



GOOSE CREEK

CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

District Teachers Attend Abydos Training

On the third day of the Abydos Writing Institute, it was already obvious that Goose Creek CISD teachers were enthusiastic about writing, willing to share with each other and excited about the opportunity to take what they were learning into their own schools and classrooms. Certainly, English teachers were in their element, but this group of 65 included educators from all levels as well as social studies and math teachers, some of whom admitted they did not think they were good writers.

With varied talents, likes and dislikes, the group in the Goose Creek Memorial High School Library was much like a class of students randomly assigned to a teacher. This is the beauty of the Abydos writing, reading and literacy training. Teachers learn to teach writing or to incorporate it into their curriculum by participating as students in a classroom setting, which makes it easy to take the concepts back into their own classrooms. They also see how writing across the curriculum can be beneficial to student success.

"This is the reality – if we teach kids how to read and how to write and they really feel comfortable doing it, they should do better on any test," said Eddie Wilson, co-director of Abydos Learning with Dr. Joyce Armstrong Carroll, as he responded to comments from participants who had just shared their own writing in groups.

Abydos Learning International is not new, although its directors stay current with research and testing. It began in 1977 as New Jersey Writing Project and became Abydos in 2010, named for the ancient city in Egypt that was believed to have "opened the way" to all who entered. The city also allowed contemporary scholars to unlock the secrets of the ancients when they found the Table of Abydos, which has been called the Rosetta Stone of the beginnings of civilization.

With a foundation based on almost 50 years of research by Harvard's Janet Emig, Abydos is built upon scientific research designed and monitored by the Educational Testing Service in Princeton in collaboration with Rutgers University and tested in a consortium of school districts in New Jersey from 1977-1979, according to Carroll. Continued research includes dissertations by Vivian Athens Eads, Baylor University; Ginger Cheville Metz, Sam Houston State University and Kelley R. Smith Barger and Robin D. Johnson, Texas A & M University.

"If they implement this process, they will get results," said Carroll. "We've seen improvement in test scores across the state."

The quest to find just the right approach to helping students succeed on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) as well as in the classroom led Goose Creek CISD administrators to Abydos. The goals of the training include assisting teachers in teaching writing as a process, teaching language arts skills within the writing process according to students' needs and state curricular guidelines, and creating a positive, non-threatening environment which encourages learning, participation and risk-taking. The three-week course will, hopefully, inspire some of its participants to become Abydos trainers. There are now more than 400 Abydos



Despite the heat outside, Leah Linares (middle), instructional coach at Bowie Elementary, and Kimberly Justice, 4th grade teacher at De Zavala Elementary, sit back and relax as they listen to Dr. Nancy Fitzgerald, area executive director for the Ross S. Sterling feeder pattern, read her reflexive writing piece during the Abydos Writing Institute at Goose Creek Memorial High School.

"The major premise that we're working around is that teachers who teach writing should write themselves," said Wilson.

When Dr. Nancy Fitzgerald, area executive director for the Ross S. Sterling High School feeder pattern, read her reflexive writing/personal narrative aloud to her group, she listened to suggestions, carefully thought about each one and determinedly began to make a few revisions.

"Writing is not a subject - it's a skill that helps us think critically," said Fitzgerald. "This institute helps us see how necessary writing is to all subjects."

By the second week, the writers have spent hours writing, sharing and revising their pieces as well as participating in group activities and debriefing. They are owning their pieces of writing and understanding how they are benefitting from the workshop.

"It's about the craft of writing - not just writing, but re-entering writing and revising it. The piece I have today is much better, much more powerful than the first one I wrote, and it's the same piece," said Meg Galloway, social studies content specialist at Robert E. Lee High School.

With one more week of training ahead of them, many of the group members are already planning how they can use this process, regardless of the subject, to enhance learning in their classrooms.

"It has opened my eyes to a whole new world," said Sherry Burr, math content specialist at Lee.

"When we ask students to elaborate and revise, they don't know how. We've gone through a process with our personal narratives that has helped us learn how to revise. We have questions we ask ourselves to determine what we need to do to strengthen our writing."

At the end of the course, their polished pieces of writing will be published in an anthology for the writers to take home. They will remember the stories that were first shared in their groups and celebrate the finished products that are now stronger and more engaging. They will share

trainers in Texas, and new districts are coming on board every year. Trainers recertify every three years using the latest research and strategies.

their writing in a Read Around, and many of the personal stories will evoke laughter or tears from the authors as well as the listeners. The Abydos training will be over, but implementation of the process will be just beginning all over the district.

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