

Dates to Remember

- Mid-April, 2008
Acceptance Letters
Sent Out
- May 14, 2008
Authors' Reception

DTWT (Do the Write Thing) is the student writing project of Central MA (CMA) SABES. SABES is funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education

Can you believe that DTWT, a project of Central MA SABES, is 17 years old?! In this edition of DTWT News we can take a little walk down memory lane to the early days. Margaret Farrey tells us of the projects beginnings. Cathy Coleman shares her memories of being the first editor. Kathy McKee, who must hold the record of having her class participate in this project for the most consecutive years, shares her recollections. The big treat for us all though, is the reprinting of two writings from that first edition. Do you have a recollection of DTWT past? Do share it with us.

Words from the First Editor *by Cathy Coleman*

***“When you read,
you take in others’
ideas: when you
write, you develop
your own.”***

These were words that I knew to be true in 1991. They were said by Loren McGrail, an experienced adult educator, in a workshop on writing I attended. I was relatively new to the field of adult education, and those words really moved me. It was in Loren McGrail’s workshop that I first learned about “process writing” and first heard about the importance of publishing the works of adult students, and it was soon thereafter that I was asked by Central SABES Director Margaret Farrey to organize and edit a

publication of student writings for our region. I must say. I did not feel particularly confident about taking this on, but Margaret assured me that she and the SABES staff were there to help, and so I agreed to do it.

We gathered an editorial board consisting of a couple of teachers, a couple of students and me. We advertised through the SABES newsletter and word of mouth. I don’t remember how many entries we got, but I remember how overwhelming it felt. Our editorial board spent many hours reading through them trying to decide which to publish in the book. Our first system was a far cry from the rubric we use today. It consisted

of three piles “Yes,” “No,” and “Maybe.”

The “Maybe’s” of course were the biggest group. Hard questions came up: How do we choose some over others when writers are at different levels? What makes for a good story? What do we do with the one about the rape? We had lots of rich discussions about those “Maybe’s.” Over time, we developed our criteria more fully – clarity, originality, and heart.

In 1991, the technology was not what it is today! Entries came to us handwritten via snail mail. Joanne Harrington spent many hours typing stories as they came in. That first year, we even had to hire a type setter to help us
(cont. on pg. 2)



*SABES is funded by the
Massachusetts Department
of Education*

DTWT Begins *by Margaret Farrey*

In 1992, two years after SABES was first funded by the Adult and Learning Services of the Department of Education, Cathy Coleman (an ABE practitioner) and I met in the SABES office to brainstorm ways to involve students in the staff development process. After many ideas were passed back and forth, we decided that we would solicit student writings from all the programs that we had identified in Central MA, to publish them within the region, and to have a celebration where students would read their work. We

decided to call the publication "Do the Write Thing" – a name that is still apropos today. Cathy agreed to be the first editor and the SABES staff (very limited at the time) began a campaign through fliers, phone calls and announcements at workshops to advertise the project. Thanks to the program directors and practitioners who encouraged writers to submit, we received a great response. Our writings ranged from three or four short lines from Basic ABE and Beginning ESL students to much more sophisticated

*"we laughed, cried,
and struggled along
with them."
Margaret Farrey*

offerings from the more advanced students at GED and ESL levels.

Our next step was to choose an editorial board to select the writings for publication. What a difficult task! Most of the submissions were heart wrenching, but some were lighter in content and shared happy moments. ESL students told us about coming to America, customs of other countries and adjusting to a new language and culture. ABE students talked about the
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Words from the First Editor *(cont. from pg. 1)*

publish the book. I remember laughing with my friend Cheryl who tried to help me with the lay out. We had a lot of fun putting those first books together. I remember working with Joanne and Rita Brennan Olsen, SABES Associate Coordinator, trying to figure out how to use that crazy binder machine late into the evening.

I was the editor of "Do

the Write Thing" from its inception in 1991 through 1996. It was a real privilege to be on the receiving end of so many wonderful heartfelt stories written and later read aloud at our Author's Reception. What Loren had told us in that workshop was true. Our students have shared their voices, thoughts, and ideas with us through "Do the Write Thing." Poet

and author Adrienne Rich said "Where naming and language are power, silence is oppression." The students in DTWT have broken the silence and claimed their power. I am honored to have been a part of that process.

*Cathy Coleman
QCC Adult
Community Learning
Center and GED
Online Program*

DTWT Begins *(cont. from pg. 2)*

difficulty of not being able to read, write or compute in English. The more advanced students described their reasons for dropping out of school and the courage it took to return and the difficulties they encountered along the way. After much soul-searching and lively debate the writings were chosen and students were notified and invited to the first DTWT celebration.

Now it was time for the staff to get to work and put the booklet together. As I look at the newer publications I realize how lacking we were in computer and graphic skills at the time. Somehow it all came

together and we were ready to share it with readers and Adult Education staff in the region.

The first celebration was held in (what we thought was a big room) 107 in the Administration Building. We were thrilled to discover a room filled with readers and their families, teachers, friends and fellow students. As the writers read their essays (and it was difficult for many of them to have the courage), we laughed, cried, and struggled along with them. The applause for each reader was deafening and from their reactions we knew that it was probably the first time

they had ever been recognized for their accomplishment. The morning ended with great desserts and drinks and much interacting. We were more than satisfied with the first DTWT and are happy to find that the tradition continues to this day. The graphics and presentation have improved considerably since our first endeavor but the student affirmation and applause will last as the booklet continues with the 17th edition in 2008.

*Margaret Farrey
First Director of
CMA SABES*

What I Believe *by Annette Bastarache* Originally published in the first edition of DTWT

I do believe in God, I come to believe that I have to believe in myself first. I didn't use to believe this and I got in trouble because I had a low opinion of myself. I

believe that if you want something really bad enough you will get it. But its not easy. You have to tell yourself you can do it and you will. Also I believe in family. Close

knit family. I believe in honesty. I also believe we don't get something for nothing. I have soon learned that.

The Academy Awards! *by Kathy McKee*

The first year I did DTWT was quite an experience. I had non-readers, non-writers and some basic readers and writers. We had spent a lot of time on reading instruction but not much on writing. I introduced the students to the idea behind DTWT and most of them felt "I can't do that!"

So we started off very basic, thinking more about words and ideas. Words weren't even a part of their thought because of their inability to read. We spent a lot of time thinking about words, like "describe the wallpaper in your bathroom." The students that could, would write, and those students that couldn't, would dictate to me. We didn't worry about the mechanics, we just wrote. We then got to

the point where we thought about topics they would like to write about for DTWT. The ideas started to pour out of them.

That year, I believe, all of my students' papers were chosen. It was better than the Academy Awards. They were so proud! They had their families come, dressed in their "Sunday best," and from that point on they seemed to feel better about themselves. Each year since the first we have submitted essays. The hard part is when they don't get chosen. We put each student's writing in a binder for all to have. We use it to read in class whenever possible. So everyone is published!

DTWT has meant a lot to all of my students since the initial submission. Going to the reading ceremony at Quinsigamond and listening to other authors has always been very emotional to me and my students. Getting up in front of an audience and reading has been such a growth experience for them all. I know it is something they will never forget, and neither will I. Thank you, thank you, DTWT!

Kathy McKee
ABE Teacher
Worcester Adult
Learning Center

"It was better than the Academy Awards."
Kathy McKee

Untitled *by Miguel Torna*

Originally published in the first edition of DTWT

When I was 17, I left my home in Cuba. My brothers and I were going fishing with my father. We fished for 12 days off the Cuban coast. My father decided that we had to

Leave Cuba. It took us 10 hours to reach the U.S. lighthouse. We were so hungry that we fished. The lighthouse keeper gave us food. Three days later the U.S. Coast

Guard rescued us and took us to Florida. When we arrived, we had nothing: no clothes or shoes.