

A Coach Takes to the Teacher Track

by Chris Lopez-Ceparo

Chris Lopez-Ceparo has been a writer coach since 2008 at King Middle School in Berkeley, Albany Middle School, and other sites. In 2011, Chris began a one-year teaching certification program at Cal State East Bay. Upon graduation, he hopes to teach English/social studies full-time.

Shortly after college, I volunteered with adult ESL learners, helping them to become fluent. When I moved back to Berkeley, friends suggested that I volunteer with WriterCoach Connection.

From the start, WCC blew me away. The training was terrific, but more importantly, it focused less on telling students right from wrong and far more on developing an audience/reader relationship with the students and developing their abilities, voice, and confidence.

Academic self-worth is something that's still forming in 8th grade – something as simple as a one-page paper can overwhelm a student. That's where coaches come in.



First, we validate their efforts: it's okay to have a terrible first draft! Writing is a struggle for the F. Scott Fitzgeralds of the world. Writing is a struggle for almost everyone. I think students are truly relieved to hear that. We help them overcome the frustration that comes from being overwhelmed and not knowing what to do next or not knowing how to improve their work. We help them find the path forward with their writing. That may

not sound revolutionary, but little course corrections have a very powerful impact.

During the coaching session, we're giving students a skill set. We're teaching them to think about writing: to think about audience, to ask questions of their own, and to give them a sense of writing as a fulfilling process rather than as something they "have to do." And finally, we reinforce positive thinking about their writing to help them strengthen their sense of academic self-worth. At the end of the year, I want every student thinking, I am someone who gets As and Bs.

I was a coach for four years. In 2011, I began an accelerated, one-year teaching certification program at Cal State East Bay. I'm lucky to have a lot of kids who are inquisitive in the questions surrounding a text, but unfortunately, many students I meet don't have a strong sense of academic self-worth. Some of them who could be earning As and Bs just haven't set that expectation for themselves – yet. I'm working to change that for every student I can. 

"WriterCoach Connection works. Student writing achievement goes up, teachers get much-needed relief with the extra individual attention to students, community members bond with their schools as they walk the hallways with their students and sit with them to help develop more effective writing and deeper critical thinking. Everyone wins, and we need more of it."

**Bruce Harter, Superintendent,
West Contra Costa Unified School District**



El Cerrito High School student Kenyatta Marcellus shares his feelings about the written word and our writer coaches.

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