

Helping Others, Helping Ourselves

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In this season of giving, I wanted to consider how those of us involved in WAC/CAC give to our colleagues in ways that enable us to receive an even bigger gift—that of learning *from* them as we learn *with* them. Whenever I have taught Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*, Flannery O'Connor's *Wise Blood*, Lucille Clifton's *Blessing the Boats*, or Carl Safina's *Song for the Blue Ocean*, I have learned new ideas and literary nuances from rereading with my students. In a similar way, reading something for the first time with a group, such as reading Donald Murray's *My Twice Lived Life* with colleagues, I learn so much from their reading that I might have missed on my own. These shared experiences across disciplines increase our own growth as learners and, more importantly, as teachers. This fall I have had several occasions to have such experiences; so I am giving you these holiday gifts to share with your colleagues—a video experience with teachers in science, a year-long faculty development project, and a shared faculty reading for personal growth and enjoyment.

At the Conference on College Composition and Communication last spring, Nancy Sommers gave me a copy of her video *Shaped by Writing: The Undergraduate Experience* and asked me to tell her how secondary teachers responded to it. Because of the schedule of departmental meetings, I have only had a chance to share the video with English and science departments so far. The video interviews eight of the Harvard students whose papers Nancy Sommers and her research team collected as part of a four-year study of student writing across disciplines at Harvard. This video allows teachers to hear the students describe their own experiences with writing in college as they reflect a year after graduation. It also includes professors of different disciplines and the writing center director describing the importance of writing from their perspectives. When I viewed this video again with the science teachers, I heard ideas that I hadn't even noticed in previous viewings, perhaps because I was viewing it this time as a science teacher. My colleagues commented on what they found important and how what they heard might impact the way they use writing in their own classes. We all learned from the dialogue that followed the viewing. In fact, one of my colleagues said he heard several science teachers talking about ideas that they got from the video several days after the viewing. This was at least as valuable as a workshop or other means of discussing WAC/CAC with colleagues in other disciplines.

Another activity that I have managed to get involved in is a faculty development project. Michael Lowry, my team teaching colleague, and I volunteered to facilitate afternoon/evening sessions once a month based on the Annenberg/CPB series *The Learning Classroom: Theory into Practice*. By using

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the course guide and videos, we are able to offer the sessions after school on one day or after dinner on another. With two options, more faculty are able to attend, and Michael and I can plan to offer the same activities and prepare the same handouts. Yes, I would also like to attend his next session, so that I can learn from his experiences as well because we each bring our own research and teaching experiences to the discussions. Each session involves reading of theoretical information beforehand, key questions, a "getting started" activity, viewing of the video with at least two actual classroom observations with descriptions to demonstrate the theoretical ideas, discussion of the video, and application activities. Topics include basic learning theory and development, cognitive processing, multiple intelligences, emotions and learning, culture and learning, learning in a social context, cognitive apprenticeship, metacognition, structure of the disciplines, learning and transfer, motivation and learning, and creating classrooms and schools that support learning. After just four sessions, I must admit that I have reviewed information I learned in undergraduate and graduate school, but I have also learned how my colleagues have applied theoretical information into their various disciplines. The rest of the school year will involve more of these interactions as we facilitate all of the sessions, applying theory to practice in all disciplines.

Last year one of my colleagues was asked to start a committee for those aged 55+, so I volunteered so that there would at least be one feminine opinion on the committee at my all boys' college preparatory environment! We had social events periodically in the form of picnics, wine and cheese parties or group meetings on topics such as my dreams for the future, long-term care insurance, financial planning for the future, and physical fitness for now and the future. We have had guest experts lead sessions to answer questions, and even had a holiday gathering where we brought canned goods for the food bank. In an amazon.com escape one day, I encountered Donald Murray's memoir, *My Twice-Lived Life: A Memoir* (2001), and ordered it. As I was reading, sometimes laughing aloud, I realized that this would be a perfect book for the 55+ group to read and discuss. At our next committee meeting, I mentioned it and sent an abstract of the book by email to the group. Immediately people responded and asked about ordering it. Within a week, we had placed an order. The group will meet to discuss the book in January; however, the conversations it has already sparked have made all of us think harder about the value of what we do as teachers and the joys of continuing to grow and enjoy this life we have. I know I will receive more gifts at the book discussion in January!