

Gender and Writing in Education



*NAWE Summer Conference in association with
The Women's Library, London Metropolitan University,
Old Castle Street, London E1 7NT*

Conference Programme: Saturday 18 June 2005

- 09.00** **Registration and coffee**
- 09.30** **Welcome and introduction – Paul Munden, Director of NAWE, plus a representative of The Women's Library**
- 09.40** **Plenary talk by Dr Becky Francis of the Institute for Policy Studies in Education: The gendered constructions of writing in education**
- 10.30** **Choice of:**
- Session 1** **Boys (11-14yrs): boosting their reading and creative writing – Anne Caldwell**
What role do we as writers in education bring to this debate about boys and their supposed lack of engagement with reading and creative writing? Do we have success stories in this field and is there a way that our work can have a positive impact in partnership with educators? This workshop will look at examples of good practice, share our current practice and look at developing our skills needed to address this agenda in education. We will particularly look at good reading material for different age ranges, and creative writing exercises that inspire boys to write. Please bring along an A4 sheet on a recent project to share with the group.
- Session 2** **Drama of Different Genders - Georgina Lock**
In this practical workshop you will build characters of the opposite gender by combining writers' and actors' techniques - reflection, observation, notes, internal monologue, interviews, interrogations and arguments. You will then write scenes for characters which emerge. The workshop is fun, avoids stereotypes and is a good way of discovering how character creates action. Georgina has used this model when teaching MA Writing students, devising actors and first time screenwriters in Freetown, Sierra Leone.
- Session 3** **The Writing or the Subject? - Megan Stielstra**
Which should a writing instructor focus on: the writing, or what's being written about? The subject matter a writer chooses to address can inspire many things in an audience—passion, frustration, dialogue, etc.—especially when issues of class, race and gender are at the forefront. Yet how, as educators, can we guide students to concentrate not on their opinions of such issues, but rather on how writers get this material on the page—process and problem solving, as well as challenges of seeing-in-the-mind, structure, point of view and individual voice.
- Crossing boundaries: how the use of feminist texts inspires superior writing in the workshop - Felicia Swanson**
Gender, race, class: when you select readings for a writing workshop that bring these together in various forms, the juxtaposition gives permission and inspires students to tell their own experience, their unique points of view. This is feminism at its best: the acknowledgement and encouraged expression of multiple points of view, particularly those that are under-represented. This presentation demonstrates practical applications of using feminist texts in the writing workshop, using examples from workshops taught in the inner city projects of Chicago to upper middle-class suburbia to rural America.
- 11.45** **Coffee, tea and biscuits**

12.00 **Choice of:**

Session 1 Reading and Writing: how writers help boys and girls learn - Heather Butler

Drawing on her experience as a primary school teacher, Heather Butler will explore how boys and girls differ in their attitudes to reading and writing, the reason why some succeed while others fail, how a good teacher will respond to those attitudes, and how a writer going in to a primary school can contribute to developing both boys' and girls' reading and writing skills. This will be a workshop session with plenty of room for discussion and interaction.

Session 2 Crossing Genders: Writing in the Voice of the Other - Shaun Levin

What kind of person would you be if you were the opposite sex? How would being another gender change the way you did things? What knowledge would you need to take on the voice of a different gender? In this practical creative writing workshop and discussion participants will explore the liberation and the pitfalls of writing in a voice very different to their own, be it male, female, gay or straight. Through writing exercises, we will look at what we can learn about the self and about how we see the world by taking on a persona we were not born into.

Session 3 Viewpoints on Gender: text, discussion, writing – Paul Mills

Paul Mills will discuss extracts from the work of Caryl Churchill, Ann Spillard and Jackie Kay featured in his forthcoming *Routledge Creative Writing Coursebook*. He will use these pieces as examples to show how published writing can be used to develop gender issues in the work of student writers. Tutors of A Level, undergraduate and postgraduate students are invited to discuss the chosen extracts and share ideas. What are the current gender issues for practising writers? How might forms of narration in fiction influence reader-response to issues of gender? Should writing about gender be political?

Teaching Writing for Performance: Gendering Creativity and Accountability - Susan Bradley Smith

This paper will draw on Susan Bradley Smith's experience of teaching writing for performance in a tertiary setting. It will explore the results of research conducted at Southern Cross University concerned with observing gendered differences in areas such as reception of teaching materials, participation in workshops, and subject matter chosen for major performance pieces. It considers in doing so that if closer attention is paid to issues of gender and creativity that this might well generate a fresh pedagogic discourse around creative writing.

1.15 **Lunch**

2.15 **Choice of:**

Session 1 Women's Empowerment through Group Voices - Debjani Chatterjee

In her years of working with groups of ethnic minority women, Debjani Chatterjee has found the creation of collaborative group poems a powerful tool for empowerment. In this session, you will be introduced to some workshop techniques that she has successfully used with Bengali Women's Support Group, Sheffield Roshni Asian Women's Resource Centre, Derby's Raunak Asian women's group and women at Pakistan Muslim Centre.

Wise Words: Women's Writing Groups in the Community - Rose Flint

In this presentation, Rose Flint will make use of her wide experience of running women's writing groups to examine the importance of single gender groups. Women have always had a tradition of collecting in groups of all ages, and the writing group is a modern equivalent of an empowering ancient system that helped women grow. The work done within such writing groups extends women's knowledge and understanding of themselves, each other and men.

Manchester Survivors Poetry Women's Project: 'Blessed are the cracked, for they let in the light' - Rosie Garland

This presentation will take the form of an honest and practically-focused assessment of a women's creative writing group in a community setting in the North West of England. The group is made up of women Survivors of the mental health system. Rosie Garland will examine the successes and advantages of working with such a group, reflect on the challenges and discuss learning outcomes and the issue of sustainability.

Transcending the Barriers: reclaiming and expanding culture and community - Nicole Moore

As a writer who has been on the receiving end of black women only courses and a creative writing tutor who has successfully delivered black women only courses, Nicole Moore will address how

creative writing is particularly empowering for black women and how important and essential it is to have black women only writing groups and classes. Such classes can provide critical awareness and understanding of race, gender and class perspectives, particularly relating to the production and reception of black women's writing in the UK.

Session 2 Sex and Gender in Poetry - Vicki Bertram

Sex and gender matter in poetry. They play a significant and neglected part in the way poets write and readers read. To deny this is to facilitate a critical tradition that prioritizes men's writing and men's concerns. Reading poetry is a paradoxical activity. On the one hand, the reader is granted enormous scope for making meaning – poems urge you to interact. But, on the other hand, lyric poetry is perhaps the most egoistical of all genres, placing its reader in thrall to the poem's persona(e). What part does gender play in this complex process?

From Gendered to Genderless - Tilla Brading

Using poems in the GCSE English Literature syllabus as a starting point, Tilla Brading will explore the aspects of gender within them and compare them with some contemporary innovative text where language, mixed media or collaboration lead away from gender. Is text gendered by the author or the theme? Is there genderless text? Is there authorless writing?

Poetry and Prose: the disguises - David Hart

Gender may be one thing clearly while also mysterious, shifting, becoming, open sometimes, sometimes disguised, made to fit, elusive, easy and hard to write. In this session we will work on writing to make discoveries, to wonder about disguise in poetry and prose, to re-invent at least a margin of ourselves.

Session 3 No Woman No Cry – Maggie Harris

This reading, writing and discussion workshop draws inspiration from Bob Marley's song title and will use writing from Caribbean poets Grace Nichols, Jean Binta Breeze, Olice Senior and Maggie Harris. We will discuss the unique nature of Caribbean women, and teaching and appreciating Caribbean writing through the sassiness of 'talking back'. Participants will have an opportunity to 'talk back' too, and write their own poem through adopting a different voice.

It all comes out in the wash - Sally James

In this workshop, Sally James will encourage participants to consider the changing role of women in society historically and linguistically. Using two of her poems as a starting point, 'Washer-woman' and 'A Women's Work' (written in Lancashire dialect), Sally will help you to capture your own memories of women from the past and create a portrait in words. This process will lead to an exploration of the ways behaviour, attitudes and language have changed over the years.

4.15 Coffee, tea and biscuits

4.30 Writing: a level playing field for men and women? Plenary panel debate facilitated by literaturetraining

Who's writing what? Who's getting published and produced? Who's writing the blockbusters and winning the big awards? Who's studying creative writing in higher education? And who's doing the teaching? Who's working in schools? And in health and social care? Is change afoot? These are just some of the challenging questions under debate by our illustrious panel drawn from the fields of publishing, higher education, screenwriting, and writing in educational and health care settings.

5.30 End

One-to-one professional development advice sessions with literaturetraining

literaturetraining is a group of eight leading literature organisations (including NAWE) working in partnership to provide information, advice and guidance on professional development for the literature sector.

literaturetraining will be at the conference manning an information point for professional development with reference publications, magazines, information sheets and partner leaflets. In addition, 30-minute one-to-one sessions will be available for delegates looking for information and advice on specific professional development matters. You can either book in advance on your booking form or book on the day (subject to availability).

**All enquiries to Joanna Ingham, NAWE Programme Manager, Flat 8, 39 Central Hill, London SE19 1BW
+44 (0)20 8670 5407 • joanna@nawe.co.uk • Conference updates will be published on www.nawe.co.uk**

Contributor Biographies

Vicki Bertram is author of *Gendering Poetry: contemporary women and men poets* (Rivers Oram Pandora Press, 2005). She organized *Kicking Daffodils*, the international women and poetry conference/festival at Oxford in 1994 and 1997. She now teaches English and Creative Writing at Nottingham Trent University.

Tilla Brading is a poet, performer and textual artist. She is assistant editor of PQR (Poetry Quarterly Review), teaches creative writing and works with students with Learning Difficulties. Her poetry appears widely in magazines and her most recent collection is *Notes in a Manor: of Speaking* (Leaf Press 2002).

Heather Butler has worked in UK primary classrooms for the past 25 years. Her first children's book was published in 1994. She now teaches part time, runs whole school story writing workshops and inset training, is a tutor for adult creative writing courses and trains adults who work with traumatized children.

Anne Caldwell is Professional Development Manager for NAWE and also a specialist in reader development with young people. She has just been commissioned to produce a poetry film for National Poetry Day 2005.

Debjeni Chatterjee is a founder-member of Sahitya Press and Mini Mushaira. Her recent books are *Namaskar: New and Selected Poems* and *Masala: Poems from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka*.

Rose Flint has run women's writing groups for the Kingfisher Project, working in both hospital and the community of Salisbury. She also has experience as an Art Therapist and set up a women's group in an alcohol treatment unit.

Dr Becky Francis is Reader in Education and Deputy Director of the Institute for Policy Studies, London Metropolitan University. Her recent authored books include *Reassessing Gender and Achievement* (with Christine Skelton, 2005: Routledge); and *Boys, Girls and Achievement; Addressing the Classroom Issues* (2000: RoutledgeFalmer). She is co-editor of *Gender and Education* international journal.

Rosie Garland works with both adults and young people. She is the co-ordinator of Manchester Survivors Poetry and has run workshops for organizations including Manchester Rape Crisis, ProudWords and ChildLine.

Maggie Harris won the Guyana Prize for Literature 2000 for *Limbolands. From Berbice to Broadstairs* is forthcoming. Her short story 'Red Gloves Waving' was short-listed for the 2005 Asham Award.

David Hart is an Honorary Teaching Fellow on the Writing Programme at Warwick University and a part-time tutor at Birmingham University. He was Birmingham Poet Laureate 1997-8 and has held poetry residencies at various places including Worcester Cathedral and South Birmingham Mental Health NHS Trust.

Sally James is a poet writing in both standard English and Lancashire dialect. Her work has been published and read on local radio and she performs it regularly. She has an MA in Creative Writing from Bolton University and has worked as a writer in schools.

Shaun Levin's novella, *Seven Sweet Things*, was published in 2003. He has been writer-in-residence in a school, a theatre, and a bookshop. He is the editor of *Chroma*, and has taught creative writing at several colleges in London.

Georgina Lock worked an actor/director and is now a writer and film-maker, teaching scriptwriting and creative writing at Nottingham Trent University.

Paul Mills has published four books of poems. He teaches creative writing at York St John College and is the author of *Writing In Action* and *The Routledge Creative Writing Coursebook*, forthcoming in 2005.

Nicole Moore's poetry and non-fiction has been published in Poetry Today Anthologies, Calabash, Public Sector and The Weekly Gleaner. She teaches creative writing and is currently studying for an MA in Modern English Studies.

Susan Bradley Smith has taught at King's College, London, and is now lecturer in Writing at Southern Cross University, Australia. A collection of her plays was published in 2001 and a collection of poetry is out later this year.

Megan Stielstra teaches Fiction and Critical Reading and Writing workshops at Columbia College, Chicago, and is a Visiting Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Chicago. She is co-editor of Sleepwalk magazine, the Director of Story Development for the Serendipity Theater Company and artist-in-residence for Barefoot Productions.

Felicia Swanson is an adjunct faculty member of the Fiction Writing Department at Columbia College Chicago. She has a degree in women's studies and her fiction has appeared in literary journals. She is currently a staff writer for Chicago's Nearwest Gazette and working on her second novel.