

Six Trident Academy Teachers Participate in the Lowcountry Writing Project

The National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project are all concerned with English writing skills in American schools. According to the National Commission on Writing, "American education will never realize its potential as an engine of opportunity and economic growth until a writing revolution puts language and communication in their proper place in the classroom."

The National Commission brought together a blue-ribbon group of teachers, superintendents, and university presidents and issued a report on their findings: *"The Neglected 'R': The Need for a Writing Revolution."* The report was prompted, in part, by the addition of a writing component to the SAT and calls for a writing revolution to return writing to its proper place in the American classroom.

"Writing today is not a frill for the few, but an essential skill for the many. The report stresses that writing is essential to educational and career success. Writing allows students to "connect the dots" in their knowledge and is central to self-expression and civic participation. Yet despite wide recognition of the importance of writing to achievement and learning throughout life, the school reform movement of the '80s neglected to give writing instruction the attention it deserves; other subjects fared well in the reform movement—but not writing. This neglect has contributed significantly to the deterioration of writing quality in America over the past 20 years." SMU School of Education and Human Development



LWP participants left to right: Mary Silgals, Katie Ryan, Mary Alice Satterfield, Therese Kristiansen, Lalla Boatwright, and Julie Stephenson

Teachers at Trident Academy, in particular because of the school's demographics consisting of children with diagnosed learning disabilities, recognize the importance of students learning structure in writing. Over the 35 years since Trident Academy was founded, teachers have taught students with learning disabilities methods to process and organize information.

“Writing teachers should themselves be writers. Through experiencing the struggles and joys of writing, teachers learn that their students will need guidance and support throughout the writing process, not merely comments on the written product. Furthermore, writing teachers who write know that effective comments do not focus on pointing out errors, but go on to the more productive task of encouraging revision, which will help student writers to develop their ideas and to achieve greater clarity and honesty.” *National Council of Teachers of English*

Six teachers from the school recently took an additional step to ensure that their students receive the best in writing instruction. They opted to sharpen their own writing skills by participating in the Fall Institute of the Lowcountry Writing Project (LWP), an affiliate of the National Writing Project. The goal of the Lowcountry Writing Project is to improve learning in Lowcountry schools by improving the ways teachers teach and use writing as a tool for learning.



Artist Jim Darlington discusses his paintings on display at the Sandpipers Gallery.

The Trident Academy teachers attended the LWP Fall Institute graduate English course at The Citadel. The three-month course combined field experience, guest author visits, research and writing time, and response groups. A number of different areas of writing addressed were travel writing, writing about history, writing reviews, humor pieces, writing about education and poetry.



Jane Mahmy, owner of Carolina Gifts and Seashells talks with Trident Academy teacher Mary Alice Satterfield.

Field experience varied widely from a trip to Irvin-House Vineyards on Wadmalaw Island, to a visit with the bell ringers at Grace Episcopal Church in Charleston. One Saturday was a “tourist” day in Mount Pleasant with travel writer, Sharon Spence Lieb. The participants spent the day interviewing local shop owners, touring two small art galleries, dining at an up-and-coming local restaurant, and enjoying a short visit to the ocean to walk the beach for writing inspiration. Using The Citadel as an another form of inspiration for writing history, the group visited The Citadel Museum, watched The Citadel homecoming parade, and viewed the Summerall Guard performance. The day also included interviewing carillonneur Richard Scott and gathering together in The Citadel carillon tower to experience his recital.



Trident Academy music teacher, Mary Alice Satterfield and Richard Scott, carillonneur.

Several guest speakers offered their expertise at the Fall Institute. Phil Leon, freelance-writer and Citadel professor, presented an overview of writing for publication. Sharon Spence Lieb discussed travel-writing and conducted the Mount Pleasant field experiences. Ronnie Musselwhite, editor of *Golf Business* magazine, gave the attendees the criteria of an editor when reviewing and selecting solicitations for his publication. Clyde McDonald, free-lance photographer, discussed the importance of incorporating the visual medium with writing and publication. CPA Joan Leon, discussed the tax benefits and liabilities when writing is used as a source for supplemental income. The class facilitator was Will Suggs, National Board Certified English language arts teacher and an active LWP Teacher consultant.



Institute participants gather with travel writer Sharon Spence Lieb at Stacks Coastal Kitchen, Mount Pleasant, to interview the owner, Terry Stacks.

The LowCountry Writing Institute conducts workshops and programs throughout the year. The next opportunity is the Winter Institute beginning January 31, 2007. The workshop's theme is writing children's books. Applications are now being accepted online at <http://www.citadel.edu/writingproject/WinterInstituteApplication.htm>. In addition, the Summer Institute, July 9 – August 2, 2007, as per the website, "brings together teachers from across the Low Country, in all grade levels and all disciplines, for several weeks of reading, writing, research, and practice. Participants, selected on the basis of an application and a personal interview, meet each day to write, discuss their writing, read about and discuss effective ways to teach writing and use writing as a

learning tool, research writing topics of their choice, and improve their teaching practices by leading or taking part in demonstrations of effective teaching practices.” Tom Thompson, director of the LowCountry Writer’s project, is an Associate Professor of English at The Citadel, where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in composition, public speaking, and the teaching of writing.

Participants in the LWP from Trident Academy were: Julie Stephenson, Mary Silgals, Katie Ryan, Therese Kristiansen, Mary Alice Satterfield, and Lalla Boatwright. When reflecting upon the LWP field experience, participant Therese Kristiansen said, “The course reinforced my belief that inspiration for the written word can come from any experience.” Mary Alice Satterfield added, “When a teacher becomes a better writer, who is actively engaged in writing, she or he can use this practice as a vehicle to make student writing experiences more relevant and meaningful. As I share my experience as a writer, my students can learn to believe that they, too, have something to say that deserves to be exercised skillfully.”