



UNT Students Connecting with Elementary Students

by Dr. Cathy Stearns

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For the past four semesters, my UNT students had a surprise waiting on their desk when they walked into my classroom the first night we met. There was a letter from their soon to be 3rd grade pen pal from a local Denton ISD school. They wrote letters back and forth throughout the semester, exchanged pictures and formed a relationship through written correspondence. The elementary students would ask questions like “Are you married?”, “What books do you like to read?”, and even “Do you have a pet?” At the end of each semester, we would all meet at the elementary school. The students would read to each other while enjoying donuts. However, each semester either an elementary student or a UNT student had his/her heart broken when a pen pal did not show up or was absent

that day.

This semester the classroom teacher and I decided to do something a little differently. The UNT students will read for ten minutes from a chapter book, upload it to YouTube and send me the link. Once I have received all of the links, I will email them to the classroom teacher so that she can use these videos as one of her center rotations. Her students will then listen to the clip while following along in the book and will write about a text-to-self connection. Afterward each reflective connection will be sent back to the UNT student who read that specific book, and he/she will read and respond back to the elementary student. Several of these will be given to the UNT students throughout the semes-

ter. At the end of the semester, my students and I will meet at the elementary school for a morning of reading and sharing donuts. Instead of connecting student to student, we are going to connect class to class and everyone will leave happy. Additionally, our elementary classroom is located at a Title I campus, and according to *Engaging Students With Poverty in Mind* by Eric Jensen (ASCD, 2013) one of the engagement factors in teaching students in poverty is to make meaningful connections with local universities and university students. My students will demonstrate that staying in school and going to college is possible for them.

From August, 2015. We would love a follow-up!

POINTS OF THE STAR

- ◆ Inquiry
- ◆ Dialogue
- ◆ Authenticity
- ◆ Modeling
- ◆ Re-visioning

It’s all About the Little Things

Link provided by Dr. Leslie Patterson

As Dr. Leslie Patterson pulled together resources for an Human Systems Dynamics webinar in the fall, she shared these links as helpful reminders “about how to create new patterns in the face of strong negative patterns that already are powering the system.” Not only are these links beneficial reminders for teachers, but also could work as powerful reflective tools or writing prompts for middle- to high-school students.

- <http://www.littlethings.com/josh-opens-doors-bullied/>
Video about how a courageous young man stands up to bullies with kindness.
- <http://zenhabits.net/survival-kit/>
“How to be Prepared for Anything” - a survival kit for navigating the daily obstacles in our lives.

Write for Texas; Partner; with Gainesville ISD

by Joan Curtis



On August 18th and 19th, Dr. Carol D. Wickstrom and Dr. Joan Scott Curtis facilitated professional development for secondary teachers in Gainesville ISD. As part of the Write for Texas initiative from the Texas Education Agency, Gainesville ISD will be a focus district for our North Star of Texas Writing Project. Joan has been a Teacher Consultant with NSTWP since the first Invitational Summer Institute in 2003, and recently left her job with Denton ISD in order to coach teachers in writing instruction with Write for Texas and NSTWP. Vonda McFarlin, NSTWP Teacher Consultant since 2004, is the ELAR Coordinator for Gainesville ISD.

Patterns of effective classrooms and infor-

mal writing strategies were the topics focused on during the session as secondary teachers of all contents engaged in reading, writing, thinking, and discussing.

Vonda and Joan visited classrooms at Lee Intermediate School, Gainesville Jr. High, and Gainesville High School on August 26th and 27th as follow up to the PD. Joan's goal is to get a sense of the culture of each school and develop relationships with the teachers. Working collaboratively, Vonda and Joan will examine the history, the current practices, and the effective plans for coaching. Joan will be on these campuses each week for the next couple of months and will begin working individually with teachers by mid-October.

Carol will be contacting other targeted districts and campuses in the near future.

Stories to Reduce the Chaos; How Do We Use Stories to Make Sense of Complexity? Free webinar hosted by Human Systems Dynamic; Institute

Greetings! Please join us for this webinar and share the link to friends and colleagues!

When young children begin to change from asking "what" types of questions to "why" questions, Maria Montessori said that we can "bring them the universe." Teachers in Montessori classrooms use stories about student learning to explore the complexity of early learning, adding more and more details as children grow older. In this webinar, we will explore how these stories plant seed of wonder, curiosity, and "reverential respect" for all that has come before. -- Mary Beth Wertime-Warner

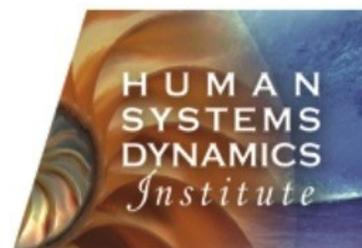
Please join Mary Beth Wertime-Warner, Montessori educator and teacher advocate, for a discussion of how teachers can use these rich stories to nurture student learning AND as an alternative to the testing regime.

January 7

7:00-8:00 pm Central Time

Free Registration: http://bit.ly/teacher_stories

For more information about HSD and its webinar series, check out: <https://hsdineducation.wordpress.com/2015-16-webinar-series/>



Research Opportunity!

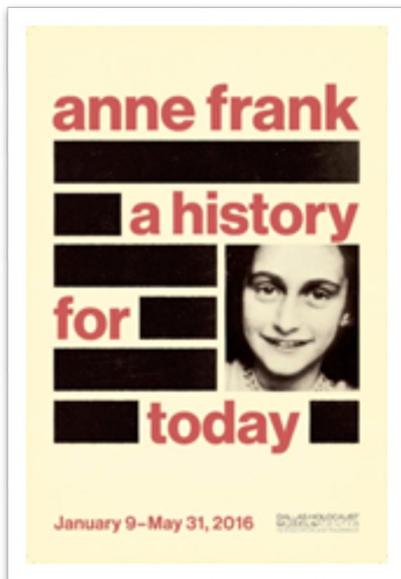
by Amy Burke

Hello North Star Teacher Consultants! My name is Amy Burke and I am a faculty member in the Department of Reading at Texas Woman's University. I graduated from UT-Austin and while there participated in the Heart of Texas Writing Project. I'm excited to make connections with NWP kindred spirits in the area. I plan to begin a new research project and am interested in collaborating with an elementary school teacher who is interested in researching the language and literacy practices in his or her classroom. I am particularly interested in questions around reading/writing workshop, classroom talk, and critical literacy. If you are interested or would like more information, please contact me at aburke@twu.edu (note the underscore). Thank you!



Dallas Holocaust Museum Special Exhibit: Anne Frank: A History for Today

shared by Amber Counts



From the Dallas Holocaust Museum Newsletter:

"I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps the time will come when I shall be able to carry them out."

– Anne Frank –

"Starting January 2016, you and your students can step through the Secret Annex door and view the story of the life of Anne Frank against a chronological timeline of the Holocaust.

Through the special exhibit, *Anne Frank: A History for Today*, from the Anne Frank Center in New York, students will learn about her life and the message she left for the world to read."

On a personal note:

I have had the opportunity to visit the Dallas Holocaust Museum several times—both with my son's 8th-grade English class and as part of my own ongoing education with the Holocaust Educators Network. Each time, I had the honor of hearing holocaust survivors speak about their experiences. Opportunities to hear these first-hand accounts by the men and women who were children and young adults during WWII are becoming increasingly rare. As educators, we often struggle with how to teach empathy to our students. Such visits to the DHM, especially when combined with guided tours and survivor testimonies, provide a great opportunity to this end. The museum has full classroom educational kits for teachers to borrow, and their special exhibits, like this one about Anne Frank, provide additional context and lesson ideas. Another recent exhibit featured pictures and materials from the World Trade Center. If you would like more information, visit <http://www.dallasholocaustmuseum.org/>.

Making Learning Palatable: What's Good for the Goose isn't Necessarily Good for the Gander

by Whitney Kelley

If any of you watch *Top Chef* or any of the popular cooking shows of Food Network, then you've more than likely heard of *foie gras*, which is duck liver or goose liver, usually served as a pâté. There is some controversy over how *foie gras* is produced, and it's explained quite well in this excerpt from Wikipedia:

"The production of foie gras (the liver of a duck or a goose that has been specially fattened) involves the controversial force-feeding of birds with more food than they would eat in the wild, and more than they would voluntarily eat domestically. The feed, usually corn boiled with fat (to facilitate ingestion), deposits large amounts of fat in the liver, thereby producing the fatty consistency sought by some gastronomes."

The entire process sounds rather painful for the duck, and somewhat diminishes the palatability of what some consider a delectable culinary treat. Really? Force-feeding fat-laden corn to purposefully overload the filtering organ? Yuck.

But we do it every single day in American classrooms. We force-feed our students a diet of reading and writing that is not nutritious for their literary health, and we do it all in the name of checking off boxes and teaching to artificial tests so that the fat cats in Austin and Washington can dine on "commendable scores," i.e. academic pâté, or the byproduct of students being oversaturated with scholastic fat.

I recently encountered this phenomenon while teaching World Experience, which is the Gifted & Talented combined class of English II and AP World History. This is my first time teaching it, and so I am

relying heavily on other teachers within the district who have gone before me. I have a trusted friend who has not only taught both the English and the History for years, she is also the AP coordinator for our district. She very graciously shared with me the reading materials and basic outline of her pacing for the first few units, and thinking that it would be helpful for jumpstarting my focus, I began implementing them "as is."

You seasoned teachers can already spot my rookie mistake. I did not take into consideration our kids, our pacing, our strengths and weaknesses. I also wasn't familiar with ANY of the texts, and I had absolutely no plan on how to incorporate readers/writers workshop in with the materials.

I found myself falling further behind. By the time I was reading the hefty texts (we're talking *Gilgamesh*, folks), and trying to stay on top of the corresponding history, and reading/commenting on written work AND trying to keep up with another news prep, AP Language & Composition, I simply couldn't stay on top of it all. My goose was cooked, so to speak.

This is not an indictment on the materials or the teacher who shared them. Not at all! This is sounding the alarm that reading material and lesson plans are only good if you take the time to understand what you are wanting to accomplish with them. My colleague who shared all that material knew exactly how she utilized them, discussed them, teased them for skills and critical thinking. I, on the other hand, was guilty of force-feeding my children with texts and questions and activ-

ities that were not moving them forward.

When I could see that my students were filled to the gills and miserable with the tasteless delivery of what otherwise might be delicious texts, I knew I had to switch gears. I knew in my heart of hearts that these kids needed - wanted - to be engaged and part of the learning process.

I have since scuttled the tomes of classical reading and instead am working with my AP History teaching partner to select one or two reading pieces related to the era of history they are studying. I'm going back to tried and true (research-based and classroom-proved) strategies that have my kids reading and writing and talking about reading and writing.

The spring semester looms in front of me, but instead of dreading it, I am excited about starting from scratch and laying out plans that include the basic principles of readers/writers workshop: *Actually reading and writing are the only ways to improve at reading and writing.*

My take-away for the start of this school year is that our tastes are unique, and I can create a warm, vibrant learning environment with the pedagogical recipes that I know work. While I may sometimes have to coddle, cajole and coerce my students to get moving with their work, there will be no more force-feeding. And if we can do it right, they'll not only be willingly participating, they may ask for seconds.



North Star knows that amazing moments are happening in classrooms across the Metroplex, and we encourage you to publish - not only in our NSTWP newsletter, but to a wider audience as well. Here are some links to publications that will help you share your expertise with the world!

NCTE Journals; see www.ncte.org	
<i>English Journal</i>	http://www.ncte.org/journals/ej/calls
<i>Language Arts</i>	http://www.ncte.org/journals/la/call
<i>Voices from the Middle</i>	http://www.ncte.org/journals/vm/call
International Literacy Association	
<i>Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy</i>	http://qap2.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/10.1002/(ISSN)1936-2706/homepage/ForAuthors.html
<i>The Reading Teacher</i>	http://www.reading.org/general/publications/journals/RT.aspx
Texas Journals	
TCTELA (Texas NCTE Affiliate) - <i>English in Texas</i>	http://www.tctela.org/english-in-texas/
TALE (Texas IRA Affiliate) – <i>Texas Journal for Literacy Education</i>	http://www.texasreaders.org/journal.html

Hello, educators and colleagues! I want to apologize for this issue’s late publication. This is due to a variety of factors, but I take full responsibility. Moving forward, I want to clarify some expectations that will not only facilitate easier compilation of wonderful ideas from all of you into this newsletter, but also illuminate my vision for the possibilities of North Star’s newsletter. The publication schedule is as follows:

Submissions due: by February 28th, May 31st, August 31st, and November 30th

Corresponding Publication dates: March 5th, June 5th, September 5th and December 5th

Types of pieces preferred: reflections on teaching experiences or strategies, creative writing pieces, lesson ideas, upcoming opportunities - ANYTHING that will help your fellow educators or inspire them in some way. Let’s make this a great resource for our writing and teaching community! -*Amber Counts*

Let us help you teach writing.

www.northstaroftexaswritingproject.org

Contact Us!

NSTWP.Denton@gmail.com

Director: Dr. Carol Wickstrom

University of North Texas

(940) 565–4568

Carol.Wickstrom@unt.edu



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For newsletter entries, comments, or questions, please contact Amber Counts, newsletter editor, at ambercounts@gmail.com. Entries for the next edition are due by February 28th.