

My GNOWP Summer Institute Experience
By Bethany Sanducci

I cannot say it enough—the GNOWP Summer Institute truly was the best professional development I have ever attended. At Institute, I learned practical, effective, engaging exercises that I have and will use in my classroom in the future.

One of the most helpful ideas I learned was the importance of having all students share their work aloud with their peers from the very beginning and, more importantly, to make that work personal. I used the interview exercise on the first day of school. Students interviewed another student and read their introductions to the class. As they prepared their introduction statements, they were more conscientious and creative with their writing because they knew that they would be sharing it. This proved to be an assignment that the students enjoyed because they got to know their peers better and came to recognize my classroom as a safe community.

Secondly, I used the “My Name” exercise from *The House on Mango Street*, which again, proved extremely personal, and therefore, meaningful. My students were encouraged to interview their parents about their names, to discuss their nicknames, explain their likes/dislikes of their names, and to share what their names mean to them. My students shared this piece with the class as well, and in the end, they learned a little bit more about themselves and that talking about something personal in front of others is not as difficult as it seems.

While the introduction activity and the “My Name” exercise were useful in English, many more lessons from Institute have shaped my creative writing class. This is my first year teaching creative writing, and if it had not been for Institute, I do not think I would have had a single idea for assignments in this class. In creative writing, the students have a Natalie Goldberg “notebook” of ideas. They are presenting short reading chapters to the class and learning how to

discuss the texts critically with their peers. We have daily “writing explorations.” I found a book called *Unjournaling* that is full of great, kid-friendly writing exploration exercises. I am surprised by the way the students anticipate what they call “fun writing” each day.

Also in creative writing, they have written and revised their work based on feedback during class workshops. Our workshops are modeled after the way we conducted workshop at Institute. And, they anticipate our read-arounds every two weeks. Everyone wants to share, and no one feels uncomfortable sharing, something I doubted that I would see. They have written vignettes and will write a cumulative tale, a mysterious story based on an intriguing image, an ode, and numerous poems modeled after other poems like Kenneth Koch suggests writing. Overall, the class’s basics are founded upon principles that I learned at Institute.

I am looking forward to using my own “Belief Statement” lesson second semester. As per Tanya Musa’s suggestion, I am going to use it as a summative assessment project for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I cannot wait to challenge my students to dig deeply and write something profound about their beliefs.

Thanks to institute, the beginning of the new school year has been much easier, and I hope to continue learning and sharing ideas with my GNOWPers in the years to come.

To find out more about the 2010 GNOWP Summer Institute, email krayes@uno.edu or call 504-280-7323