"Writing is like breathing; it's possible to learn to do it well, but the point is to do it no matter what." (Cameron, 1998)

The art and craft of writing means a great deal to both of us. In our personal lives and in our professional lives as teachers and teacher educators, writing has been our soapbox in times of advocacy, our microphone in times of triumph, and our refuge in times of indescribable grief. While we hope to do writing well and to teach it even better than well, we know how difficult it can be to write for others and to place feelings and thoughts into a vulnerable place. This place of vulnerability is real for the students in our classrooms and for ourselves as their teachers. For many of us, writing may be as habitual as breathing, a necessary part of the everyday routine inside and outside the classroom. For others, the idea of writing with and alongside our students is a frightening consideration.

Yet, we know that the most effective teachers of writing are teachers who write. Decades of National Writing Project work supports this assertion, and hundreds of NWP sites around the country have exponentially impacted the writing lives of students and families in their communities. In the spirit of that work, we share the voices of teachers taking up the position of teacher-as-writer and the successes and vulnerabilities this creates. This issue highlights five tenets of teachers as writers that speak to the very heart of the work we do as middle level educators.

We teach.

In this issue, Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O’Dell offer eight practice steps to help teachers envision a classroom that exudes writing. Katie Kraushaar and Peter Anderson help us see the classroom of a teacher who sees writing not as an assignment but as a natural act of individuality, differentiation, and self-expression. Michael Cook, Matthew Gremo, and Ryan Morgan envision writing through game-play as a way to connect and teach traditional literacy practices in sophisticated layers of critical thinking. And, our friends from the Nerdy Book Club share their conversation about reading and writing, helping us to see the value in making visible to our students the words we read and the words we write.

We model.

Chris Lehman provides us with concrete examples of the benefits, for both students and new teachers, in seeing an experienced teacher grapple with the teaching of writing and reflecting on one's practice deliberately. We explore student-to-student writing workshop through Lisa Scherff’s analysis of a research article that heralds the value of peer interaction in writing instruction. We also learn about the importance of modeling the vulnerability that writing and sharing with students can bring, as Kristine Pytash highlights the benefits of modeling writing alongside her students. And, as the namesake of the Linda Rief Voices from...
the Middle Award, Linda Rief shows us the hallmark example of teacher-as-writer as she models best practices alongside her middle level students.

We fail.

Leading the Call, Jeff Anderson focuses our attention on the importance of showing students our writing failures, advocating for the resiliency we can build together when we admit to falling down during the very hard work of writing. Likewise, YA author Laurel Snyder shares the lessons she learned about failure from her writing teacher, noting that “failure only turns into shame if you hide it away, if you bury it inside yourself” (p. 14).

We persevere.

Writing about difficult times gives heart to our work, as Shelly K. Durham shares about writing through grief alongside her students. Jason Griffith and Jennie Brown discuss their approaches to writing and exploring brave topics with their students. And Nicole Damico and Anne Whitney remind us of the mindfulness necessary for both teachers and students to be present when writing, allowing us to “be all in one place.”

And ultimately,

We impact.

It is only fitting that we share the ways in which the National Writing Project sites across the globe are impacting middle level education. Sites were invited to highlight projects specifically from their work with middle level students and teachers, showing the broad impact of teachers as writers in our communities. Frances Lin, from the Middle Level Section Steering Committee, invites us to broaden our impact through our involvement with NCTE leadership and engagement opportunities. And finally, Cathy Fleischer reminds us of the impact we can have in our communities by engaging them in literacy experiences related to real issues that affect the lives of our students, parents, and neighbors.


We hope you find pieces in this issue that affirm, question, and push your practice as a teacher of writing. Deep breath, here we go!


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**Call for Voices from the Middle Cover Photos**

Have you got an eye for a great photograph?

*Voices from the Middle* editors are looking for compelling digital images to feature on our four journal covers during each of our volume years. We are looking for color photos that highlight our classrooms, our students, and the unique and important work that we do as middle level teachers.

**Images should align with the themes for each issue and deadlines are the same.**

Photos should be at least 300 DPI, in either jpg or tiff formats. Published photos will be full color. Please do not submit previously published photos.

If you choose to include people in your submission, you are responsible for obtaining the necessary releases from all of the individuals depicted (and parent/guardians, where appropriate) and must be able to provide copies of those releases prior to publication. For more information, contact voices@ncte.org.