



**COMMUNITY
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FOR
LEARNING**

WriterCoach Connection™

Program Assessment

2008-09

Executive Summary

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WriterCoach Connection™

Program Assessment 2008-09 Executive Summary

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For the design of the program assessment and for the preparation of this report, we most gratefully acknowledge the expertise PJ Hallam, Ph.D., pjhallam@speakeasy.org. (See Appendix A.6 for credentials.)

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The entire report is available in .pdf format on request and at the website of Community Alliance for Learning, www.writercoachconnection.org.

WriterCoach Connection™ Program Assessment 2008-09 Executive Summary

Introduction

This executive summary highlights the major findings of the annual WriterCoach Connection™ (“WCC”) Assessment Report, a benchmark for monitoring this unique volunteer program that provides one-on-one academic coaching in writing proficiency for secondary-school students in their English classes. Participating students and teachers respond to surveys designed to provide feedback on key aspects of the coaching process and teachers administer comparative cold-write assessment essays in fall and spring to measure changes in writing achievement during the school year. Results guide program improvement and planning and make the program accountable to supporters, schools, and the public. The full report and this executive summary delineate remarkable results and an exceptional level of engagement by students and teachers.

“One can never underestimate the power of one to one interaction. WriterCoach Connection volunteers provide students the structure, guidance and time to improve their writing skills. The program connects community members and our public schools in a way that benefits both.”

---Marla Stephenson, Superintendent, Albany Unified School District

Superintendent Stephenson’s comments go to the heart of WriterCoach Connection™ (WCC), a community volunteer-based program that provides one-on-one writing conferences for seventh through tenth grade students as they complete English class assignments. WCC recruits, trains, and coordinates volunteer coaches to support the learning and teaching of writing.

Student Survey Results

In spring 2009, students from seven Albany, Berkeley and Oakland secondary schools completed a survey that asked them to rate their experience with eleven aspects of the coaching process on a four-point scale. The scale ranged from “Not Helpful” to “Very Helpful.” Mean scores for each aspect on the survey were analyzed. Major results of the student survey are as follows:

Students

In spring 2009, students¹ from seven Albany, Berkeley, and Oakland, California secondary schools completed a survey that asked them to rate their experience with eleven aspects of the coaching process on a four-point scale. The scale ranged from

¹ Approximately 88% of participating students were surveyed, with comments and qualitative responses reviewed. Actions were taken to address any specific concerns. For the purpose of the quantitative analysis, a random sample of 50% of student responses was tallied and is reflected in the charts and statistics cited in this report.

“Not Helpful” to “Very Helpful.” Mean scores for each aspect on the survey were analyzed. Major results of the student survey are as follows:

1. **Overall, students rated writer coaching as “Helpful”** (Mean = 3.1). Student survey results were consistent with, and overall generally slightly higher than, findings over the previous two years, with the highest scores coming from students Media Academy in Oakland where the mean response was 3.24.

2. Students felt the most helpful aspects of coaching were “helping me understand the next steps I need to take to improve my writing” (3.2); showing me what’s working in my writing” (3.1), “giving me suggestions for organizing my ideas” (3.1); and “showing me how to express my ideas more clearly” (3.1). Students overall rated “reading my work out loud” – a hallmark of the Writer Coach interaction – as helpful (mean score 3), although student comments indicate many students also find this the most challenging aspect of writer coaching. Typical comments regarding the reading of their own work aloud range from, “It really helps me catch my mistakes and pay attention to what I’ve actually written” to “I don’t like reading my work aloud but I admit it is helpful” to “I don’t like reading my writing out loud.” We will continue to address this issue with coaches in training and refreshers, suggesting approaches and alternatives. All elements of coaching received student mean scores of “helpful” 3 or above, except the prompt “motivating me to turn in my work.” This is consistent with prior year findings, and reflects that a substantial number of students selected “not applicable” and indicated that they are already motivated to turn in their work so that coaching does not impact their motivation level. However, for struggling students, comments indicate that working with coaches to get an assignment started or developed does motivate students who otherwise might not complete an assignment to actually finish and turn in their work.

3. The notably high ratings of 3 or above reflect both the energetic interaction between student and coach and the program’s intent in developing writing and critical thinking skills and in addressing issues for which teachers most consistently request help for their students. Student comments further underscore the degree to which coaches help students clarify their ideas, organize their thoughts, and develop clear, fluid writing. Sample student comments are examined in Section 13 of this report.

Assessment-essay-based writing achievement data

Berkeley Unified School District

During the 2008-09 school year, Berkeley Unified School District administered writing assessment essays to all seventh- and eighth-grade students at King, Longfellow, and Willard Middle Schools, in October, January, and March. To determine writing proficiency levels, the district supervised trained readers who scored the essays holistically.

The essay scores were evaluated independently for Community Alliance for Learning by Dr. P.J. Hallam, former Director of the Berkeley Unified School District Department of Assessment, Evaluation, and Research. The results indicated that writing proficiency among students in the WriterCoach Connection program increased by an average of 20% during the school year.

Media College Preparatory High School, Oakland

The tenth-grade English teacher at Media Academy, as the school is commonly called, administered cold-write assessment essays in fall 2008 and spring 2009. A team of trained readers scored the essays holistically, using a scoring guide delineating fifteen elements of the writing process. This guide enabled the teacher to give highly specific feedback to each student, based on the scoring of the student's essay.

The maximum possible score for each essay was 30. The scoring team noted a significant jump in writing proficiency from fall 2008 to spring 2009, with the average essay score progressing from 15.3 to 20.6 during that period, a 35% increase.

In spring, three students achieved scores of 30, with an additional five students earning scores of 27 to 29, and five more in the 25-26 category. These figures represent a significant jump – in fall, only one student scored 25 or above. In spring, a total of 28 students scored in the proficient range on most individual elements and overall writing, a substantial improvement from fall, when only five students scored 22 or above.

Teachers

Twenty-five out of thirty one completed the program assessment survey.¹ Teachers answered 17 questions regarding aspects of the coaching process and their observations regarding degrees of effectiveness in particular areas. The teacher survey also included evaluation of the helpfulness of coaching for students with differing skill levels. Major results of the teacher survey are as follows:

1. **All teachers said their writer coaches were helpful with improving the quality of student writing**, with a mean overall score of 3.38. No teacher rated coaching, or any individual elements of coaching, as being of no help.
2. When asked to compare a recent writing assignment on which students did NOT have writer coaching with a similar recent assignment on which students DID have writer coaching, all responding teachers indicated a noticeable improvement in the rate of assignments turned in, the quality of student work, and the grades earned. The mean score on this question was 3.5.
3. Every aspect of the coaching program was rated “Helpful” with a mean score of 3.0 or above. Six of the elements round off to “Very helpful”, including helping struggling writers, improving the overall quality of student writing, improving structure and organization of writing, and conveying the goals of the lesson.
4. Consistent with past years and amplified once again this year with even higher scores, the highest mean scores were attained on the two questions regarding working with site coordinators (mean score: 3.92) and communicating with site coordinators

¹ Three of the AHS teachers participating in the program had not had sufficient coaching sessions to provide reliable feedback before the survey date. One teacher returned narrative comments in lieu of the survey; two additional surveys were returned too late for inclusion in data analysis

regarding the goals of the lesson and areas for coaching emphasis (mean score: 3.82). These responses indicate the high degree to which WriterCoach Connection is embedded within the curriculum of the schools, and is recognized by teachers as supporting their existing learning goals for their students.

Teacher comments in the surveys indicate a high level of appreciation for the support of writer coaches, and of the importance of individual attention from a trusted adult. A sampling of teacher comments is included in Section 11. One representative of the typical overall teacher sentiment comes from Susannah Bell of Berkeley High: “I appreciate everything about the program...My students and I ‘walk on clouds’ the whole day after a coaching experience!”

Descriptive Data

Table 1.1 WCC Program Statistics (as of April 15, 2008)

	King	Longfellow	Willard	BHS	BUSD	AHS	AMS	Media	Grand Total
					Subtotal				
<i>Teachers</i>	6	5	3	2	16	8	6	1	31
<i>Classes</i>	12	10	5	4	31	24	12	5	72
<i>Students</i>	306	292	152	115	865	450	308	93	1,716
<i>Sessions</i>	2,792	2,313	1,857	676	7,638	1,466	2,678	649	12,431
<i>Coaches</i>	75	58	68	55	256	51	55	39	401

By the end of the school year, coaches had met with students for 12,431 individual writing conferences.

The entire assessment report is available in .pdf format on request and at the website of Community Alliance for Learning, www.writercoachconnection.org.

Action Steps

WriterCoach Connection continues program development activities to address the data and narrative comments generated through the teacher, student, and coach surveys. Action steps include development of additional training materials (particularly a video for new coaches to see examples of coaching in action) communication through site coordinators to address specific concerns or suggestions, development of a “Coach Pop Quiz” tool for ongoing coach training, revision of CAFL’s *Shortcuts* handouts and explore ways to use these handouts for grammar and mechanics support more consistently and effectively, and incorporating observation in the training protocol. These issues are discussed in Section 15 of the full report.

The most important areas of agreement among all survey groups:

- **The quality of coaching directly depends on the coach understanding the assignment, and understanding the individual student with whom he or she is working.**

- **Very clear goals from teachers, and very specific, action-oriented steps from coaches, yield the best results.**

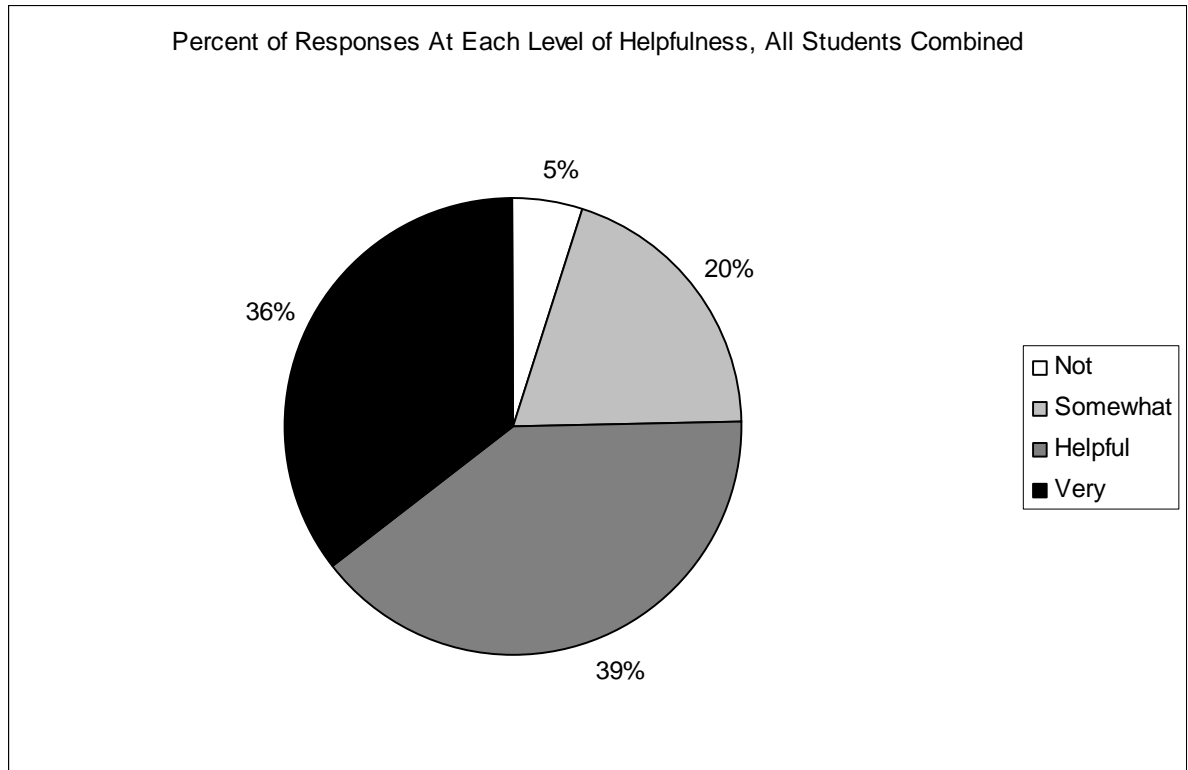
As demonstrated in the survey results, the WriterCoach Connection program “best practices” provide the optimal outcomes. Those best practices, which CAFL will continue to emphasize and refine, include:

1. Teachers providing information before coaching commences regarding specific student learning needs, writing levels and English language learning needs; AND teachers providing advance information regarding the lesson and goals for the coaching session.
2. Site coordinators using that information to prepare coaches in advance, provide coaches with information regarding particular student needs, and encourage coaches to address the learning goals of the assignments.
3. Coaches providing specific action oriented steps which address the expressed goals of the coaching session. Students walk away from the coaching session with two or three concrete specific suggestions of how to proceed.

In a separate survey, coaches were asked to rate elements of the WCC program and the quality of volunteer experience. Coaches indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the WCC as a quality volunteer experience. Elements which coaches rate highly include the structure and support provided by site coordinators, the training, and regular advance preparation regarding coaching assignments and goals. Of the coaches responding to the survey, 80% indicated coaching is a “very rewarding” experience, and fully 98% indicate it is at least fairly to very rewarding.

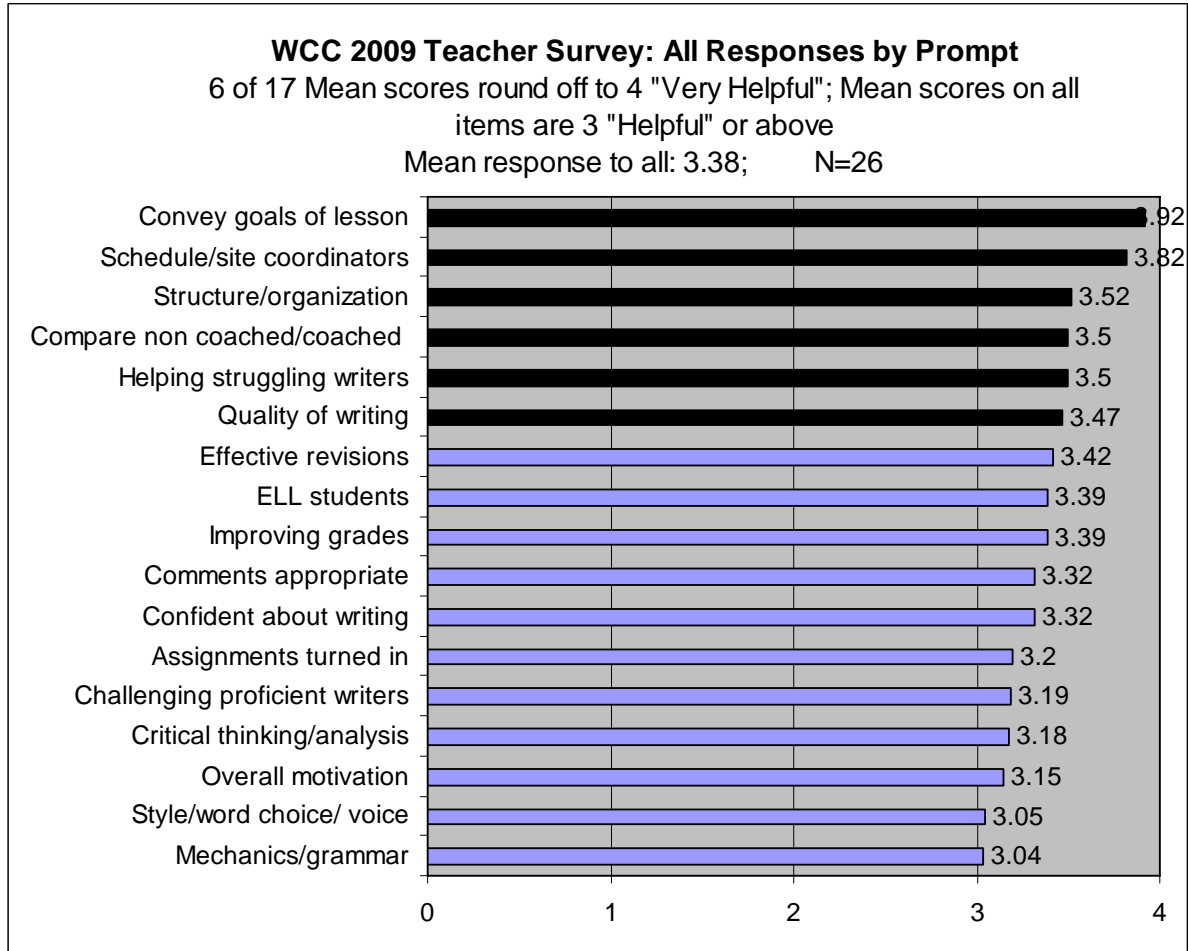
Appendix

Figure A.1 Percent of Student Responses at Each Level of Helpfulness for Combined Sites



Overall, students selected “Helpful” or “very helpful” in their responses to the eleven aspects of writer coaching 75 percent of the time, and indicated at least some degree of helpfulness 95 percent of the time.

Figure A.2 Teacher Responses at Each Level of Helpfulness, Combined Sites



Teachers rated all aspects of writer coaching as “Helpful” or above, with a mean response to all items of 3.38.

A.3: Student Survey

WRITER/COACH CONNECTION

Student Survey

January/February 2009

WriterCoach Connection would like to know about your experience with the writing coaches. **Your name and individual responses will remain anonymous.** *Thank you for your feedback!*

Name (optional) _____
First *Last*

Coach Name(s) _____

If you remember

I have met with a writer coach this many times so far this year: 0 1 2 3 4 5 or more

I have worked with this many different individual coaches this year: 0 1 2 3 4 or more

<i>Here are some things Writer Coaches do with students. How helpful are these aspects of coaching to you?</i>	not helpful 1	a little helpful 2	helpful 3	very helpful 4	
1. <i>Giving me suggestions for organizing my ideas</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
2. <i>Showing me what's working in my writing</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
3. <i>Showing me how to express my ideas more clearly</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
4. <i>Encouraging me to analyze/think more deeply about my ideas</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
5. <i>Giving me suggestions about grammar or punctuation</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
6. <i>Giving me suggestions about word choice and style</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
7. <i>Making sure I understand the next steps I need to take to revise my work</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
8. <i>Overall, I find coaching to be:</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	
9. <i>Checking that I understand the assignment completely</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	(I already understand assignments)
10. <i>Motivating me to complete and turn in my assignments</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	(I'm already motivated)
11. <i>Reading my work out loud</i>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	(Didn't read out loud)

12. Please finish these sentences (more space on the other side):

My coach or coaches help me to improve my thinking and writing skills by:

Is there anything about working with your writer coach that you did not like, or that you would change?

Here are my other thoughts about working with the writing coaches:

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A.4: Teacher Survey

WRITER COACH CONNECTION

TEACHER SURVEY

January/February 2009

Teacher name _____

School site _____

<i>Please rate the degree to which the program this year has been helpful in the following areas, for your students and their written work after coaching:</i>	<i>Not 1</i>	<i>Little 2</i>	<i>Fairly 3</i>	<i>Very 4</i>	-OR- Check here if not applicable – please explain on back.
1. Increase in number of students turning in writing assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1. Students becoming more confident about writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Students making effective revisions from a first draft to a final draft of their written work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Improving grades on written assignments	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Helping low-skilled or struggling writers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Helping/challenging proficient writers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Helping ELL students with their writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Helping students overall in becoming more motivated about writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Improving critical thinking skills such as identifying, evaluating, and analyzing evidence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Improving the structure and organization of their written work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Improving their mechanics, grammar, spelling, etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Improving their style, word choice, and “voice”	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. Overall improving the quality of writing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
If possible, compare a recent writing assignment on which students did NOT have writer coaching with a similar recent assignment on which students DID have writer coaching. Do you notice any improvement for the coached assignment in the rate of assignments turned in, quality of work, grades earned, etc?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>In working with the program, how did <u>you</u> find:</i>	<i>Not 1</i>	<i>Little 2</i>	<i>Fairly 3</i>	<i>Very 4</i>	-OR- Check here if not applicable – please explain on back.
13. Arranging coaching schedule with site coordinator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. Working with the site coordinator(s) to convey goals of the lesson, areas for coaching emphasis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. Did comments on student papers and/or coaching worksheets reflect your lesson goals, seem generally appropriate given the student writing skill level?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please tell us, briefly (use reverse if needed)::

What has worked well for you this semester?

Is there anything that you would like to change?

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A.5: Coach Survey

WRITER COACH CONNECTION™ -- COACH SURVEY 2008-09

Your Name: _____

School _____

<i>Please rate the degree of satisfaction you have with (or interest you have in) the following:</i>	<i>Not 1</i>	<i>Little 2</i>	<i>Fairly 3</i>	<i>Very 4</i>
1. I felt prepared to begin coaching upon completing training.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Training has prepared me for most of the coaching situations I have encountered.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. The “6 steps of coaching” guide is something I refer to (or have ‘internalized’) and it guides how I approach coaching sessions.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. I find coaching worksheets useful for providing students with a guide for revising (or beginning) their writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I regularly use the 60 Shortcuts (tip sheets) and provide students with a tip sheet to take away from the coaching session.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I usually get adequate preparation material in advance of coaching (assignments or writing prompt, novel, teacher lesson goals, etc.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. I enjoy working with ELL students on their writing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I would like additional training regarding working effectively with English language learners.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I usually feel confident about how to approach a coaching session once the student has read his/her writing aloud.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. I regularly use the WCC website for any of the following: to check for assignments, look at links to other writing resources, view the tip sheets, and/or read up on CAFL news.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. When working with a student I have worked with earlier in the year, I usually do notice improvement in writing skills and/or level of thinking, organization of ideas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Generally teachers have prepared their students well so that our coaching time is productive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Overall, coaching students on their writing is a rewarding experience.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Schedule permitting, I plan to continue as a writing coach next school year. (Note: WCC is not asking for a commitment here -- it’s just a straw poll.)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. I’m so jazzed about writer coaching that I would be interested in becoming more involved with the WriterCoach Connection, and the Community Alliance for Learning, beyond coaching at my current site. (See examples on reverse) **	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Here's your chance, if you so desire, to share your ideas. Please use this space to tell us about any of the following. (Feel free to leave some or all blank – it's not a test!!)

Do you have suggestions regarding the training class?

Do you have any suggestions regarding the Shortcuts, particularly if there are ones needing revision or that we do not have and you would like to have available to give students?

Do you have any suggestions regarding how to improve the overall experience for the students or coaches?

What was your most challenging issue or your greatest success as a coach?

Do you have suggestions/ideas for recruiting more coaches?

Do you have any additional feedback for the site coordinator?

****Possible ways to expand your role with WriterCoach Connection include: volunteering to help with recruiting, promotion, or fundraising, applying to become a site coordinator or board member? What experience/skills (e.g. computer graphics, accounting, grant writing, etc.) would you be willing to bring to WCC or CAFL?**

Thank you for your time and input,

WriterCoach Connection

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A.6: PJ Hallam, Assessment Design

Research and Evaluation Consultant P.J. Hallam designed program assessment for WriterCoach Connection and supervised the preparation of the 2007-08 Program Assessment Report.

Phyllis J. Hallam, Ph.D.

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Education and Degrees

December 2000	Ph.D. Education, Language, Literacy & Culture University of California, Berkeley
August 1979	Masters in Education, Special Education University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August 1978	Reading Specialist Credential California State University, East Bay
June 1976	Multiple Subjects Teaching Credential University of California, Berkeley
June 1976	BA in Sociology University of California, Berkeley

Professional Employment (non-teaching)

2007-2008 Berkeley Unified School District (BUSD)

Director, Department of Assessment, Evaluation and Research

2006-2007 California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC)

Title II, Improving Teacher Quality Grants: Research and Dissemination Consultant

2001-06 Berkeley Evaluation and Research Center, UC Berkeley

Institute of Education Sciences Research Grant Researcher:

Evaluating the Validity of Teacher Licensure Decisions (EVTLD)

1993-01 Center for Language and Learning <http://www.learningrecord.org/>

Program Evaluator – Collect, analyze and report findings, 1997-01

1992-94 California Reading and Literature Project

Literary Coach

University Teaching Experience

1999-00 California State University, Sonoma

Adjunct Professor; Sonoma, CA

Educational Leadership for Master's Degree Students – design and implementation of visionary leadership projects for literacy reform

Reading Content for Secondary Teacher Education – *literacy strategies for math, PE and all other secondary content courses*