

I'm interested in what happens when we are able to write together in real time. Perhaps you are, too. Let's test that out a bit here. I'm going to publish whatever is in this text box along with an explanation of how we wrote this as a blog post on my blog at <http://budtheteacher.com> in about a week. Between now and then, it's up to us to write what's going to end up there. You're welcome to post whatever you'd like wherever you'd like, too. You can also share this text with anyone you'd like to be here by sending them this link:

<http://etherpad.com/aG3NK5UuB9>

So, let's make this easy - remember - we can always return to older drafts if we make mistakes - so feel free to write and revise and fiddle as you go. This is our space - don't be afraid to tinker. Be sure to add your name to the bottom so that I can give you credit for your contribution(s) in the blog post.

### **What's one thing that you've learned about writing or teaching writing?**

1. Writing is about purpose and audience more than it's about the number of paragraphs. We write for different purposes and audiences all the time. Too often in school, we only focus on the audience of the teacher and the purpose of pleasing the teacher.

Writing has historically been a solitary activity. You write by yourself in a room for years and you MIGHT get something published. Now writing is shared instantly.

I believe it is more than about writing. I believe it is about publishing in any form. Connie

Writing is but one form of communication, and shares characteristics with other forms (face to face, video, audio, etc). Audience is important - who you communicate to determines message and language choices you make. The words you choose, the structure and form you use, the punctuation rules you follow - all these sorts of decisions actually modify the message you convey. I believe "good" or "successful" writing starts with identifying the message and audience, then crafting the writing to convey the specific message to the selected audience - even if the "message" is responding to a prompt and the "audience" is one's instructor. One unique thing to writing is the amount of participation required by the reader. Based solely on the reader's interpretation of unannotated text not accompanied by body language, it is very easy for a reader to infer something a writer did not imply.

Students that are passionate about writing, that have a peer group that is passionate about writing, write collaboratively. For more than five years a group of peers into writing fantasy fiction have been writing together, holding each other accountable and publishing (outside of the school walls). Some writings are hidden away in their personal computer hard drives, other writings have been published in deviantart.com, a social networking site for creatives to publish their "art". How can we bring this passion into the classroom? Connie

C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien met every Tuesday at the Eagle and Child Pub in Oxford to discuss their writing. It makes me wonder if collaborative technologies had existed then, whether we might have seen even more fruitful works from both authors.

Writing sometimes results in a product for sharing. Other times, writing serves to clarify ideas without requiring a formal product.

The read/write switch in students' minds can be profound. Now while they are reading something they are already writing their response.

Students understand audience! They do it all the time with their phones and accounts. Getting them to tap into that knowledge to sell an idea, project, or assignment is the challenge teachers face.

communication generally, is about people. "Words matter; write to learn what you know."-- Mary Anne

Rademacher

This year I am committing myself to writing with them because then it hopefully removes the traditional barrier of us versus them. It does scare me a bit, but I want to show that writers never arrive, they are always in the process.

Students have stories they want to tell; many just associate writing with schoolwork. Once you get them to see writing as art, or writing as purpose, or writing as anything that may be meaningful to them, they love it. But you have to be flexible. As an English teacher, I sometimes want to overwhelm them with the details when they just want to know how to tell their own story. When I started as a teacher, it baffled me that kids didn't want to write. I have learned that they just didn't want to write for me.

Teaching writing is FUN!!!! Students like to write for an audience other than me. New tools like Wordle make teaching and proofing even more fun!--Joanne Troutner I agree, probably because of the creative aspect of it!

Teaching writing to upper elementary students is like walking a tightrope between directing, modeling, and helping the students organization and giving them enough freedom to find the subjects that they can write passionately and with confidence about.

Teaching structures matters -- knowledge of genre can help inform both creation and thought. A knowledge of common sentence templates helps as well. To master the use of a relative clause or a sequence of bound modifiers is in a way to master a certain more general understanding, or at least provide students with a way to posit different and more complex thoughts than they are used to.[Mike]

2. Writing is recursive. I draft, revise, re-draft, re-revise, and often scrap what I've done and start over. Sometimes, I pre-write, other times I don't. The "writing process" isn't a linear series of steps to be followed in a lock step fashion. (I agree that the writing process isn't necessarily a linear series of steps, but I maintain that good writers almost always pre-write--even if it is very informally. I don't always get out a piece of paper and outline what I am going write, but I do make a plan. I have at least a general idea of the path I hope to guide my audience along. I often compare the writing process with the "wonder circle" we use in science. Not only is writing recursive but it also ricochets from step to step.

I'm thinking about crafting a presentation as writing as well. I've finally come to grips that my style is to process/pre-write in my mind and with scratchy notes. Then I can sit down and begin to really compose. I hope to leave time for that "walk away and come back with a fresh eye" approach. I demo this to my students...kind of like taking off the top of my head or using metacognition so students can actually experience the creation process from at least one point of view.

3. Everyone likes to see their writing published. Which is why publishing needs to have a strong place in our standards we teach! But publishing can take on many forms. One of the wonderful things about the internet and technology is it allows real publishing without money for printing. Hanging kids work up on a bulletin board isn't really publishing if that's all that you do. I still like to publish one project professionally, though. I love the look on their faces when they see what they wrote in a "real book." Along with the standard for publishing could be included different audiences.

4. Casual (conversational) writing has become much more acceptable. (I think this needs to be defined better...[agreed-"writing" is a broad term]). I'm able to effectively convey my message by writing almost as I'd speak to a friend in a cafe. (have English teachers stopped teaching grammar? I think grammar lessons look different now than 20 years ago. Thoughts?)Of course, this doesn't disregard the importance of grammar. Casual writing style and grammar are not mutually exclusive, though the former does sometimes allow a relaxation of the latter. My parents (former teachers) frequently question how I teach grammar and are skeptical that I actually teach it. But I think you're right, not mutually exclusive. (I don't know about this

one - is the point that tone is important in writing, and that some audiences respond in very particular ways to particular tones? For example, writing "Hey, wazzup, l8tr" to a prospective boss might not go so well, but writing the same to a friend would be just fine.) I relaxed my expectations for correct grammar this year in my student's blogs at the beginning of the year to help enthusiasm and build community faster and tried to raise expectations as the year progressed. I found the content and topics suffered and I wondered if a less academic approach to grammar was partially to blame.

Grammar has become about audience. When students are writing to each other, grammar isn't important, not to them or the message. But we do need to teach them how to transition from a casual tone to a more formal one and grammar is key to this. This is a case where we need to meet students where they are and not trash talk their previous teachers. If a student can't write a sentence, don't worry about who didn't teach them what, just teach them how to write a sentence. What we shouldn't do is discredit how they write.

Students need to be fluent in casual and formal writing to be well prepared for the future. They do not have to be mutually exclusive.

5. The writing process needs to be less defined, as someone alluded to above. It's not a five step chronological process. Yes, in a basic form, there are 5 different stages that you go through, but you drift in and out and repeat. Trying to put the writing process in a box form doesn't allow it to be free flowing and contemplative. Young writers need to have a structure (is structure "what" you write about or "how" you write??) (*in this example, I meant the "how to"*) on how to write to begin their "writing life," but don't corner them into a process. It's almost like hitting a baseball. Everyone's goal is to hit every ball, but they all do it in a little different manner. Some do have a textbook swing like you'd find in an instructional video (some kids love the 5 step process like you see in a writing manual). Some baseball players have "unorthodox" swings (i.e., Ichiro Suzuki), but still get the job done. The same can be said about writers. Love the baseball analogy. The best players hit 3 or 4 or 5 out of 10 times (for average). Students (especially) and teachers need to understand that what works for one doesn't work for all. I require drafts of some papers, but that isn't always necessary for every piece of writing.

I think the struggle is getting students to understand the importance of revision. Even students who love to write, don't like to revise. Finding a real purpose for writing helps this. Personally, I don't care if they understand the five stages as long as they understand how to make their writing better, both through revision in one piece and growth from piece to piece.

6. To be a writer, you have to write (if I "write" a video is it writing? Yes Are you writing a storyboard for the video? Then yes, that's writing.) Practice and experience with creating many pieces of writing are necessary to build your ability to write. I worked with a professor that taught teachers a methods course on writing. She taught her students that to be able to teach writing well, you first had to be a writer. The majority of her students agreed by the time they had finished her course. At the start of the methods course, a small percentage of the students enrolled saw themselves as writers, or, people who regularly participate in independent, self-motivated writing. The course pushed these teachers beyond their comfort zones and forced them to write, and to write regularly, as part of their coursework. At the end of the course (this was an eight credit course, double the amount of time and credits of most courses at the university), most teachers said things like "I didn't really know how to teach writing before this course because I didn't know what it meant to be a writer myself". To push the argument further, could you teach students how to draw if you haven't drawn since first grade? Sure you could study drawing, and talk to others about how to teach drawing, but to be best able to teach drawing, you should be able to draw yourself first. (I wonder if we can incorporate this into one of the other statements above - because it's true. You learn to write and to teach writing by writing.) (I wonder if the preceding comment needs to be better qualified, "To be able to teach writing well, you first have to be a writer." ??) I agree, and changed it, thanks!

Can we use the word "creator" instead of "writer"?

I think it is interesting how in using technology with our students we talk all the time that mastery for the teacher is not important that the students will solve problems for themselves. Could not the same be true for writing? If we accept that everyone has a unique voice so to might they have a unique way of expressing themselves through writing?

8. I always talk with my kids about "The more you write the more you know." I always tell my 4th graders that their voice (writing) is their power. Agreed, being able to communicate clearly your ideas to someone else is key and writing is one way of thinking through or learning more of what one's thoughts are about which one is writing.

9. I start writing with a concept map. Visually develop and represent the thoughts, ideas and then develop the text. This is often less intimidating for those who do not consider themselves "writers," and can be important when helping students to get their ideas on paper.

10. The English language is a precise language. Writing is the delicate dance of balancing the precision and beauty of words in a way that communicates with intent to a specific audience. The audience is paramount as it dictates what kind of dance you are creating. (That's some beautiful language there.) The dance and precision of language and writing reminds me of Emily Dickinson. And the length, time and place of said dance. I am always apprehensive to say "Great writers, do this"... because the audience dictates so many uncontrollables; context, grammar, text, tact and sometimes even beauty.

11. As more and more text is produced with video and audio, rather than printed words, we might need to begin to talk about "composition" rather than "writing." The two terms might be synonymous. I said publishing above in relating to the same thing. But writing isn't just about publishing. Not always. We could always publish for ourselves or a small group or an individual audience.

12. Students have to feel safe to be able to write. I learned a process that I call wordspill from my NWP institute. I start with two minutes and a undisplayed word. Students see the word at the same time and the timer starts. In elem and hs I have done this activity, I start with a color, let them write. We circle favorite words or phrases and some share. I read the color poem out of Hailstones and Halibut Bones and we discuss the imagery and emotion that evolve from one word. The point is to silence the critic and allow words to flow, to spill from the pen as if dripping directly from your arm. No one stops or pauses, everything that comes into the head is written down. This exercise builds to longer times and then to specific topics. This freedom to ramble, stray, and play with words helps most of my students avoid the block that our search for perfection places in our way. This one exercise, early on, creates writers before my eyes. They beg for this activity and we build from the results with amazing outcomes. I'm going to use this next year. That block, the search for perfection is a stumble for me as well as my students. I use oneword.com to start many of my writing warm-ups.

13. I've learned that writing is a complex act that requires motor output (whether computer or paper based), the ability to generate, synthesize and organize ideas. It requires memory, attention and metacognitive skills. One of my professors (Richard Wanderman) once told me, "Spelling is the spoiler of writing" and I have seen that repeatedly played out with students who struggle with writing. At a young age meaning is more important than perfection- maybe there is value in this for older students also?

14. Writing is a muscle you have to exercise. Writing better comes from writing more and being open to editing. As a metaphor for writing, we might explore building muscles, toning muscles, etc. But I'm not convinced that the writing counterpart to the muscles on a body builder would constitute the epitome of writing.

15. It is not always necessary to write in the formal sense of the word in order to learn to write and excel in writing. A high school student submitted only originally created videos in the accomplishment of their English assignments and made a 34 on the writing portion of the ACT as a 16 year old high school graduate.

(Citation?) Yes perhaps natural talent could also be involved or the ACT is flawed.

16. My students continue to teach me the importances of creating a space for them to write with their own tools, to work with real genres, and to learn alongside model writers who are transparent about lessons to patience, habits of mind, commitment, etc. I totally agree they need time, space and freedom!

17. I've learned that just because I see the value of writing, just because I love it, doesn't mean my student's will automatically love it. While all student have a story to tell, and want to tell it, many students don't think thier stories are of value. Many don't think that anyone will care. They view writing as an activity that is solely for school and not in the real world. Part of my job as a writing teacher is to get students to see that their stories are valuable, that they have something to contribute. My job isn't to teach them how to write, but to help them find the best way to say what they want to say. I need to show them that their is a purpose for them to write.

18. My love in life is reading. My worst fear is that young people will stop writing so there won't be anything new to read when I am old.

19. I've struggled with writing and wish that it were taught in ways that would allow for more creativity and fullness of expression. If we focus too much on perfection, young writers can get turned off or become averse to writing. I think young writers should have the opportunities to write and write and write and write and express themselves freely without the red pen limiting their expressions. Having been immersed in academia for the past 10 years, I feel my true voice in writing has been stifled by academic conventions. Thankfully for this project/collaborative effort, we need not provide citations:) Thank you for sharing this project. I look forward to seeing how the comments shape up!

20. As an ESL teacher I wonder what kind of impact writing has for students and, above all, what kind of learning do they get from our corrections. It seems to me that most of the mistakes in the first composition of the beginning of the term are the same as in the final composition at the end of the school year. Is this a reading / writing / correcting / study problem? All of the latter?

I grew up in a traditional school setting where writing meant writing a paper and getting it back with lots of grammar mistakes identified. Writing was, at best, a conversation between myself and a teacher. As a teacher today, I see so many authentic opportunities for us to write and participate in real conversations and communication with others. I try to prepare my students (4th grade) for the challenges and the thrill of writing in the 21st century.

My 7 year olds adore the chance to write freely and the results are superb! We don't always need to focus on the negatives. Give them a real, meaningful, exciting context and watch them fly! Stories, instructions, information, blogs...you name it they love it!

The more I write, and the more I read, I am beginning to have a glimmer of an understanding that there is no right/wrong to writing. Some of the most effective literature in history is that which breaks the rules of convention. Perhaps defining writing as conventional or traditional would allow for greater freedom in student writing...allowing for students to study and concentrate conventional styles of writing without feeling confined to these forms or bound by these rules in their own personal writing. Over the past two weeks, I have heard *professors* say they feel uncomfortable writing because they feel inadequate expressing themselves in words on paper. If we are to foster confident and able writers, writers who add to our ever-exponentially-expanding canon of literature, students must be allowed to express themselves in a variety of ways, taught (as I never was) that writing is more than correct or good, it is effective communication of ideas...however they come.

Writing is, ultimately, a creative act. It may be shared, it may be private. I try to have my "voice" coming through the writing. I don't want to "sound" like others, I want to **sound** like myself!

The physical method used does seem to play a role. Pen & paper vs typing seems to affect the end product. To some extent, it may be due to the need for more forethought with pen and paper, where it's easy to create multiple revisions and move things around with a text editor.

Schedules make a world of difference it seems. A periodic deadline, whether it be monthly, weekly or daily seems to mitigate writer's block, and boost creativity. Submission on the fly, while allowing for more polish often times ends up being counterproductive. Although, I often feel stifled when pressed by a deadline, and no matter how hard I try to create something, the words just aren't there. I wonder if that's how children feel when constrained by a set time to write each day. Sometimes I just need to sit and think, or run, or bike or read in order to get the writing flowing. I wish we could afford our students that same luxury, while teaching them the necessity of schedules and deadlines as a reality of life.

This is a pretty fascinating "experiment," Bud. From an "academic" standpoint, I wonder what collaborative writing tools mean for the notion of authorship. We (professors) get credit for "authoring" publications and there is a hierarchy: sole authored publications are the "best." From there, who gets listed as first author "matters." What happens now when publishing can happen like THIS? I wonder that, too, Jon. Who's the privileged voice here, Jon? Who gets to ultimately decide what this text looks like? Who gets to be the "I" used several times above? Who gets to be the "we" in other places? Why are we having this "conversation" in the text rather than in the comments? (Lots of questions.)

I'm not sure whether collaborative writing among larger groups (over 3-4) in real time is even something we want to consider. What I like about blogs, wikis etc is the reflection time that we have. Though, considering the distracted day I'm having, I may be missing the point. What I need is just more time to read and write, or more discipline to focus on one thing at a time. ;0) I do group writing like this already in class. For some students, the notion of anonymity helps with the authoring process, especially when it comes to revision. Since there is no single author, they learn to understand that revision isn't about all the things they did wrong, but about improving writing. The fear of being laughed at is diminished since no one really knows what they wrote themselves. I don't think all writing could be done this way, but it is a valuable tool. It can actually free kids to be more creative rather than stifling them.

And, with everyone having the opportunity to export/download the document, what are we creating? Is this truly community knowledge?

I love "the more you write, the more you know." It's true. We understand the thing about which we write more and more as we write.

I've seen more fire from student writers who have been involved in a community of peers than I have from kids I've inundated with "great authors" and "timeless works." In fact, showing kids stuff from textbooks or from well known authors seems to perpetuate their belief that writing is reserved for the professional and that classroom writing is essentially a closed conversation between student and teacher. Frankly, many kids could care less what I think of their writing - they're often simply performing for a grade and many of my students aren't too worried about getting an 'A.' They do, however, care what their peers think. When students are engaged in active reading strategies and when what they are thinking about peer writing is transparent and the student writer gets to see these thoughts, magic happens. This is when student writers begin to look deeply into technique and message. It is only when the thoughts of someone they care about are visible to them that they start to see themselves as powerful enough to ensure that what they write is what they mean. It is then that they care enough to tease meaning from their own writing. To be clear, I'm not talking about peer critiquing or peer editing. These strategies actually disempower the author. That model says the reader is more important than writer. I'm talking about a loud speaker on reader thoughts tempered with a lot of questioning. Authors can make great choices if they're prompted with, "I wonder what you meant when you said \_\_\_\_\_. I thought maybe you were saying \_\_\_\_\_."

## **Other Forms of Learning by Creating**

Writing is but one way of learning through creation. Here are some other examples:

- in the process of preparing for presentations, which includes the preparation of diagrams and/or photos, and the authoring of slides, I learn a huge amount.
- the practice of taking photographs regularly has taught me a great deal not just about photography but also about flowers, trees, bugs and birds
- creating videos (especially, eg. my Bogota video, which involved a lot of production) help me find themes and generalizations in my experiences
- writing software has been enormously educational to me, with lessons in everything from nomenclature and logic to data structures, communication and interaction, and conceptualization, all in addition to learning how to program.
- writing OLDaily, which is a series of short posts, has taught me not only how to write concisely, but also to be more observant, to establish a rigorous and regular research practice, and to communicate with a wider community
- carpentry - for example, the building of a set of shelves and window-box, in addition to finishing a room, taught me how to use power tools, about materials (strengths and properties), about design and decoration, and about furniture building.
- gardening has taught me about plants and insects (and especially how to control lily beetles organically), about soil and weather and botany, about landscaping, and also about process and patience

This is my learning. I know that others learn through creativity in their own right.

Many people, for example, learn through working on mechanics and machines. 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance' captures the way the physical practice of manipulating metal and rubber contains wider life lessons.

I think that, in general, creativity in its various forms - writing, film-making, etc. - is a much more powerful form of learning than any sort of passive receptivity or information transfer. Learning, as you say, in a bottle.

when writing for learning, for reflection, for creativity,...i think grammar takes a back seat.

unless it's grammar that you are trying to learn, reflect upon or create.

what do you mean by - the closest thing to learning in a bottle - bud?

learning in a bottle makes me think of thick walls and algorithms and standardized tests and ....and .. grammar.

after writing the above yesterday - i starting thinking of other purpose here. these are my thoughts:

what i like about blogs - time to read and really listen to others - time to reflect - time to write.

what i like about im - real time conversation

what i like about twitter - more minds

this seems to combine my - what i likes....

One thing I've learned about teaching writing is that when we give our students choice, time, and the opportunity to collaborate (write together, get feedback, use writing mentors, etc) kids engage with the process of writing and, once they do, there's no turning back. So, I approach each new school year with confidence that my students will learn to love to write and will do great things during the year. An important point about collaboration is that when we work together in partnerships our product is always that much better. Children (and adults) borrow from each other's work sometimes without being aware that that's what they're doing. I

love seeing evidence of this in the children's writing and I am especially pleased when I see that I've done this effectively in my own work.

Writing in my science classroom is generally related to learning during or thinking following an experiment. I find students get so wrapped up in the excitement of their work that they often skip details in the writing. My efforts to encourage their writing is to ask questions as I walk around the room. When I see a fragment - and recognize the thinking behind it, I'll still ask "What made you decide to write that?" When student gives an oral response, I suggest they write it down on their papers. During parent/teacher conferences, I've had parents comment about their student's lab papers and how they have discussed it at home.

That even a math teacher (who attended English classes with the "jocks") can learn to write. The skills come from lots of practice and lots of good, honest feedback.

That maybe you just go away from this topics. It is summer. Talk about the cupcakes at the bakery and when we really look at learning seriously especially middle/school/high school kids the brains are located in their stomachs. And if we can align a learning event with a certain food item they just ate we might have success. Such as "hey kids remember when we wer exploring about that castle in the Loire Valley, you know the one we sudied when eating a chocolate croissant". tt

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