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Learning Professional Journalism with Help from University Faculty and Students

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Joshua Patton and Sean Smith

Introduction

The Oakdale Eagle newsletter started as an idea I had for my class in the summer enrichment program at Oakdale Elementary School. My objective was to get the students to write. One of the requirements of the summer enrichments program was to bring in people who made writing a career. I invited Dr. George L. Daniels, a journalism professor at the University of Alabama, to speak to my class about newspaper writing. He has graciously continued to help and advise the reporters of the *Oakdale Eagle* news staff.

*Latrina Spencer, 3rd grade teacher,
Oakdale Elementary School, Tuscaloosa,
Alabama*

In July 2011, students of Oakdale Elementary in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, participated in a summer enrichment program. We learned a lot about writing and photography before we published *The Eagle* (Figure 1). But the writing wasn't just regular writing; it was professional writing because we were writing a newsletter. Many of the students were excited to do the newsletter and many weren't. They weren't excited because they thought it was going to be boring. We focused on interviewing, our garden, and the final mission of the space shuttle Atlantis. Having someone from The University of Alabama was a great experience. Being in the summer program was lots of fun. Many of us were 6 or 7 years old and yet we still did a great job on the newsletter. We had help from Dr. Daniels, who is a professor at the University, as well as from Miss Spencer, our teacher. We also learned about photography and how to get just the perfect picture.

First Publication

In the middle of the 2011 summer, the co-authors, along with Daniia Wills, Jailah Brown, Tywaun Smith, and Dorian Pugh, got to see our very own articles in the newsletter, *The Oakdale Eagle*, at Oakdale Elementary School. We had stories about our principal, Dr. Lucile Prewitt, and

the school secretary, Ms. Paulette Cobb, also, the outdoor classroom. One of the reporters, Daniia Wills, said "I felt excited and I felt like a professional reporter." Also, Sean Smith said "being a reporter helped me improve my writing skills." Lots of people had a hard time working on their article because it was their first time writing one. They got used to it when Miss Spencer, Dr. Daniels, and Ms. Kent helped them. A few weeks later the reporters got better and better. Almost everyone worked on the newsletter for Oakdale Elementary. Everyone had things for the newsletter and everything was on track for making this newsletter one of the best in Tuscaloosa City Schools. The reporters from our second grade class were great for the newsletter.

Annual Awards Luncheon

In April 2012, the co-authors, along with Daniia Wills, Gabreona Jones, Javon Hughes, DeQuavin Hutt, Ta'Miyah McKinstry, and Jailah Brown went to an awards ceremony at the Hotel Capstone on The University of Alabama campus. Ms. Kent, Miss Spencer, and Dr. Daniels were given awards there for the wonderful work on *The Oakdale Eagle*.

Before they handed out the awards, we got to eat salad, pie, and chicken. They started handing out awards. When *The Oakdale Eagle* was called up, we were excited. Daniia Wills said, "It felt wonderful being able to get that award."

Presentation at UA

On October 2, 2012, the co-authors, along with Daniia Wills, Quedasia Herrod, Ms. Kent, and Dr. Daniels went to the Hotel Capstone on the campus of the University of Alabama for our presentation at the National Outreach Scholarship Conference (Figure 2). We used a PowerPoint slideshow to give a visual of what we were working on and how we worked. When we learned that we were going to be doing a presentation in front of a lot of adults, we felt very nervous. We practiced a lot and that helped. When the co-authors reflected on our experience, it made us feel proud to represent our school and *The Oakdale Eagle*. We did so good that we were mentioned in Dr. Daniels' newsletter at The University of Alabama. It also

was mentioned on our school's website. There were pictures of the co-authors making the presentation that was recorded on camera.

About the Authors

Joshua Patton and Sean Smith are third graders at Oakdale Elementary School in Tuscaloosa, Ala.

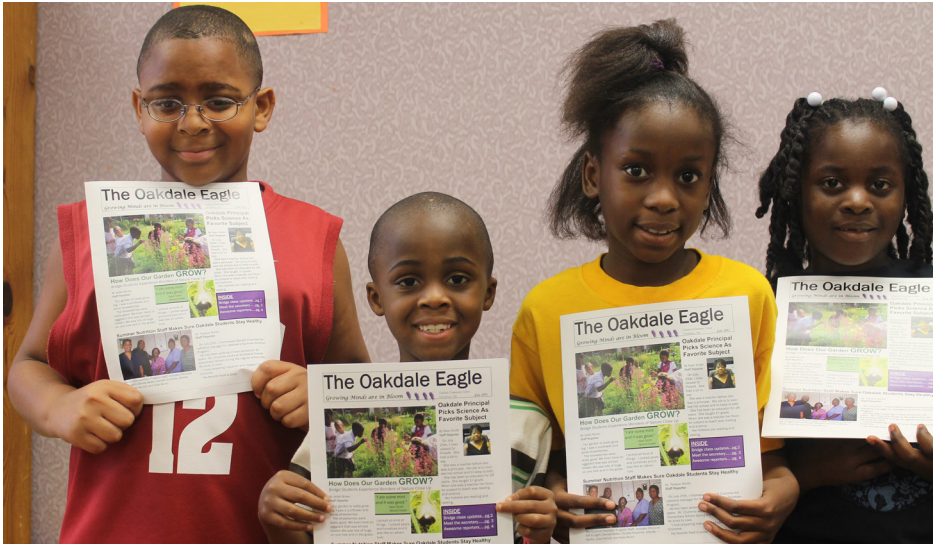


Figure 1. Staff members proudly display copies of *The Oakdale Eagle*.



Figure 2. Third graders Joshua Patton and Sean Smith, perhaps the youngest presenters ever at an international scholarly conference, are shown here during their NOSC presentation on October 2, 2012.