

AP Teacher Blog to Pitch

AP scores for more than two million students are being released to schools this week. Most people don't realize that the free-response sections of these exams are scored by thousands of AP teachers and college faculty every June. This year, some 11,000 educators from across the country and around the world convened to score more than 3.7 million AP Exams in 34 subjects — and I was lucky enough to be selected to participate in what's called the "AP Reading" process.

I just completed my fifteenth year of teaching, my fourteenth year as an AP English Language and Composition teacher, and my eleventh year as an AP Reader. In that time, I've also spent six years as a member of my Reading's leadership team (previously outlined on this blog). And I can attest that the Reading has truly been some of the best professional development I've ever attended. In fact, my willingness to give up somewhere between nine and fourteen days (including travel to and from the Reading location) to score as many essays as humanly possible in such a short time, should stand as testament to my belief in the process.

One of the main benefits to the Reading is the immersion in the scoring process, where it is your sole occupation for eight hours a day. This, matched with the fact that I'm removed from the rest of the distractions of daily life, allows for a focus that is difficult to reproduce. After being trained to score essays, and then seeing several hundred essays over the course of a week, I return home with a stronger sense of what the AP English Language and Composition course is expecting of students and more confidence as I approach the development of content for my own AP class. I also share that knowledge with my colleagues and through workshops I present for the College Board, so that more educators can benefit from my Reading experience.

There is also something extraordinary about the dynamic of the table, around which the scoring takes place. As a small group of extremely motivated, highly trained professionals, the nine of us have detailed conversations about student writing and what characteristics a student must display on one of three writing tasks to demonstrate collegiate quality work. Because these tables are a mix of high school teachers and college/university professors from across the U.S. and around the world, we share our own concerns and biases, all while working to accept the norms established by the Reading leadership. This exchange is invaluable in the preparation of not only my AP students, but all of the other students I come into contact with on a daily basis. As much as my experience at the Reading works to prepare my AP students for exam success, it also enhances the richness of my non-AP classes.

The AP English Language and Composition Reading had roughly one thousand members this year. The dedication and professionalism of those individuals is geared toward one thing: ensuring student success. This is not about all students “passing” the test, but about engendering the kinds of dialogues that will lead to improved instruction of all students. It is about diagnosing trends in writing on an international scale, and brainstorming ways to help all of our students (particularly the ones not yet college proficient) to improve as writers in a world that increasingly demands skills in multiple modes of writing: those being email, tweets, blogs and status updates! As one of the few venues where college professors and high school teachers work side-by-side in volume for an extended period of time, our ability to bridge the notorious gap between common ed and higher ed grows exponentially. The dedication of professionals at the Reading is but a microcosmic expression of the dedication devoted to students on an annual basis.

The Readings have also introduced me to some of my best friends, all of whom I admire for their dedication to student learning. We share all we have in our bag of instructional tricks that can make students stronger in our subject and better prepared for the world they will enter once they leave high school, be it a college or university or the work force. Having had the good fortune to be selected to the Reading and to have proven worthy of returning repeatedly (each invitation is only for one year), has made me a better teacher, and this has happened because of the people, process, and professionalism that I have only found at the AP Reading.