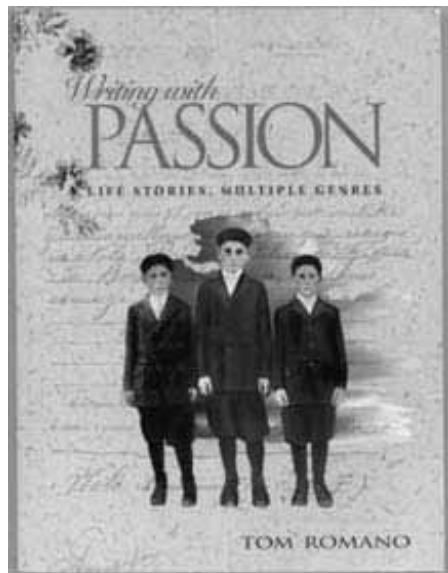


## Tom Romano at the KIVA Writing with Passion— and 155 teachers



On Saturday, January 13, well-known author and educator Tom Romano led 150 Oakland County teachers to “Write with Passion!” In his keynote address, Romano noted that the school emphasis on “paradigmatic thinking”—a term used by Jerome Bruner to denote linear, analytical, factual

thought—needed to be balanced by attention to the “narrative thinking” of story and metaphor. He argued it is not a matter of good or bad, but instead, a recognition that different genres and modes of thinking could achieve different effects.

Romano then orchestrated a little experiment, inviting the audience to read and respond to an encyclopedia passage about jazz musician Count Basie, followed by a poem on the same subject. Most commented on the ways that metaphoric phrases and passages stuck in memory and evoked emotion, while the analytical passages tended to provoke curiosity.

In the workshop that followed, Romano demonstrated the value of multi-genre research, and taught several strategies for unifying diverse genres on the same subject.

Break-out sessions by Oakland Writing Project teacher-consultants Renee Hitchins and Jennifer Hogan, Sherri Masson, Kathleen Kryza, and Peter Shaheen concluded the conference program.

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# Dr. Cathy Reischl Joins Oakland Schools

In the fall of 2000, Dr. Catherine Reischl joined Oakland Schools as a language arts consultant. Reischl, who has taught high school English and Journalism as well as English as a Second Language at both elementary and secondary levels, has also worked in several state departments of education and university education schools. She has taught in an impressive variety of contexts, ranging from the Midwest to India to Thailand to New Zealand. She studied at Harvard, where she received a Masters in Reading, and at Michigan State University, where she received her Ph.D. in Curriculum, Teaching, and Education Policy.

In her new position, Reischl will work closely with the Oakland Writing Project in her role as Associate Director. *élan* recently interviewed Dr. Reischl so that readers could learn more about her vision:

## **On the Creation of an English Language Learners Workshop**

“One thing I really do hope we can develop is some kind of Writing Project initiative working with multilingual children. I use this term multilingual because it’s not ESL and it’s not bilingual. How do you invite kids into school participation? How do you invite *all* kids? And how do you think of all children’s languages as resources? I think most people who are teachers just haven’t been in contexts where they have had to deal with those questions and when they suddenly have

to, then it’s a panic.

But I do think there are some creative, and also systematic ways that we can look at how to invite participation for all students.”

## **On Policy and Practice**

“I want to be a good resource for people. I want to be a person who can help people through policy and practice issues, around literacy. Let me give you an example. Right now I am helping a lot of districts work on the Literacy Achievement Program grant. And there are policies that have been put into place at the state level, through the legislature, that have made a tremendous amount of money available to a range of districts. That money is available through competition, and how that money can be used is very strictly delineated. When I talk about puzzling through literacy and policy issues, I want to sit down with people in those districts, and say, yes it’s true that there’s money to be had. But what is it about the particular children that we’re working with in these particular buildings and what is about the way our district works and the way we’d like to see it work, that we need to put together into a plan that either matches or doesn’t match this particular policy? I want to think these issues through together so that we’re proactive, instead of reactive, to policy.”

## **On Literacy Issues**

“People are also asking me about how to assist kids in grades 4-8. That sort of

middle chunk, particularly around how do we help them do well with informational reading, they’re asking “how do we get them creative and competent in their literacy use?”, in a way that’s quite different from early literacy. I think there are several kinds of work to be done there. I think, also, it’s really interesting and productive to work with content area teachers and get them to see themselves, get them to choose to see themselves, as people of language, people who have learned to use language in very particular ways within the content areas and who need to identify those ways and think of themselves as people who are teaching children to use language in those particular ways.”

## **On Oakland Writing Project**

“I am excited to get very involved with Oakland Writing Project. The kind of professional development the National Writing Project promotes, the kind of respect for teachers, teachers’ thinking, teachers’ work, and the work that is done when teachers have sustained opportunities to work collegially, I think—*now that’s professional development.*”

## **On Demands Teachers Face**

“I’m trying to be very aware of the particular demands on teachers in Michigan. I think we have to consider carefully the many demands from the outside; how can we lay them over the work of teachers and then expect careful, thoughtful attention be paid to individuals in classrooms?”

# Teachers Writing Writers Teaching

## Some thoughts on the reading-writing connection from professional writers

*And how  
do you think  
of all children's  
languages  
as resources?*

"I think many, probably most, teachers, find their satisfaction in peak moments that happen say, at 10:13 on a Tuesday morning with that kid you have been working with for the last seven weeks on a particular concept, and having enough wherewithal and time within your day to get a moment to share that with a colleague. Or getting to call a parent and saying, I need to tell you what happened today. It is so exciting, and so much more meaningful than a number on a MEAP test. I don't want to fill up teachers' lives in ways that they can't do that recognition of those moments. Those are big dilemmas right now."

### On Personal Literacy

The literacy Reischl is so passionate about in her professional life, she also practices in her personal life. She says, "I am a reader....I am a voracious reader. I also read aloud a lot because I have a third grader and a fifth grader. The Ann Arbor Public Library is a terrific library. One of the first things we did, three days after we moved in, was participate in a book club they had for fifth and sixth graders."

Cathy Reischl describes her writing life: "In my journal, I've been writing a lot about being a Mom, mostly because I've been watching my kids going through so many transitions. I also need to finish up some articles, and do more academic writing."

From the introduction to *Telling Stories, An Anthology for Writers* edited by Joyce Carol Oates, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1998:

Every book, every story, every sentence we read is a part of our preparation for our own writing, so it's wise to choose our reading carefully, as an athlete trains carefully, as a musician practices at his or her instrument for hours and for years in pursuit of excellence, of fully realizing a talent. (p.xv)

From *One Writer's Beginnings* by Eudora Welty, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1983:

Ever since I was first read to, then started reading to myself, there has never been a line read that I didn't *hear*. As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me. It isn't my mother's voice, or the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human, but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it. It is to me the voice of the story or the poem itself. The cadence, whatever it is that asks you to believe, the feeling that resides in the printed word, reaches me through the reader-voice. I have supposed, but never found out, that this is the case with all readers—to read as listeners—and with all writers, to write as listeners. It may be part of the desire to write. The sound of what falls on the page begins the

process of testing it for truth, for me. Whether I am right to trust so far I don't know. By now I don't know whether I could do either one, reading or writing, without the other.

My own words, when I am at work on a story, I hear too as they go, in the same voice that I hear when I read in books. When I write and the sound of it comes back to my ears, then I act to make my changes. I have always trusted this voice. (p. 12)

From *On the Teaching of Creative Writing* by Wallace Stegner, edited by Edward Connery Lathem, University Press of New England, Hanover, NH, 1988:

Though it is always helpful to the young to be steered and guided toward what may catch their interest, I would be inclined, also, to throw open the library and let them find many things for themselves. The delight of discovery is a major pleasure of reading; and discovery is one of the best ways to light a fire in a creative mind. (p.28)

From *Starting and Keeping On*, The Hopwood Lecture, 2000, given by Donald Hall, reprinted in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, Fall, 2000:

When we read with an eye for what we can use, we take pleasure and then exploit our pleasure. We read with curiosity and greed. (p. 729)



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# Teachers as Writers Expands Program

For many years, the *Teachers as Writers* program has provided a writing community for teachers; this year it does so for nearly fifty primary through post-secondary teachers at all skill and experience levels. Meeting seven times during the school year, participants enjoy interacting with other teachers, learn new writing strategies to apply in their own classes, savor built-in writing time, and conference with other writers during response groups. Facilitators Linda Denstaedt and Karen Manross have packed each session with rich writing activities and discussion, in what one participant calls “a watershed experience.”

At the October and November sessions, teachers were frequently asked to write in their writers’ notebook, once employing a new strategy called, “Writing that Moves Forward.” Using many powerful passages from chosen authors, writers moved the same piece of writing in four different directions.

As the school year progresses, members will continue to explore their own writing, their lives as writers, and the relationship to their classroom practices, as well as considering various publishing opportunities.



*For me  
TAW has been  
a watershed experience,  
profound and deep,  
that has changed me  
forever...*



# The Sauna, Politics, and Public Education

By Jim Haugh

“Why do we celebrate the Fourth of July?”

The young woman chews her lip for a moment, studies her eyebrows and answers, inflecting her voice like a question.

“That’s the day they invented fireworks?”

*The Tonight Show’s* studio audience erupts into laughter and so, we can safely presume, do the folks at home. They know as well as Mr. Leno that there is nothing funnier than ignorance.

Two guys in the sauna at my gym thought it was a real hoot.

It was only a minute before I realized that I had plopped down in the middle of a discussion about Proposal 1.

They were using the “Jay Walking” bit as fodder to hurl at our country’s pitiful public school system, and to fortify their support of Michigan’s proposed voucher system.

This plan, which allocates public funds for private education, would, they seemed to believe, lead the Great Lakes State from the shackles (chuckles?) of dumbhood to an enlightened promised land.

Believe me, the last thing I wanted to do was argue politics with two sweaty, near-naked men, but I imagined this same conversation occurring at breakfast tables, around water-coolers and in bars across the state. I was like a new mother who had just been told how homely her baby was. I couldn’t hold my tongue.

I wish I had been shrewd enough or clever enough to have nodded in assent initially and then played devil’s advocate, asking them some questions about Proposal 1’s salvation of public education. I could have invented a fictitious son, (Little Jimmy), whom I would have loved to send to parochial school, if only the tuition weren’t so darned steep. “Jimmy needs lots of special attention, too, since he is learning disabled. You don’t think that matters, do ya?”

Regretfully, I wasn’t feeling exceptionally witty at that particular moment, as the two were kicking sand in the face of my profession, but the workout *had* significantly inflated my confidence. “It’ll never work!” I interjected. They turned their attention to me and I proceeded to pontificate about special needs students, state mandated testing and certified teachers; about accountability and equity and...

They were clearly unimpressed. The pair set off on a trip down memory lane, reminiscing about those “good ole days” when Sister Mary Gestapo could smite with a ruler the knuckles of any daydreamer without fear of recourse.

“And,” one added with righteous indignation, “If Little Jimmy can’t control himself, throw him out on his butt!”

“The public schools’ obligation is to educate *everybody*.” I interrupted, insulted. “We don’t get to choose who fills the seats in our classrooms; we teach’em all L.D., E.S.L., A.D.H.D., everybody.” I told them that in one state that has the voucher system, the overwhelming majority, something like 85%, of the students attending private schools attended them before the proposal passed. Vouchers, in effect, mattered very little to the students who needed it the most.

*..the last thing I wanted to do was argue politics with two sweaty, near-naked men...*

“It matters to that 15%,” was the response.

“It matters to Little Jimmy, too.” I added. By now, we know that the people of Michigan have rejected Proposal 1. It’s a done deal. I can resume going to church on Sunday morning without my ‘No Vouchers’ button drawing the loathing glares of the loving Christians. (The Catholic Church has made it very clear that Jesus is a card-carrying Republican and very much in favor of vouchers for Michigan’s schoolchildren.)

Even with the battle won I can’t help but think that the war rages on. The two sauna guys weren’t official representatives, but I’m afraid that they express the opinion of a lot of Michiganders (maybe even Americans) who don’t know what really goes on in a classroom, who don’t have a niece or a neighbor who is a teacher, who don’t have the privilege of seeing the dedication, the frustration, the celebration.

“That’s the day they invented fireworks?”

How do you think *they* learned it?

Jim Haugh, a regular columnist for *élan*, teaches at Birney Middle School in Southfield.

# Writing to Remember

By Jill Price-Winters

In a corner of my basement, an old beer case holds the few mementos I have kept from my high school years. The contents have a musty smell, consistent with their age, and my English papers have a grimy damp residue that clings to my fingertips as I reread them.

My first attempt at serious writing began in my senior English class in high school. The year was 1968, and the class was taught by Mrs. Maynard, a new teacher who was pretty, young and stylishly dressed in short dresses complete with matching shoes and hose most days. She had a ready smile with dimples, and I didn't like her. I never threw pencils at her or got into screaming confrontations, but I used tried and true adolescent girl tactics, rolling my eyes when Mrs. Maynard explained assignments. I answered almost sarcastically when I was called on, even if I volunteered. I talked behind her back about her picky little rules for writing and "no excuse" spelling errors.

*It is ironic that I chose  
the very life that puts my own  
personal ticks and quirks  
under the adolescent microscope*

Why did I behave like this? Well, of course I enjoyed the attention. I was always the little brown wren that no one noticed, and it was a heady feeling being a little outrageous. Besides that, I was a 17 year-old who had experienced the problems of having an alcoholic father. Even worse, I had lost my mother to cancer just as I started my sophomore year. I moved to live with my aunt and uncle, which meant attending a completely new school. Maybe a good psychiatrist would have seen my conflict with Mrs. Maynard as repressed anger at her seemingly perfect life in contrast with my own hidden anguish.

In Mrs. Maynard's class we read and wrote more than I had previously experienced. This was the first class that I remember reading novels. *Lord of the Flies* and *The Once and Future King* come to mind. I know there were more.

The paper I had written on *The Once and Future King* was returned to me as a D grade. I had never thought of myself as a writer, but my grades were generally Bs with a sprinkling of As, so I was shocked with a D. I remember feeling angry and a bit embarrassed about getting such a low grade. I exploded to my friend Maribeth about how much Mrs. Maynard didn't like me, but on the bus home my throat ached with how much I wanted my mom to be there for me when I opened the door.

Sitting at my desk that night, I had to admit that my paper was a poor representation of the meaning of the book. It had been dashed off with little care, and I had more than a few of those "no excuse" errors I had complained about. I knew so much about the book that this time the words fairly flew. I was determined to make my rewrite a good paper.

I wasn't even appropriately grateful when she changed my grade, but it did catch me by surprise when she read it to the class. That had never happened to me before, and I felt a kind of knowing pride mixed with the uneasy glare of the spotlight that caught me doing something good in a class I professed to hate.

It would be nice to say that my personal relationship with this teacher improved after this, but it would be untrue, and it wouldn't be so for lack of effort on Mrs. Maynard's part. She went so far as to make me her student aide second semester during my study hall hour. I made her copies, stapled her papers, and delivered her messages, but I was never very nice to her and I continued to find fault with her whenever possible.

It is ironic that I chose the very life that puts my own personal ticks and quirks under the adolescent microscope. And I sometimes see a reflection of that young unhappy girl in the voices and faces of my most troubled students. Life is terrible and painful at times, and we lash out at others. The brain holds on to important memories, and it has never let me forget my regrettable behavior that year with Mrs. Maynard. It is only now, and in this memoir, that I have begun to understand it.

Jill Price-Winters, a graduate of OWP Invitational Summer Institute 2000, is the Literacy Team Leader for Cray Middle School and Mason Middle School in Waterford.

# A Peek into a Classroom

## Renee Hitchins

First Grade

H.T. Burt Elementary  
Brandon, Michigan



By Sharon Martens Galley

SCENE: A classroom full of print—dish tubs brimming with colorful, readable paperbacks, a word wall with alphabet-grouped “no excuse” words, student writing folders stuffed with writing ideas and child initiated stories, a bulletin board with “dialogue bubbles” of characters talking—all being absorbed and enjoyed by Renee Hitchins’ students, just sixteen days into their first grade lives.

The class first gathers on the rug for shared reading. Each day a different student is assigned to share a book; today Evan reads a book he has brought from home. Hitchins then shares a class book she has just “published.” She has mounted photos of the children on their first day of first grade and added captions to each. As the children eagerly scan the pictures, chattering and giggling as they see themselves, Hitchins reads the captions, reminding them, “The picture is nice, but with the words I won’t forget. Words help us remember.”

Hitchins sends the children back to their seats, reminding them to pick up their writing folders as she adjusts a James Stevenson poem on the overhead. Hitchins has been sharing poetry with her class from Stevenson books—*Cornflakes*, *Popcorn*, *Sweet Corn*,

and *Candy Corn*. She has explained to the class, “It’s not the topic, it’s what you do with the topic.” Today the poem contains a “mystery” and Hitchins covers the poem illustration so “you won’t have too big a clue.” She reads the poem a couple of times, asking the class, “Who’s talking?” A multitude of guesses shows the involvement of the class. Finally Hitchins shows them the illustration of two school buses in a bus parking lot, and explains, “Stevenson is imagining what the buses would say. What if buses could talk? Imagine in your head a conversation between two things that don’t really talk. You might want to write about it,” she invites.



Individual writing time begins with a flurry. Students pick up lap boards and find a comfortable spot to write. Others stay at their desks. All use a variety of writing instruments: markers, pencils, crayons. Some are illustrating completely, some are writing just words, some have a combination. Hitchins travels from child to child, nudging, encouraging, and suggesting. Many ask her to spell a word; she helps

them sound it out or she says, “That’s a ‘no excuse’ word; check the board.”

With cast clearly visible, Brett is writing about breaking his arm. Anthony illustrates his story about giving his dog away when they moved to Canada. “I like the words you wrote about being sad, Anthony,” Hitchins says. Matthew has written more than a page on his story about the burglar man who was scared away by his brother. Hitchins is very interested in just how “his brother scared the man away.” Evan is writing “Questions to Ask a Caterpillar.” In the day’s science lesson the class had been concentrating on the life cycle of a caterpillar. Yesterday the class had read “Questions to Ask a Butterfly” from *I’m Going to Pet a Worm* by Constance Levy. Now Evan is connecting it all in his own writing.

Writing time ends as it began, with sharing time on the rug. Now, however, student authors are eager to share their own writing. For these first graders, honoring words and honoring writers go together.



# Mark these dates!

- **February 26, March 26, May 7, 2001** Teachers as Writers—Linda Denstaedt and Karen Manross; 5:00—8:00 p.m.; Oakland Schools KIVA
  - **March 6, March 27, April 30, 2001** Not a Luxury: Poetry at the Heart of English Language Arts—Laura Roop and Linda Denstaedt; 4:00—6:30 p.m.; Oakland Schools KIVA
  - **May 2, 2001** Fostering Self-Directed Literacy Learning—Kathleen Hayes-Parvin, Pete Rynders, Phoebe Schoenherr; 4:30—6:00 p.m.; Oakland Schols KIVA
  - **June 25—July 20, 2001** Oakland Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute—Richard Koch and Sharon Martens Galley; 9:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.; Oakland Schools Room 315; deadline for applications April 1, 2001
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