ICTE NEWSLETTER

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WELCOME

The International Council of Teachers of English (ICTE) brings NCTE international teachers from around the world together, offering support and professional development to further enhance teaching and student learning. Our affiliate draws on a wealth of NCTE support materials and will be expanding this knowledge-set to cater specifically to educators interested in international education.

International Council of Teachers of English

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES
We welcome submissions for our ICTE members stationed around the world! Manuscripts should range in length from 500 to 2,500 words. Please contact us if you would like to submit longer manuscripts. Follow the NCTE guidelines for nonsexist use of language.

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Please join our Facebook group to keep updated on the latest in international education. Click ***here*** to view the group. Alternatively, you can find us by searching for "International Council of Teachers of English."

WHAT'S inside

Updates from Central High School, Uganda

A Journey of Progress and Hope

Sunday John
Central High School
Kabale, Uganda

Dear Friends,

Warm greetings from Kabale! I am pleased to share some exciting updates about Central High School and the incredible impact your support has had on our students and community since our last communicaton.

Previously

In our previous article, I shared the story of how Central High School was founded in 2009, driven by the desire to provide educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Having experienced poverty firsthand, I understand the challenges that many of our students face. Thanks to the kindness of a British couple who sponsored my education, I was inspired to help others, particularly vulnerable girls who are open pressured to marry young instead of pursuing their studies. Today, our school serves 153 girls and 88 boys, with some students paying subsidised fees while others rely entirely on sponsorship. The very real need for support continues to grow, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, which further deepened the struggles many families face.

What has happened since?

I am thrilled to report that many of the generous contributions received since our last publication have made a significant difference at Central High School. The computers provided through the 'Digital Doorway' fundraiser have transformed our teaching and learning environment, allowing our students and teachers to conduct online research and enhance their computer skills. In addition, a recent donation of a 10,000-liter capacity water tank has greatly improved our access to clean water, especially during the rainy season.

This improvement is reflected in our students' impressive results; last year, every O-Level finalist achieved level 1 grades. This means that many have since been able to progress to A Levels, while others have enrolled in nursing training insttutions and vocational programs. In our recent A-Level final exams for 2024,

CHS 2025 with new water tank


CHS 2025

I am proud to announce that 12 of our students qualified for university education, and two will pursue diploma courses. These accomplishments will have far-reaching impacts on the lives of these children and their families and are a testament to both the dedication of our students and the support we receive from many generous people from around the world.

What are we doing now?

To support the hard work of our students, we continue to plan and make improvements to the infrastructure and learning environment at Central High School, Kabale. By May 2025, we aim to have raised $2500 USD to build an IT classroom, which will act as a secure place to store our new equipment, as well as an additonal learning space for our growing student cohort. Despite our recent successes, challenges remain. Many of our students continue to struggle with poverty, making it difficult for them to access basic necessities. For example, while we aim to provide important sanitary items to our girls, the need is still substantial, and we continually look for funding or donations from well-wishers. Where possible, the school provides subsidised education and accommodation for students who cannot pay, but, ultimately, there is a limit to how much we can do while still effectively supporting our current cohort. This means that many of our students receive sponsorship to cover the $300USD cost to provide food, accommodation and schooling for the year. These needs are constantly

I am excited to have the opportunity to reach out and meet new friends who share our vision for a world in which all children can access education regardless of their location, gender or wealth.

present and ever-growing and, along with needs relating to infrastructure, form the core activity of our fundraising aims.

How can the ICTE community help?

In today's world, where needs are abundant and the internet amplifies these voices, it can be challenging to know where exactly to focus one's efforts or who might benefit most from your support. As the founder and headteacher of Central High School, Kabale, I can confidently assure you that any time, support, or financial assistance you provide will directly address this very real issue. Our operating costs are entirely focused on education, meaning that 100% of donations received go towards enhancing our students' educational experiences. This includes providing school placements, food and board for those who might not otherwise have access, ensuring quality teaching and learning resources, and improving basic living and sanitary conditions for our students.

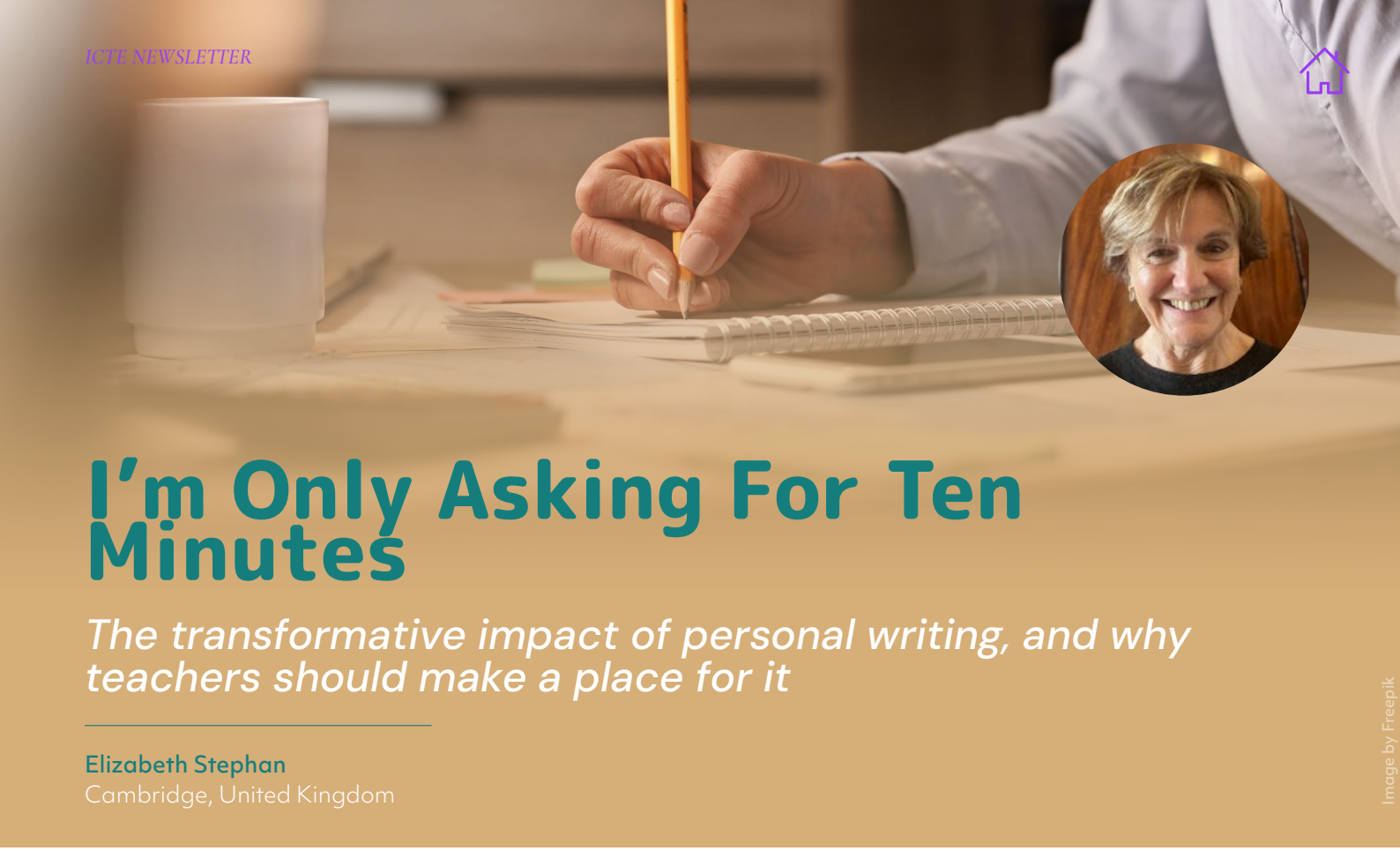
We also welcome the opportunity to connect with schools and other organisatons from around the world who could help to improve the outlook for our students in ways that are not only centered around fundraising. Opportunites such as a pen-pal activity between our students and yours can foster cultural exchange and broaden our shared global perspective. I wish to end by thanking the many supporters of this school from around the world. The support you have offered us has greatly improved the lives of so many here. I am excited to have the opportunity to reach out and meet new friends who share our vision for a world in which all children can access education regardless of their location, gender or wealth.

Thank you for taking the time to read about our story. I hope to hear from you soon.

Warm regards,
Sunday John
Headteacher, Central High School, Uganda

About the author

Sunday John *is the founder and principal of Central High School Kabale in Uganda. In 2004, he graduated from Makerere University with a BA in Education and began a career as a teacher. In 2009, he started Central High School Kabale to support the education of youth who, like him, were raised in poverty and lack opportunities to acquire a basic education. He has made it his mission to support the education of girls, who are particularly vulnerable in Uganda. He hopes he is able to pay back to others some of the love and compassion that he once received as a helpless boy. Sunday John's book The Story of Central High School Kabale is available for sale on Amazon. If you would like to contact him, you can write to him at Sunday John, Central High School Kabale, P.O.Box 74, Kabale, Uganda, or send him an email at centralhigh2009kabale@gmail.com.*



I'm Only Asking For Ten Minutes

The transformative impact of personal writing, and why teachers should make a place for it

Elizabeth Stephan
Cambridge, United Kingdom

Image by Freepik

Recently I was unexpectedly drawn into a writing exercise that had a profound and surprising impact on me. There was something about the context of the experience that reignited my conviction of the power of personal writing for both students and teachers. Teachers potentially have an invaluable opportunity to encourage and guide students in this lifelong and lifegiving activity, yet often find it hard to create the time to grow in this respect themselves. "Of the language modes, (writing) is the one that all of us, even English teachers, are most likely to fear".[1] I suggest that one can begin to break down this fear, even in a single session under the right conditions. And that we should.

The context of the writing exercise was a workshop at a Cambridge college, open to any member of the college and the wider community. There were 20 or so of us, and the age range was approximately 18-90. The participants were drawn from all disciplines– amongst them, urban development, architecture, theology, physics, biology, and English, and comprised undergraduates, postgraduates, and Fellows, alumni. It touched and intrigued me that these diverse individuals should have elected to commit themselves to this activity on a precious summer evening, that writing mattered to each of them, at 90 as much as 18.

The workshop leader was a published writer whose medium is poetic prose, and who focuses on the topic of motherhood and family. We were to read and discuss some of her work for an hour, and then, if we chose, attempt some writing of our own, which we would share and discuss. I had organized the event. I didn't anticipate becoming involved in the writing, let alone the 'sharing' that followed.

Our immersion in the initial reading was unexpectedly engrossing, and stimulated good discussion, thanks to the relaxed but engaged facilitator, her original writing style and approach to her topic, and the highly relatable subject. Everyone had something to contribute to that. Although few of us knew each other, trust and respect were readily established in the group – key to the later sharing of our endeavours.

The immersive reading of the texts preceding this had obviously released creative capacities, especially through hearing and embodying the voice of the writer in the live readings.

Then came the invitation: 'You have ten minutes to write about a family event', and a few guidelines or prompts. As I have observed with my own students, these were not a restriction: people tend to know what they want to write, and will ignore guidelines. The time limit was a stimulus. Everyone bent their head and began to write intently and unhesitatingly, including me.

The immersive reading of the texts preceding this had obviously released creative capacities, especially through hearing and embodying the voice of the writer in the live readings. It's a convention in this college society that everyone participates in the live reading– a process that establishes a relationship between reader and writer, between reader and subject. It breaks down the barrier readers often feel between themselves and the written word, and enables our own writing.

As I have witnessed in my classes, there is something compelling for students about everyone writing together, in a limited time frame, rather than amid the distractions and in the isolation of a library or bedroom. I realized that almost all my writing has been in isolation, in the confinement of a study or office, so it was at least partly the positive pressure of the time frame and social context that projected me into action. We were also being granted permission, in this safe space, to take time – if just a brief time– to try out some personal writing without fear of judgement or exposure. There was no expectation to share it. That anonymity, that choice and freedom – crucial elements in such exercises – certainly liberated me.

For some reason the memory of an unfortunate family event came to me. I rapidly tried to represent the moment (in free verse) as accurately and vividly as I remembered this "misshapen celebration" – a phrase that someone commented on later approvingly, but which in fact had sprung on to the page seemingly of its own accord. Lineation, diction, alliteration, and other literary features came into play instinctively in the effort to represent the event faithfully. In ten minutes, the poem had some direction and punch.

What brought about the "profound and surprising impact" was not so much the shaping of this experience to some satisfaction in the time allotted, the fact that I could do it at all, but what happened in the days following. Describing the family event in its sad grotesqueness as effectively as possible felt inadequate, superficial, without significance.

There had to be a way to suggest the pathos of human failure to connect, to express love and the need for love with grace; a way to suggest the tragically lost opportunities of family relationships and reunions. A creative solution encapsulating this sense of pathos, came – again instinctively – through the inspiration of a metaphor. This finally distanced me from the memory, the hopeless tangle of family relations, and brought resolution, the 'untying' that the word forgiveness involves.

Profound and surprising too was discovering the pleasure and stimulation of being in a community of diverse individuals who wanted to write; the role of the group experience in fostering confidence and creativity. I have never thought to identify as a 'writer', though I have written a good deal in a lifetime, including for a living. What I experienced was how rapidly one grows and gains from such a group on both the human and professional level. I had not expected to share my small effort, but to my surprise I did, spontaneously,

not from any need for approval or from pride, but I think because I felt a responsibility to contribute to the life and energy of the group.

The experience impressed on me how relatively easy and how productive it would be to incorporate personal writing periodically into the English classroom, embedded in the study of texts. What is not easy, for a teacher in an exam and performance driven culture, is to give oneself permission to do this, to justify to oneself and the students (and possibly one's department, the parents, and the administration) taking time 'off' what seems the real and pressing business of the classroom. The personal and creative can seem a luxury. But it is vital.

As teachers, and as students, after writing ourselves, we go back to the literature classroom with greater energy and capacity to respond to texts with understanding and pleasure. We can articulate and share thoughts and feelings about them more easily. We can appreciate more fully the challenge and "labour" of creating – that process of 'stitching and unstitching' that Yeats poignantly describes in "Adam's Curse"[2]. How can we adequately evaluate creative work if we do not attempt it work ourselves?

The process I unexpectedly encountered– the 'labour' of rendering an experience memorably through considered language choices, the discovery of solution through the structure of thought and form – would enable students to understand what Yeats meant, and what Robert Frost meant in his famous description of the shape of poetry. As he sees it, it begins 'in delight' (a memorable moment in time), and ends in 'wisdom', in "a clarification of life...a momentary stay against confusion".[3] (How rarely we find an understanding of this 'clarification' in IB Literature exams!). It is the deep and intense focus of both the reading and the writing process that brings about this gift of understanding. I have seen even quite young writers achieve this remarkably in both their reading and their writing.

Writing has a profoundly psychological impact. In Salman Rushdie's recent account of the terrible attack that nearly killed him in 2022, he emphasizes writing as a major part of his emotional healing process: "To write (is) my way of owning what happened, taking charge of it, making it mine, refusing to be a mere victim"[4]. In a far less extreme context, I had 'taken charge' of a family narrative in which I had no voice. The permanence of the written word, the authority and autonomy of the crafted piece, is something that cannot be taken away or destroyed. Words are also the last hope in the face of "those (political and societal) forces which seek to silence us, to rob us of our voices and our precious freedoms", of the truth itself, as the writer Sara Paretsky asserts in her powerful memoir Writing In an Age of Silence.[5]

Psychologists have also become very interested in the 'flow state' – that state of total absorption in an activity (which writing obviously can produce)- as the secret to wellbeing, even happiness.

Writing comes from an inviolable place from deep within the self. The Scottish writer Kenneth Steven painfully describes the devastating bullying he suffered for many years at school, and how he survived it only by inhabiting an inner core of himself that the bullies could not reach, where his imagination came alive and he found the solace, and permanence of writing[6]. Writing bestows identity, helps locate one's place in the world, one's relationship with the world. It also is a way of making meaning out of our experience, of interpreting and navigating the events of our lives. It can have a life -giving or a destructive impact on others, in all the writing challenges life calls us to undertake: the personal and professional letters, the references, reports, articles, funeral eulogies, wedding speeches, and more.

It is not surprising that recent and previous research into student attitudes to writing has highlighted the correlation between engagement with literacy and wellbeing[7]. Psychologists have also become very interested in the 'flow state' – that state of total absorption in an activity (which writing obviously can produce) – as the secret to wellbeing, even happiness.[8] How can we justify not enabling students and teachers to experience these manifold benefits?

The new schools-based IB Literary Arts programme offers an opportunity to both students and teachers of this kind. It is a validation of the importance of personal and creative writing in its focus on "crafting texts and conveying what it means to be human" (my Italics). [9] It emphasizes equally exploring texts, creating texts, and developing personally and artistically through membership of a community of writers, which includes the teacher. It has the advantage of being open to all students, not just students of English, but it may well only flourish where teachers are confident about writing themselves.

As teachers, we can be more isolated than we realise, with little chance to discuss our professional experiences in any depth with others. Teachers in an English department might agree to embed such a writing experiment as I have described in their classes, bringing their findings back to the department for evaluation. And obviously any teacher can conduct such an experiment independently. What is much harder is for teachers to carve out that invaluable time for their own writing in a dedicated group.

One could argue that we have a responsibility to ourselves, as well as our students, to develop as writers. The network of teachers' writing groups that has sprung up in recent years across the UK, under the aegis of the UK National Writing Project [10] (in turn inspired by the National Writing Project in the US [11]), has had a far-reaching impact on its participating teachers, described in the extremely helpful Introducing Teachers' Writing Groups by Jenifer Smith and Simon Wrigley[12], which has an excellent bibliography and is essentially a guide to beginning such groups. Teachers, their classroom practice, and individual schools have all been transformed through these groups, and the book bears witness to this.

Teacher writing groups may be a relatively new development but there is nothing new about the theory and practice, the perception of the value of personal writing. The consistency and conviction with which it has been written about by inspirational educational practitioners over more than half a century is striking.

Arranging such a meeting on a one-off, possibly voluntary basis with English teachers in a neighbouring school or schools could well provide the motivation to continue. Skilful facilitation is a key factor in this. And is it really so difficult to carve out thirty minutes in a Professional Development Day or at a departmental meeting, (ten minutes for reading and discussion to stimulate the personal writing, ten for composing, ten for sharing and discussion)?

I also like the possibility of teachers from other disciplines coming together in a workshop such as I have described, perhaps as an option on a PD Day, or in a lunch hour, or an evening.

Teacher writing groups may be a relatively new development but there is nothing new about the theory and practice, the perception of the value of personal writing. The consistency and conviction with which it has been written about by inspirational educational practitioners over more than half a century is striking.[13] Yet it has sat uneasily alongside the attention to formal writing – undeniably a necessary and useful tool and competence- which has tended to eclipse its neighbour.

They are not mutually exclusive. They reinforce each other. I have been gratified over decades to see how students are empowered through mastering the form and conventions of the formal essay, but their work is the more rewarding and impressive when it carries the authentic voice and sense of personal engagement which grow from confidence in reading more deeply and writing more freely. Conversely, mastery of formal elements can give impressive weight and impact to personal writing.

In an age of influencers, we need writing to explore who we are and what we value. In an age of instant, too often shallow response, we need time and space, however briefly, to grow through thoughtful reflection. In an uncertain and volatile age, we need a "still point (in) the turning world" [14]to find and focus on what will sustain us. Isolated in our own technologies, we need writing to connect satisfyingly with others.

As Rushdie declares: "Art is not a luxury. It stands at the essence of our humanity"[15]. Every student, every teacher, should have the opportunity to know this.

ENDNOTES

1 Jenifer Smith and Simon Wrigley, Introducing Teacher Writing Groups (London and New York, Routledge,2016) 31

2 William Butler Yeats, "Adam's Curse", In the Seven Woods (Dun Emer Press, 1903)

3 Robert Frost, "The Figure a Poem Makes" in Collected Poems of Robert Frost 1939 (New York, Henry Holt, 1945)

4 Salman Rushdie, Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder (Barnes and Noble 2024) 129

5 Sara Paretsky, Writing in An Age of Silence (London and New York, Verso 2007) 138

6 Kenneth Steven, Atoms of Delight (Saraband 2004) 48-9

7 National Literacy Trust, Mental Wellbeing, reading and writing 2017-18 (literacytrust.org.uk, updated May 2018)

8 Robson, D, 26 July 2024, "Grow with the Flow" (The Guardian Weekly Vol.211 No 4) 30-31

9 International Baccalaureate, Literary Arts Guide (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2022) 7

10 www.nwp.org.uk

11 www.nwp.org

12 Jenifer Smith and Simon Wrigley, Introducing Teacher Writing Groups (London and New York, Routledge, 2016)

13 For example: James Moffett, Don Murray, John Dixon and Frank Whitehead in the 960s, 1970s and 1980s

14 Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Burnt Norton" in Collected Poems 1909-1935 (London Faber and Faber 1936)

15 Salman Rushdie, Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder (Barnes and Noble 2024) 168

About the Author

Elizabeth Stephan *worked in publishing and journalism in London for some years after graduating in English from Oxford. She transitioned to teaching on receiving a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to teach English at the University of Kansas and subsequently Northwestern University. She later taught at Georgetown University and in several universities in Japan. Life changes took her to the American International School of Algiers where she taught a schoolwide (K-8) Creative Arts programme. After moving to Belgium, she was for many years Head of English and Drama, and also taught IB Theatre at St Johns International School. More recently she taught at Hockerill Anglo-European College in the UK. She has been an IB examiner for Literature for 25 years, and an IB workshop leader for even longer. She has written three books for teachers and students of the Literature programme. Among her passions are creative approaches to teaching literature, and enabling creativity in all students. She organizes and presents with a poetry society at a Cambridge College. She can be reached at saintjohns@hotmail.com*

Celebrating Difference and Fostering Belonging with Caribbean Literature

A New Resource from Words Without Borders Campus

Maggie Vlietstra,
Words Without Borders,
New York City

Image by Mystlav Chernov

> "I ask that you join me. To come to learn my roots, which I spent a lifetime missing, with me. . . . I would like you there to celebrate what makes me different from you. And yet, if I am writing to you, it is because you live inside me."

Italian Haitian author Marie Moïse extends this invitation to readers in her sweeping essay "We Cried a River of Laughter" (translated from Italian by Barbara Ofosu-Somuah), in which she uncovers her family's roots across Africa, Haiti, and Italy.

Moïse's essay features in Words Without Borders Campus's newly published unit of stories and poems from the Caribbean, and her request to the reader—to both celebrate what makes her unique and acknowledge that she and the reader are interconnected—beautifully encapsulates the collection's goal.

I manage WWB Campus, the education program of the magazine Words Without Borders. For over 20 years, WWB has been home to international writing from thousands of global writers, hailing from more than 147 countries and speaking over 141 languages.

In 2017, WWB launched its sister site, WWB Campus, in response to educators' growing interest in teaching these global texts to their students.

On WWB Campus, we select engaging, eye-opening literature from the magazine's archive and make it accessible to students and teachers with multimedia contextual materials, discussion questions, teaching ideas, and paths for further exploration. Our eight units, organized geographically, offer readers a nuanced glimpse into the literatures of countries around the world, including Japan, Mexico, and Egypt. Our materials are free to use for anyone with an internet connection, and we engage with and support educators around the world, from Philadelphia to the Philippines.

For the past three years, WWB Campus has

been developing a unit of literature from the Caribbean, and we were proud to unveil the completed unit for teachers and students this past February. This vibrant collection showcases 21 stories, essays, and poems encompassing seven countries and territories and five languages. Of these pieces, 14 are published bilingually, making them an excellent fit for multilingual learners.

When WWB Campus creates a unit of literature from a part of the world with which students may not be familiar, we group the stories under common themes that they'll recognize no matter their location: topics like leaving home, love stories, and resilience.

Several educators in the WWB Campus community have already brought readings from the Caribbean collection into their classrooms, with exciting results. One New York City teacher used Dominican poet Frank Báez's "Self-Portrait" (translated by Hoyt Rogers), a larger-than-life persona poem that explores how our mishaps and injuries shape us as resilient people, as an introduction to the genre of confessional poetry. After having her students write their own self-portraits modeled after the poem, she asked them: how do we know if the poet is telling the truth? Is he a reliable narrator of his own life story?

Another teacher brought Haitian poet and rapper Jean D'Amérique's "Poem for Children with Trouble Sleeping" (translated by Nathan H. Dize) to her high school ENL class. The poem, which juxtaposes simple language and a childlike lullaby structure with dark images of state violence and government corruption, offered her students the opportunity to analyze complex ideas at an accessible reading level.

When WWB Campus creates a unit of literature from a part of the world with which students may not be familiar, we group the stories under common themes that they'll recognize no matter their location: topics like leaving home, love stories, and resilience. Introducing the literature under such universal categories helps students to understand that, while our circumstances may differ, we all feel the same emotions and experience common struggles.

The rollout of our new Caribbean unit coincided with several challenging events in the United States, including destructive hurricanes in the southeast, widespread forest fires in Los Angeles, and a government crackdown on immigration. Our unit provides a framework for educators to address these difficult topics in the classroom.

For example, as US students were dealing with the devastating effects of recent natural disasters on their communities, we featured writings about the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. Haitian author Lyonel Trouillot wrote the essay "January 12, 2010" (translated by Linda Coverdale) to record his memories of the earthquake as well as to reflect on the state of the country in its aftermath. Moving past his "sense that language is inadequate" to capture the traumatic event, Trouillot employs similes and metaphors to describe the indescribable: "The noise, first of all. As if some unknown monster were crashing through everything beneath us to get to the surface." Trouillot models the kind of descriptive writing students can adopt as they process their own experiences of difficult or traumatic events. Engaging with natural disasters through global literature can help students feel less alone in their grief, while also providing a safe distance between the events on the page and in their own lives.

Similarly, WWB Campus revisited a science fiction story of interplanetary migration to help challenge myths about immigration during the current crackdown in the US.

"Nothing to Declare," a harrowing story by the Cuban science fiction writer Anabel Enríquez Piñeiro (translated by Hillary Gulley), follows three siblings who attempt an ill-fated journey from the toxic mining moon of Io to the safety of Earth by hiding away in the waste compartment of a spaceship:

Now Io is below us, behind us, like the spherical prison of a thousand famished dragons locked in a never-ending battle. This freighter is wrenching us from its jaws forever . . . and away from Father's never-failing goodnight kisses. We're bound for Earth to see for ourselves that it's not just some fairy tale we've heard since our eyes opened to Io's red sky.

Piñeiro wrote the story as an allegory for the dangerous trips that hundreds of thousands of migrants from Cuba have attempted in order to start a new life in the US. Upon reading the story, students might have a hard time imagining that such a perilous path to migration could exist outside of fiction. To help them understand that the siblings' plight is grounded in reality, WWB Campus published the story next to a wealth of multimedia resources, including true stories from migrants, images of makeshift rafts used to cross the ocean, and video interviews with Cuban Americans who came to the US as children. We've also included resources to help educators guide classroom discussions on politically charged topics like migration. Reading fiction about a polarizing topic can prepare students to approach these issues with empathy, allowing them to transfer the emotional connections they've formed with the characters in the story to their critical thinking about migration narratives and myths they may encounter in the news and online.

While some works in the unit address current events or difficult subject matter, we found it equally important to center stories of love, humor, and joy. As Haitian novelist and scholar Évelyne Trouillot writes in her critical introduction to the unit (translated by Paul Curtis Daw), "The literature of the Caribbean, like everywhere else, embraces all realities, from the squalid to the sublime, transforming them into something fresh and unique." In the spirit of Trouillot's words, we assembled a well-rounded collection that takes students well beyond news headlines. A few of my favorite pieces include the rollicking "Cinderella's Secret Dream," a Cuban twist on the fairytale in which our heroine dreams of a career as a telenovela villainess; "Kriol Soldier," a loving ode to the poet's mother tongue of San Andrés–Providencia Creole; and "Carnival Life," an inspiring story from Guadeloupe about a woman who finds renewal in her town's Carnival parade.

Our unit offers just a sampling of the many languages, countries, cultures, and stories that make up the Caribbean. It is our hope that the collection will serve as an entry point for educators and students, inspiring a greater curiosity about the region's literary output and encouraging further inquiry.

As you explore the unit—or even try out some of the texts with your own students—we hope you'll get in touch to share your feedback and experiences. We love to hear from readers, and we often publish lesson plans from teachers in our community on our blog.

We'll continue to celebrate the launch of our Caribbean unit in the coming months by publishing new teaching ideas and student writing, hosting webinars, and even inviting one of the authors to lead classroom visits in New York City, where Words Without Borders is based. You can join the excitement, keep up to date with new offerings, and become a part of our dynamic community of educators by signing up for our monthly newsletter.

About the Author

Maggie Vlietstra *is the education program manager at Words Without Borders, a translator from French, and a former English teaching assistant near Lyon, France. She holds a BA in French and theater from Barnard College and an MFA in literary translation from French from Boston University. She can be reached at maggie@wordswithoutborders.org.*

Understanding the Pros and Cons of AI Tech in Writing Instruction

R. Paul Lege, PhD
Nagoya University,
Chikusa-ku, Japan

Image by Freepik

By now, most educators are familiar with the debate over the use of AI technology in the classroom. Indeed, since its inception on the market, the amount of research devoted to the topic has exploded in academia covering, a wide number of concerns and ethical considerations associated with personalized learning, instructional design, assessment; and feedback. While research results are mixed regarding the impact that AI technology will have on learning, ethical issues continue to drive apprehension over the extent which it should be allowed in the classroom setting (Fuchs, 2023). However, AI can also be used to mitigate its negative influences, though a precautionary understanding of the pros and cons should be considered before implementating the approach into a learning environment.

For some writing instructors, this new technology is unwelcome, symbolizing a Digital Frankenstein that threatens to undermine the already thin membrane of classroom ethics worn down by years of battling plagiarism. Such instructors are not only concerned about the improper usage of AI technology but may also be astonished by the amount of time it can take to learn, check, and enforce a policy on the ethical use of AI technology in the classroom. The fact is that many writing instructors feel that they already devote too much time to guidance and control over traditional forms of plagiarism to be further saddled with this expanding issue (Perkins, 2023).

Indeed, the advent of digital tech has exacerbated the continuing problem associated with plagiarism and ghostwriting. Without proper institutional support, the full burden of proper guidance and control falls upon the instructor to intervene and manage the problem. This not only means that the complete burden of guidance, monitoring, and policing of such behavior falls upon the instructor, but instructors may also have to bear the time and costs with learning how to stay ahead of the seductive allure of such technology. Even if an institution completely bans the usage of AI technology, instructors will still have to monitor and police student

behavior as the technology is now so readily available. The fact that many students remain fascinated and drawn to its convenience, and they will always find a way to engage with the technology as long as they have access to it.

As such, many writing teachers have begun to enlist AI programs not only to help students with learning writing skills but as a way to monitor student behavior and engagement with such technology. While there are some AI detection tools available in the marketplace (both free and subscription) that help detect passages generated by AI technology, their reliability remains limited if not controversial. In contrast, subscription programs such as Jasper, Propensity, Prowriting AID, Quillbot, Scribo, Trinka, and WriteSonic represent just a few of the products on the market that may potentially assist instructors with controlling the problem by emphasizing proper guidance and usage of AI tech. Of course, the costs of such products could be an obstacle for many educational programs, even though the long-term benefits may be worth the investment.

Although resistance to the idea of using AI tech in writing programs remains firm among many instructors, the proverbial genie is not going back into the bottle. In fact, there could be long-term risks in delaying the adoption of AI technology in the classroom (Mehdaoui, 2024). On this issue, the educational sector appears to be in an arms race of sorts, and no institution can afford to simply drop out of the race by completely banning the use of AI. Although AI detection programs will not eliminate the problem of plagiarism, some of the subscription programs that emphasize guidance and proper usage of AI tech may offer assistance to instructors in gaining a modicum of control over the growing dependency that learners have on artificial intelligence.

Designing a writing course around the use of AI technology should consider both the advantages and disadvantages for students. Based on the available research thus far, integrating AI tools into a writing programme can help in areas such as generating ideas (brainstorming), grammar and style, providing direct feedback, and improving writing habits, while also being resource-efficient (i.e. cutting down on time used for organization) and increasing accessibility (for students with disabilities). On the other hand, overreliance on AI tech may limit students' understanding of the rules of language and could hinder their development of critical analysis, which in turn could result in generic writing without much development. The potential to misuse AI tools will remain high, while being able to access AI tools could be a problem for some students, which in turn could result in serious disparities between learners of different socio-economic backgrounds. Lastly, the development of AI tools involves ethical concerns over the collection of private data.

Incorporating AI tech in a writing course can be beneficial if balanced with traditional teaching methods that do not simply surrender the instruction of critical thinking skills. AI tools can be used for learning,

AI tools can be used for learning, for monitoring, for enforcement of ethical standards, or for a combination of all these elements. Depending upon the features of the software and the level of student proficiency, AI writing tools can provide students with ways to improve their writing skills. AI tools can also serve as management platforms that provide students with ease of access and submission as well as corrective feedback to deal with the prescriptive aspects of writing.

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In conclusion, student dependency on AI will likely persist as this technology advances. Educational institutions will either surrender to this reality or adjust and evolve as AI technology continues to develop. In addition, higher education continues to play a role in the research and development of AI technology such that it is partly responsible for both the positive and negative consequences associated with its use or misuse not only in its own institution but society writ large. The burden for this responsibility should be shared and not simply dumped on writing or language instructors.While there remain both pros and cons to the idea of fighting technology with technology, each institution and instructor will have to experiment with AI tools and make adjustments that are suitable for their particular learning environment.

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