



WRITER COACH CONNECTION

A Program of Community Alliance for Learning | Winter 2009

The left column view

'Tis the season, and we are surrounded by gifts—lots of them. They include volunteer CAFL board and advisory board members, hard-working teachers finding extra time (when they have no extra time) to work with our site coordinators to create assignments specifically designed for writer-coach support, those same site coordinators and their coach-trainer colleagues, school administrators who scour the landscape for WCC funding support, and especially our 400 volunteer coaches, who light up our students' eyes with confidence in their developing skills as effective young writers.

But there's another group of gifts that really stops me in my tracks. They typically arrive in little envelopes, pre-printed with our address and found nestled in this newsletter. They come from all over the East Bay and beyond—from Pennsylvania, from Washington, D.C., from New York—I'm amazed when I see these return addresses. These gifts, of course, are donation checks, or clicks on the Donate Now buttons all over our website (www.writercoachconnection.org). They are from our own volunteers (OMG, generosity on steroids), and from far-flung friends and family members responding to what our volunteers and associates say about WriterCoach Connection.

'Tis the season to be grateful, to you, for these crucial gifts. And believe me, on behalf of the students and teachers we serve, we are.

Bob

Robert Menzimer
Executive Director
Community Alliance for Learning

Homegrown coaching

Oakland journalist Reginald James is coaching on his turf. He says, *"Writing, like reading, really does open up a new world. It helped me find my voice and learn more about myself. I wanted to share that experience with young people in Oakland."*

An Oakland native, Reginald describes his coaching experience in terms of community commitment, of deepening his roots: *"While it is great to have volunteers from all walks of life, sometimes young people feel they can relate better to someone who may look like them and speak their language, too (Oaktown Teen Turfanese). I'm aware of the psychological significance of students seeing a responsible, young Black man in the classroom promoting literacy. It's already rare to have men in many of these classrooms, but to have a young man of color – that happens to be pretty fresh – in the class, it adds an additional credibility. It emphasizes the message of developing writing skills."*

As a journalist, he recognizes what is unique about the WriterCoach Connection approach, noting, *"The philosophy used when coaching writers*

is unique. People often expect people to write their papers for them when they get feedback on their writing, but not here. The goal is to help writers strengthen their own voice and express themselves."

Reginald sees beyond the connection he clearly makes with his students. He says, *"I like knowing that I will be able*



Coach Reginald James guides a Media Academy student's Senior research project.

to inspire someone to use their voice, and who knows who they will inspire? It also can encourage them to volunteer in the future." And he demonstrates a clear view of the coaching big picture when he says, *"All in all, I want to encourage young people to find their voice, because young folks are too often missing from the discussion. And more often than not, the issues will affect them now, and later."*