SandraS: and practice the idea that writing is a process

SandraS: and recursive

SusieC: yes

SandraS: Susan, also if the posters know their are readers out there

SandraS: readers can respond to the web presence thru email

SandraS: for instance, I've got advanced comp. students blogging

SandraS: but they need to have two outside readers

Jan_NS: blogging has great potential

SandraS: I agree, Jan

JeffC: Technical note: Make sure all students/participants know about the "track changes" tool in MS Word. This is especially useful and important for collaborative work... or heavily revised work.

SandraS: the challenge again is cultivating discerning readers

SandraS: wanna expand on that, Jeff?

JeffC: Also the "comments" feature. With "Track Changes" you can revise documents, and/or make suggestions for revisions that may be accepted or rejected by the original author. With "Comments" ... you may make marginal comments that the writer may

incorporate (your thoughts) into the next revision.

SandraS: both options are in MS Word?

JeffC: Yes... at least in the more recent versions... I think if you have Office 97... it might not have them.

SandraS: we've got about another ten minutes

JeffC: Tools--Track Changes and Insert-- Comment

SandraS: thanks Jeff!

SandraS: imagine that you get a visit not from the tooth fairy tonight, but from the writing development fairy

SandraS: what wish would you ask for?

SusieC: My methods professor would like that

SandraS: cool

SandraS: I'm trying to answer the question myself

JeffC: If I ever teach English (or anything else where I have to grade/respond to papers), I will only accept typed and electronic versions... too much writer's cramp from grading in the past. Besides... I can type 90wpm... can only handwrite about 14.

SaraAB: I would have to think about that.

SandraS: I can relate to writer's cramp

SandraS: my answer would be:

SandraS: Oh great Writing Development Fairy, please make writing less painful

SandraS: Please make writing instantaneous

SandraS: and magical

SandraS: Please invent a Writing ATM machine

SandraS: (I think it's called GetEssay.com)

SusieC: Write something that someone else other than me would appreciate

SusanR: How to get the creative juices going..

SandraS: very cool

SandraS: anyone here journal?

SaraAB: How to revise effortlessly

SandraS: yes, Sara

SandraS: I want that too

Jan_NS: I try but I seem to have great periods of neglect in that area.

SaraAB: I've tried. But have never kept up.

JeffC: I write a lot of gonzo journalism on several comedy boards.

SandraS: way cool

SandraS: gotta see that

Jan_NS smiles because she can imagine Jeff doing just that!

SandraS: ok, you've given me some great ideas for future AAMU Writing Project stints

SandraS: I also thought of something tonight

Jan_NS listens intently

SandraS: every third session could be

SandraS: something like a writers' support group

SandraS: where we could each bring in pieces and respond

SandraS: kinda like a writer's group on Tapped In

JeffC: Is that where we get non-writers to send us huge piles of cash?

SandraS: the cool thing would be we could post our pieces ahead of time even

SandraS: um, um...huge piles of cash???....dunno what that looks like
JeffC: . o O (someone here should create a group room for that...)
SandraS: that's what I'm thinkin'
Jan_NS: that would be awesome.
SandraS: would y'all be interested in something like that?
Jan_NS: yep
SandraS: ok, well it would be the next session
SandraS: that would be the 2ndThursday in October
Jan_NS: if for nothing else, for others to give me kick in the seat to get moving.
JeffC: Oh... that kind of support... well... absolutely. What we could do is upload what we want reviewed into the room... people could download and revise (assuming we all have Word and can do track changes and comments)...
SandraS: cool
Jan_NS: that is a good idea, Jeff
SandraS: we can meet in ASO
JeffC: Why ASO? Why not meet in "The Room"
SandraS: but we can post in the AAMU Writing Project Room
SusanR: Neat idea! Saw that idea presented in a workshop, Jeff!
SandraS: I can invite all of you to become members
SandraS: then you can post whatever you'd like everyone to read and respond to
Jan_NS: . o O (sounds like something I could do to encourage my students.)
SaraAB: Sounds interesting
JeffC: Also... have "collaborative tag team writing" ... you know... write a sentence (or paragraph)... continue on... for the heck of it.
SandraS: if you want to post something in the AAMU Writing Group room
SandraS: I'll go ahead and invite all of you to be members
Jan_NS: I call that "progressive" writing
SandraS: unless you're not interested
SandraS: so the folks I see here are:
SandraS: SusieC, SaraAB, Jan_NS, SusanR and JeffC
Jan_NS: yep
SandraS: I will send out invites to all
SandraS: and you can accept or decline.
SandraS: How about you post two weeks ahead of our meeting
Jan_NS: thanks, Sandra (or do you use Sandy?)
SandraS: that way folks can respond to writing
SandraS: (Sandy)
SaraAB: thanks, I will definitely consider it.
SandraS: and we will be ready to discuss online at ASO
SandraS: no pressure...
SandraS: just a possibility
Jan_NS: do you folks mind if I try some of my proposal?
JeffC: Here's something even more macro: What about the other members of Tapped In? I've been a bit concerned about the fact that there really isn't much "lateral" communication between individuals, groups, etc. How about posting this to "Meet Me at Tapped In" or other listservs... so that those who weren't at this meeting could join as

well?

SandraS: that would be great Jan

SusanR: Thanks Sandra. Some fruitful ideas.

SandraS: Sounds excellent Jeff

SandraS: Thanks Susan

Jan_NS: good idea, Jeff

SandraS: great meeting...

SandraS: thanks to all for participating

SandraS: Jeff, we gotta talk....

Jan_NS: gotta run, thanks for the chat everyone.

SusanR: goodnight all

SandraS waves by to Jan and Susan

SaraAB: Thank you, Sandra

JeffC: Thanks Sandra... everybody. I'd love to show people some of my articles... etc...