

## Personal Reflections on PCWP

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Being a fellow the PCWP this summer has taught me first-hand what life is like on the other side of the desk. I've known for many years that I need to write with my students, and I have even written a few papers myself before I assigned them in order to anticipate the challenges students will face writing them. But the writing has been at my own pleasure and discretion, almost on a whim. Not so this summer. I have had the daily discipline of writing: journal entries, brainstorming, webbing, poems, essays, memoirs, logging. Writing has become part of who I am this summer, not just something I'm always reading and talking about.

I realized during this institute that I've never come all the out from behind the big desk that Nancie Atwell writes about because I have rarely shared my writing with colleagues and asked for their honest response. During the institute I have been that nervous writer, dreading yet desiring the constructive criticism that will allow me to see my poem or essay from another perspective and improve it. Never again will I view student conferences in the same light.

Years ago I began reading journal articles and books on writing that advised teachers not to make ambiguous marks in the margins of students' papers and expect their writing to improve. Questions on earlier drafts that prompt the

writer to rethink why a sentence or passage isn't working for the reader are the way to go. Earlier drafts? How will I ever get all these papers read? I admit that when I have made time for this process, students have revised more than conventional surface errors. Year after year, though, has found me after only one assignment chasing after that bandwagon that says, "Impossible. Not enough time. Can't be done. Great in theory, but just isn't practical." Once safely seated in that wagon, I've found plenty of company willing to agree with me and assure me I've made the wisest choice.

Thanks to the institute, I now have a new mode of transportation to see me through the frustrations and concerns of the coming school year: a network of fellow pearls who, like me, have committed to do what is right for kids, not what is easiest. Colleagues who ask, "how can we make this work?" rather than chiding, "I knew it would never work." I am reminded of a line from one of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poems, "Friendship is a sheltering tree." At the risk of mixing metaphors, we pearls all strung together on a single strand are forming that sheltering tree.

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