

WAC, CAC, and Writing Centers in Secondary Education

## High School-College Collaborations: Making Them Work

Pamela B. Childers, Secondary School Issues Editor

Homepage: <http://www.mccallie.org/pchilder/>

Email: [pchilder@mccallie.org](mailto:pchilder@mccallie.org)



Throughout the world, schools of different academic levels are collaborating in the area of communications. In order to get an idea of how to work with our colleagues who teach at other academic levels, we need to consider what we have in common as well as what already works before we think about possibilities for the future. No matter what the academic level, our students are similar in their differences, including socio-economic backgrounds, gender and sexuality, race, religion and ethnicity, mastery of English, life experiences, access to technology, learning styles, and generational concerns including what *Nightly Business Report* calls "continuous partial attention" (June 8, 2006). In New York City alone, over 50% of over 16,000 homeless children get transferred from school to school each year (*Up Against the Odds*). We can only hope to touch some of these young people before they move to another school. Also, this year alone over 12.4 million students entered college directly from high school. Two recent studies report that 19-25% never or hardly ever read for fun (NAEP 2004 *Trends in Academic Progress*), and only 42.8% of 18 - 24 year olds read literature (*Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*). These factors all impact the writing our students will create on paper, PowerPoint, and other multimodal compositions (auditory, visual, electronic, etc.)

We are all educators, and we are all specialists teaching reading and writing, supervising, counseling, administering to programs, and directing first-year composition, writing across the curriculum programs, and writing centers. We may be historians, rhetoricians, researchers, authors, critics, collaborators, facilitators of learning, lecturers. In fact, we all wear many hats.

So, if we consider the similarities among all these variables, then high school/college collaborations in writing can become win-win situations by focusing on common concerns. For example, one of the key issues concerning secondary educators in the last few years has been the problem of "senioritis." *The Final Report of the National Commission on the High School Senior Year* states that students are "afflicted with a short-term disease, one as predictable as the flu season that incapacitates young people in terms of academic growth... There is little sense of the final year as a time to strengthen skills, [and] enhance preparation for postsecondary programs." This same issue now impacts teachers on the college level who have undergraduates that Mark Bauerlein in a "A Very Long Disengagement" describes as showing "troublingly high levels of disengagement" (p. B7). By working together, high school and college teachers may engage students in new and innovative ways to improve their writing, thinking and learning.

---

### *Across the Disciplines*

A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing ISSN 554-8244

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2007.4.1.02>

wac.colostate.edu/atd

*Across the Disciplines* is an open-access, peer-review scholarly journal published on the WAC Clearinghouse and supported by [Colorado State University](#) and [Georgia Southern University](#). Articles are published under a [Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license](#) (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs) ISSN 1554-8244. Copyright © 1997-2017 The WAC Clearinghouse and/or the site's authors, developers, and contributors. Some material is used with permission.

Some programs have already made a difference. For instance, the National Writing Project has been a unique program involving elementary, secondary and college teachers since 1974. With 195 university-based sites, the NWP works in partnership with local schools to improve the quality of student writing. This is a sustainable program working together with other national programs, including the current National Commission on Writing, on projects to improve student writing.

Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) programs have remained vital in colleges and universities for at least 25 years, morphing into different initiatives as needed to improve the teaching of writing across disciplines. Movements such as whole language and grade level collaborations in elementary and middle schools replicate many of the ideas of WAC programs, while high schools sometimes lag behind without some collaborative initiative.

Writing center associations at the local, regional and international levels offer ways to collaborate at all academic levels to improve the quality of writing. Since its origin as NWCA in the 1980s, the IWCA ([www.writingcenters.org](http://www.writingcenters.org)) has spread to global collaborations. Also, the Bread Loaf Teacher Network, started in 1984, continues to be vital, bringing together rural teachers as well as urban ones to work with the Middlebury College program and through Write to Change, a nonprofit organization that promotes youth engaged in public service writing and publishing.

The AP English Language and Composition program has been a work in progress since the 1980s, with over 270,000 students taking the test last May. The latest iteration, designed by secondary and college writing teachers, includes the addition of fifteen minutes on the third essay question, which is a synthesis paper, in an attempt to replicate the qualities of research writing. This change will better prepare students for taking college composition classes because students must learn how to synthesize information into a logical, well-written response.

Finally, there are other programs, such as GEAR UP, a federally funded program at more than 300 middle and high schools that helps low-income, academically challenged students stay in school and prepare for college. It provides after school and Saturday services during the school year and summer weekday programs on college campuses with field trips as well. If they do well in high school, students in this program are eligible for 5-year tuition-free scholarships. Concurrent enrollment programs such as the Syracuse University Project-Advance also allow students to receive college credit in high school for English classes taught by high school teachers trained by the university. Even local community and four-year colleges offer high school students credit to take courses on the college campus while they are still in high school, and over 500 secondary schools give International Baccalaureate (IB) degrees focusing on classic education.

I have merely scratched the surface of what is currently going on, and I would like to focus my next column on visions for the future. Think about how you can take advantage of what already exists rather than reinventing the wheel, and then think about other possibilities. If you have an idea in mind that you would like to see come to fruition, please email me ([Pam.Childers@gmail.com](mailto:Pam.Childers@gmail.com)) so that I can add it to my list.

## References

- Bauerlein, Mark. (2006, January 6). A very long disengagement. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B7-8.
- Bradshaw, Tom and Bonnie Nichols. (2006, June). *Reading at risk: A survey of literary reading in America*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Arts.
- Feldscher, Karen. (2006, Summer). All gears clicking: A comprehensive program gets local teens ready for college. *Northeastern University Magazine*, 9.

- Kirst, Michael W. (2001, May). Overcoming the high school senior slump: New education policies. *Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education*, Retrieved October 31, 2006 from: [www.ecs.orgclearinghouse/27/03/2703.htm](http://www.ecs.orgclearinghouse/27/03/2703.htm).
- NAEP 2004 trends in academic progress three decades of student performance in reading and mathematics. (2005, July). *Institute of Education Sciences: National Center for Educational Statistics*. Retrieved October 11, 2006 from: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005464>.
- NBR Enterprises (Producers). (2006, June 8). *Nightly Business Report*. Miami: WPBT2
- Raising our sights: No high school seniors left behind. (2001, October). Final Report. *National Commission on the High School Senior Year*. Retrieved November 1, 2006 from: [www.woodrow.org/CommissionOnTheSeniorYear/Report/FINAL\\_PDF\\_REPORT.pdf](http://www.woodrow.org/CommissionOnTheSeniorYear/Report/FINAL_PDF_REPORT.pdf).
- Up Against the odds: New York City's homeless children lose out in school*. (2006, September). New York: Advocates for Children.