Superb Scribes

Writing is not an easy skill to master at any level, making teaching writing at all levels quite challenging. Whether teachers find themselves challenging grade school students to write personal narratives or high school students to compose poetry, the first step, according to Sherry Posnick-Goodwin, is to urge students to find their own voice in writing and discover how empowered they can become by simply using words. Posnick-Goodwin, author of an article in *California Educator* entitled “The Write Stuff”, asserts in her article that once students at all levels discover themselves through their writing, the actual task of writing becomes far less daunting, and students begin to enjoy all steps in the writing process leading to a final draft. Her sincere tone, anecdotal format, and powerful message make this article one that all teachers should read.

From the very first line of the article, the tone established by Posnick-Goodwin is one that is indubitably poignant, serious, and highly informational. The article reads somewhat like a pedagogical textbook, and that is, most likely, the aim of the author since the article appears in an educational journal. In the first paragraph of the piece, the author asks teachers to build a rapport with their students before they address curriculum so that students feel comfortable enough to express themselves through their writing. She goes on to say in that opening paragraph that teachers must allow students to do a bit of introspection so that they can discover themselves before they
attempt to write about themselves (Posnick-Goodwin 18). This serious tone does not wane throughout the subsequent paragraphs of the article; the information put forth by the anecdotes, explanations, and conclusions retains the poignancy of the initial paragraph. Near the end of the article, the author explains what writing poetry can be for high school students by stating, "It’s a vehicle for expressing teenage angst" (23).

The article's focus on students' feelings about themselves and about writing creates and maintains a very serious tone from beginning to end, and that makes the entire piece quite powerful.

The power of the piece is not just in the tone; the anecdotes about teachers' and students' experiences as they work their way through the production of different genres of writing also add to the efficacy of the article. Who could argue against the fact that writing can be truly cathartic when reading the words one sophomore wrote describing her dysfunctional family: “I feel like Hansel and Gretel lost in a forest with no end” (21). Another student penned the following line expressing how she felt in her English as she composed a poem about herself: “Here, you can express deep feelings you are not able to tell others” (38). The article is replete with similar accounts of students and teachers uttering heart-felt sentiments about writing in the stress-free environment created by the teachers featured in the piece. One teacher went as far as to say that getting students to feel comfortable about their writing skills will prepare them for college and for life (22). The anecdotal evidence within the pages of the article serves further to prove that the article is masterfully done and deserves a good bit of credit, as does the author.

The overall message of the article deserves perhaps the most credit. Any good teacher knows that teaching students to master writing at all levels in various genres is
no small task, and Posnick-Goodwin’s article not only imparts that very message to all readers, but it goes a step further by clearly stating that students must be comfortable with themselves before they can become comfortable with how they portray themselves in their writing. This supports the common notion among many educators that instructors at all levels must build a culture before they build a curriculum. This is stated quite well in the opening line of the article: “When students find their voice and understand the power and magic of words, they are capable of expressing a myriad of emotions” (18). If students dread walking into a classroom, they will most assuredly dread what they are asked to do in that classroom. Teachers who build a strong rapport with their students are often more adept at drawing them out of their comfort zones and getting them to take chances in their writing, thus expressing their true feelings. Once students are able to express their feelings, they take more ownership in their writing and show a great deal more passion in what they create. Passionate teachers create passionate students, and passionate students become successful members of their communities and of society at large. This powerful message was woven throughout the article and should be taken to heart by all educators at all levels.

Sherry Posnick-Goodwin’s article is an inspirational piece that can stand as a lesson to all teachers at all levels. The students depicted in the anecdotes all had one thing in common; they felt like they belonged in their classes and let down their guards because of the inviting classroom atmosphere. This allowed them to shed any writer’s anxiety and get down to the business at hand – writing. As one sophomore student mentioned at the very end of the article, “Usually I am kind of quiet . . . I don’t fit in anyplace. But here, we all fit in (38). As Posnick-Goodwin so eloquently presented in
“The Write Stuff,” even an otherwise shy, introverted student such as the quiet sophomore can transform herself into a wonderful writer, a competent composer, a super scribe.

Work Cited

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