

## Cultural Conversations is a “premier program” Reports Dr. Arnetha Ball

by Bernie Mathes, School Literacy & Culture Project

Cultural Conversations “stands out as a unique and effective demonstration of a collaborative effort between university-based expertise and school-based professional development programs,” according to Dr. Arnetha Ball, Associate Professor of Education at Stanford University. She visited the project this past May to assess the impact and effectiveness of Cultural Conversation’s work. A former classroom teacher, speech pathologist, educational administrator and teacher educator, Dr. Ball has a strong interest in linking sociocultural and linguistic theory to educational practices among culturally and linguistically diverse students.



*Cultural Conversations co-facilitator Bernie Mathes discusses a reading with fifth grade teacher Georgia Johnson during a meeting at MacGregor Elementary.*

Created in 1996 by Connie Floyd, Associate Director of the School Literacy and Culture Project, in response to her observations that many teachers avoid discussing issues of race even when they seem to be a significant factor in how a class functions, Cultural Conversations strives to create a safe place for teachers to talk about the impact of race, ethnicity, gender and culture on students’ learning. The six-week seminars focus on cultural bias, systematic inequities, language differences, racial identity development and teacher expectations in the classroom. Since it began, the program has grown from one pilot seminar at Kennedy Elementary School in Alief ISD, to having served over 400 teachers, administrators and parents from elementary, middle and high schools in HISD, Alief ISD, and Aldine ISD.

During her two-day site visit, Dr. Ball sat in with a group of former Cultural Conversations participants to observe a typical Cultural Conversations session. These sixteen teachers and administrators assembled on the Rice University campus to discuss teacher expectations and “at-risk” students from the perspective of race. Dr. Ball observed that

“teachers and administrators engaged in large and small group discussions and group activities which focused their attention on issues of race, class, gender, and educational equity. These conversations took place in a very direct, non-threatening and engaging manner. I was positively impressed by the facilitators’ ability to effectively create an environment in which teachers and administrators felt comfortable considering these controversial and potentially unsettling concepts. Through their excellent group facilitation skills, the program leaders were able to accomplish their goals.”

Dr. Ball also met with project staff to discuss curriculum, documentation, and future plans for Cultural Conversations. Based on these conversations and her own observations, Dr. Ball made several recommendations for enhancing and extending the scope of the project. While she praised the readings selected for the Cultural Conversations groups as having been “carefully selected with great care and with an experiential knowledge of the most critical and important issues,” she felt that the teachers would benefit from additional literature on teachers as researchers and agents of change. She also suggested that the number of co-facilitators be increased so that more groups can be formed. She felt that “Cultural Conversations is a premier program that should consider expanding its offerings to include

### WHAT’S INSIDE

<i>Contradictions of School Reform</i>	p.2
<i>Recommended Reading on Testing</i>	p.3
<i>Oil and Kids Do Mix</i>	p.4
<i>School Science Project</i>	p.5
<i>Sharing Writing</i>	p.6
<i>Creating an Intimate Space</i>	p.7
<i>East Asian Faculty Development</i>	p.8
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	p.12

*continued on page ten*

---

---

# Contradictions of School Reform Tells the Real and Complex Truth about Standardized Testing

by Priscilla Fish, School Writing Project

A team of Jim Lehrer News Hour people came to interview Linda McNeil when her new book *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Testing* was first available. If you saw that News Hour segment on school reform in Texas, you also heard Terri Goodman, Sheila Whitford and Elizabeth Floreani, all veteran HISD teachers, speaking both of the inadequacy of the TAAS as a sole assessment of students and of the harm done to students who drop out of school rather than fail the test again.

What you missed, however, was a telling moment, cut for good reason: the interviewer had opened by asking these three School Writing Project teachers about “the miracle of school reform in Texas.” Stunned into uncharacteristic wordlessness, they looked at each other and burst out laughing. Kids in overcrowded classes, teachers with loads of one hundred fifty or more students—a miracle?

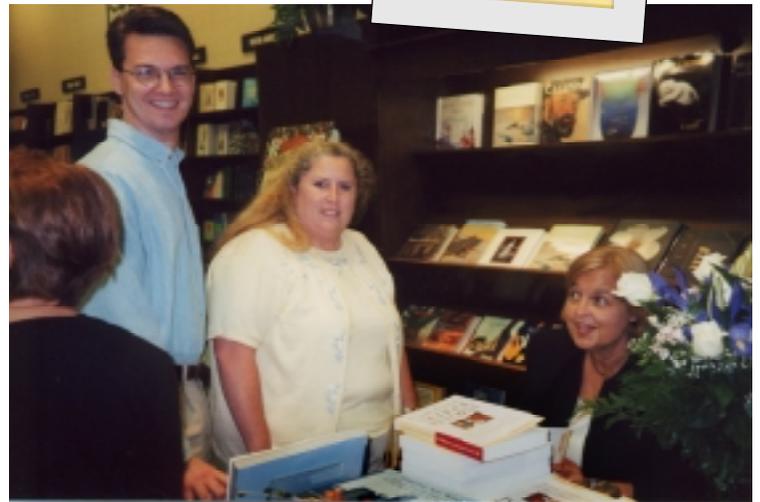
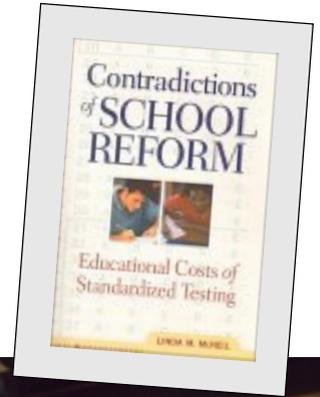
Increased emphasis on a one-size-fits-all test with no regard for the real learning of different kinds of students— a miracle? Treating reading as if it were medicine to be taken by the teaspoonful, with students skimming only enough to circle an answer, a miracle?

Even the best of the media, however, is likely to fall back on the official version of miraculous school reform in Texas. It is, after all, a prevalent myth, appealingly packaged in sound bytes, statistics and business-like notions of accountability.

As we heard the News Hour people interviewing other teachers who testified to improved TAAS scores, the camera scanned their classrooms. Maybe only a teacher would have noticed that the rooms were packed with too many kids and the kids really didn't seem to be part of a miracle. They just looked bored. Here in the classroom with the kids was a glimpse of a story more difficult and more interesting than the running of the numbers on a single test.

It is this real and complex story that Linda McNeil tells in *Contradictions of School Reform: Educational Costs of Standardized Testing*. Approaching her subject in a series of narratives, McNeil provides the political and social context for centralized controls of education and then shows the “perverse” and perhaps unintended effects of that system on the classroom. We see in close-up detail the experience of students and teachers in Houston magnet schools, before mandated standardization and after.

It is not a simple story, and to tell it truly she returns to the reforms instigated by Ross Perot. Originally intended to raise teacher salaries, these reforms actually shifted control over public schooling away from the public, and away from the profession, toward business-controlled management accountability systems (xxiv). Since the 1980's, power to make educational decisions has belonged primarily to conservative business leaders, and educational policy has been founded on test scores. The result is a closed hierarchical system, with teachers, of course, occupying the lowest level. McNeil shows that this “de-democratization” of public schools marginalizes anyone who does not speak the language of authority, the language of the standardized test. To this analysis of political power, McNeil adds the history of magnet schools in Houston, which became the sites of her research because from the beginning they had invited a diverse population of students and teachers dedicated to making authentic learning experiences accessible to these children. In her early observations of the Pathfinder school, with students drawn from “all over the city and all kinds of neighborhoods and family backgrounds,” McNeil found students and teachers ready “to accept, to tolerate, even to celebrate these differences.” She reports on a government class, an English class, a biology course, with teachers very different in style from each other but all concerned with responding to students needs and helping them develop their individual interests in these areas of study. Here was a school where teachers “constantly pushed the students to try things, to extend their thinking, to move beyond facile responses.”



Linda McNeil gave a talk and signed copies of her books at Barnes and Noble on September 13. She also talked about her book at the Book Stop on September 23.

*continued on page eight*

---

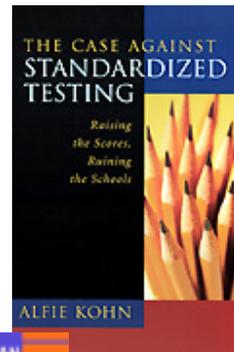
---

## Recommended Reading

By Laurie Hammons, Center for Education

---

When we look back on the year 2000, we very well may say that this year was the turning point in the way we look at standardized testing and accountability systems in public schools. Over the last ten or fifteen years we have seen the increase in importance of standardized testing in decision making concerning our schools, teachers, and especially students. And with the increase in consequences has come an increase in the amount of time and resources spent to prepare for these tests. Parents are speaking to parents, teachers are speaking to teachers about the harmful effects they are seeing in the classrooms and what the children are learning. Two recently released books shed light on these concerns and will be useful for those of us who are wondering what is going on in the classrooms, and what can we do about it.



### ***One Size Fits Few: The Folly of Educational Standards***

*One Size Fits Few: The Folly of Educational Standards*, by Susan Ohanian, is a treat. Ohanian is a longtime teacher, who has great stories to tell; these stories are poignant, absurd, hilarious, tragic – it is hard to know whether to laugh or cry. These examples illustrate vividly the problems with the Standards movement, and is an answer to those who say that all children must learn a certain fact by a certain timetable. Ohanian pleads for schools which will acknowledge and nurture the different strengths of students, not forcing each one to fit the mold of a narrowly-focused educational system, instead giving them a chance to develop in their own ways, without being labeled “failures.” As she works her magic with her “rotten readers,” we are brought into the world of creative teaching; for example, she uses her budget for basal readers to instead take her remedial reading class to a used book store to select a book each month, and she edits and types up a booklet of the class’s writings each day to teach a love of writing with a side-order of grammar. She gives powerful examples of the triumph of teaching individual students in ways that touch them and encourage them to enjoy learning. It gave me chills to read these examples of reaching out to students juxtaposed against what I hear on the news about drills, higher scores, and feet being held to the fire. After reading this book, you will never again hear the pronouncements of the “Standardistos” in the same light. This uplifting book will give you great faith in the power of teachers to do what they do best and the need for them to have the resources and flexibility to light the fire of learning in our children.

ISBN# 0-325-00158-8  
Heinemann

### ***The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools***

*The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools*, by Alfie Kohn, is just the book to read for a concise look at the problems with the standardized testing boom, to give to friends, or to read in a parents’ discussion group. It is a very readable book, written in question and answer format, and it is brief – 66 pages of text. Yet in its 6 chapters it covers the main arguments against standardized testing, some alternatives, and ways to get involved. Kohn discusses what is behind this movement for accountability, and what makes a particularly harmful or useless test. What happens when these tests are used to make high stakes decisions for students, teachers, and administrators? Is it helping low-income, minority students, or are there problems which have not been addressed? What can be used in place of standardized tests to assure that students are learning? How can a parent or an educator get involved in the movement to re-think these policies? With this timely book and his suggestions for further reading, Alfie Kohn provides a helpful contribution to our nation’s dialogue over standardized testing.

ISBN# 0-325-00325-4  
Heinemann



# Oil and Kids Do Mix During the EEI Summer Institute

by Margaret Immel, School Literacy and Culture Project

"Look, Miss, the sand is working. It's soaking up the oil." This remark to me during a simulated oil spill and clean-up operation came from a sixth-grade Drew Academy student participating in the Education for the Energy Industry (EEI) Summer Institute. He quickly turned to his partners and they begin to write down exactly what they were observing. "We need to get this just right for our report to the head of our company and so if this ever happens again we will be able to clean it up faster." The summer school students were role-playing the jobs of oil company employees, oil spill clean-up specialists, and public relations spokespersons. Most of the students were taking their "jobs" seriously and making sure the fine details were included in their logs. They were using communication and technical writing skills as well as math and science knowledge and art and drama skills during their language arts period.

This simulation occurred during the language arts time at the end of the third of four weeks of a combined summer school session for students and professional development institute for teachers. The students had been preparing for this day for almost three weeks. They had learned



A Bethune Academy Elementary student builds waterwheels during the EEI Summer Institute.

*Integration of content is one of the goals of the Education for the Energy Industry project, a collaborative effort among the Rice University Center for Education, the Aldine Independent School District, and the Harris County Department of Education and made possible through the generous grants of several oil companies in the Houston area. Another goal is to improve instruction through professional development, which in turn will impact student achievement. A third goal is to develop an integrated curriculum that teaches students about the energy industry. All three of these goals were addressed during the summer school session. Teachers received professional development in which they improved their knowledge about their content area and learned strategies to use with their students. They applied what they learned during the professional development sessions with their students during class time. And they helped refine an EEI curriculum unit by giving feedback about how the lessons worked with their students. This was a unique approach when compared with the two previous professional development communications summer institutes, which had been three weeks of intense work for teachers only.*

*continued on page ten*

the power of detailed and precise "how-to" descriptions of procedures. They had written descriptions of themselves and classmates so that when the teacher read the descriptions, the students were easily identified. They had read books about the effects of oil spills, watched videos, and used the Internet to research oil spills, clean up procedures and careers. They had honed their skills of observation and objective reporting. They had written objective descriptions of the school's nature center using one of three formats for organizing a technical report. The students were each assigned a section of a cement sidewalk to describe in writing so that it could easily be located when the descriptions were anonymously read. Each class created an oil or oil-related company, choosing a company name and deciding the type of company they would be. Each student chose an oil-related career, researched the career using wrote a job description for him/herself. They had also learned an easy yet effective technical report model.

The day of the simulation arrived. The classes had been divided into small groups. Each group received a section of a clean cement paving stone. They were given three items to use for the clean up—a turkey baster (skimmer), Dawn liquid detergent (surfactant), and sand (absorber). Each group was given different directions for using the clean-up materials. The teachers went to each group and created the spill on the paving stone using vegetable oil. The clean-up operations began.

The groups worked diligently, discussing and taking notes about the clean up. The students had to work cooperatively to solve the problem and make decisions about when to move on to the next material if the first one or two weren't working.

*continued on page ten*



# Teacher Participation in School Science Project Leads to Significant Increase in Student Learning

by Wallace Dominey, School Science Project

The Rice University/Aldine Independent School District's Science Collaborative (RASC) has begun its third year. This collaborative was created by the Center for Education's School Science Project and Aldine ISD to meet the teacher professional development needs of Aldine ISD's seven science related magnet schools.

Essential to Rice/Aldine Science Collaborative are the RASC Science Specialists. Each of Aldine's seven science magnet schools now has a full-time RASC Science Specialist. These Specialists are charged with improving the science programs at their respective campuses.

The School Science Project serves to organize and focus the reform effort. Each week, the Specialists come to Rice's campus for sharing, professional development, and support.

At Rice, the group focuses on problem solving, program documentation and evaluation, planning teacher professional development activities, and professional development for the Specialists. The Specialists report that their time at Rice has been essential to their success in the schools.



*Stovall Academy 2nd grader shows off a carrot that she grew from seed.*

In addition to organizing and focusing the reform effort, the School Science Project provides teacher professional development to all those who teach science in the seven schools. At the elementary level, this includes most of the faculty. Professional development occurs both during the academic year as well as in summer institutes. These institutes are specifically designed for each school by each school's Science Specialist and School Science Project personnel.

Summer institute activities differ widely according to the interest and needs of the teachers. For example, Candace Miller, an ex-teacher and author on native folk legends, provided training for Stovall Academy teachers on methods of incorporating native folk legends about plants and animals into their classrooms. Stovall Academy is a K-4<sup>th</sup> grade school with a magnet theme of environmental sciences. Contrast this experience with Carver High School's professional development program aimed at empowering teachers to use Energy Industry examples in their every day teaching, or Reed Academy's incorporation of aerospace engineering into their curriculum.

The RASC approach of school-specific professional development programs and full-time Science Specialists has proven extremely successful for Aldine's science magnet schools. This success has been thoroughly documented with quantitative data. The first year's data (1998-99 academic year) and reports from the schools were so compelling that Aldine's Superintendent, M.B. (Sonny) Donaldson decided to extend the Collaborative to all 58 Aldine campuses by putting a science specialist on every Aldine campus over the next five years.

Adding Science Specialists to every campus in the District represents a multi-million dollar commitment by Aldine ISD. A necessary precursor to this expansion is to provide training for the additional Science Specialists. The Collaborative is currently seeking funding for this Specialist training program.

*continued on page eleven*



# Sharing Writing Is a Risky , But Mutually Rewarding Exchange, for Teachers and Students

by Sheila Whitford, School Writing Project

Modeling writing in my English classes is a risky business. Not only do I share my writing aloud, but also I put my work down as part of a revision model. Selecting a piece of my writing becomes a trust exercise in that I am allowing students the power to approve or change my work; therefore, choosing pieces from my journal creates degrees of risk for me. My most memorable revision scenario occurs this way:

My junior English class is working on a poetry project. Each student is to collect ten poems centered about a theme, write an introduction to the anthology, include some samples of literary analysis about their selected poetry, and write original poetry. As we proceed from first drafts to revised drafts, I decide to read aloud from my journal a poem called "Farm to Market 1942" about my family's loss of our "favorite older son," Harry Coker Winkler in a tragic traffic accident. I had written about the setting of the accident. I really want to work on this particular piece of writing and I want my students to find a piece from their journal that they want to revise. I decide to use "Farm to Market 1942" as my shared revision piece. I am somewhat hesitant at first, but because Furr High School is divided into houses my level of trust with the students is greater. I have taught and known these students who are now eleventh graders from their freshman year.

I read the poem aloud then explain what FM 1942 is.

One student says, "I'm glad you explained. At first I thought you were talking about a radio station."

That's when Teneshia interjects, "Let's revise."

Maneuvering the overhead in place, I write up the poem. "How do we revise poetry?" I ask. And the conversation begins about revision and my poem. Teneshia again calls out, "Needs something like similes or metaphors."

***"When a teacher demonstrates her work for me, it is a big help. It not only opens my mind, but it also gives me a sense of how to do the work. I feel every teacher should do this because it helps us out a lot. Using your personal affairs assures us that you are comfortable with us. I am grateful that we have you and you are doing this."***

Our class conversation adds a simile to my poem and changes the title of the poem from "FM1942" to "Farm to Market 1942." Then for the next few minutes there is silence, and I move the class into small, revision groups.

The next day, I continue conversations about revision with small groups of students about their poems. One group that I join is with Teneshia, Ronaldo, April, and Angela. I ask first to share my piece with the group. The group signals me "O.K.," but I go last. After listening and working together on revision pieces, I discover that Teneshia is working on an elegy about her brother, Dennis Jerome Sneed, Jr. From the experience of working on Teneshia's poem, I'm able to finish up my poem.

The public address system begins to blare announcements. We stop our work. Journals close, and so does the class.

Even before the posted poems have faded into the red bulletin board paper, I begin having conversations about this teaching style with my colleagues from the School Writing Project. These fellows offer several extensions of the lesson. One that I use is having students write about the experience of revising a teacher's piece of writing. I implement this suggestion when I ask my revision group to share their journals. Several of the students talk about teachers needing to revise and edit their work. My answer to them is, "Yes, everyone uses the writing process."

Angela writes, "I never would have thought an English teacher could

## Farm to Market 1942

By Sheila Whitford

Down a fast, blacktop road.  
Mindless speed approaches him.  
His tender heart beats.  
Fate swirls into his path.  
His compassionate soul flees.  
Tangled twisted metal  
Encases my boy.

Forever.  
Life like dust on a windowsill.  
Only memories  
Linger.

*continued on page nine*



---

# Creating an Intimate Space in the Classroom Sparks Student Creativity

by Gastonia (Terri) Pumarejo-Goodman, School Writing Project

I faced an unexpected insurrection in my classroom a couple of weeks ago. The student revolt caught me unaware, but unlike the teacher nightmares I have on occasion where I stand in front of a crowded classroom with an agenda that no one seems interested in, this experience left me smiling. It is odd because in many ways what happened in my classroom at 7:30 a.m. on that Friday morning mirrored my nightmares. I had an agenda on the board that clearly read, "Peer-responding for the Compare/Contrast Essay." Two days earlier on Wednesday of the shortened HISD week, I had explained to my seniors that since we were starting classes midweek we would suspend our traditional Floor Friday, a journal writing period. But when I walked into my first period classroom that morning my 35 students sat with their journals placed squarely on their desks, waiting.



*Bellaire High School Teacher Terri Goodman and her students sit in a circle and read from their journals during Floor Fridays,*

Thursdays the students take turns signing up to bring cookies the following day. When they come in on Friday instead of lugging a hefty literature text, they carry their personal journals. The putty-colored desks are pushed in a circle against the wall and the day's prompt, usually in the form of a hand-out, is situated on the table near the door. I use Fridays whenever possible to link the curriculum study of British literature, recently "Beowulf" and "Sir Gawain and The Green Knight", with a contemporary poem, essay, or short story. After we read a piece together, students underline or jot down some observations about the meaning or style of the piece. We talk about the connections we find in the work. And then we write. There are only two rules in my class on Friday. Everyone writes for the entire twenty minutes, and on Friday I am one of the writers.

After we write, I take my place on the floor, quietly signaling that we are about to begin readings. In many of my classes, students raise their hands to read before they even reach the floor. The first time I pushed the desks back and sat on the floor it seemed awkward, but less so than the distance, both emotionally and physically, that I found when the students remained in their desks. There is something intimate and shared about forming a circle to read. We sit close together Indian style. My more fastidious students are encouraged to bring plastic mats to avoid the cold linoleum floor. It is another instance where as a high school teacher I have followed the wisdom of primary teachers and found my instruction the better for it. As emotionally valuable as I find these Fridays, I would not continue them unless I could measure the impact on my students' writing and observe an improvement in the class climate. I think about this quite often because it is part of the magic and mystery of this time I have carved out for my students. Recently, my students submitted their first drafts of personal narrative essays. As a class, we had spent at least a week looking at examples and developing a rubric that would reflect essential criteria. Despite peer response workshops and quick writes, the finished

Although I could not have predicted that my students would seize the fifty minutes of personal writing, reading, and sharing as inviolate so early in the year, I initiated the Floor Friday practice two years ago for this very purpose and with this type of class in mind. With more than 30 students in each class, I found it difficult to create a reading/writing workshop that fostered trust and openness with voluntary readings. As one of my students commented last year, most of her classes were so large that she never even learned the other students' names. Yet, based on my training and experience with the School Writing Project, I knew that if I wanted students to engage in authentic writing, I needed to create a caring environment where students were comfortable enough to read their work aloud. In my class, this means that on

*continued on page nine*



# Faculty Development Institute on East Asia Offered This Spring

by Richard J. Smith, *Asia Outreach*

The Texas Consortium on Teaching about Asia (TCTA), part of the Asian and Global Outreach Project of Rice University's Center for Education, will offer a 30-hour "Faculty Development Institute on East Asia" in the Spring semester of 2001 starting January 27. This Institute, funded by the Freeman Foundation and based on a module developed by Columbia University's National Consortium on Teaching about Asia (see below), will focus on two major themes: (1) "ways of world-making"—that is, the way culture groups arrange "things," ideas and activities into coherent systems of meaning; and (2) the complex historical interaction between China, Korea and Japan from neolithic times to the present.

Twenty-five teachers will be selected for this Institute, each of whom will receive a stipend of \$500.00 upon successful completion of the program (\$250.00 after the regular Institute sessions and \$250.00 one year later, upon submission of a report on classroom implementation). A free subscription to the journal *Education about Asia* will also be provided to each teacher. In addition the participants will receive \$200.00 worth of books for the Institute at no cost. These books include: *Asia in Western and World History: A Guide for Teaching* by Ainslee Embree, *East Asia: A New History* by Rhoads Murphey, *Cultural Atlas of China* by Caroline Blunden and Mark Elvin, *Cultural Atlas of Japan* by Martin Collcutt, Marius Jansen, and Isao Kumakura, and *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* by Bruce Cumings. A photocopy packet of translations and other relevant materials will also be provided free of charge. Finally, the library of each participating school will receive \$300.00 of curricular materials (books and videotapes) *per teacher*.

**Institute participants must teach a course such as world history, world geography, world cultures, world literature or world art, in which there is a substantial East Asian component. To request an application form, or for additional information on the program, please contact Ms. Dee Garza, Coordinator for Asian Studies at Rice University. E-mail address: [deegarza@rice.edu](mailto:deegarza@rice.edu); postal address: Asian Studies (MS-47), 266 Sewall Hall, Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, TX 77005.**

The Director of the Institute will be Dr. Richard J. Smith, George and Nancy Rupp Professor of Humanities, Professor of History, and Director of Asian Studies at Rice University. Professor Smith has written, co-written or co-edited ten books, the most recent of which is *Chinese Maps: Images of "All Under Heaven"* (Oxford University Press, 1996). The most recent of his twelve teaching prizes is the "Texas Professor of the Year" Award (1998), given by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.

The topics and themes of the Institute have been inspired by the "National Standards of World History" and by Columbia University's "East Asia in World History" model (<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/eacp/webcourse/index.html>).

*continued from page two, Contradictions of School Reform*

How did the emphasis on standardized testing affect this learning environment? In a chapter entitled "Collateral Damage," McNeil looks at injury done to students in classrooms like those at the Pathfinder by state-mandated reforms. Teachers who had come willing to work long hours to develop in-depth courses for urban children, including those in most need, "now found themselves evaluated in ways that required that they standardize. The dilemma of remaining in teaching, and being required to bracket one's own best knowledge and one's commitment to children's development as thinkers and learners, confronted some of these teachers on almost a daily basis." (227) In these classrooms, where children and teachers had made a pact to work for the highest standard of learning, this compromise felt like betrayal.

By going into the classroom, McNeil reveals the links between the official policy and the altered experience of the child with teacher. "The irony is that this panacea [standardized testing] has two great costs: it undermines quality, and it increases discrimination." (xxii)

When the stakes are so high, the discussion cannot be limited. McNeil does us a great service with her penetrating analysis of the damage being done to children, particularly those in most need of constructing a new future. Her clear language and careful research allows us to see what we had only glimpsed in part. With this articulation comes the realization that the present problems are not inevitable.

Her study of specific classrooms suggests what teachers and students, allowed to focus on full, deep learning, could accomplish. It is this faith in kids and hope for their future that seems to drive McNeil's writing, urging us to think more clearly about the limits imposed by a system that could be expanding the possibilities.

ISBN# 0-415-92074-4  
Routledge



---

*continued from page six, Sharing Writing*

have mistakes in their writing. Well, it goes to show that even they need to revise and edit. When Whitford came to our group to revise her paper, I figured it would have been perfect. Maybe just a little mistake. But it wasn't, and we helped her with our ideas."

Ronaldo adds, "By working in groups we can solve problems better and communicate more with each other."

Many students conclude that a teacher writes a first draft just as they do, and the experience becomes more real world. Many students comment as Ronaldo does in the following: "Teachers shouldn't feel embarrassed because we all need some help sometime in our lives."

I discover this journal excerpt. Joshua has responded to a journal topic suggestion from my assignment sheet: "How can teachers help you learn?" "When a teacher demonstrates her work for me, it is a big help. It not only opens my mind, but it also gives me a sense of how to do the work. I feel every teacher should do this because it helps us out a lot. Using your personal affairs assures us that you are comfortable with us. I am grateful that we have you and you are doing this."

The experience of teaching with this model has been very successful for me. I must continue not only to write with my students but also to revise and edit with them as well. When students view and experience working with adults as they revise, then students can acknowledge their own learning. I also know that these learning experiences would not have happened without the small school structure. Being able to build academic trust is essential to the writing progress of students. Writing workshops progressively improve as students acquire the skills to complete the writing requirements and the trust of peers.

### ***A Lifetime Question***

By Teneshia Sneed

I don't understand why it had to be you  
Why did God take you away from me?  
Did he want to set you free?  
Away from painful days. and my evil ways.  
Maybe it was just your time to leave; you're in heaven I do believe.  
I sit asking myself why and I always start to cry.  
I miss seeing you and arguing too.  
When you were here I didn't tell you how much I loved you.  
If I could turn back the hands of time, I'd tell you until my face turned blue!  
But there's still one thing I don't understand, why it had to be you?

---

*continued from page seven, Creating an Intimate Space*

papers lacked the fire and depth of real student engagement. However, on Friday of the same week without the pressure of a rubric or structured writing environment, many of the same students who produced weak personal essays found their voice during a twenty-minute write on a poem by Michael S. Glaser, "Preparations for Seder". One student's two writings in particular stand out. Paul's personal narrative was a travelogue of a trip to New York City. His essay chronicled almost minute by minute his stay in the city without connecting it with any visual description or communicating the importance of

this trip. Yet on Friday, during his twenty-minute write on rituals, he descriptively captured his grandmother and great-grandmother's food preparation in the kitchen and the legacy of his multigenerational family as they gathered to eat empanadas, rice and beans. His description of the food was so vivid that during his reading there was a collective sigh as we all looked down forlornly at our rather ordinary store bought cookies. Perhaps for some teachers it might be painful to admit that a student's best writing occurs when we step down from the podium and share floor space with our students.

Perhaps the voice that our students long to hear is their own without adult static, or as one of my students commented, "Reading to your peers also lets you get feedback on your work which is very encouraging. It is a rare chance to sit back during the hectic school day and just enjoy writing."

Perhaps finding the formula to good writing can be as simple as bringing a well-chosen prompt, a journal, and enough cookies to share (or as difficult as creating the illusion of time and space in a public high school).



---

*continued from page four, Oil and Kids Do Mix*

Decisions were made by some groups to take their time and make sure the spill was as clean as possible. Other groups worked methodically making sure that precise measurements of time and amounts used were taken and recorded. Some groups saw it as a competition, with the group who could get through the directions first as being the "winner."

After all groups announced their pavers to be as clean as they could get them, there was a whole group discussion about the effectiveness of the materials as well as the order in which they were used. Students listened to each other's explanations and compared notes. In all classrooms the students concluded that the sand worked best. The groups that had used Dawn before sand reported the cleanest "roads." They concluded that the skimming method was useless in their experiments because most of the oil soaked into the cement instead of staying on the surface. In one class a boy suggested that the truck driver probably wouldn't have the clean-up materials with him in his truck; so, the clean up couldn't have begun immediately after the spill because it would have taken some time for the clean-up crew to arrive. He thought if they had waited a few minutes after the teacher spilled the oil before beginning to clean the spill, it would have been more realistic.

The students wrote group technical reports using the logs they had created during the simulation and the format they had been taught. The group reports became a part of each student's electronic portfolio. During the last week the students presented their reports, and the class companies decided on one spokesperson to be interviewed by an eighth grade student posing as a television reporter investigating the spills. Those interviews were videotaped. Seventh and eighth grade students participated in similar experiences. The Education for the Energy Institute gives children a chance to grow their ideas and show what they had learned.

*continued from page four*

*Tim Martindell, language arts department chair at Drew, and I began planning for the Communications Summer Institute by surveying the teachers about their own and their students' strengths and areas of need. We designed the professional development sessions so that they could be used "as is" or easily adapted for use with the students. Technical writing was the focus, but we also included some lessons—grammar and mechanics—that would apply to all genres. We read, discussed and applied the information from several prominent non-fiction and/or technical writing manuals—William Zinsser's *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction*, Thomas Pearsall's *The Elements of Technical Writing*, and Melba Murray's *Engineered Report Writing*. We also read and followed the suggestions in Ralph Fletcher's *A Writer's Notebook: Unlocking the Writer Within You for keeping a writer's notebook*. We read articles from oil journals and identified the features of the technical reports. Most importantly, we wrote. We wrote the types of writing they would take back to their classes and teach their students how to write—objective descriptions, "how-to" papers, power writing, "inspection", and technical reports. The final project was for each teacher to take on the role of CEO or comptroller of her class company and to write an annual report about the company using all she had learned about effective technical writing. Each made an oral presentation of the report to the imaginary company shareholders or board of directors, role-played by the rest of the group. The reports were revised, copied, and bound into books that the teachers can use as examples of technical writing with their future students.*

*When the four weeks were over, we were tired, but energized and armed with new knowledge and strategies for effective communications instruction.*

---

*continued from page one, Cultural Conversations*

more teachers and administrators at the middle and high school levels and to a broader state and/or national audience." Another recommendation was to establish an on-line chat room to allow past participants to exchange ideas and continue their learning.

Plans to implement Dr. Ball's suggestions are already underway. A list serve for participants should be operational in the new year. Two

new co-facilitators have been trained and are conducting seminars. "Connections" groups for past Cultural Conversations participants have begun and will be held quarterly. An advanced study group again will be held for four weeks in the winter. This fall, Cultural Conversations seminars were held at Johnston Middle School, MacGregor Elementary School, Red Elementary School, and Westbury High School.

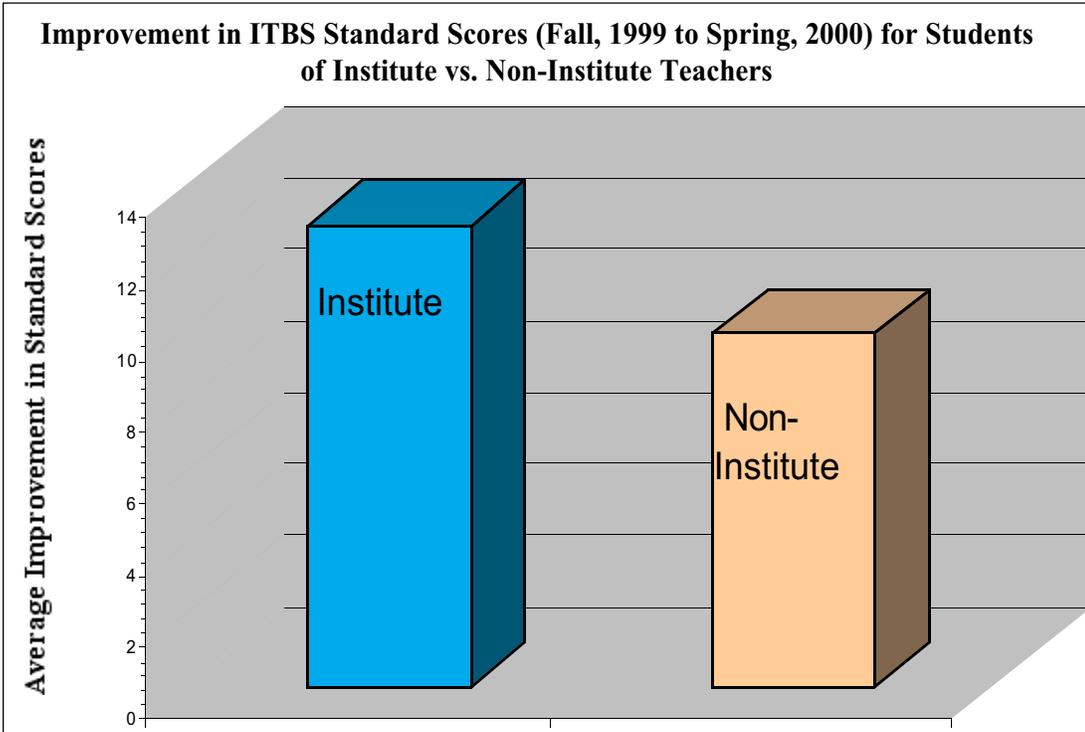
New school-wide surveys were distributed to gather teachers' impressions of the racial and cultural climate at the schools.

With these changes, Cultural Conversations hopes that it can continue to be successful in helping teachers embrace different strategies that address the needs of the diverse students in their classrooms.



continued from page five, *School Science Project*

As with the 1998-99 data, the recently analyzed 1999-2000 academic year data provide compelling evidence of the impact of RASC on student achievement. The data are comprised of three independent measures: the science portion of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), and an alternative assessment (performance based assessment) developed by the School Science Project.



Approximately 2000 students from the seven schools were tested using the ITBS science test. The scores of students of teachers who had participated in RASC summer institutes were then compared to the students of teachers in the same buildings, serving the same student population, but who had not received RASC summer institute training. As can be seen in the graph, students of teachers that received the RASC summer training performed statistically significantly better than did students of teachers who did not receive the RASC summer training.

A second quantitative measure was used, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade science TAAS test. At inception, only one middle school was part of RASC. We compared the percent passing for this middle school to the district's percent passing for the year prior to the program (1997-98) and then for the following two years. Results show that the RASC middle school entered the program as next to last in science student achievement as measured by this test. After one year in the RASC program, this school had the best scores in the district (1998-99) and continued to improve its 8<sup>th</sup> grade science TAAS scores and to maintain its "first in district" status the following year (1999-00).

To evaluate student gains in a more authentic way, the School Science Project developed an alternative assessment requiring groups of students to plan and conduct a scientific experiment. In this comparison, the students of summer institute-trained teachers again outperformed the students of nonparticipant teachers.

The focus of the data, and in fact of the program, is student achievement. Each of these three measures demonstrates the value of RASC to Aldine's science magnet schools. The questions that must be asked are these: Have the students actually comprehended and retained the material? Have their attitudes about science and learning changed? Have students undergone long-lasting changes in their ability to problem-solve and to think critically? The answers to these questions are essential because these students represent the next generation of decision makers in an increasingly scientific and technological society.



*Students of Reed Academy study aerospace engineering.*

---



## •Upcoming Events•

January 16, 2001, 4:30 p.m. - *White Teachers of Black Children: Does Race Matter?*, Dr. Patsy Cooper, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Hofstra University, Farnsworth Pavilion, Student Center, Rice University

January 26, 2001, Linda McNeil and Angela Valenzuela, *Latinos and Educational Equity Conference*, Bass Lecture Hall, University of Texas-Austin (cosponsored by Center for Mexican American Studies and Provost's Office at UT-Austin, University of California System, LBJ School of Public Affairs, Rice Center for Education, Harvard Civil Rights Project and International Reading Association)

January 27, 2001, 9 a.m. - *School Writing Project Reunion*, Kyle Morrow Room, Fondren Library, Rice University

February 17, 2001, 9 a.m. - *Growing Literate Children: What Teachers Need to Know*, School Literacy & Culture Project, Student Center, Rice University

March 1, 2001, 4:30 p.m. - *Linda Darling-Hammond*, Professor of Education, Stanford University, Grand Hall, Student Center, Rice University (cosponsored by the Center for Education and Houston Annenberg Challenge)

March 27, 2001, 4:30 p.m. - *Sonia Nieto*, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Hazel Creekmore Memorial Symposium, Grand Hall, Student Center, Rice University

March 31, 2001, 9 a.m. - *School Writing Project Reunion*, Kyle Morrow Room, Fondren Library, Rice University

April 5 and April 12, 2001, 4:00 p.m. - *School Writing Project Student Readings*, Farnsworth Pavilion, Student Center, Rice University

*For more information about these events, the Center for Education or its projects, please contact us at (713) 348-5145.*



CENTER *for* EDUCATION  
RICE UNIVERSITY  
P.O. Box 1892  
Houston, TX 77251-1892

NON-PROFIT ORG U.S. Postage PAID HOUSTON, TEXAS PERMIT NO. 7549
---