

FFORUM

A Newsletter of the English Composition Board, University of Michigan

Literacy in the 1980's



**ECB
WORKSHOPS
'81**

**WORKSHOP I: An Invitational Workshop For Teachers of Writing Throughout the United States
June 21-24**

**WORKSHOP II: Third Annual Workshop For Michigan Teachers of Writing
June 28-30**

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Editorial

At the close of a particularly long day in May of 1979, I gathered together three sets of papers which wanted marking that night and hurried off to a meeting of my high school English Department. I arrived in time to hear the chairperson announce that members of **The University of Michigan's English Composition Board** would conduct a three-day **Workshop** for teachers of writing throughout Michigan in June. Since two of these **ECB** instructors had conducted a one-day **Seminar** on the teaching of writing at our school in March, and since I had profited from their presentation, I was interested in hearing more about the **Writing Workshop** to be held in June of 1979.

For our faculty, as for other faculties who had participated in **ECB** Outreach **Seminars**, only a limited number of **Workshop** places was available. Those of us who wished to attend outnumbered the available places. So we resorted to English department democracy: We drew straws.

With long straws in hand, my colleagues and I (with 125 other teachers of writing from Michigan schools) studied theory and practice in the teaching of writing at the **University** that June. With **ECB** members as **Workshop** leaders, we explored our mutual concerns as teachers of writing. Together we began and renewed professional friendships; and at the close of the three days, together we decided to extend our mutual **Seminar**- and **Workshop**-experiences by founding a newsletter to continue our discussions about the teaching of writing. Out of this decision, the **ECB's fforum** was born.

After accepting an invitation to become the first editor of *fforum*, I dreamed of its resemblance to the Roman forum and the Greek agora before it — marketplaces which formed the centers of public business and open discussions in their respective societies. Once our brain child was conceived, I felt much like a new mother — uncertain and insecure — as I asked thinkers and teachers in our discipline to contribute their thoughts about the teaching of writing to issues of our newsletter. My anxieties were quickly dispelled. My first two calls were to Ken Macrorie and Ed Corbett, teachers who need no introductions to teachers of writing anywhere. Both were willing to address a small group of their colleagues in Michigan whose dialogue about the teaching of writing had begun in the **Workshop** of June, 1979. Since its fortunate first issue in October, 1979, *fforum* has continued to be nurtured by teachers who write with clarity and grace. In June, 1980, the **ECB** conducted its **Second Annual Writing Workshop** for yet another group of 125 teachers of writing in Michigan. In this second gathering, many of us who had participated in 1979 joined with **Workshop '80** participants to extend our dialogue. And our numbers have been growing ever since.

Even as members of the **English Composition Board** have
(continued on page 116)

Workshop I

Beginning with registration from 4:30 to 6:00 PM on Sunday, 21 June, and extending through a special presentation that ends at 4:30 PM on Wednesday, 24 June, this **Workshop** is intended for experienced teachers of writing and has two closely related purposes: Description and analysis of methods and materials proven successful in the teaching of writing to all students beyond the elementary grades; examination of theories that account for that success. Four different types of sessions have been designed to fulfill this dual purpose:

Small Group Seminars and Large Group Meetings are scheduled for a total of six hours each during the extent of the **Workshop**. In the Small Group Seminars, 20-25 teachers work with a single leader to develop strategies and materials appropriate to the needs of their own students; in the Large Group Meetings, every teacher has the opportunity to work for the same purpose with leaders of all other seminars.

Two Plenary Sessions are intended to provide a forum for our visiting seminar leaders, Bill Coles from **The University of Pittsburgh** and Lee Odell from **SUNY/Albany**, to discuss their own work, and for Richard Bailey and Dan Fader from the **ECB** to report on aspects of Michigan's writing program that may be useful in other settings. In the four Special Presentations, members of the **ECB** will share their teaching and research on topics such as writing assessment, writing of non-traditional students, writing contexts, and writing in the content areas.

All four types of sessions — Small Group, Large Group, Plenary, and Special — are meant to provide opportunities for sharing the professional experience that brings us together as colleagues from diverse schools in many parts of the nation. Members of the **English Composition Board** take great pleasure in welcoming their fellow teachers to **Michigan**.

William Coles, **Pittsburgh**
 Daniel Fader, **Michigan**
 Barbra Morris, **Michigan**
 Lee Odell, **SUNY/Albany**
 Jay Robinson, **Michigan**
 Bernard Van't Hul, **Michigan**

Sunday, June 21

4:30-6:00	Registration
6:00-7:30	Dinner
7:30-9:00	First Small Group Seminar
9:00	Wine and Cheese Party

Monday, June 22

7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:45-10:00	First Plenary Session: "ECB: Program and Proof" D. Fader/R.W. Bailey
10:00-10:30	Coffee Break
10:30-12:30	First Large Group Meeting
12:45-2:00	Lunch
2:15-3:30	Second Plenary Session: "Crisis and Challenge" W. Coles/L. Odell
3:30-4:00	Coffee Break
4:00-5:30	Second Small Group Meeting
6:00-7:30	Dinner
8:00	Shared Problems: Other Voices, Other Schools

Tuesday, June 23

7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-10:30	Second Large Group Meeting
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break
11:00-12:30	Third Small Group Seminar
12:45-1:45	Lunch
2:00-3:00	Special Presentation: "Assessment" B.S. Morris/R.T. Brengle
3:00-3:30	Coffee Break
3:30-4:30	Special Presentation: "Non-Traditional Students" G. Rueter/C. Johnson
5:30-7:00	Dinner
8:00	A Gathering of Gatherers

Wednesday, June 24

7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-10:30	Third Large Group Meeting
10:30-11:00	Coffee Break
11:00-12:30	Fourth Small Group Seminar
12:45-1:45	Lunch
2:00-3:00	Special Presentation: "Medium, Audience, Purpose, Situation" B. Van't Hul/P. Stock
3:00-3:30	Coffee Break
3:30-4:30	Special Presentation: "Writing in the Content Areas" J Robinson/J. Reiff
4:30-6:00	Registration for Instate Participants
6:00-7:30	Dinner
8:00-9:30	Introductions and Keynote Speakers
9:30	Reception for Speakers

Effective Writing Assignments and Classroom Exercises

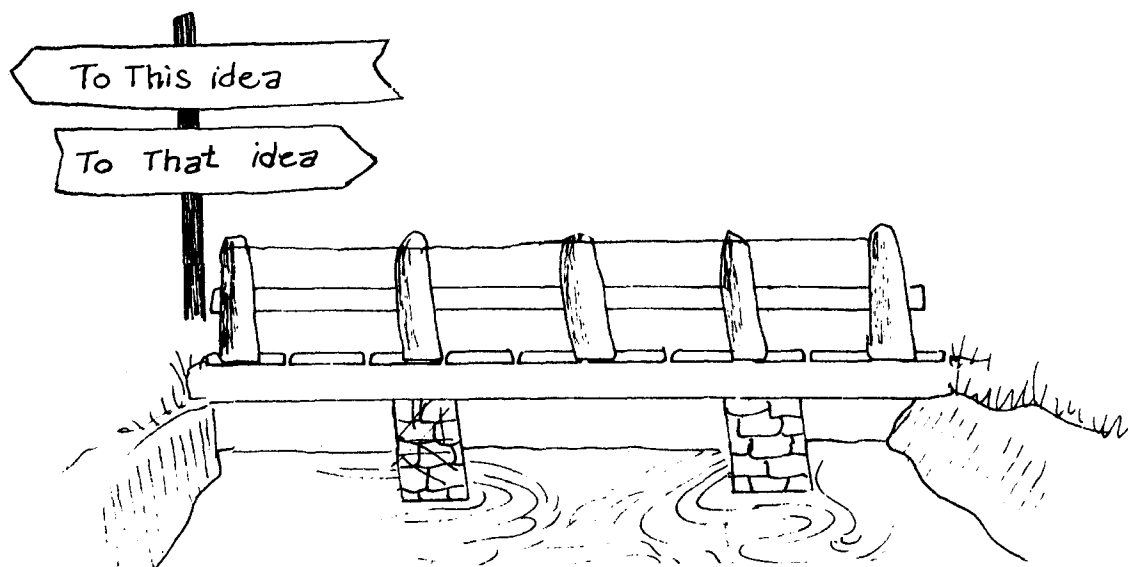
William E. Coles

No teacher works very long at the teaching of writing without understanding the vital importance of convincing students that the activity can be profitable for them. But no teacher who has tried to do this can fail to have noticed that traditional ways of defining writing or describing its benefits are likely to have very little appeal. It is no longer possible for us to get very far as teachers by offering writing to our students as a predominately mechanical activity whose importance we assert with the half-truths of negative arguments: If you *don't* write well you will not be thought well-mannered (rounded, educated, etc.); if you *don't* write well then you will not obtain a high-paying job or be successful. Simply to write sentences, all of them for someone else, with no more consciousness than this of what the activity can involve or of how it can be important, is as meaningless as it is boring; and it is hard to imagine how anyone who understands the activity of writing only in such terms could care very much about writing at all, let alone whether she gets any better at it.

But for teachers to understand and present writing as a uniquely powerful instrument for learning, as a special way of thinking and coming to know, is to be able to suggest to students that the ability to compose may be seen as the ability to conceptualize, to build structures, to draw inferences, to develop implications, to generalize intelligently — in short to make connections, to work out relationships — between this idea and that idea, words and other words, sentences and other sentences, language and experience. To teach that writing is as important for what it is as for what it is about — that it is a form of language experience which all of us can use to run order through chaos, thereby giving ourselves a part of the identities we have — is to provide

students with a way of seeing how the activity of writing can have something in it for a *writer* even when the writer does not find the activity enjoyable, even when the writer does not intend to make writing an essential part of his or her life. Writing offered as a form of language using that can enable writers to become better composers, better conceptualizers, and better thinkers, is writing that becomes an activity with meaning for students.

Our purpose in working together will be to explore some strategies for devising the kinds of writing assignments and class exercises that can move students beyond conventional ways of seeing and writing, that can put them in the position of seeing how language using is important, and what good writing as a form of good language using is good for. We will begin with a comparison of some highly traditional writing topics (Why Go To College? Write a Description of Someone You Admire) with the kinds of better writing assignments that teachers can create from them. From this we will move to consider some ways that teachers can develop materials which will enable students to better understand themselves as people whose experience is arranged and defined by the language they use to shape it. How all of us know (and do not know) such a simple mechanism as the telephone dial can serve to illustrate this. Finally, we will look at various ways of using student writing as a basis for different kinds of writing assignments and class exercises. We will discuss how to use such assignments individually, and also how to extend them in a sequence that can guide students to increasingly complex ways of thinking about writing at the same time that it can structure a composition course from beginning to end.



Peering Into Revision

Daniel Fader

Use of peer grouping to improve the writing skills of students can be an exceptionally profitable experience for teachers of composition. One of the most challenging and rewarding methods of learning to use any teaching device, and especially the device of peer grouping is to do it yourself *and* observe yourself doing it: It is this dual experience that will be the formal center of my **Workshop** seminars this year.

Not only will members of the seminar belong to the same three-person group during their six hours in class, but they will also do several hours of work with those same group members outside of class. In both instances they will be responsible for maintaining a double view of themselves as passionate participants and dispassionate viewers of that participation — as well as the participation of their peers in the group. With the right combination of effort and good fortune, members of the seminar can expect to have an intensive experience of some of the strengths of peer grouping as it supports and enriches the teaching of writing: For example, the single most important function of the group in relation to the individuals who compose it may be that it defines a precise, proximate audience for the writing of each of its members. In the process of making use of that audience, all members of the group come to know their individual voices by the effects they have upon their peers. These effects are readily observable (as they are not when the teacher or an imagined person in the audience) and im-

mediately translatable into relative success or failure. From such immediacy of effect is most likely to come both affirmation and change.

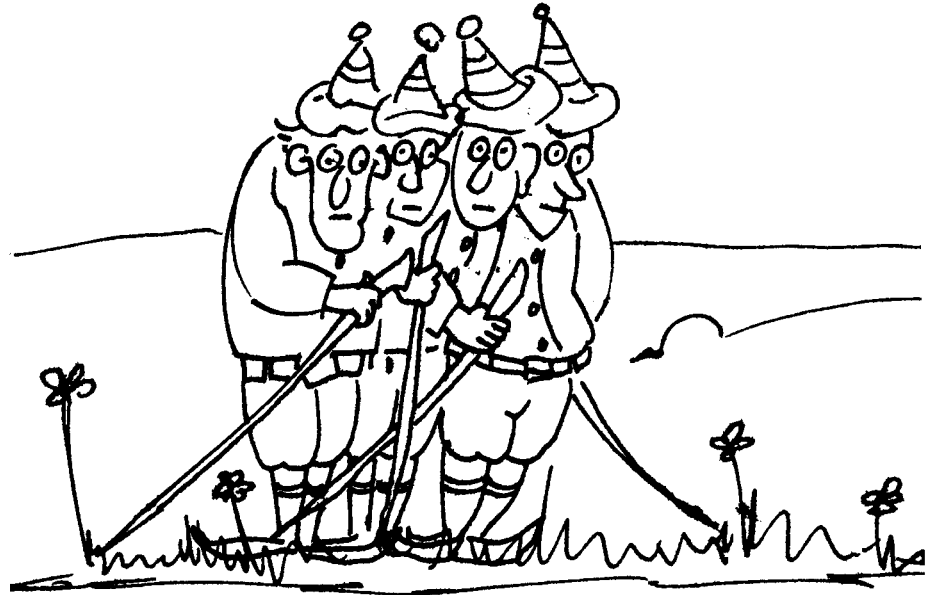
Not only can peer grouping define audience and confirm the individual voice, it can also provide sources of invention otherwise difficult for individuals to discover during the composing process. Group members experienced in writing for each other and in considering the writing of their peers, can often enter into one another's conceptual processes in such a way as to lead their partners to ideas that are acceptable because they are clearly implied by the selection and ordering of their partners' own material.

Within the peer groups of the seminar, the primary work will be to define and apply principles of editing which form the basis for a rhetoric of revision useful to good and bad writers alike. By a "rhetoric of revision" I mean a coherent, cohesive series of textual activities which convince both writer and editor of their usefulness through their persuasive influence upon the form and meaning of particular texts. In the following example, the original text of a student's sentence is on the left and my edited version is on the right. Neither the student nor I care to make any claims of perfection. At the time she wrote and I edited the text, we both thought we had done as well as we could do.

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It is a sad fact2. of American political life3. in the twentieth century4. that many of its great leaders5. have been killed6. by the assassin's bullet.7. Even more appalling8. for most Americans9. are the reports that the CIA10. has attempted to kill11. or has killed12. leaders of other countries.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A tragic fact2. of American politics3. in the twentieth century5. is the murder4. of great leaders6. by an assassin's bullet.7. Equally appalling 9. are reports that the CIA11. has murdered10. or attempted to murder12. leaders of other countries.
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As editor of these two sentences I have performed sixteen separate acts to improve the fit between form and meaning; five of these editorial acts occur in the opening three lines: I *omit* "It is" in order to provide a substantive opening that *emphasizes* the impact of the sentence, and I replace "sad" with "tragic" to *sharpen* its intended meaning. Then I *compress* the first prepositional phrase from four words into three for the sake of economy, but I leave the second unchanged — even though it could easily be replaced by "contemporary" that would precede "American" — because I want the writer to recognize the sentence as hers rather than mine. If I do not *attend* to her need to possess her own voice as a writer, she will not be able to hear my voice as her editor.

These five acts, identified by the italicized words, are five of the twelve editorial acts that I have identified for myself as those which seem to describe *all* editorial relationships to any text. The four *occurring most frequently* — *omitting, compressing, emphasizing, sharpening* — encompass about seventy percent of all such acts and are illustrated in the first three lines of this text. The fifth in this portion of the text — *attending* — occurs far less frequently than any of the other four and, in my opinion, is far more significant. Even as it describes the most important work of the editor, so does it describe the most important work of peer grouping and the purpose of my **Workshop** seminar next June.

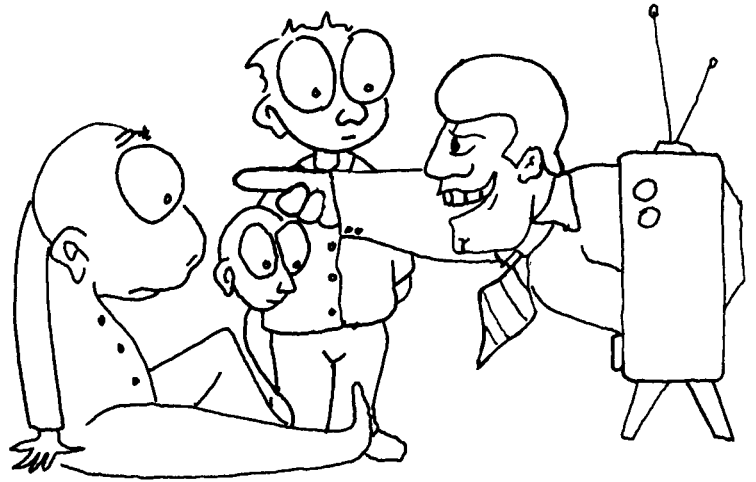


A precise proximate audience
looking for their individual voices

From Television to Student Writing

Barbra Morris

Both in-school training and out-of-school experience influence the writing of our students; an especially powerful influence upon them is watching television. Unlike some other out-of-school experiences, however, television is often characterized as the enemy of literacy. The differences between how people learn from television and how they learn in school account for much of this prejudice. Television creates a learning environment different from that of the classroom where individual attention to the learner and discussion of subject matter can be fostered. The environment television creates is impersonal, one in which viewers are sent abbreviated, fragmented messages to be learned privately and integrated rapidly into whole patterns of meaning. As individuals learn the explicit content of their television viewing, they also learn an implicit form of communication that does not allow them time for response or reflection.



Implication of Television Viewing for Teachers of Writing

As teachers of written communication, we want to encourage thinking and learning processes different from those that television promotes. Studies now available on the subject of relationships between television viewing and literacy suggest that we can make use of students' past conditioning as we help them to become capable writers. If television can serve as a point of departure for teaching composition, we need to build upon and extend the small body of research that informs us about the relationships between television and writing.

One of the few research projects directly linking television to writing in an academic situation was conducted at **The University of Michigan** during 1978 and 1979. The ECB experimented with the addition of televised information to students' written instructions during entrance essay procedures for undergraduates. Written directions for the assessment essay always specify topic, audience, purpose, and situation for students. Television information, added for several consecutive days to the written instructions for randomly selected students, was a visual reinforcement of points-of-view suggested in the description of the topic.

Essays written by the experimental group were collected and mixed together with essays by writers who had received only the written instructions. Assessment readers did not know which essays were composed by those students who had the televised information; after essays from both groups of students had been read and placements of students into the writing program had been determined, the test booklets were reviewed by assessment readers in order to determine whether any discernible differences existed in the texts.

Readers reported that there were some differences: Entering students who had seen televised information used visual examples more often to support their opinions. Students who were questioned about their responses to the televised segment indicated that the television stimulus had both put them at ease and promoted their recall of illustrative images. One student described the television stimulus as "a bridge between the page and my store of examples."

This experiment suggests that a specific connection can be made between assignments and recall of visual information during the composing process; it may be that when writing assignments contain visual illustrations, students are enabled to draw upon their own collections of visual data. This notion is an important one to consider because student writers are often puzzlingly unpredictable in their abilities to perform in different composing situations. A student who would be classified as a "poor" writer in one situation produces a very rich text in another. If one of our aims as teachers of writing is to encourage writers to produce richer texts, texts with, for example, more vivid illustrative details, then the assignments we give to writers should invite the production of such details. Television, when appropriately introduced within an assignment, may be one method of priming writers to make use of their own stores of images during composing.

Another link between television and composition occurs when teachers develop direction for writing assignments in specially sequenced form. Television promotes learning of rapid-pattern response; teachers can make use of this knowledge by incorporating uses for this behavior into composition assignments.

The phenomenon of pattern response to television is well recognized. Two decades ago Marshall McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* observed that frequent television

watching would lead to a viewer habit of limited, shallow-pattern responses because television prohibits extended contemplation of any single image or unit of information. The habits of limited response that McLuhan foresaw in the 1960's have actually evolved into a highly complex cluster of rapid-response behaviors. These behaviors can be differentiated into several categories: **Pattern recognition**, **pattern discrimination**, and **pattern selection**.

Very recently, in his analysis of research into television entitled *Interaction of Media, Cognition, and Learning*, Gaviel Salomon noted that rapid-pattern response has created an audience of rapid channel switchers: These channel switchers — our students — are able to take in sufficient visual information to determine in seconds their preferences for content. Because television producers must take this behavior into account, they regularly design sensational program openings to attract and hold viewer attention beyond the first few critical seconds of viewing.

How can we as teachers of writing put this same information to use? Sequencing assignments is one way for us to do so. We can prepare students for a composing task by making use of pattern analysis and discrimination upon texts which are similar to those they will need to produce on their own. In Junior/Senior level writing courses which I teach at Michigan, I have students move through several stages of pattern analysis before composing. This activity enables my students to make a transition from their familiarity with processing television information to the less familiar task of writing sustained, complex texts. This systematic approach to composing, which sequential assignments encourages, resembles the learning behavior of "organized persistence" Jerome Bruner has described in *On Knowing*.

The best way for me to illustrate how I foster this transition process is to describe a sequence of assignments from my writing class entitled "Fiction, Fantasy and Fairy Tale." I begin to teach students how to write their own stories by introducing them to several types of story frames — predictable narrative structures typically found in a genre — as working examples. The first structures we analyze are from television. This initial analysis often becomes a lively exchange of observations because students are astute at rec-

ognizing, discriminating, and selecting among the program patterns of television shows.

In their next stage of development, I focus students' attention on folk tale frames; I draw upon information from Chapter III of Propp's *Morphology of the Folk Tale* and compress Propp's extensive tale categories into four major headings which describe stages of dramatic action: Opening, Complications, Hero/Heroine Actions, Resolution.

Although such story elements are never created by writers for teaching purposes, when beginning writers examine each element of text in isolation, and in relation to other features, they begin to see how parts of any specific discourse function in combination with others.

I order in-class and out-of-class assignments in this sequence:

- (1) *Analysis of television story frames*
- (2) *Analysis of folk tale frames*
- (3) *Composition of first drafts of original folk tales by small groups of students*
- (4) *Exchange of first drafts of original tales among groups for comments*
- (5) *Revision and completion of original tales in small groups*
- (6) *Presentation of original folk tales by the small groups to the class with story boards used to illustrate key events (A story board provides a series of illustrations, somewhat like a comic strip. It depicts events as they occur chronologically in a story. Text intended to be heard simultaneously with specific pictures is printed below each illustration).*

In my class, learning about television story frames and folk tale frames is a natural prelude to the writing of an original story. Not only does the careful study of texts extend analytic skills my students already possess as viewers, but it encourages students to contrast conventions common to television presentation with the conventions of written texts.

Television is a powerful, readily accessible point of departure for teachers who want to help their students write more effectively; in our small group sessions this June, we will discuss television as one of many factors to be taken into account in facilitating the development of student writers.

Evaluating Writing

Lee Odell

Of all the tasks confronting composition teachers, the chore of evaluating student writing sometimes seems the most difficult, the least exciting, the easiest to ignore, postpone, or slight. And yet we must evaluate. Our students deserve to know how well they are writing and what they need to do in order to improve. Moreover, we as teachers need to know about these matters; otherwise, we will have no way to assess the effectiveness of our own teaching, no way to focus our efforts with a particular group of students. Since evaluation is so important to both teachers and students, my part of **Workshop '81** will be solely concerned with this topic.

At the outset, I will ask participants to accept some assumptions about what evaluation is *not*:

1. "Evaluation" is not a synonym for "grading." Indeed, assigning grades to students' papers is, at most, only the last stage of a complex process that begins not when students turn in their papers but when we formulate a writing assignment.
2. Evaluation is not some mysterious activity that only teachers can engage in. Quite the contrary: Effective evaluation requires that we devise explicit, reasonable criteria which our students can apply to their own and their classmates' writing.
3. Evaluation is not simply a matter of praising or finding fault. We must, finally, make some sort of value judgement about students' work. But we must do so only after we have described their writing accurately, fairly, nonjudgmentally.

Everything we do in the **Workshop** will be guided by the preceding assumptions and by three additional beliefs about our role as evaluators of writing:

1. When we ask students to write, we must help students understand the audience and purpose for which they are writing;
2. We must grade students' work with criteria that are specifically appropriate to the audience and purpose for which they are writing;
3. We must assess the intellectual and rhetorical demands of the assignments we give.

The emphasis on audience and purpose reflect a combination of current theory, research, and common sense. All three sources tell us that 1) good writers vary diction, syntax, and content to suit the audience and purpose for which they are writing; 2) astute readers do not judge a personal letter by the same criteria they use in evaluating a formal, impartial report.

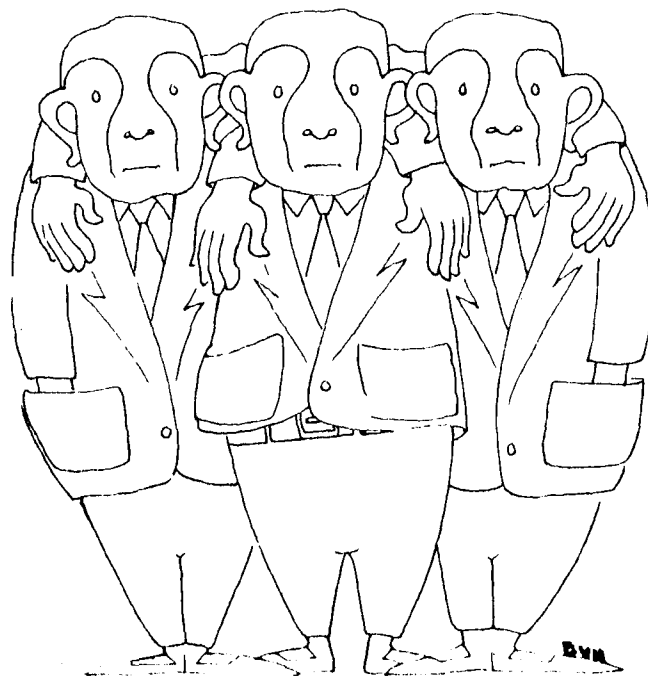
My third assumption, about the need to assess the demands of our assignments, arises from my experience as a teacher of writing. I have too often assigned topics far more complex than I imagined, topics presupposing skills which my students either did not have or did not know they should use. Upon evaluating students' writing about these topics, I

learned only that they performed badly when I had no reason to expect them to do well.

As evaluators of writing, we have access to at least three different procedures for evaluating writing: Holistic scoring, analytic scales, and primary trait scoring. We shall read and talk about all three procedures, but most of our **Workshop** time will be spent on the third — primary trait scoring. In the course of our meetings we shall

- use one particular set of primary traits to describe and evaluate a set of student papers;
- devise sets of criteria that would let us describe and evaluate the writing students have done in response to several different assignments;
- formulate writing assignments that specify audience and purpose;
- assess the intellectual and rhetorical demands of those assignments by trying to do them ourselves.

We will spend comparatively little time talking about "mechanics." We will, however, examine students papers with serious conventional problems, and I will describe one approach to assessing students' mastery of the conventions of standard written English.



Three Additional Beliefs

Talking and Writing

Jay Robinson

In her very important book *Errors and Expectations*,¹ Mina Shaughnessy lists three explanations for the inexperienced writer's frequent mismanagement of syntactic complexity: "One explanation focuses on what the student has not internalized in the way of *language patterns* characteristic of written English, another on his unfamiliarity with the *composing process*, and another on his *attitude* toward himself within an academic setting." Each of these explanations, Shaughnessy goes on to say, suggests a pedagogy: the first, with a focus on grammar — on forms of written English not learned through everyday conversation; the second, with a focus on process — on the behaviors, conscious and unconscious, of successful writers as they write; the third, with a focus on the student — on his or her feelings in an attempt to build confidence in the use of writing. "A teacher should not have to choose from among these pedagogics," Shaughnessy concludes, "for each addresses but one part of the problem."

For my seminars in **Workshop I**, however, I will have to choose. My focus will be on patterns of written prose and patterns in speaking — in conversation, in oral monologue — that are clearly contrastive. My assumption is that most students talk easily and effectively and, if they are inexperienced in the uses of writing, incorporate into their papers — quite naturally — the patterns they habitually use in everyday conversation. My aim in the seminars will be to develop pedagogical strategies for moving students from their (usually) comfortable ease in talking to a comparable facility in writing.

To learn to write is to learn to find one's "voice": that is what we often — and rightly — tell our students. But in telling them, we do not always remember that "voice," so used, is a metaphor: to "find one's voice" is to develop a sense of self, to discover a personal stance. Having done so, one can find language to express self and stance. But if the result is talk, one kind of language is used; if writing, another. To find one's voice in writing is not necessarily to use the language that comes most readily to hand; it is never to write as one talks — as if one could. Most of us have had the experience of seeing a transcript of something we have said, and we know the intense itch to take pen in hand to make the transcript look more like something that *should* be written.

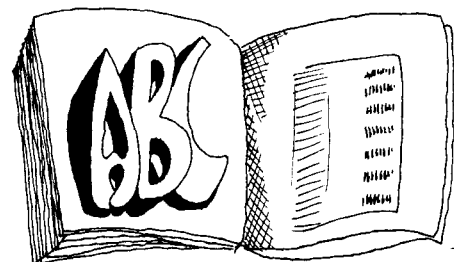
Shaughnessy suggests a focus on grammar as an appropriate pedagogy for dealing with writing that is too much like talk. Such writing usually does exhibit sentence and lower-level grammatical problems, but there are other sorts as well. As, for example, in this brief paper written by a student in a community college developmental English course:

1. My worst fault is not trusting in my own
2. judgement. In college it is a very easy task to
3. get mix up about answers on an objective test.
4. I study hard and most times I know the answer,
5. but another word might sound better than the
6. word that I know is right and I will put it
7. instead. I have many faults. This one is about
8. on the same level as all my other faults. Sometimes
9. I have very little confidence in myself; like
10. tonight I was really falling apart when I
11. realize that I was the only one left in the
12. room working on my pretest. I know I have
13. not said much but I want you to know I
14. have no one fault that sticks out over my
15. other faults.

One can point to the missing *-ed* on *mix* (l. 3) and *-d* on *realize* (l. 11) that are reflections of the writer's pronunciation. One can also point to the colloquial character of the clause beginning with *like* (ls. 9-10), or of some of the diction. But this paragraph is least like prose — or at least formal prose — in its organization and the direct address to teacher-as-reader in the last sentence, which distorts focus; in the use of the largely meaningless but grammatically impeccable sentence of ls. 7-8 — used as a filler, much as we might use an empty expression in speech, to allow time to discover what to say next. Clearly the conventions of written prose extend beyond the sentence level, such conventions are all too rarely noted or taught.

Effective talk is structured and conventional. Talkers learn structures and conventions through everyday converse with other talkers. Effective writing is structured and conventional, but its structures and conventions are learned through converse with books and through instructions by teachers. In our work together, we will explore some differences between talk and writing and ways to provide instruction in the organizational and grammatical patterns "characteristic of written English."

¹Mina P. Shaughnessy. *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 73.



Literacy: Social Uses and Pedagogical Obligations

Bernard Van't Hul

During the **Conference** to follow our **Workshop**, we are to hear experts discuss uses and abuses of written English in their several corners of the world surrounding us and our students. None of us doubts that our teaching of literacy is related somehow to its uses in society. The nature of those relationships raises complex social, political, and pedagogical questions, some of which I hope to discuss with participants in my seminar.

Narrowly conceived and generally described, our academic expertise is in the conventions of written English; and our effort is to guide students toward mastery of those conventions. In all of our teaching we behave, however, in keeping with social, ethical, and other extra-literary assumptions. Concerned as we are to know the social uses of literacy, our teaching is not simply directed to the uncritical perpetuation of such uses.

Our socio-political assumptions vary, yet most of us believe that literacy is close to the center of learning; that with literacy our students acquire not merely a certain knowledge but a way of knowing; that in being literate they are free to practice or to modify the uses of literacy that society may demand of them.

With such belief in common, most of us would be daunted but undeterred to hear from **Conference** speakers — or to read on the bottom lines of computer surveys — that writing had fallen out of fashion in all but a few exotic corners of society. We would be challenged rather than undone by reports that society's chief demand was for writing of just one manipulative or servile kind — for the gleaning and retrieval of data manipulated in Orwell's own 1984 by punctilious scribes, their heads teeming with nothing but basic skills.

Anticipating complexity and variety in our **Conference** speakers' messages about society's demands, I hope to address in the **Workshop** such pedagogical questions as these:

How do our perspectives on students' literacy — its values and its uses — compare with their own?

Behind this question is my impression that students bring to our courses in writing a demoralized sense of their potential as writers and a skeptical view of their eventual participation in the social uses of literacy. It is as though our students feel personally implicated by the sweeping verdict of the public media — the verdict that American Education in general, and the teaching of literacy in particular, have failed. Newsweek, Edwin Newman, Johnny Carson's guests, William Safire, Time, John Simon — the media prophets are of one monotonously apocalyptic mind.

In the **Workshop** we will discuss the conceivable effects of alarmist media on students' expectations — of us, and of themselves as writers in our courses. Such expectations figure in their confidence and competence as writers, in ways more complex than *Time* will ever tell.

How do we characterize what it is that our students have done when they have written well?

This question emerges from experimental evaluation of students' writing by teachers in scores of schools and colleges. Such experiments lead to these two conclusions: (a) In both schools and colleges, we are remarkably agreed in our more or less intuitive evaluations of given pieces of writing; and (b) in discussing our agreement, we invoke specific and identifiable criteria for the evaluation of written pieces.

In the **Workshop** we will evaluate samples of students' writing; and we will consider how our criteria do or should relate to our intuitive evaluations.

Among participants in the Workshop, what are the favored approaches to the teaching of writing? Does one approach reflect more concern than another for the uses of literacy beyond the classroom?

Having articulated our conceptions of high-school and college students, and having clarified our responses to students' written work, we will weigh the relative merits of our several ways of engaging students in the practice of writing. Heuristic grids and problem-facing strategies, the imitation of models, the combining of sentences, the simulation of real-world tasks — is one obliged to choose one or another of these activities? Or is there a theoretically valid case for orderly eclecticism — for engaging students in some or all of these and still other activities? Will anyone argue for sequence in the assignment of such activities? On what grounds? Having characterized and contemplated our pedagogical approaches, we will design and evaluate assignments compatible with each.

I hope that work of the **Workshop** will prepare us for critical attention to the speakers of the **Conference** — and that we will profit from both events.

WORKSHOP LEADERS



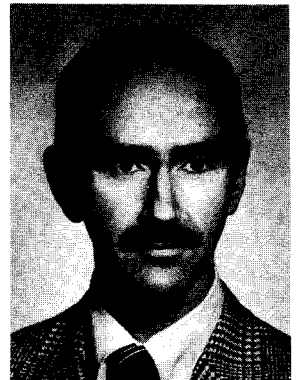
William Coles



Daniel Fader



Barbra Morris



Lee Odell



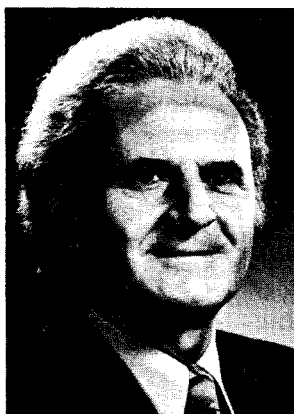
Jay Robinson



Bernard Van't Hul



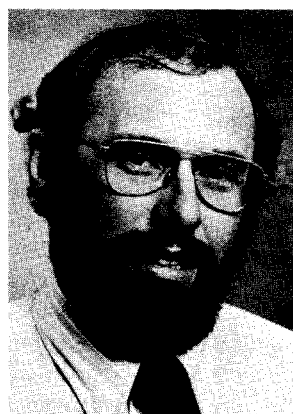
Loren Barritt



Frank J. D'Angelo



Janet Emig



Toby Fulwiler



Art Young

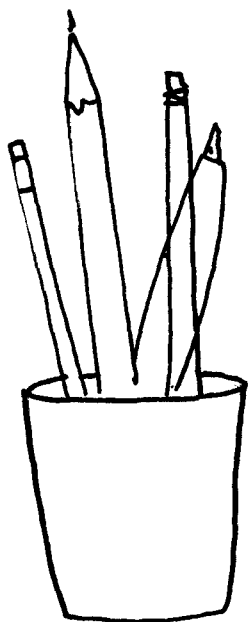
Workshop II

Workshop II is the last of three, three-day events sponsored jointly by the **ECB** and the **Mellon Foundation** between 21 and 30 June 1981. Preceded first by **Workshop I** for teachers of writing from schools and colleges outside the state of Michigan, and then by a Conference on **Literacy in the 1980's**, **Workshop II** begins on Sunday, 28 June, and is intended solely for teachers from within the state.

Teachers who attend the **Workshop** will be offered a wide variety of sessions which all concentrate on the teaching and learning of written composition. These session will be led by five teams of instructors:

Loren Barritt, **Michigan**; Jay Robinson, **Michigan**
Frank D'Angelo, **Arizona State**; Barbra Morris, **Michigan**
Janet Emig, **Rutgers**; Daniel Fader, **Michigan**
Toby Fulwiler, **Michigan Tech**; Frances Zorn, **Michigan**
Arthur Young, **Michigan Tech**; Bernard Van't Hul, **Michigan**

In addition to Small and Large Group Sessions where teachers have the opportunity to profit from all five teams of instructors, **Workshop II** will have special presentations by Professors Emig and D'Angelo, as well as by members and associates of the **English Composition Board**. Topics range from "The Composing Process" and "Features of Good Writing" to "Tutorial Methods" and "Editing and Revision." All are designed to provide information of immediate use to every teacher of writing.



Sunday, June 28

7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-10:00	First Small Group Seminar
10:00-10:30	Coffee Break
10:30-12:00	Exchange Small Group Seminar
12:00-1:30	Lunch
2:00-3:15	Special Presentation: "Tutorial Methods" E. Golson/J. Kirscht
3:15-3:45	Coffee Break
3:45-5:00	Special Presentation: "Some Features of Good Writing" R.W. Bailey
5:30-7:00	Dinner
7:30-9:00	Special Presentation: J. Emig
9:00	Wine and Cheese Party

Monday, June 29

7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-10:00	Second Small Group Seminar
10:00-10:30	Coffee Break
10:30-12:00	First Large Group Meetin
12:00-1:30	Lunch
2:00-3:15	Special Presentation: "The Composing Process" B. Dougherty/H. Isaacson
3:15-3:45	Coffee Break
3:45-5:00	Special Presentation: "Editing and Revision" D. Fader
5:30-7:00	Dinner
7:30-9:00	Special Presentation: F.D'Angelo

Tuesday, June 30

7:45-8:30	Breakfast
8:30-10:00	Second Large Group Meeting
10:00-10:30	Coffee Break
10:30-12:00	Third Small Group Meeting
12:00-1:30	Lunch
1:30-2:30	Summary Session
2:30-4:00	Consortium Meeting

Research About the Writing Process

Loren Barritt

Recently my daughter saw a Quebec auto license with its slogan *Je me souviens*. She wanted to know what it meant. The translation, *I remember*, only raised the further question: What was being remembered? In conjecturing about the likely answer to that one, I realized that that phrase would never have the same richness of meaning for us that it has for every native *Quebecois(e)*. We, as outsiders to that context, could understand the words but only **thinly** and not **thickly** with their fuller significance.

The distinction between **thick** and **thin** description was first made by Clifford Geertz, the anthropologist, to call attention to the need for context in describing human events. His delightful example was the various meanings attributable to a wink. A deliberate wink, a muscle twitch, a wink that mimics another's wink — are "merely" winks, but they nevertheless have different meanings.

We now know that context is also an essential part of understanding the young child's developing communicative competence. Parents who know the child's history and who share the child's situation, who see the gestures which accompany an utterance, understand richly while visitors must often ask for a translation. Educational psychologists who studied language in isolation thought black children suffered from linguistic deprivation. William Labov who studied speech in context set that myth to rest.

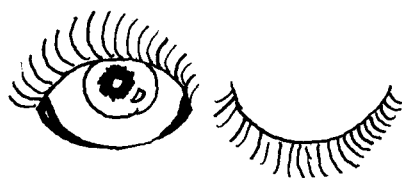
The distinction between context-bound significance and context-free insignificance is important for assessing the potency of educational research. Professional researchers whose roles are too often themselves without context share our dilemma with the license plate: They too must try to understand the message when they have only words to guide them. Research which goes beyond words to include an understanding of the situation which makes words come alive, has the potential to inform practice and thereby be helpful to meaning.

Teachers who live with and within the daily situation where writing is taught have immediate, valuable information available only to outsiders after careful, extensive observation. And even then, outsiders cannot learn what teachers know. It is the teacher who is ideally placed to do meaningful research.

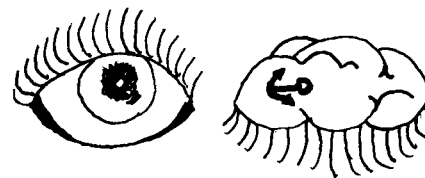
My workshop will begin with a discussion of educational research. I will try to show that research is not tied to method or statistics or tests. Good research asks only that we look closely and systematically at events and report honestly what we see. Research, at least research in human science, has more to do with rhetorical skill than it does with a knowledge of statistics.

We will do research about the writing process that focuses especially on the teaching of writing. We will begin by choosing a topic on which we all can write. For example: "My most frustrating experience as a teacher of writing" or "The way I *turn on* the basic skills class" or "Good assignments I have known" or . . . or We will work out the right topic together, then each of us will write a short description from his or her own experience. Several descriptions will be duplicated (volunteers only) to serve as the basis for analysis. Our goal: To find shared themes in the experience and to discover what these might suggest about improving the teaching of writing.

Although we may not be able to do more than start this process together, I believe we will be able to make a convincing start. The ideas that research is separable from practice, that researchers are not teachers, and that research results are for journals, are unfortunate. I believe we can all profit from looking carefully at our practice. If we wait for outsiders to look at it, we are likely to be disappointed. After all, to them a wink may only be a wink.



deliberate wink



Muscle Twitch

Imitation and Style

Frank J. D'Angelo

It may seem incongruous for someone who has written a text entitled *Process and Thought in Composition* to lead a writing workshop that stresses the imitation of models. The imitation of models suggests a product approach to the teaching of writing, whereas a heuristic approach puts the emphasis on the process. This seeming dichotomy is not a real one, however, for the imitation of models mediates between process and product.

What is imitated is not merely the form or structure of the original model, but more importantly the grammatical and rhetorical principles that underlie the structure of the model. These principles are the elements that model the writer's cognitive processes. They are analogs of the composing process.

Imitation is a process that focuses the writer's attention on the "literalness" of the writing activity. This literalness is one of the meanings we give to literacy. But it is also a process that enables a writer to go beyond the letter, so that the principles a student learns in imitating models can be applied to other kinds of writing tasks.

To teach students to imitate is to teach them to make full use of literacy, that is, to read and to write. In the seminar that I will be conducting, I want to discuss strategies that teachers might use to teach imitation and that students might find useful to develop their skills in reading and writing. These strategies consist of a close reading of the model, followed by an intensive study of the features of the text, and two kinds of writing assignments — stylistic analyses and imitation exercises. This is the process that I will hope to imitate in my workshop:

Close Reading

I ask students to read the model carefully before coming to class, making annotations on their copies of the model. In class, we reread the selection. Then, I proceed inductively, asking questions about the context, the dominant tone, point of view, arrangement, sentence structure, diction, and so forth. I encourage students to relate the various features of style to the writer's intention. I also guide students into a discussion of the effect that a stylistic feature has upon meaning, tone, or dominant impression.

We use short selections from literary works, from time to time I will introduce non-fiction models, especially those that may be similar in form, but different in rhetorical purpose. For example, I may pair a non-fiction narrative with a fictional narrative or a scientific description with a literary description. This kind of pairing raises interesting questions about genre, technique, and intention. Each model is selected because it has certain characteristics of arrange-

ment or style that might reward our study. For example, one selection will emphasize the cumulative sentence, concrete and specific diction, and figurative language. Another will emphasize the balanced sentence. A third might emphasize abstract and impressionistic diction, Latinate words, and so forth. I try to get students to notice that these principles of style *can be found in any kind of discourse*. Their use and their effect, of course, will vary as their context and their writer's intention will vary.

This kind of close reading and analysis provides *material* for one kind of writing that they will subsequently do. It also provides the rhetorical *means* for a second kind of writing. In this kind of class, teachers and students use a *subject-specific heuristic* rather than a more general heuristic. The heuristics implicit in our teaching are not always clear to our students, so this is one way of our being explicit about what we do. Both kinds of heuristics are important, but in imitation exercises we aim at something more specific and limited.

Stylistic Analysis

After a class period or two, I give the first kind of writing assignment, a stylistic analysis of the features of the model. The purpose of this assignment is to insure that students *understand* the rhetorical and grammatical principles that they will subsequently *use* in their imitations. Another purpose is to reinforce their reading skills, since they must necessarily read the model carefully in order to write about it. To help them write this paper, I suggest strategies they might use for dealing with the context, the tone, the stylistic features, etc. In brief, I introduce them to the conventions of doing this kind of writing.

Imitation Exercises

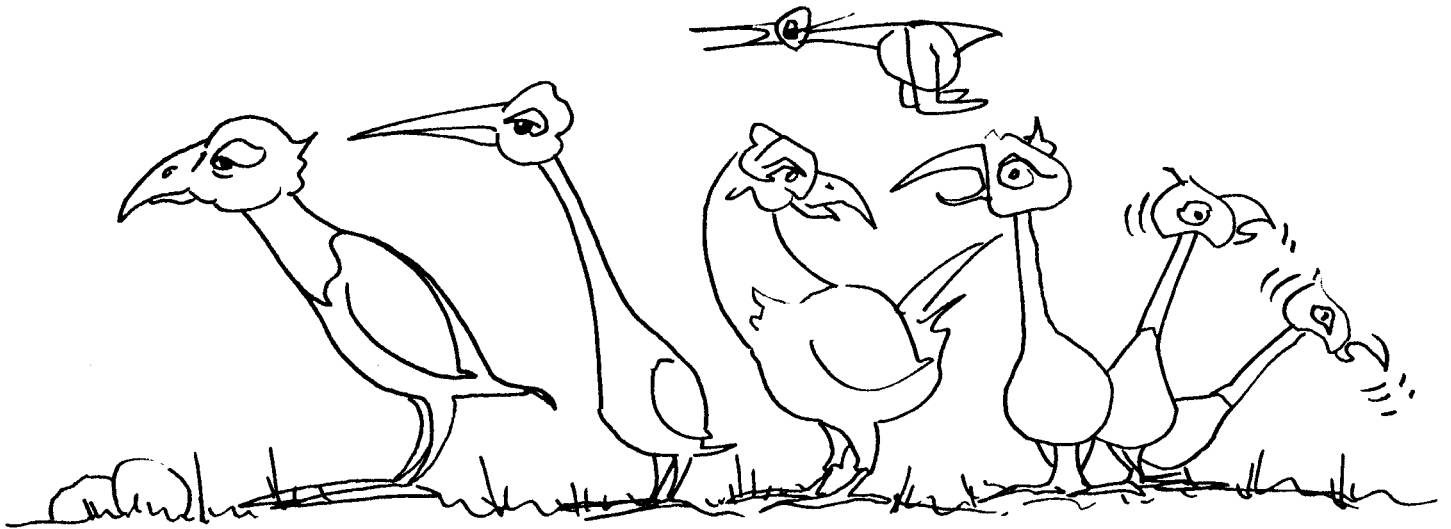
The next assignment is one in which students must imitate as closely as possible the structural and stylistic features of the original. I suggest certain subjects that they might want to consider in doing this assignment, but more often than not I encourage students to provide their own subject matter, based on their own knowledge and experience. Not only do students learn that certain kinds of stylistic features will not be appropriate to all subjects, but they also learn how important it is to be able to choose the proper set of features that will communicate their intended meaning. This calls for more than slavish imitation. It calls for a thorough understanding of stylistic alternatives.

Follow-up

After each kind of writing assignment, I bring my students' papers to class, read them aloud, comment on the relative

strengths and weaknesses of each, and make suggestions for improvement. I reinforce this procedure by writing marginal and summary comments on their papers and by student conferences. As often as I can, I discuss the possible applications of what they are learning in my class to other

classes. My hope is that the principles of writing they learn in doing these exercises can be applied to other kinds of writing situations. I also hope that this method of teaching and process of learning can be modeled successfully in my June workshop.



Imitation Exercises

A Writing Across the Curriculum Workshop

Toby Fulwiler

How does a teacher of writing encourage colleagues in other disciplines to pay more attention to student writing? And, once encouraged, what specifically, can teachers of history, biology, or business do in their classrooms to promote student writing?

Most teachers in disciplines other than English understand well that writing, like reading and mathematics, cannot be the sole province of teachers in one discipline. As Dan Fader and James Britton have argued before me, writing is an interdisciplinary learning activity with a place in every classroom. But not all teachers know how to integrate writing instruction easily into their pedagogy, nor are they comfortable "teaching" it outright. Each teacher is already a professional, practicing writer in his or her own field, yet few have ever been trained to teach writing to others.

There is a wealth of knowledge about writing in the pool of content-area teachers who think they do not know how to teach writing. Who knows better than the geographer whether or not first person narration is acceptable in professional geography publications? Who knows better than the physics teacher whether or not to use passive construction in laboratory reports? Furthermore, most teachers have a fairly firm grasp of the "elements of style" according to Strunk and White or Turabian. It matters little that they can't label a particular modifier as "free" or "dangling"; it does matter that they can identify good writing appropriate to work in their field.

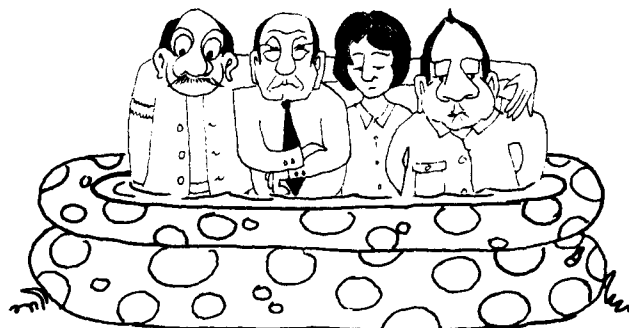
During the last several years, my colleagues and I have planned and staffed half-a-dozen writing workshops for teachers at **Michigan Tech**; we have also worked with high school and college instructors from other schools. The principles of conducting good writing workshops are remarkably consistent whether working with high-school English teachers or history professors. Showing works better than telling, induction better than deduction. By introducing

workshop participants to the complex nature of "the composing process," experientially rather than through lecture, we have been able to draw consistently on knowledge and ideas already present among the participants. The writing workshops work because the lessons are learned through personal experience and appeals to common sense.

Writing across the curriculum, as we conceive it, is based on principles which are second nature to most writing teachers: 1) people learn to write by writing frequently; 2) writers need critical feedback to improve their writing; 3) writers need to understand the audience for whom they write; 4) writers should not be punished for experimenting or taking risks; 5) writers need to distinguish between writing as heuristic and writing as communication. The workshop experience which we have developed explores these principles as they apply to teachers in all disciplines.

In my **Workshop** series I will ask members of my group to join me in some writing activities and then to examine the nature of our own composing to see what lessons we can discover. More specifically, I will ask participants in my **Workshop** to take good notes during the presentations on **Literacy in the 1980's** and to ask the presenters hard questions; then we will begin developing our own written responses to the **Conference** theme. Time will be provided during the **Workshops** for brainstorming, composing, receiving feedback, and revising; if the pieces are good, we will seek to publish them.

I believe strongly that writing workshops work for all teachers, regardless of discipline; I believe, furthermore, that language arts teachers must take a leading role in developing such workshops. In addition to opportunities for writing, this **Workshop** will also provide a forum for discussing how teachers can create successful programs at their own schools in writing across the curriculum.



Pool of content-area teachers

The Role of Writing in the Classroom

Art Young

Providing students with the opportunity to engage in a variety of writing experiences can enhance their ability to learn the subject matter of a course and to communicate their knowledge to others. Written language serves many purposes for writers and readers and for individuals and communities. In my seminar series this June, I propose to investigate the uses of writing for the individual student writer.

Students can and do use writing for a variety of purposes; we will examine classroom strategies and techniques for enabling students to use writing in the following four ways: 1) *to communicate* information to a particular audience, 2) *to learn* about certain subjects, 3) *to express* themselves and order experience, and 4) *to assess values* in relation to the material they are studying. While these four functions of written language are not mutually exclusive, or even exhaustive, I have found it useful to segregate them so that the unique value of each can be studied and practiced. We will look at these functions of writing from two points of view: first as an English teacher might employ them in both the composition and literature classroom, and second as they might be employed in any classroom through a "writing across the curriculum" program. Seminar participants will explore these functions of writing by writing and talking about their writing in small groups.

I have been designing assignments based on these functions of writing in my own classes for the past several years. In order to encourage students to become confident, fluid, and effective in writing for a variety of purposes and audiences, I have assigned research papers, interpretive essays, journal entries, speculative pieces, poems, stories, graffiti. After each of these assignments, I ask my students to reflect in writing on the experience of doing the assignment. Let me share with you a suggestive student response to each of these functions from the perspective my seminar will take: **The value of writing to the writer.**

1. When the primary function of writing is *to communicate* then the writer has the dual obligation of arriving at a coherent understanding of the material and of presenting it in an attractive, efficient way. This particular aspect of writing is familiar to us all, and we spend a great deal of our professional lives assisting students to become proficient in it. After completing an analytic paper for a course, one student put it this way:

By writing a formal paper, you want to get an idea across clearly, neatly, and concisely. You want your reader to be able to go through it and understand immediately what you are saying without having them stop and ask questions — about your purpose or grammar and spelling mistakes. You write a formal paper to make sure you don't make mistakes, to make sure you're organized, and to make sure you don't

leave anything out, but by using an outline, a rough draft, and proofreading.

(John)

2. When the primary function of writing is *to learn* — to reach a secure understanding of new information, either for no immediate pragmatic end or as a step to mastering information in preparation for a formal paper or a test — then the writer is free to discover ideas and to play with language without the constraint of pleasing a demanding reader. Here is an example of a student writing his way to an understanding of Emily Dickenson's poem "I started early, took my dog —":

This particular poem is very perplexing. Even after quite some time of study I don't understand the meaning. I've even had problems with the overt meaning and the words.

The poem seems to be about the sea — about how she (Emily) stands in a wave and then runs from it — back to dry land. But what do the dog, mermaids, frigate, mouse, and the town represent — why are they added? The dog and the mouse especially don't seem to have any meaning to the poem if it is just about the sea. Therefore the sea must be a metaphor or symbol or something.

The mermaids in the basement speak of mermaids from the depths as the frigate in the upper floor speaks of a ship on the sea. When the ship extends its hempen hands, it seems to be beckoning to her to come out there — But she just seems to stand there until the waves wash on her and try to pull her in. Then she realizes that she can't be a part of the sea so she moves toward the land with the water close behind. As she gets closer, the sea "realizes" it can't go with her so it retreats.

Overall the poem speaks of two worlds, both different and distinct from the other. E.D. is part of one and observes the other. This could be the recurring theme that nature is separate from humanity.

(Ralph)

3. When the primary function of writing is *to express* the self's perception of reality and to order experience, then the writer's primary goal is to personalize knowledge — that is, make it his or her own. New information must be made to fit the individual's perception of reality. All of us need to symbolize reality in order to handle it, and written language can be a valuable tool in this process. Here is a student reflecting on the experience of reading Emily Dickenson's letters:

They had a moral code. Now I understand, mind you, that some people rebelled against it, but at least there was something to rebel against. They know where they were, and so the courageous ones could strike out on their own, from someplace to someplace. They had a culture. We either don't have one or have one too embarrassing to admit to. I can never decide which. I think maybe I'm just writing this on a bad day, because even though I'm no Puritan, I think I would rather be there than here. The only thing this has to do with Emily D. is that I started feeling this way reading her letters.

(Joyce)

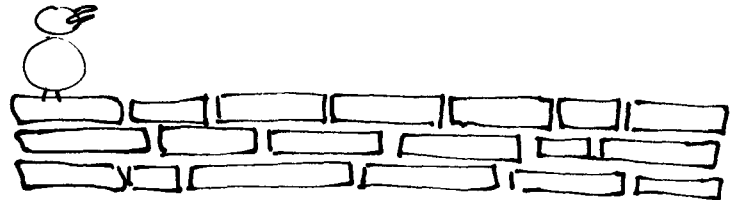
4. When the primary purpose of writing is *to assess values*, writers are engaged in discovering what they believe and how they feel about a particular experience or piece of information. Although such engagement can be encouraged in many ways, I have found creative writing assignments related to understanding the subject matter of the class to be a particularly effective way of sharing and shaping values. Here is the response of a student who had just completed an assignment to write another final chapter to Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Player Piano*:

I think that I actually do enjoy creative writing and just the opportunity to be able to have anything you want happen to the characters. It is true that I usually tend to depict them pretty much as before but I still get the chance to see what it is like to be an author. That provides me with more motivation to do the other assignments. Looking back just now, I

realize that when I have some character do something it is mostly likely to be in the manner in which I see that group in which the person can be classified. That is, I have women doing what I see as the role of women. Doctors doing what I see as the role for doctors, etc. I suppose that that is, actually, an indication as to what I am like, believe and see as important.

(Steve)

The teaching of writing and the teaching of literature are alike as humanistic callings. While we are proud to teach the survival skills of writing, reading, interpretation, and critical thinking, we are privileged to teach whole persons — persons with thoughts, feelings, beliefs, personalities. I believe that by systematically allowing writing to serve various functions, teachers encourage people to grow as their talents do. See you in June.



As my grandfather used to say:

Any fool can make ~~almost~~
any old sentence at all;
Something
You've gotta ~~know~~ ^{plan and} work and sweat
~~plan~~
-to make an honest wall."

Reflection in writing
on the experience of doing
the assignment

EDITORIAL (continued from page 98)

travelled throughout the country to talk about **The University's** writing program, and as *forum* has made its way south to Australia, north to Alaska, east to Nigeria, and west to Hawaii, our state-wide group has expanded into a national community committed to learning from one another as we teach literacy to our students.

This year, a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation enables us to strengthen and extend this network of people interested in the teaching of literacy: In June the **English Composition Board** will sponsor a three-day **Conference on Literacy in the 1980's**. The **Conference** is to be preceded by one three-day **Workshop** and followed by another. The first is for teachers invited from eleven states and the District of Columbia; the second, for Michigan teachers of writing who have attended either **Workshop '79** or **Workshop '80** or one of the 250 ECB Seminars on the teaching of writing held in Michigan's schools during the past three years. The overlapping structure of this event — **Workshop I >Conference< Workshop II** — will provide teachers of writing in Michigan and elsewhere with the opportunity to benefit from one another as well as from twenty persons who will deliver papers at the **Conference on Literacy in the 1980's**.

In this issue of *forum*, eleven workshop leaders describe the seminars that they will conduct in June. Because these descriptions reflect many of the theoretical concerns and pedagogical practices current in our discipline, they are likely to be of interest to those who are unable to attend our **Workshops** as well as to those who will participate in them; therefore, we invite those of our readers who will not be with us in June to read these descriptions and to correspond through *forum* with those seminar leaders from whom they may desire to obtain more information.

The centerfold of this issue is devoted to the **Conference on Literacy in the 1980's**, to be held in Ann Arbor from June 24-27. Open to all who wish to attend it as well as to all who participate in one of the two **Workshops**, the **Conference** will address two important questions of the next decade: What will be the educational, vocational, and professional demands for literacy? How will literacy be taught? The particular interests and experiences of the wide variety of persons presenting papers during the **Conference** will guide us as we try to answer these crucial questions and to construct an agenda for our work in the next decade. I hope to see many of you here in June — to greet old friends and to welcome new ones into our growing community.

Patti Stock

FORUM

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