

# Introduction

Many schools lack a comprehensive literate environment which encourages good writing and reading habits. Without such an environment, students are not compelled to take writing and reading seriously. In schools where the lessons taught in English classes are not repeated and emphasized in the student's other classes, the knowledge and skills learned in those lessons tends to atrophy. We believe language skills deserve more conscious attention from teachers in all academic disciplines, and that teachers who recognize the role played by these "elementary" skills can help students increase their learning ability, improve their communication skills, and enhance their cognitive and emotional growth.

Our aim in this book is not to make every teacher an expert in writing and reading. We believe English teachers have unique and specialized contributions to make in the education of students; the complex and difficult techniques for teaching traditional and transformational grammar, rhetorical conventions, and discourse theory remain in their domain. However, teachers in disciplines other than English can draw on general language skills to enhance student learning and, at the same time, reinforce the more specific language skills taught by reading, writing, and speech teachers. A "writing-across-the-curriculum" program, to use the phrase coined by James Britton, places some responsibility for language instruction with every teacher.

We believe that a comprehensive program must start from certain pedagogical premises: (1) that communication education (primarily writing, but including reading, speaking, and listening) is the responsibility of the entire academic community, (2) that such education must be integrated across departmental boundaries, and (3) that it must be continuous during all four years of undergraduate education. Furthermore, a comprehensive language program must incorporate the several roles language plays in education: to communicate, to learn, and to form values. While these roles are not mutually exclusive or exhaustive, we have found it useful to distinguish them in order to better understand and talk about them.

Writing to communicate - or what James Britton calls "transactional writing" - means writing to accomplish something, to inform, instruct,

or persuade. This has been the traditional emphasis of most rhetorical texts on expository writing, where audience and purpose define our voice and determine our tone. Communicating information to a particular audience involves all of the writer's skills from invention through revision. Expository writing of all kinds falls into this category: essays, reports, and term papers in school settings; letters, memos, and proposals in work settings.

Writing to learn is different. We write to ourselves as well as talk with others to objectify our perceptions of reality; the primary function of this "expressive" language is not to communicate; but to order and represent experience to our own understanding. In this sense language provides us with a unique way of knowing and becomes a tool for discovering, for shaping meaning, and for reaching understanding. For many writers this kind of speculative writing takes place in notebooks and journals; often it is first-draft writing, necessary before more formal, finished writing can be done.

Finally, writing is a value-forming activity, a means of finding our voice as well as making our voice heard. The act of writing allows authors to distance themselves from experience and helps them to interpret, clarify, and place value on that experience; thus, writers can become spectators using language to further define themselves and their beliefs. This value-forming activity is perhaps the most personally and socially significant role writing plays in our education; this role must not be forgotten or lost as we also attempt to produce careful, clear, and correct prose.

Given that writing has several functions, teachers in all disciplines can provide opportunities for individuals to explore through writing their relationship to knowledge, articulate it, and scrutinize its value. When students begin to understand and appreciate the full potential of written language, their respect for the conventions of writing well increases.

The cross-disciplinary writing program we developed at Michigan Technological University is teacher-centered. This framework assumes -computers and television aside- that the teacher is still the center of educational experience. Other schools have taken different routes to improve writing proficiency for all students: junior-level competency examinations, for example, or senior-level writing courses required of all students. We believe that people soon forget knowledge acquired under an examination approach; we don't believe that one more required course in our students' jam-packed curriculum will make them truly better writers. Our program attempts to achieve more

fundamental changes than either of these solutions by addressing the students' total work across the school curriculum.

We conduct off-campus writing workshops to educate teachers from all disciplines in the functions and processes of language and, at the same time, provide assistance with pedagogical strategies so that they, in turn, can teach their students to use language in a variety of meaningful ways. Through the format of these workshops we explore theoretical ideas and consider whether or not they may lead to useful classroom practices. We actively promote certain experience-based premises about teaching writing: that students learn to write by writing and rewriting, that students need to write often to become fluent, and that writing should serve different purposes and audiences to remain interesting and challenging to the writers. In addition to the four-day summer workshops, our particular program involves academic-year seminars on writing for different university departments, follow-up activities for former workshop participants, a newsletter network, a university-wide language skills laboratory, and interdisciplinary research by writing and reading teachers.

Like many comprehensive programs we have borrowed ideas freely from colleagues at other places - Beaver College, the University of Michigan, and the National Writing Project, for example - but the primary influence on both our program and our book has been the first-hand experience of conducting interdisciplinary writing workshops. We have tried as much as possible to incorporate the principles which govern the workshops into this text. All of the authors in this book have participated, in one way or another, in the interdisciplinary writing workshops; all but one are currently teaching in the Michigan Tech Humanities Department.

Randall Freisinger introduces the conceptual framework for writing across the curriculum programs. He asserts that attention to the composing process and to inquiry-oriented learning serves the goals of liberal education.

Toby Fulwiler and Carol Berkenkotter explain the uses of expressive writing in learning, idea generation, and problem solving. Fulwiler provides practical suggestions for journal writing in all disciplines, while Berkenkotter suggests ways in which traditional problem-solving models can be applied to composing, particularly to the early stages which often prove especially difficult for student writers.

Robert Jones and Toby Fulwiler discuss strategies for using formal writing in the classroom, including assignments and evaluation. Jack Jobst focuses on the role of audience in writing and delineates the

numerous audiences inside and outside the classroom. Both of these chapters focus on “transactional writing,” that is, on communicating information.

The next two chapters suggest ways in which poetic and narrative forms enhance learning by providing students with a means of engaging ideas and evaluating experience. Art Young demonstrates how student writers can bring both their imaginations and value systems to bear on the subject matter of a class by writing in various creative forms. James Kalmbach and William Powers discuss particular ways in which the narrative or “story telling” mode provides a perspective on new knowledge.

The reading process is the principal focus for Bruce Petersen, Anne Falke, and Elizabeth Flynn. Petersen demonstrates how the subjective nature of the reading process calls for writing assignments which make knowledge personal. In her overview of recent research on reading, Falke contributes an exposition of how people learn from reading. Flynn discusses developing students’ reading abilities in relation to particular subject matters.

Two chapters offer techniques for teachers who work with students orally, individually, or in small writing groups; they attest to the invaluable contribution talking and listening make to the learning process. Peter Schiff provides a variety of methods for conferencing with students and giving feedback on writing assignments. Diana Freisinger and Jill Burkland describe the role of the writing lab tutor in developing student writing abilities and offer useful suggestions to classroom teachers on advising and assisting students with a particular writing assignment.

An annotated bibliography on language and learning across the curriculum, prepared and annotated by Bruce Petersen, concludes our book. It provides a useful starting point for those teachers and educators who wish to further understand the concepts and practices implied by the phrase “writing across the curriculum.”

Throughout this book we have tried to provide teachers with a provocative mixture of theoretical ideas and practical classroom activities, no one teacher could or should use all of the ideas presented here; however, we believe that every teacher, regardless of academic specialty, can find something here for speculation if not practice. In order to teach writing well, instructors need neither magic nor rules; instead, they need only to examine and understand the role played by language in learning. We hope this volume contributes toward such an understanding.

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