

Title of Session: AAMU Writing Project-WriteTalk

Moderator: Sandra Shattuck

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SandraS: ok, should we get started?

AnitaD: Sure!

TonjaC: yes

SandraS: all right - enthusiastic group!

SandraS: we usually begin by introducing ourselves

SandraS: I'm Sandy, and I teach English in Alabama

AnitaD: I'm Nita and I teach French in Texas

SusanRo: I'm a therapist in Atl Ga

TonjaC: I am Tonja Caywood and I teach Special Ed and music in Oklahoma

BJ: I'm a helpdesk volunteer for Tapped In and an art teacher in Pennsylvania

SandraS: all right - thanks for the introductions

TonjaC: COOL! I wish I were an art teacher

SandraS: I'll begin with a quick overview of the National Writing Project

SandraS agrees with Tonja

SandraS: and then we'll go on to the subject for today

SandraS: The National Writing Project

SandraS: www.writingproject.org

SandraS: is federally funded

SandraS: and has been around for 30 years

SandraS: as a professional development organization

SandraS: dedicated to bettering the teaching of writing in schools

SandraS: there are currently 185 sites nationally

SandraS: and the one I belong to, the AAMU Writing Project, is in Alabama

SandraS: housed at Alabama A&M University

SandraS: the sites are housed at university

SandraS: but most of the participants are K-12 teachers

SandraS: the idea behind the project is that teachers are the best teachers of other teachers

SandraS: and that writing helps everyone learn better in every subject

SandraS: and teachers of writing teach better when they write better

SandraS: that's the basic premise

SandraS: the core of the project is an intensive summer institute

SandraS: and there are other projects

SandraS: I began the AAMU Writing Project last summer

SandraS: as a way for our teachers to network

SandraS: it became clear that writing was something plenty of folks at Tapped In

SandraS: were interested in

SandraS: and I think we need places to discuss our own writing

SandraS: what I'd like to do this evening is to do a dry run of the Festival WRiteTALK session

SandraS: that is, the Festival

SandraS: at Tapped In is on July 21

SusanR joined the room.

SandraS: and there will be sessions all day long

SandraS: Write Talk will be a session on writing challenges and solutions

SandraS: so I'd like to talk with you tonight about the challenges you face in your professional writing

SandraS: we can also brainstorm some collective solutions

SandraS: why don't we go around the room

SandraS: introduce yourself again and just talk about your writing challenges

SandraS: I can begin

SandraS: I'm Sandy, English teacher in Alabama

SandraS: I think my greatest challenge is finding time and avoiding perfectionism

TonjaC: I agree, try to make everything perfect and I run out of time

SandraS: right, or revise yourself into oblivion....

TonjaC: This is my biggest problem

AnitaD: My biggest hurdle is also the time issue

SusanRo: I'm Susan, Atlanta therapist, and I have trouble putting into words what I "sense" (see, feel, etc).

AnitaD: I don't like to start if I don't have time to really get into it

DavidWe: I'm David Weksler. I work with teachers to help them use technology. I find getting started a big hurdle

SandraS: anyone else?

SusanR: I am Susan, K to 8 Occasional Teacher. Writing has always been a challenge for me..I am always revising

AnitaD: I think in the classroom the biggest problem is just getting the kids to start putting their words on paper

TonjaC: As a teacher you have to be perfect and colorful in your writing

AnitaD: They have perfectionist issues too

TonjaC: true

SandraS: yes... Anita, by "they" - you mean students?

AnitaD: yes

SandraS: it's interesting that writing tends to inspire (or frustrate) people into perfectionism

SandraS: for instance, in math, either you find the answer or you don't

TonjaC: so true

DavidWe: well, not always...

SandraS: however if one focuses on the process of finding the answer, then we're more in the field of writing

DavidWe . o O (the math can be a process, too)

SandraS: that is, writing, like finding the answer to a math problem, is a process

TonjaC: I am always comparing myself to other's writing

AnitaD: Yep, it's definitely a process

SandraS: I agree, David

DavidWe smiles

SandraS: that's why math teachers use writing in their teaching!

SandraS: ok, so we've got a few challenges here that we've identified

SandraS: time

SandraS: perfectionism

DavidWe: More and more it helps teachers "understand" what students know. If they can explain it....

SandraS: getting started

SandraS: finding the right words

SandraS: David, you mean if the students can explain it?

DavidWe: ...they understand something as opposed to getting the right answer

SandraS: yes, absolutely

SandraS: i also think that kind of learning stays with the student

SandraS: ok, let's keep going by discussing these challenges in more depth

SandraS: for instance, let's start with David

DavidWe . o O (see one, do one, teach (or explain) one)

SandraS: can you talk a bit more about starting to write

SandraS: what do you enjoy? what do you resist?

DavidWe: I resist organizing...

TonjaC: I agree

DavidWe: coming up with a plan - I want it to flow out

TonjaC: my problem too

BJ . o O (pretty successfully, too, David!)

SandraS: is that the main component of the hurdle in starting?

TonjaC: I hate organization

DavidWe . o O (Bj knows me TOO well)

AnitaD: I don't mind organizing, depending on what I'm writing

TonjaC: I am too creative

SandraS: how many people here start with an outline?

DavidWe: Well, Tonja, I appreciate organization

SusanRo: I do

DavidWe . o O (ARGH!)

AnitaD: I tend to have a basic idea, but I rarely write anything down

SandraS: I don't

SandraS: usually

TonjaC: I will if I have too but I hate to - it is frustrating for me

SandraS: ok, so basically we've all got different styles

SandraS: I think that's the important thing

SandraS: find what works for you

AnitaD: Hmmm, just like our students

SandraS: revelation, Anita...that was nice!

AnitaD: I never liked it when teachers told me how to organize

TonjaC: I have a paper to write for a class and I am putting it off

SandraS: so let's hear from Susan, if she's willing to tell us how an outline works for her

SandraS: how do you use an outline?

SandraS: or, we can take a concrete example right now

SusanRo: I start with a big idea, gather research, and break it into smaller (more manageable) portions.

SandraS: Tonja has just told us that she has a paper to write

SandraS: so Susan, the writing you do before the outline is note taking from the research?

TonjaC: yes about a time line of reading in our history

SusanRo: yes

TonjaC: I am supposed to create a timeline of the teaching of reading

SandraS: wow, Tonja, that's quite a project

DavidWe wonders how far back

SusanRo: I love the organizing part of the writing (weird I know)

SandraS: Susan, I don't think that's weird

SandraS: that's another thing I love about writing

TonjaC: I haven't had enough time to gather resources and get good stuff, and it is due soon.

SandraS: just the process of putting words on paper helps me to think

AnitaD: I understand...Sometimes I wish my plan would just pop onto the paper

DavidWe commiserates with Tonja

SandraS: ok, let's finish talking about Susan's outline, then we'll get to Tonja's paper

TonjaC: do you think we skip the brainstorming part too much??

SandraS: I think it's important to expand our definitions of writing

SandraS: writing included thinking and talking, on many levels

DavidWe hopes doodling is included

SandraS: that is, when Susan has a big idea, she's in the brainstorming part of writing

SandraS: also known as prewriting

SandraS: David, I'm thinkin' doodles are very important

DavidWe smiles broadly

SandraS: I get great ideas driving down the highway

SandraS: can't jot them down easily

SandraS: but it's part of the process

TonjaC: me too

SandraS: research is part of the process

DavidWe: do you dictate them or record them?

SandraS: talking, like right now, is part of the process

SandraS: David, I'd love to be that organized....

SusanRo: research makes the whole process easier

AnitaD: I have a little tape recorder

SandraS: excellent... I've heard from people who use tape recorders that they're very helpful

AnitaD: It's cool, but I hate the way I sound on tape

TonjaC: that is a good idea Anita!

TonjaC: I never thought of that

SandraS: you could use a voice changing program and make yourself soundlike Yoda or something

SandraS: ok...

TonjaC: no body hears I learned to get over it teaching music

AnitaD: I think I already do...rather mannish

SandraS chuckles

DavidWe: Sandra, do you find for some people starting by dictating their ideas about writing helps them get going?

SandraS: absolutely

SandraS: for me, it's often talking with someone else

SusanR: what about using graphic organizers or Inspiration to get started

SandraS: writing is ultimately an intensely social act

TonjaC: do you mean dictation with someone else writing?

SandraS: way cool, Susan

SandraS: David, I'm assuming you meant dictating into a tape recorder

SandraS: or voice activated computer program

DavidWe: Not that many people have a personal secretary...yes, taping what you are saying

SandraS: Susan, do you want to explain graphic organizers and Inspiration?

TonjaC: I believe if I tried that I would have to record over everything because I change my mind too much but that is ok I guess

SusanR: it's a brainstorming technique I use for creative writing in the classroom

AnitaD: I just use it record general ideas if I'm not in a place where I can write them down (i.e., in the car, etc.)

TonjaC: WE are studying graphic organizers now in class and they really have helped my kids!

SandraS: great!

SandraS: Susan, can you expand?

TonjaC: yea I'm interested

SusanRo: me too

SusanR: I notice some students automatically use a simple readymade graphic organizer before they start their writing in their Writer's Workshop period

SandraS listens

TonjaC: what do you mean by ready made

SusanR: to expand their ideas

SusanR: junior students seem to write on a daily basis

SusanR: let me dig up some simple organizers

SandraS: Susan, can you describe the brainstorming exercise you mentioned?

SusanR: ..one moment

SandraS: while Susan is looking

SandraS: I always get stuck when I start writing

SandraS: if I'm editing while I'm writing

SandraS: that is, if i want each sentence to be perfect

SusanR: they use a simple flow chart

SandraS: then i usually stall

SandraS listens to Susan

TonjaC: We should never edit while writing the first draft-not very much anyway

SandraS: I agree, Tonja

TonjaC: but I do it anyway

SusanRo: Editing can also unstick me if I get stuck and feel pressured. I can just stop, edit for a while, and clear my brain.

SandraS: good point, Susan

SandraS: so David mentioned the difficulty of getting started

SandraS: does anyone else have that problem?

DavidWe admits that he did

SandraS: maybe we can see how Tonja's starting her paper?

SandraS: this is a perfect example

TonjaC: If I were a fast reader and had great recall memory, I would not have such a hard time getting it all together.

SusanR: These graphic organizers can overcome the difficulty of getting started

SandraS: you've got an assignment, a deadline

SusanR: <http://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/>

SandraS: what do you do?

SandraS: thanks for the URL, Susan

SandraS: "getting it all together"

SandraS: that's the process of writing

SandraS: and it takes time

SandraS: in my advanced comp. class we spend at least four weeks on one paper

SusanRo: It's like painting. Prep makes it smoother

SandraS: and it would be easy to spend a whole semester on one piece of writing

TonjaC: I know but my comprehension is weak on some things and it takes me sooooo long to get it and I want perfection

SandraS: right...so prep in writing is all the prewriting

TonjaC: I never feel like I have enough time to do the reading and gathering

SandraS: there usually isn't enough time...

SandraS: I recently wrote a paper for a conference

SandraS: but I started it last fall

TonjaC: I know I'll just have to work on that one

SandraS: and it sat for a long time

AnitaD: I have my students keep all of their drafts, that way they can make changes or put the whole thing to one side and start over without any fear of losing or forgetting anything

SandraS: while I thought

AnitaD: I think that helps them have a little more freedom

SandraS: great idea, Anita

AnitaD: It doesn't have to be perfect the first time or any other time

AnitaD: Some of them have 7 or 8 drafts before we finish conferencing over the piece

SandraS: can you see your student's writing change because of your practice?

TonjaC: true, I never do what I tell my kids to do

AnitaD: definitely

SandraS: ok, exactly.... that's the same for me. i often don't do what i advise my students to do

AnitaD: My French 4 students are so much farther ahead than they were at the beginning of French 3 when we first start working on writing in French

DavidWe cheers for hypocrisy

SandraS: how many times have you written 7 or 8 drafts and conferenced with someone?

TonjaC: kids always want to hurry like the first one is it

AnitaD: I've written 7 or 8 drafts for a piece several times, but I don't conference with anybody

DavidWe: I find if I can get to the point where I'm willing to show some writing to someone else (not ashamed of it) that's a good place for me to be

TonjaC: conferencing really helps. I had an English teacher teach me that and it works real well

SandraS: absolutely

SandraS: I also think you've got to find readers you trust

SandraS: folks who are willing to be honest with you and supportive

TonjaC: She made us group up and trade It really works!!!

SusanR: I think conferencing is crucial

AnitaD: I don't really know who I'd conference with actually

SandraS: welll.....

SandraS: you can conference with us

DavidWe: . o O (in Tapped In!)

SandraS: I tend to run WriteTalk as a discussion

AnitaD: On my pieces in English, yes, but I have to find someone who speaks French

SandraS: but it's designed so that anyone can post a piece of writing

TonjaC: Anita, do you have a co-worker you trust

SandraS: to the group room

SandraS: we all can read it

SandraS: then meet and discuss it

SandraS: if you have any piece of writing you want feedback on

SusanRo: that sounds scary

AnitaD: I do, but I haven't really had time to work on too much that I would even want to share

TonjaC: no one can see you though and that is COOL

SandraS: Susan, what part of that sounds scary?

BJ: . o O (the members of the group are very helpful and non judgmental)

AnitaD: That's definitely something to keep in mind

SandraS: nods to BJ

SusanRo: so many people seeing it but that's a great point that y'all can't see me!

TonjaC: We are all friends and we all have trouble in this or we would not be here

SandraS: no question, showing one's writing can be scary

BJ: we've also done some freewriting that has helped open up the thinking

SandraS: Thanks for mentioning that BJ

AnitaD: That's a good idea

TonjaC: LETS WRITE MY TIME LINE PAPER TONIGHT HA HA

BJ: . o O (I love the freewriting sessions)

DavidWe: grins

SandraS: chuckles

SandraS: The AAMU Writing Group room has prompts

SandraS: I put up a file with a series of writing prompts

SandraS: there's also

AnitaD: I think it would be kind of fun to practice our writing by coming up with a story-starter and then seeing what everyone comes up with

SandraS: a guideline for timed writing practice

BJ grins...Tonja, we could do a round robin on your paper...each contribute a paragraph

AnitaD: I like prompts

AnitaD: They're fun

SandraS: we can do that right now, if you want Anita

TonjaC: it is so fun to do that

AnitaD: Cool!

SandraS: let's do a prompt on reading

TonjaC: I wish we could

SusanR . o O (progressive writing)

SandraS: way cool

SandraS: if we do a prompt on reading, maybe Tonja's creative mind will go flying

SandraS: I'll start

TonjaC: I can try but I do not know

SandraS: one hot July evening, my car ran over a book in the middle of a country road....

AnitaD: Do you want us to work and this and then come back together with our stuff later?

TonjaC: and I couldn't resist the temptation to see whose it was...

SandraS: let's do it right now...

SandraS: just jump in and write something

BJ: I pulled over to the shoulder and got out of the car

DavidWe: I pulled over to the side and then walked back to see what book could have made such a bump when I drove over it.

SandraS: we'll have a transcript

SusanRo: so I went inside

SandraS applauds

SusanRo: the book

TonjaC: inside where

SusanR: I brought my car to a screeching halt!

SandraS: the book was bound in old leather

TonjaC: the book was gold with ornate flowers

AnitaD: I don't think this is going to work

AnitaD: Too many different ideas at the same time

SandraS: it's definitely working

SandraS: I love it!

TonjaC: choose your own

DavidWe . o O (conflict!)

SusanR: Something was inscribed on the inside cover of the book.

TonjaC: it is neat to see what everybody says

AnitaD: I don't think we'll come up with one story, though

SandraS: that's ok, Anita

SandraS: we'll have a quilt story

TonjaC: the book was dusty and old

SusanRo: It said find the happy ending to get back on your road

AnitaD: Interesting

SandraS: as I looked at the inscription, my eyes blurred and my body moved into the book

TonjaC: It was the book I had been looking for all of my life and I held it to my heart

TonjaC: how could it be...

TonjaC: it had been years...

TonjaC: and then I remembered... 9somebody?

SandraS: since I had studied with the guru on the mountain who had told me about this book...

SandraS: all right, Tonja...working hard to get us writing!

TonjaC: I was moving into a love romance

DavidWe . o O (okay, go with it)

SandraS: what strikes me about what we've just done is how creative and varied our minds are

TonjaC: by the way I love the tape recorder idea

SusanRo: I was very fortunate to enter the journey of the book and set out to see what I could discover

SandraS: and if we did the same prompt tomorrow, we'd probably each come up with entirely different lines

TonjaC: I could still see him standing there

AnitaD: I think it would be cool if we could all write something and then come back together at a later time and share what we came up with

SandraS: cool, Anita

TonjaC: yes

DavidWe: ...holding the book, this book, the one I've found, again...

SandraS: go for it, David

TonjaC: I began to shake

BJ: do you all know how to join the AAMU group?

DavidWe . o O (working on Tonja's romance...)

TonjaC: cool

AnitaD: Nope, please share

DavidWe smiles

BJ . o O (then we can use the discussion board to communicate)

SandraS listens to BJ

BJ . o O (in case you can't wait a month!)

BJ: click on the TAPPED IN tab at the top of your screen

BJ: then click on GROUPS

BJ: enter AAMU and press find it

SandraS: I'll send this prompt

TonjaC: GREAT

SandraS: and we can write stuff

SandraS: and share it

SusanRo: great fun thanks..

AnitaD: That would be great!

SandraS: thanks to all of you for your ideas and your input

TonjaC: Thanks Sandra you sound great

AnitaD: Thanks for hosting this...

SandraS: back atcha, Tonja

SandraS: good luck with the paper, Tonja

TonjaC: thanks

SusanR: Great fun, Sandra and a non threatening atmosphere.

DavidWe waves bye to Tonja

SandraS: Thanks, Susan. You helped create that!

AnitaD: I joined the group...So now I can post things to the discussion board when we write about the prompts?

BJ: Dianne is giving a tour in Reception if anyone needs a refresher of how to use Tapped In

SusanR: especially for those of us who have a fear of writing

SandraS: absolutely, Anita

AnitaD: Cool

TonjaC left the room.

AnitaD: I'm gonna get going now...Thanks again

DavidWe thanks Sandra for an invigorating session

SandraS: take care, Anita

BJ waves goodnight. Thanks, Sandy

SandraS: thanks to all!

SandraS whooshes off on hoverboard...