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CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS
Wisconsin English Journal


Fall issue: October 1989, Literature: Reading and Responding. Whole language approach to reading, selecting texts, units based on literature, teaching particular texts, reader response, guided questions, motivating students to read, young adult literature. Deadline August 1, 1989.

Winter issue: January 1990, Composing and Evaluating. Writing as a means of learning, improving student writing, new approaches and insights for teaching writing in all the grade levels, variety in all the grade levels, variety of evaluation methods. Deadline November 1, 1989.

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responses. Flynn (1982:4) found students to be too accepting of each other's papers and unable to impose any constraints on their reading of a peer's text: "Their ability to compensate for the deficiencies of a student essay too often served to interfere with their ability to provide constructive criticism." The students imposed coherence onto incoherent texts, filling in the gaps with their own experience and knowledge. Flynn attributes this tendency to an inappropriate reading strategy. Her subjects were used to reading textbooks, which rely heavily on headings and other such coherence markers, but inexperienced in reading flawed texts. Thus they endowed their peer authors with the same authority as textbook authors and accepted their peers' texts unconditionally. Newkirk (1984) also found students to fill in information gaps when responding to peer texts. He attributes this reaction to the students' personal identification with the author.

When assessing the writing of their peers, students often rely on criteria different from those that more experienced writers might use when analyzing texts. Hartwell (1984) found that students value grammatical correctness, simplistic form and structure, and a sparse prose style consisting of unsupported premises. Newkirk (1984) discovered that students favor a concept of originality which teachers view as banal or flawed. In addition, George (1984) found that her student writers tended to focus on one idea in an essay at the expense of the progression of ideas or of overall coherence. These studies show, then, that students' priorities in determining what is good writing are flawed. Students, it seems, can be impressed by factors that teachers would consider negative and by writing that is poor.

Other researchers have examined how students manage the responses of their peers. Berkenkotter (1984:313) found that students respond to each other's comments "in significantly different ways, depending on the writer's personality, level of maturity, and ability to handle writing problems." In other words, both affective and cognitive domains figure in how they deal with feedback. Berkenkotter presents three categories of responders: the egocentric resistor who is reluctant to accept any advice, even when it would be beneficial; the resistor who also disregards advice, but advice which is not helpful, and who improves his or her writing; and the initially very responsive student who ultimately learns to reject inappropriate feedback. The latter two types in Berkenkotter's taxonomy bring us back to the previously discussed problem: the often inadequate nature of peer response to help students improve their writing.

George's (1984) study of how students deal with peer feedback produced different results. First of all, analyzing over one-hundred tape recorded peer review sessions, George found most of the feedback generated to be sound and potentially helpful. However, her students tended to forget the advice when the session ended and therefore could not apply it when revising their papers. George also documented another type of failure, the failure to function and communicate as a group. She identified three basic group types in the hundred sessions reviewed: the "Leaderless," "Dysfunctional," and "Task-Oriented." In the last category, all the members participate equally without relying on the instructor for direction. They are compatible with one another and willing to work together to solve any problems. In contrast, the "Leaderless" and "Dysfunctional" groups do not produce healthy dialogue. In the former, one person dominates the discussion to the exclusion of the other group members. In the Dysfunctional group, all are passive and resistant to working together. Refusing to commit themselves to the task of assessment, these group members view peer review as a joke or game.

Although the results of the studies above are by no means overwhelmingly negative, they show that dividing students into small groups will not always or necessarily lead to collaboration and productive dialogue. The factor of group dynamics, influenced by the personality and maturity level of participants, greatly affects the way groups interact. My own experience has shown me that the older and more mature the student, the more
meaningful the interactions in peer review. First-year students, it seems, are at more of a disadvantage for effective peer review sessions; functioning as a group requires independence on the part of the members, who must willingly forego teacher domination of the class. Younger students are not always willing to seize this independence.

Even if the members of a group are compatible and mature, there is no guarantee that the dialogue produced through collaboration will address the features and weaknesses of the texts at hand. In addition to the factor of group dynamics, students' inexperience in reading and critiquing plays a role in the quality of peer group talk. As the research has shown, student writers tend not to read and assess writing as teachers do. According to Elbow (1973) the nature of a reader's response is irrelevant; any reaction is significant as it informs the writer of the import and significance of his or her words. However, when students respond to the texts of their peers, they may react to what is not in the text or they may react according to petty or invalid concerns. In order for peer review to be a meaningful experience, students have to assess each other's writing as informed, critical readers.

The problems in peer review are not insurmountable and can be checked by the responsible teacher. First, teachers must prepare students for critiquing writing by helping them to become critical readers. Students can learn through modeling that coherence cannot be imposed onto a piece of writing. They must be shown that it resides implicitly in a text's underlying propositional structure and that it is manifested explicitly through the organization of the text's components, cohesion devices, and other metatextual statements. Students can learn how to read for coherence by examining how proficient student writers continually set up and fulfill expectations for a reader in their essays and by comparing these well-written papers to weak essays. Students must also be taught priorities in writing assessment. As Linda Flower et al (1986) point out, student writers tend to interpret the act of revision, which for experienced writers entails reshaping a text's macrostructure, for surface error correction. This may explain why students, as some of the studies have shown, pay undue attention to grammatical concerns in peer review. Students must learn the difference between surface and global features and realize that one should address content and its development and organization before correcting mechanical errors. Students must be educated to use peer review to address content and global features as well as spelling or capitalization errors.

Besides showing students how to read and assess their essays, teachers must assume responsibility for the management of writing groups. Teachers can provide students with a procedure to follow in group interaction. Researchers such as Wiener (1986), Strang (1984), and George (1984) have recommended the author-led session as a means of improving the quality of communication. They found that when the author of a paper controls the dialogue of his or her session by preparing questions and by leading turn-taking, the session is more meaningful. Teachers can also facilitate helpful conversation by preparing a criteria for students to follow when assessing their papers. Although some teachers might argue that such involvement is inappropriate and intrusive, I will reply that providing an evaluative agenda is not the same as prescribing the substance of conversation. An agenda will serve to organize talk for the participants and, if it is the one the teacher will be using to assess the papers, will inform the writers of their teacher's expectations of them.

Teachers can further facilitate collaboration by accounting for students' personality, maturity and education levels, and writing ability when organizing them into groups. To organize groups effectively, we must also understand how our students' language behavior affects group dynamics. We need to study the mechanism of collaboration and dysfunction in writing peer groups. For research models we have to look beyond the body of research on classroom discourse, which has been traditionally concerned with the function of the statement-response in the teacher-centered classroom. Instead we should look to studies in
conversational style, for example, Tannen's (1984) analysis of talk at a holiday meal. Tannen shows how different linguistic styles, reflecting gender as well as ethnic, social and cultural background, can clash and lead to alienation and communication breakdown among the participants. A major source of the clashing lay in the participants' inferences about each other's intentions based on paralinguistic behavior which Gumperz (1982) refers to as "contextualization cues" (i.e., intonation, stress, pitch). As sociolinguistic research has shown, these elements mediate how a speaker's words are to be interpreted by a listener. These cues provide a layer of meaning that is processed along with, and may superimpose, grammatical meaning in the ongoing negotiation of conversation. According to the research undertaken by Tannen and others, we can expect students to behave in peer group interaction according to the conversation conventions of their social and economic backgrounds (see also Saville-Troike 1980 and Erickson and Schultz 1982). The greater the sociocultural differences between students and the less aware students are of the implications of their own "contextualization cues," the more the potential for breakdown and misunderstanding. A contributing factor to the communication breakdown reviewed by George (1984), then could be incompatibility among the participants' conversational styles.

Tannen's study has particular significance for the multiethnic classroom but relevance for all researchers who want to study peer group conversation to better understand the dynamics of interaction (see Gumperz 1982 and Schenkin 1978 for an introduction to conversational analysis). In addition to undertaking research, teachers can improve the quality of writing group communication by preparing students for the task of analysis. Teachers can instruct students in how to read essays effectively as well as provide direction for the peer review session. Through research and involvement teachers can facilitate talk that will help students gain control over their writing.

REFERENCES


COLLABORATION IN THE WRITING PROCESS
Helen Dale

Knowing that the next issue of Wisconsin English Journal would be about collaborative learning, an area of special interest to me, I searched my files for an article about group writing I had written some years ago. It was nice to discover that I still agree with what I had written then, but I was aware that something was different. The difference had nothing to do with the benefits of group writing. If anything I feel even more strongly about the benefits of collaboration now. Then I saw it—-the terms had changed--"group" vs. "collaborative" writing! And there is a real difference in perspective, one that indicates a much better understanding of what happens when students think and write together.

The article began, "As class sizes increase and the paper load becomes heavier, many writing instructors have tried group writing as a means of easing that load--and yet they've felt uncomfortable with the process. They question whether each student will do an equal amount of writing and learning, and feel vaguely guilty when they bring home fewer papers in a class set." I had almost forgotten that my initial motivation for group writing had been to ease the paper load. Perhaps that is why so many teachers felt uneasy, as though they were cheating; the words uncomfortable and guilty are certainly prominent in that sentence. Now I have no doubts at all that in assigning collaborative writing, I am giving my students a wonderful opportunity to learn about their own writing patterns and to gain from working with others.

The biggest advantage of collaborative writing is that it offers students the opportunity to see how other minds work through the steps of the writing process. English teachers often talk to students about writing as a process which all writers approach differently. Here students can observe someone else approaching and working through a writing task, and for many students that is a very liberating experience. Suddenly writing
is not so lonely, so lacking in feedback. As students brainstorm, for instance, a student who doesn't know how to organize might observe one group member “mapping” and another working on a scratch outline. That is certainly a direct way of knowing that there isn't just one correct way to brainstorm.

The classroom atmosphere also benefits from collaborative work, especially at the beginning of the semester because it allows class members to become acquainted, promoting a relaxed atmosphere which enables students to write better. I generally assign the writing groups so students meet and begin to feel comfortable with people they didn't know before. Closeness built into the collaborative writing groups spills over into other class sessions, making peer editing run more smoothly, and creating a class cohesiveness. Another aspect of these groups which I enjoy is the break from the more formal lecture or discussion format. The instructor can circulate, discussing ideas, word choice, and syntax with each group, trouble-shooting as needed.

Although I have had positive experiences with collaborative writing, I know there are some who worry about students' objections to working with others for a grade, and others who are concerned about some students doing more work than others. Those are important concerns; there are two ways that I address them. One is very simple. I talk to my classes about collaboration, why I feel it is a vital skill to learn, and how I think they will benefit from experiencing collaborative work. Once they know how much I value collaboration and, therefore, cooperation, they are much less likely to complain about how the group is running. They know they are supposed to be learning how people work together and how they themselves function within a group working toward a common goal.

The other way in which I address the “who-does-the-most-work” issue is built into the format I use. This format spans the course of a semester. There are as many students in a collaborative group as there are assignments I intend to assign during the semester. That is because for each assignment there is a primary writer and that responsibility shifts for each paper. For instance, I usually assign three collaborative writing assignments each semester, so I put three members in each group. The primary writer is the one whose job it is to do just a little more for the assignment. Although all the students contribute to the essay, someone has to do the extra work of gathering each person's draft and synthesizing the material, finishing a paragraph that was only half-written in class, cleaning up a messy draft, or typing up the final draft. Realistically, it doesn't work for all the group members to do everything. Each student has this responsibility only once.

An average collaborative assignment--and the subject matter is as unlimited as any other writing you have your students do--takes at least three or four class days, spread over a week or two. I might give the assignment on Thursday or Friday, so that each person has time to think about the topic. I might ask each student to come in with some of the brainstorming already done and perhaps with something committed to paper. That way when the group members come together on Monday, each person has something to contribute, and the group spends that day and perhaps the next (depending on the length and complexity of the assignment) working on a first draft, discussing organization, working on development, and deciding on specific details. The primary writer must see to it that all the group members are working or s/he will have too much work to do alone. Students do cooperate on these collaborative assignments, knowing that if they don't, their group members will not help them out when they have primary responsibility. Whatever parts are not completed in class must be finished by the primary writer, or the group must meet outside of class, depending on how much is yet to be written.

The next step is the revision of the first draft. It's best to leave at least a day or two between the first draft and the revising session. The primary writer must bring to class a copy of the draft for each group member, and the class session is spent with each student making changes, adding examples, looking for repetition, and changing surface errors. The reason for each
student having a separate draft is apparent if you will imagine the scene I first observed with three or four students trying to read the same draft. After each student has read the draft individually, the group members discuss what changes need to be made, and the primary writer takes home the marked-up drafts to revise the paper and return a day or two later with one final copy. The other group members have some class time to proofread the final draft to catch any mechanical errors. This is important because all members of the collaborative group will receive the same grade.

Usually I have the strongest, or second strongest group member be the primary writer for the first assignment, hoping that by the end of the semester, the weaker students will have improved their skills sufficiently to feel comfortable being in charge. Sometimes, too, I base the order on the difficulty of the upcoming assignments, putting the strongest member in charge of the most complex assignment. The better, more competitive students accept someone else being primarily responsible because they each have a turn and because they will have a great deal of input in each stage of the writing process. Even the less committed students work hard, knowing that they'll be letting their classmates down if they don't. Peer pressure is on our side.

There are, of course, other structures for these groups. For instance, if the teacher wanted to try only two collaborative assignments, that instructor could form groups of four and have one person be primary writer for the first draft and another person be primary writer for the final draft of each writing project.

Beyond the advantages of letting students see other minds at work and improving classroom atmosphere, I find the quality of the papers improves through collaboration. There is peer pressure to think well and to write well. Students test ideas against each other, so you get their best and clearest thoughts. For example, in a letter to the school newspaper, students monitored each other's idle griping and found support for their complaints. When I first started assigning group papers, I thought I'd get "patchwork prose," but somehow that doesn't happen. Working together, students seem to integrate ideas, organization, and style.

Collaborative groups also teach mechanics, sometimes more meaningfully than we can. In groups, there is pressure to be mechanically competent. It's a real learning experience for a student when a classmate says, "But you have to put a comma there for that to make sense." Suddenly that knowledge of the mechanics of writing becomes a real asset. Collaborative papers also tend to have many specific details, perhaps because students achieve ownership in the joint paper by having their examples used to illustrate the point they all want to make. Students working collaboratively also seem to put more time into struggling for just the right word. Since various members of the group might say a different word as they talk through a sentence, they see that there are choices to be made. Without knowing much about connotation or audience, students become sensitive to word choice when each contributes something different. While writing a descriptive assignment, one group tried out many related verbs--frighten, alarm, startle, shock--before deciding that scare had just the right connotation.

An important aspect of the format I've used in collaborative writing is that all the steps in the writing process are built into it. The students accept as a matter of fact that time must be spent generating ideas, organizing those ideas, and revising after writing one draft. Proofreading is built into the final stage as a final concern, not an overriding one.

There are two more advantages of collaborative writing worth mentioning. Collaboration gives students an experience, perhaps for the first time, of really listening to views different from their own. Students get a realistic idea of how others respond to their thoughts and their words. By internalizing and generalizing the reactions of group members, they develop a sense of audience. There is someone else listening.
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There are two more advantages of collaborative writing worth mentioning. Collaboration gives students an experience, perhaps for the first time, of really listening to views different from their own. Students get a realistic idea of how others respond to their thoughts and their words. By internalizing and generalizing the reactions of group members, they develop a sense of audience. There is someone else listening.
Finally, collaborative groups give students the experience of working together, an experience which our educational system doesn't often provide. Much of our life work is done collaboratively and we need to learn how to work with others. In the working world much writing is done jointly; there are committee reports and joint projects of various kinds. Collaborative writing groups are often the only experience our students will have in thinking and writing together to produce a finished piece of writing.

The collaboration groups are more than just groups; the emphasis on collaborating is what is important. Wonderful things happen when students are allowed to see other minds at work, puzzle things out, search for the right example or the right word, and arrive jointly at a completed piece of work. And by the way, you'll have fewer papers to grade.

Helen Dahl
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

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CAPTAIN'S LOG-STAR DATE .084 or WHAT HAPPENED HERE YESTERDAY
Julie Bronson

On Wednesday two students stand before your desk with absence slips for your signature.

"Sara said that I need the handout on comparison transitions that you gave out on Monday," says one student.

"Did we do anything in here yesterday?" interrupts the other student.

Taking a deep breath, you explain that you don't have the handout with you today—it's in your office—and launch into a summary of the preceding day's events before realizing that the question of having done anything is always rhetorical.

With the help of a great organizational tool called the class log, these daily trials are eased. Written by a different student every day, the log, a record of the class activities, is intended mainly for other students in the class. Furthermore, it benefits the teacher. In my elective class, Intermediate Writing, a course based largely on the learning of expository structure, the class log provides an opportunity for organization and sometimes creativity.

Setting up a class log is very easy. The materials needed are a notebook, and a folder that has pockets. A regular widelined notebook can be fastened inside an inexpensive paper folder, or a looseleaf ring binder can be used if pockets are added. The best notebook to use is one that has a pocket inside a colorful, durable front cover.

Once a teacher has the basic materials, a seating chart for the class is added to the folder. A written chart with the names of student writers assigned to specific dates can free the teacher from remembering who is scheduled to write each day. This chart should be kept in the folder of the log, too.

With these materials in place, the teacher is ready to instruct the students in the writing of the daily log. The assigned student takes the log recording the date, the names of the people who are absent, the class activities, and any

Waiting for a Poem

The best gifts come on nights
too steep to climb away.
They start with the smallest of breezes
breathing over gravestones, swishing
through town, picking up speed. A bit
of chaff from the feed mill, a newspaper
or two if they're interesting, smells
from a cafe, snatches of voices, a squirrel
or maybe a bird, a shoelace, a scarf,
picking up speed, whooshing
to the corner of 8th and Montana, whirling
and rubbing against this window
I warm my open hands on.

Bergine Haakenson
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire
assignments given on that day. If no assignment is given, the
recorder writes NO ASSIGNMENTS so that the reader will know that
no work was actually assigned and that the writer did not simply
forget to write down the work. Then if a student is absent, the
student consults the log, asking the writer for clarification of
any part of the entry not understood. It is important for each
student writer to realize that the audience for this piece of
writing is other students, and not the teacher, a unique
experience for the student writer who has never written for
anyone but the teacher. The student writer is encouraged to
comment on the lesson, asking questions and making comments about
any problems. If the teacher distributes handouts, the recorder
is responsible for keeping in the log folder copies for these
absent students, writing their names on the sheets to make
identification easier when they return. Most students are able
to finish the entry in class; however, a few students take the
log with them overnight. Each teacher needs to decide whether
taking the log home is a good idea because doing so requires
responsibility on the student’s part. If the log is not
returned, the next day’s activities cannot be recorded. If a
student loses the log, the record of class activities up to that
time is also lost.

The value of this class log is in organization, and the
advantages to the teacher are numerous. Because many teachers
move from room to room daily and cannot carry with them all of
the week’s handouts and lessons, the log provides a consistent
place where teachers can store the papers for absent students.
The log also stores rough drafts without danger of loss until the
class is ready to edit them in the teacher’s room to room
odyssey. Moreover, tests returned during a student’s absence can
be stored in the log so that a trip to the teacher’s office can
be avoided when the absent student returns. Teachers also have a
wonderful record of the class activities and more importantly,
the way the students view the class activities. The log
eliminates the “Did we do anything while I was gone?” questions
and puts the responsibility on the student to find out what the
assignments were and get the handouts. The teacher need not
become involved unless the returning student does not understand
the assignment after consulting with the writer.

The advantages to the student are also numerous. The student
writer gets some valuable practice writing for a real peer
audience. If friends do not know what happened in the class
because of the student writer’s inability to write clearly,
suddenly it matters more than if only the teacher fails to
understand the work. Early in the semester, the log helps
students to know each other. In addition, the student writer is
constantly practicing note taking and summarizing skills while
recording class activities. Because writing increases
understanding of a subject, the writer has a better chance to
understand the materials being presented. Furthermore, the
absent student benefits because handouts will always be in the
log. A student need not depend on the teacher to remember or
make a special trip to the teacher’s office for the work.

Besides the great help in organization for both student and
teacher, the log also provides a place for creativity. Student
writers are encouraged to record their feelings and to comment
about the class. I discovered some real creativity in my
Intermediate Writing class, an expository class with emphasis on
structure. The following entries are reproduced exactly, errors
intact.

First, I discovered that my tests are viewed in this way:

11-10-81
Absence—none
Today Mrs. B. handed out a single sheet of paper. This sheet of paper just happen to be
covered with questions that were designed to seach the inner reaches of the human brain
(father for apes and other lesser beings). After the examination the survivors crumpled to
their seats in sheer exhaustion.
This brilliant literary work was compiled by the marvelous
Todd Wallace

Dec 9, 81
absent—Brad Walters, Tim Piasceki
Today marked the first testing of a new type of written exam. Yes, today Mrs. B.
unveiled the top secret nutron test. As this writer can testify it worked perfectly. Yes sir
it blew up right in my face showering the whole class with a near lethal dose of radiation.
“It was terrible! I was sitting there and suddenly there was this blinding flash of light
and for the next five minutes everybody g lowest said one eye witness. Well, this is Todd
Wallace. Good might and have a pleasant tomorrow.
The term paper, an eight week project, was described in this way the day it was assigned.

11/11/81 Wednesday
Absences: Dee Bissing, Deany Intrepid
Ah, a day of elation, disappointment and sheer wonderful panic. First we went over comparison/contrast paper set up and schedule again. Not bad, but what happens next sets in the elation or dissatisfaction. In short we recieved an evil looking yesterday's graded exam which we painfully went over to see where some failed and lost their way and where others, much to their relief passed triumphant. However, a bad day comes along things could always get worse, and things got worse. Even though in the deep abysses of our minds we knew of the terrible specter of the second quarter term paper, Mrs B. brought it in to plain view today. Whereas the panic? Said term paper is a research paper that should be started on *soon!* (soon means like Now 11/11/81) Preliminary due dates are as follows: Dec. 11 cards and preliminary outline finished; Dec. 22 have rough draft written. Jan 8 you must have it finished in entirety! Also 5 research sources must be used and all cards, rough drafts and relevant notes will be handed in with final draft of said paper. For more details see handout “Details of the Research Paper” Mrs. B. also suggests: don’t give up a RHS library, City library or even if you have real drive the Nicolet library but go right on to some other outstanding facility in Stevens Point, Madison, or if your really driven and like driving and the Arabs, Washington D.C. “NUFF SAID” Brad Brown
P.S. I always wanted to write a book.

Some students experimented with different forms:

Tuesday, Nov. 17
Absent: Today I zink sat noon was absent from zee lesson. Well, see started to understand what ve have to do to take zee notes for zee next cheem. Zee Bibliography is information for zee paper listed in “A-Z” order, from zee authors names. There are 6 peices of information that must be listed in the right order. You can fint zee peices, and here order on page 10 from “Details of the Research Paper,” which most of us don’t haf. But trust me if in - a few stinks Bronson sed, “Don’t use Ensziklapijas for good information!” I zink sat you an order. She also handed out a few examples, most of which were written wrongly. Also she lectured us around about Not Cards. Zay go like zis:
Subject
plz plz are zee things

Zen all zee information, all of zee things is on zee hanti-out she gave us. Zen...
Short Bibliography

*Take good Notes II* She secramat us. Zen group zee notes in subject order. So far...
1. Pick a subject.
2. Find som information.
3. Take good notes.

Tomorrow see vil talk about plagiarizm. Unt by za way don’t exepet me to know zis stuff after I spent za whole lesson just trying to write it down in zis silly accent.
Terry Franti

Dec. 21, 1981
Missing in action: Mary Ann Miag, Brad Walters, Bradley Brown. There were strange looking students in the back of the room working on stacks of papers.
THE SUM OF THE PARTS IS NOT GREATER THAN THE WHOLE: AN EXAMINATION OF COOPERATIVE LEARNING

James Maylin Erdman

"No one of us is as smart as all of us!" (Circles of Learning, 65) The essential truth of this simple statement undergirds the value of cooperation in the classroom. Educators have long recognized the value of the diversity in experience and knowledge that students bring to classroom discussions. A careful examination of widely different perspectives can provide unique insights into complex problems. Students grow intellectually as they learn to recognize, understand and accept or reject the ideas of others. The benefits of effective small group discussions are significant, but the problems that an educator can encounter in structuring and conducting small group activities are also significant. Cooperative Learning Theory offers help in anticipating and avoiding these problems. A combination of applied theory and practice that makes for real changes in the educational environment of classrooms. The distillation of a diverse body of information into a practical program can increase the probability of success with small group interactions.

COOPERATIVE LEARNING THEORY

Cooperative Learning Theory offers a conceptual basis for the implementation of small group interactions in the classroom. The product of twenty-five years of research by Roger and David Johnson offers a flexible "theoretical framework that provides general principles on how to structure cooperative learning activities." (Cooperation, 1:12) The conceptual nature of this approach allows educators to adapt the general principles of cooperative learning to unique classroom situations. The cooperative learning strategy is said to enable educators to "teach any lesson in any subject area cooperatively." (Cooperation, 1:11) Cooperative learning groups are designed to foster concern about the performance of all group members. Cooperative learning experiences promote the best elements of small group interactions and help improve the long-term retention of information through oral rehearsals and carefully controlled "conflicts among the ideas, opinions, conclusions, theories and information of members." (Cooperation, 3:14)

The claims of success for cooperative learning groups are impressive. Cooperative learning activities are said to result in significant gains in both the cognitive and affective domains. Cognitive gains are shown in higher academic achievement, increased retention, and greater use of higher level reasoning. (Cooperation, 3:13) A meta-analysis of one hundred twenty-two studies conducted between 1924 and 1981 provides strong support for cooperative learning experiences.

Results indicate that cooperative learning experiences tend to promote higher achievement than do competitive and individualistic learning experiences. These results hold for all age levels, for all subject areas, and for tasks involving concept attainment, verbal problem solving, retention and memory, motor performance, and guessing-judging-predicting. (Cooperation, 3:13)

The results of cooperative learning experiences in promoting gains in the affective domain are equally impressive. Cooperative learning is said to "promote more positive attitudes toward both the subject area and the instructional experience, as well as more continuing motivation to learn more about the subject area being studied." (Circles, 26) A meta-analysis of ninety eight studies that were conducted between 1944 and 1982 indicates that cooperative learning situations improve relationships between students of different ethnic backgrounds and help to breakdown barriers between handicapped and nonhandicapped students. (Cooperation, 3:16) Improvements in self esteem, emotional maturity and social awareness are attributed to this learning style. (Circles, 27-28)

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A COOPERATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

There are five basic elements that must be included before any small group interaction may be considered cooperative: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, interpersonal and small group skills, and processing. (Cooperation, 1:10)
POSITIVE INTERDEPENDENCE

The essence of cooperative learning is positive interdependence, although probably the most difficult aspect of cooperative learning to teach. It involves changing the competitive and individualistic orientation that many students will have to one of "mutual responsibility" and a "shared identity." (Circles, 60) Johnson and Johnson caution enthusiastic converts of Cooperative Learning Theory to be patient. Students may not want to work with each other or share what they know because "they have been taught to work by themselves and to hide their knowledge from others." They may even hope for other student's failure to guarantee their success. (Circles, 61) This situation is best described as: "I swim; You sink." This sense of intense competition is deeply rooted in contemporary educational practice. "The research indicates that a vast majority of students view school as a competitive enterprise where you try to do better than the other students." (Structuring, 4) Positive interdependence is a dramatic departure from the educational environment that many students have accepted as normal and might initially be viewed with confusion and suspicion. Students must believe that they "sink or swim together." (Cooperation, 1:10) Circles of Learning provides a concise summary of this aspect of Cooperative Learning Theory.

Positive interdependence is the perception that you are linked with others in a way so that you cannot succeed unless they do (and vice versa), and that their work benefits you and your work benefits them. It promotes a situation in which individuals work together in small groups to maximize the learning of all members, sharing their resources, providing mutual support, and celebrating their joint success." (59) Positive interdependence may be achieved through a variety of techniques. Mutual goals can be set for group members (goal interdependence). Tasks may be assigned to individual group members (task interdependence). Materials, resources or information may be divided among group members (resource interdependence). Specific roles can be assigned (role interdependence). Joint rewards of various types can be given (reward interdependence). (Cooperation, 1:10) Suggestions for implementing each of these techniques is provided in Circles of Learning, Cooperation in the Classroom, Learning Together and Alone, and Structuring Cooperative Learning: Lesson Plans for Teachers (1987).

FACE-TO-FACE INTERACTION

Students are to sit "knee-to-knee" to foster "eye-to-eye" contact with the members of their group. The room should be arranged in such a way that students are allowed to sit and work together effectively without disturbing the other groups. (Circles, 41) Group size is suggested to be between two and six. The Johnsons suggest beginning with small groups of two or three to allow students time to develop the social skills necessary for small group interactions. Group size can increase as students gain sophistication in working together in small groups. (Cooperation, 2:15) My experience indicates that three or four students work best in small groups.

INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Cooperative Learning Theory specifies that every group member is to be held accountable for learning the assigned material and helping other group members learn. "The purpose of a cooperative learning situation is to maximize the achievement of each individual student." (Circles, 8) Everyone is to actively contribute to the best of his or her ability. Formal and informal measures of mastery of the assigned material can be used to determine individual accountability. Quizzes and criterion-referenced tests can be used in conjunction with informal questioning by the teacher or other group members to assure individual accountability. The role of "checker" can be assigned in each group to make sure that each of the other group members has read the assigned material or completed the homework.

INTERPERSONAL AND SMALL GROUP SKILLS

Students must be taught the necessary collaborative skills required for effective small group interaction. "Students are not born with the interpersonal and group skills required to collaborate with each other, nor do the skills magically appear
when the students need them. (Cooperation, 5:1) Cooperative skills should be taught at all levels of instruction from kindergarten through graduate school. Johnson and Johnson identify and detail four levels of cooperative skills: forming, functioning, formulating and fermenting.

Forming Skills:
"Forming skills are an initial set of management skills directed toward organizing the group and establishing minimum norms for appropriate behavior." They include such things as moving into groups quickly and quietly, staying with the group, using quiet voices, encouraging everyone to speak and eliminating 'put-downs'. (Cooperation, 5:9-10)

Functioning Skills:
"Functioning skills help manage the groups efforts to complete the task and maintain effective working relationships between the members." These skills include giving directions, expressing support and acceptance, asking for help and clarification, offering to explain or clarify, paraphrasing, suggesting new ideas, using humor, and describing feelings when appropriate. (Cooperation, 5:10-11)

Formulating Skills:
"Formulating skills are needed to provide the mental processes needed to build deeper level understanding of the material being studied, to stimulate the use of higher quality reasoning strategies and to maximize mastery and retention of the assigned material." Specific roles and responsibilities have been created to develop these skills. The "summarizer" includes all important ideas and facts in an oral summary of the discussion. The "corrector" adds important information that was left out of the summary or stated incorrectly. The "elaboration seeker" asks other members of the group to relate the material to their experience and previous learning. The "memory helper" seeks clever ways to remember important ideas and facts. The "checker" requires that each member state aloud the thinking that went into each response. The "explanation checker" asks each member to explain aloud how they would teach the material to another student. (Cooperation, 5:11-12)

Fermenting Skills:
"The fermenting skills are the most complex and the most difficult to master. They ensure that intellectual challenge and disagreement take place within the learning groups." (5:13) Some of the skills involved in this area include: criticizing ideas without criticizing people, differentiating where there is disagreement, integrating many ideas into a single position, asking for justification for conclusions, extending another's answer with additional information or reasoning, asking probing questions that lead to a deeper understanding, producing a number of plausible answers, and testing the reality of the group's work.

GROUP PROCESSING

"Groups need specific time to discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships among members. Groups meet to describe what member actions to continue or change. Such processing enables task groups to focus on group maintenance, facilitate the learning of collaborative skills, ensures members receive feedback on their participation, and reminds members to practice collaborative skills consistently." (Cooperation, 6:2) Processing sessions will vary in length and do not have to follow the same format. Both student participants and outside observers may participate in processing the group's effectiveness. A large selection of forms, checklists and other instruments are provided in Cooperation in the Classroom to help train students and teachers as observers. (6:10-6:41)

THE COOPERATIVE LEARNING NETWORK

A significant body of practical information exists for classroom teachers interested in cooperative learning. Lesson plans and teaching units have been developed and tested by an international network of educators who have "recognized the power in having students learn cooperatively, and persevered in following that belief to success." (Structuring, ix) The Cooperative Learning Center on the campus of the University of Minnesota (202 Pattee, 150 Pillsbury Drive, S.E. Minneapolis, MN
serves as a clearing house for information and materials related to cooperative learning. This center offers compilations of lesson plans produced by teachers in the cooperative learning network. Structuring Cooperative Learning: Lesson Plans for Teachers (1987) is the fifth volume in this series and offers examples of thirty cooperative lesson plans from many different subject areas and levels. The Center also provides bibliographies, collects information on research being done in this area, and coordinates training programs for educators interested in joining the cooperative learning network. A significant amount of information and support is available for those willing to build this eminently reasonable and humane learning environment in their classrooms.

WORKS CITED


EYE GLAZE

Vincent Lopresti

"What To Do When Their Eyes Glaze Over," a panel presentation of the College and University Section, given at the annual convention of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, Madison, Wisconsin, April 4, 1987.

Like any teacher I have been fighting dullness in the classroom for most of my career. And sometimes I have won the battle. I can recall a student complementing me one morning after History of the English Language class. As she left the room she stopped at the lectern to say (and I quote), "You know when you were at the board writing about dialects it was almost interesting." Her voice was sincere and I could tell the appreciation her heart felt; that indeed was a high point for her and me in the course.

Less successful was my ingenuity in linguistics class where I compared phonemes to positions on a football team. The guard position, for example, is like the phoneme /p/ (I confidently assured my pupils). Just as three different players can take over the guard slot on a football team even though they normally play in the backfield or someplace else, three different allophones can fill the /p/ position in a word and get the same job done. Result: athletically inclined students came alive arguing that no underweight halfback could handle the guard position. The rest of the class took another look at the wall clock.

So much for phonemes; morphemes didn't do much better and I have never succeeded in making absolutely clear and exciting the distinction between restrictive and non-restrictive clauses—no matter how beneficial my professional services may be, they are accepted with reluctance; such is the life of English teachers and dentists.

By drawing from the work being done in such diverse sources as writing across the curriculum and cooperative learning, I have come to the conviction that the glaze can be removed more often than conventionally thought possible.
Here, in no particular order, are my rules for active learning:

RULE ONE. Don't lecture unless you have to—and there are times when you must. I have found that if I can readily understand the day's material so can most of my students—the explaining of the obvious is our great weakness because we do it so well. In lieu of lectures, I opt for discussion based on students' reading and understanding of the material. Students must be challenged of course, but it's foolhardy and boring to go into complexities before they have a grip on the basics. For example, I avoid symbolism (if I include it at all) until long after plot, character, and setting have been clearly established, and not the teacher but the students do the establishing through trial and error exploration.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom, I find intelligent and sometimes heated discussion easy to achieve by having students begin the class with a writing exercise. Either by having students read aloud journal entries (required of each assignment) or having them compose focused freewrites jotted down at the beginning of the period, or just having them write down a twenty-word sentence on who, what, where and why regarding the day's topic is a sure way to generate discussion, determine what the class knows and what the teacher needs to tell them—and staves off boredom as well.

It is always surprising and gratifying to see that in a class of twenty or so, just about every major idea in a story, poem, essay comes to light without teacher comment when students first write down their thoughts and then read them to each other. Rarely does a class hour go by without the students, on their own, discovering the major ideas. Even better are the illuminating moments when the teacher discovers what is not known or well understood. It is on those occasions that the teacher teaches an enraptured and ungazed audience.

Discussion may be sluggish at first, but it will increase as students grow comfortable with each other and confident that their ideas are worthy of consideration.

Nothing is more edifying for a teacher than to see one student correct another's logic when it has gone astray. The entire class is attentive, and the teacher hasn't said a word.

Five to ten minutes of this so called "expressive writing" at the beginning of the period not only forces students (and the instructor who should be writing too) to collect their thoughts, it permits them to discover insights they didn't know they had and gives them a script to follow once discussion begins.

RULE TWO. Never ask for volunteers. How many discussions have died at birth when discussion readers begin with "Would anyone care to comment upon...?" The dead silence and the anxious hope that follows make everyone want to crawl into a hole somewhere. And when finally some poor soul attempts to alleviate the embarrassment with a non sequitur—deadness returns as soon as the remark falls to the classroom floor. The student feels like a patsy; the instructor returns to reading lecture notes.

So rather than lecture or seek out volunteers to lecture for me, I prefer beginning the class with an expressive writing exercise. And instead of asking for volunteers, I require (within reason) all students to read their work to the class. I begin at the left or right (they are usually sitting in a circle). Hence there are no volunteers and all contribute—and most feel good about it. Class is not monopolized by the few outspoken, and if handled properly, it is a nontreathing hour for all. We are not in discussion to find the best writer; we seek to have students explore and discover their own thoughts and share them with their peers who are pleased to learn they have much in common.

RULE THREE—and perhaps—it should be noted first—involves the seating arrangement.

The rectangle class with the teacher the central focus works against cooperative learning. In a full classroom it may be the only way, but with twenty-five students, there are other possibilities.

Often times while walking through the halls or subbing in a colleague's class, I can tell by the way the groups, gangs, and
individuals cluster about the room just what the dynamics of the class are going to be. When three and four nuclei are scattered about the room, there is little learning. A disorganized seating provides a disorganized class—it's as simple as that.

A circle and face to face bring results. Don't let students talk to the back of the necks in front of them or crane necks to see who's talking behind them--put them in a circle when possible. Students find it refreshing to meet one another. As one student noted at the end of the semester, "Now I know nineteen people."

We rarely appreciate the isolation of students in a classroom. I used to think it was me against the twenty-five; it turns out that the only sympathetic person a student expects to find in the classroom is the teacher.

RULE FOUR. Have students work out their own problems in groups. When material is terribly abstract and your repeated explanations frustrate the bright and confuse the dull, put the class in groups of four and let them help each other. This works best with exercise or question assignments. The bright delight in being of assistance and the dull benefit from personal, one-on-one attention.

Once I allowed teams in a remedial class to establish grading criteria for their papers and then allowed peer grading. Alas, some measured margins with a ruler while others counted indentation spaces—but all stayed awake for the entire hour. Some even considered content and phrasing at times. All papers were thoroughly read, and one hopes appreciated—albeit begrudgingly.

With more advanced students, peer critiquing of first drafts and peer editing of final drafts prove more profitable and popular. A teacher cannot expect too much from peer critiques. But even a weakly corrected paper provides benefits for both writer and critic. In fact more gain is made, I think, indirectly than directly.

What pleases me after a peer critique of first drafts is when a student will come up after reading other student papers and say, "I guess I got the assignment wrong and will have to redo it." It's so much nicer when students come to such realizations on their own rather than having their paper rejected once again by the instructor.

Also, requiring peer reading of papers sharpens students' realization of audience. Rather than writing to that void called "the teacher," they begin writing, in part, to the students who will be reading their papers.

RULE SIX. Do anything to avoid class routines. I see my classes as having at least four major components: discussion, lecture, writing, group activities. I try to cover at least two activities in a period, and I find it best when I get in three. Students should leave the classroom tired, like a good work out.

A routine order should be avoided. If class started with writing yesterday, start today with one of the other three components. Keeping students guessing can also combat eye-glassing. Be unpredictable.

I am confident these six rules can work wonders. But for any teaching technique to work well the teacher must enjoy the activity first if students are expected to follow suit. And the enjoyment comes from the element of surprise. The surprise the teacher holds in store from the beginning to the end of the hour, the surprise of wisdom from the mouths of adolescents and young adults, and the joy of discovery made when one's ideas, as opposed to the textbooks', become worthy of consideration.

Vincent Lopresti
University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh
NCTE ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS IN WRITING, 1988

The National Council of Teachers of English is honoring 621 high school seniors for excellence in written English. The students are judged on samples of their best prose or verse and on their performance in impromptu themes written under supervision. NCTE congratulates the students, their teachers, and their schools. The coordinator for Wisconsin is Sandy Heartman.

APELL
CHANG
COX
GAUCYS
GORDON
HAVENS
JENSON
KURAJETZ
MURPHY
SINMONSEN

NEKA APELL, OSHKOSH NORTH HIGH SCHOOL
Neka is the school newspaper editor, and School Board Representative for the Student Congress. She was a National Merit Commended student, received the 1988 Forensics State Gold medal and placed first for the 1988 State Associated Press in newswriting. Other accomplishments include the 1988 Quill & Scroll National Gold Key, and first place in newswriting for the 1988 NEWSPA. Future vocation: PR or journalism at Grinnell.

STEVEN Y. CHANG, STEVENS POINT AREA SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
Volleyball, gymnastics, tennis and photography editor for the school newspaper are some of Steve's achievements. He has been involved in SADD, Junior achievements, yearbook photographer, band and, during the summer, the Red Cross benefits from Steve's participation. UW-Madison is where Steve plans to focus on an education in the life sciences.

TODD COX, OCONTO SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL
Todd has received the Writing Award from Arts Week at UW-Marinette. He plans to attend UW-Oshkosh. Teaching English will be his future profession.

PETER GAUCYS, MADISON WEST HIGH SCHOOL
Peter is an active participant in the French Honor Club, SADD and the school newspaper. His awards include the National Honor Society, French Honors, and Quill & Scroll Journalism. He plans to attend one of four universities: Bowdoin, Carlton Macalester, or Grinnell.

EMILY ALEXANDRA GORDON, MADISON EAST HIGH SCHOOL
Emily is involved in Forensics, theatre/drama, orchestra, swimming, soccer. She's been editor of the school newspaper, a member of Beta Club and concert mistress. Emily received the Community Service Award for her volunteer help with the elderly, the State Silver Medal in Forensics, and the American Legion Essay Award. Future vocation: journalism.

CHARLES HART, APPLETON HIGH SCHOOL WEST
Chuck is a frequent contributor to the school newspaper and the literary magazine. His story "Indians and Assorted Stuff" was published in Scholastic Scope. He won fourth place in the UW-Whitewater writing contest. The writers who influenced him the most are Ginsberg and Kerouac. He plans on being a writer, but will major in business and international finance at UW-Madison.

CYNTHIA HAVENS, OSHKOSH HIGH SCHOOL
Cynthia is the Senior class president, member of O'Neil Honor Society, past president of the German Club, former news editor and present managing editor of Index, the school newspaper. Cynthia was selected for Badger Girl's State. She won first place in prose and poetry in Leyda Josselyn Writing Contest, fifth place in American Legion Auxiliary writing contest, first place in WI Association of School Councils Leadership Essay Contest. She plans to attend the UW-Madison, probably as an English major.

TANIA JENSON, ELK MOUND HIGH SCHOOL
Tania was class vice-president and class secretary. She is presently president of future Homemakers of America. She has been yearbook editor and copy editor. Tania was a delegate to the National Youth Leadership Council, member of Who's Who Among American High School Students, won Gold Medal for alto solo and solo acting. She is a varsity volleyball letterwinner. She plans to attend UW-LaCrosse majoring in English education.

CHRISTOPHER DAVID KURAJETZ, RIVERSIDE UNIVERSITY HIGH SCHOOL
Christopher has played All-Conference football and was team captain. Other activities include JV basketball, JV tennis and participation on the Math team. A political career is in Christopher's future and he plans to attend U-Minnesota.

DAVID META, RUFUS KING HIGH SCHOOL, MILWAUKEE
Information not available.

CARRIE JEANNE MURPHY, UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MILWAUKEE
Carrie is active in theater. She was class president and is editor-in-chief of the school newspaper. She has won the Latin Award and Service-Above-Self Award. She is considering Sarah Lawrence with a future in running an art museum.

JANE SIMONSEN, MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL, EAU CLAIRE
Jane is president of Thespians, editor-in-chief of the school newspaper and president of the German Club. She placed first in the Scholastic Essay Contest.
NCTE PROMISING YOUNG WRITERS

The National Council of Teachers of English announces winners in its third Promising Young Writers competition for eighth-grade students. A total of 438 students are being honored for their exceptional writing skills, demonstrated in samples of their best writing and impromptu essays written under teacher supervision. The winners, now in ninth grade, competed last spring. Each person who entered the program received a Certificate of Participation; the winners have also received a hand-calligraphic Certificate of Achievement. The writing competition is made possible by a grant from D.C. Heath, Inc., publishers. A major aim of the program is to call attention to students' need for early encouragement to develop their writing abilities.

Kim Cowling
Shattuck Junior High School
600 Elm St.
Neenah, WI 54956
Teacher: Mr. Mott

Julie Kindsfater
Whitman Middle School
1100 West Center St.
Wauwatosa, WI 53222
Teachers: Mrs. Gelstrom & Mrs. Boyce

Najam Khan
Horace Mann Middle School
2520 Union Avenue
Sheboygan, WI 53081
Teacher: Mrs. Norita Thorne

Caitlin Howell
Urban Middle School
1226 North Avenue
Sheboygan, WI 53083
Teacher: Mr. John Vollrath

Jeremy Bay
Cumberland Junior High School
1008th Avenue
Cumberland, WI 54829
Teacher: Mrs. Garibaldi

NOT THAT GOOD OF A WRITER

Beverly Nordberg

Jason waited until the other sixth grade students left the classroom, then approached his teacher. A little shyly, he asked if he could have a copy of the story he wrote in class that day, saying he wanted to show it to his mother. He admitted to being proud that he had written "almost three pages," and of how he had "figured out" the ending. Rather sheepishly he added, "Usually I'm not that good of a writer."

Jason is not the only upper-elementary school student lacking confidence in writing. Countless others throughout the nation mirror his frustration. In fact, in a national assessment (The Writing Report Card, 1986), almost three of every five eighth graders did not think they were "good writers." Generally, as students move up from primary grades through high school, their attitudes toward writing and their views of their own performance gradually deteriorate (59).

Along with poor student attitude and self-concept goes poor achievement. We are all familiar with the distressingly inadequate writing reported in national and state writing assessments. At the lowest end of the spectrum, students whose writing was rated "unsatisfactory" ranged from ten percent to more than thirty percent, numbers that are probably reflected in classrooms across the country.

Instruction for such students becomes discouraging for teachers. Strategies that work for better students miss the mark. Soon teachers begin to wonder if the problem with the student who is "not that good of a writer" may be caused by a teacher who is "not that good of a teacher."

Teachers, too, need to experience success. Moffett (1985) pinpoints the difficulty for teachers of writing, citing the way teachers "wistfully put aside the exciting activities they have"

This study was partially funded by a grant from the Robert C. Poole Foundation of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English.
learned about" through summer institutes and other programs. "When the person, the funding, and the other special circumstances disappear, so does the exemplary activity, for nothing in the school organization or philosophy makes certain that it will endure" (52). Recently one teacher, obviously a classroom-scarred veteran, posed the difficulty succinctly. She listened impassively to an enthusiastic speaker at a writing workshop who quoted her students' array of outstanding poems willingly written. At the end the skeptical teacher got up with her friend and headed for the doorway. "It would have been better," she said, "if it hadn't all been so wonderful."

It's true that the recent focus on improving writing in the schools has provided teachers with an almost overwhelming choice of materials and ideas. Summarizing the mushrooming research on composition for the last two decades, Hillocks (1986) stresses the importance of moving from the lecture mode of instruction that prevails in schools today. He cites research favoring an environmental mode, characterized by clear and specific objectives, with materials and problems selected to engage students in a variety of activities. But merely hearing about such strategies won't help teachers. They need, he says, to learn the theories underlying them, discuss the strategies, develop their own materials for use in their own classrooms, try those strategies and materials, discuss the results with others, try them again, and cycle through the process again (250).

This study grew out of questions such as those suggested by Moffett, Hillocks, and our cynical teacher. How can teachers help those writers who are the least successful, those for whom a knowledgeable and understanding teacher is most critical? What strategies will best help these unskilled writers? How can teachers collaborate to support each other, finding the determination to try again and again when success is so elusive?

BEGINNINGS: AS TEACHERS SEE THE PROBLEMS

In the summer of 1987, six teachers were selected to take part in a collaborative study of poor writers in grades five through eight. The teachers were a representative sample: three were from the public schools of a large city, one from a suburban parochial school, and two from public schools in the nearby countryside. From their fall classes, teachers were to select three to five of their poorest writing students as subjects for the study. Thus we had two levels of subjects: the teachers, and the students with whom they would work.

Prior to the group's first meeting the six teachers responded to a questionnaire concerning their feelings about writing instruction. Describing the difficulties of their poor students, they pointed to lack of skills running the gamut from complex rhetorical concepts to the simplest mechanical skills. "Many of these students worry about ideas--they don't know what to write about," said one teacher. Others mentioned students' "lack of background information" on which to draw, their "narrow range of independent reading," and their "trouble getting ideas across to the reader." "It isn't easy to figure out what point they're trying to make," noted one teacher. Another said that the students lack an ability to "respond appropriately to the task--for example doing a narrative when the task was persuasive."

Students also lack fluency, having difficulty in "expanding ideas beyond" a few sentences. And, needless to say, inability to organize ideas or even paragraph their work was listed as a common failing.

Problems with syntax and mechanics were widely prevalent, too. Students "have no concept of a complete sentence." They make "many word-usage and grammatical errors," and have a "general weakness in vocabulary." Every teacher, to one degree or another, mentioned students' inability to cope with even basic spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. "These kids make so many mistakes in simple elementary skills that neither they nor I can tell what their words say," summarized one teacher. Severe cursive handwriting problems add to the difficulty.

All of the teachers, however, recognized that their students' difficulties went beyond just learning the steps of how to be "that good of a writer." Teachers were actually aware of the heavy burden of a poor self-concept. "Students who don't feel
good about the way they write become apathetic and don't attempt assignments." "They have a fear that what they say will not be good;" they have "no pride in their work, and are not willing to share their work orally." For such students, "writing is a chore, and there is little enthusiasm." "If they can't find a 'right' way to write, they choose to write nothing."

This lack of confidence carries over into higher-order thinking skills connected with writing. Students "worry about ideas; they don't know what to write about." Some have a "self-image so poor they cannot support even their own opinions in writing." They don't "rely on themselves for ideas," or have "trust in themselves that they are capable of accomplishing a written task." Such feelings bring about "reluctance to recognize that writing is worth working at, that it is a skill which needs to be practiced. This difficulty is, in itself, the root to the other listed above!"

Seeking help to cope with student problems, teachers report referring to resources from teachers' manuals and professional literature, or "trying some things from my resource file that worked before." They also go to other professionals in their schools: reading resource teachers, colleagues, supervisors, and other specialists. "Sometimes," confessed one teacher, "I just need a break."

Teachers also report on their frustration when they see few changes taking place. "It can be frustrating when I've been trying to teach something for an extended time and see the mistakes continue to appear." Another teacher confesses, "I come down a little hard on myself...and when other strategies don't work,...I lose enthusiasm." "Working with these students can be the ultimate frustration because there are so many things that need remediation...." As for the successes, one teacher admits that "the rewards are great when a student finally begins to apply something we have been working on." But another notes that "successes are minimal," and working with such students is "more physically, emotionally, and mentally draining."

LOOKING FOR ANSWERS

Group meetings of the six teachers and the Project Director began at the start of the 1987-88 school year, and continued during most of the first semester. Early meetings addressed teacher concerns listed above. For example, at one meeting a Language Arts Coordinator discussed use of the writing process in a workshop approach. At another, a Special Education professor talked about instructional and emotional strategies appropriate for poor achievers. The Project Director also provided resources and materials, helping to solve problems teachers raised.

Primarily however, meetings became forums for teacher sharing, discussion, and support. Teachers brought ideas that had worked for them, compared strategies and insights, and talked about their successes and failures.

Trying to understand their students better, teachers used a modified form of the Daly-Miller Apprehension Test (Daly and Miller, 1975), conducted personal interviews with students, and did at least one extensive case-study of a student. Student subjects completed writing tasks at the beginning of the study (September or early October) and again at the end (about the first of March), so that achievement could be measured. These papers were scored holistically by disinterested consultants.

At the end of the period, the six teachers once again completed anonymous questionnaires summarizing their thoughts and feelings about the project.

OUTCOMES AND IMPLICATIONS

TEACHERS: EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Our skeptical teacher would have felt more comfortable in group meetings of this project. Everything wasn't "all so wonderful." Student subjects didn't conform neatly by doing tasks enthusiastically in the manner their teachers wished. Teachers continued to feel frustrated; indeed, even at the project's end. One teacher expressed the view that was reinforced by the group: "I feel like we're just getting started!"

But at least teachers knew they were not alone. Talking and working with others who have similar problems lends support.
Probably the most clearly positive outcome of the study, voiced by all six teachers, was the collaboration with their peers. Each of them mentioned that and elaborated on their feelings.

"It is reassuring to hear that other teachers have similar problems," said one. It was good to know "that other teachers are successful with some ideas or students and not others, just as I am." Another cited "that emotional support" which comes from speaking "with others who were feeling the same frustrations from time to time as I did." Other teachers liked "the emotional support and empathy the group had for one another," the "realization that all teachers experience these feelings and frustrations," and the "strength in numbers." Apparently reflecting the whole groups' feeling, one teacher summed it up this way: "A teacher can easily take a student's learning weakness as a personal weakness. It is easy to feel defeated. You begin wondering if you have really tried everything to help the student."

On the other hand, teachers didn't only find comfort in sharing their misery. They also spoke of the enthusiasm generated by seeking solutions together, and realizing that one has to be content with small gains. "Coping skills used by others can be helpful," just as "exchanging ideas can create a new enthusiasm." One teacher felt, "It is refreshing to see the innovative and creative lessons teachers are using in the face of great adversity." Another found encouragement in the feeling that, "Yes, it can be done!" But she warned, "It would be foolish to believe you can walk away with all the answers, but you can leave with clues to point the way to creating success of your own."

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

In group discussions and on the final questionnaire teachers pin-pointed strategies that were more successful with these at risk writers:

1) Prewriting: "I have multiplied the prewriting time by at least five times;" "....setting the stage for writing;" "daily journals...;" "....more time on our prewriting experiences."

2) Individual conferences: "Individual conferences--if only for two minutes;" "Individual conferences...not necessarily formal or scheduled. Sometimes a nod, or a word or two will suffice;" "...a timely (figurative) pat on the shoulder."

3) Instructional focus: "Mini-lessons on skills, focusing on one or two areas that need correction...;" "...Extra attention to rewriting and editing;" "...some evaluation of their own and others' writing;" "...A focus on specifics" rather than trying to do everything at once.

4) Word processor/computer use: "Editing and revision became easier. Students felt better about their finished product;" "Handwriting problems disappeared;" "Students found some of their own spelling and punctuation mistakes;" "He doesn't get so bogged down in penmanship."

STUDENT ATTITUDES

From the outset, as we have seen, the six teachers in our study recognized the prime importance of getting students to see themselves as writers. They continued to consider this a major thrust, and sought ways to motivate students and build their self-confidence. Success came slowly, as it did in achievement. But there were gains.

One teacher wrote, "In at least three of the five student subjects I saw a much more positive attitude toward writing. One boy commented that he actually liked writing now... 'It actually makes sense!!' Another saw "improvement in their ability to help critique each other's work" and to accept evaluation of their own. Most of the students "showed an improved attitude toward creative writing," she reported. And, summarizing thoughts about the link between attitude and writing, a teacher wrote:

"Attitude...is particularly tied, I think, to growth in writing. The nature of the writing task is such a personal one that if a student doesn't feel very positive about himself, then he/she won't have a positive writing attitude either!

She gives an example of a boy,

very unsure of himself, and this is reflected in his writing. Only when he talked, and I assured him that others would be interested in what he had to say, did
he begin to relax about the writing task.

Teachers were cautiously optimistic, though. They noted that there was too little time during the period of the study for significant gains in attitudes that had been "building up for years," and that changes in willingness to write that may seem trivial in other studies were important in these reluctant writers. "Since the subjects were from the poorest students, it would take more time," a teacher stated. Another teacher, detecting a slight change of feeling in a student's final writing attitude survey, was encouraged at this beginning. He is "hinting, I think, that he sees value in writing...and just might realize that his writing is of worth." Like sixth-grader Jason, with whom we began, this student made a start in seeing himself as "that good of a writer."

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Comparisons of narrative writing by students early in the semester and about five months later show a definite gain in holistic scores. The data are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holistic Scores in Narrative Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Students</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>26</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Directions of change:</td>
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*Based upon narratives written using the picture from the "Fire" narrative of the 1984 Wisconsin Pupil Assessment Program Report (1985), or one of the pictures from the Mysteries of Harris Burdick (Van Allsburg, 1984).

The average student score improvement of nineteen point two percent is significant, particularly in light of the slight gains these students apparently made in previous years of schooling.

A direct cause-effect link to the present study may not be in order for the entire change, however. Several teachers reported a focus on narrative and expressive writing for the first semester. Also, the pictures which served as the prompts may not be comparable. Teachers reported that the Harris Burdick pictures, used primarily for the final student compositions, were highly motivating. Also, since all compositions were written in the schools under each teacher's directions, neither first nor final narratives could qualify as being done under tightly controlled conditions.

No comparison of expository writing was made, since available data from students was too fragmented to be scored with validity.

Conclusions

Not all of the three questions posed at the beginning of this study have clear-cut answers pointing out which path to take if we are to make "good writers" of our least capable students. What does seem clear, however, is that it's easy to get lost on the way, and give up trying to get there.

From the outset, the teachers in our study realized the fundamental need to bring about a change in their poorest students' negative attitudes about writing. Before teachers can move their students from apprehension and defeatism, they must experience the understanding and validation they seek for their students.

The major finding of the present study suggests that the best way for teachers to achieve this vital emotional support is through collaboration. Teachers working together can create the atmosphere and instructional repertoire needed for these anti-writing students.

But it takes time--another important point made by teachers in the study. It takes time for students to begin to see themselves as writers after years of negative feelings. It takes time to work on the many skills that such students seem to be missing. It takes time for their teachers to keep trying and to work together to help each other.
Teachers defined worthwhile instructional strategies as 1) prewriting activities; 2) frequent (often brief) individual conferences, 3) a clearer, more circumscribed focus on instruction; and 4) student use of word processors to aid in eliminating mechanical and graphic problems.

If we wish to improve the achievement and attitudes of our weakest upper elementary writers, we need to recognize that the problems of students and teachers are interrelated. Students who can be helped to see themselves as "that good of a writer" reflect teachers who see themselves as "that good of a teacher." The hardest part is to begin, together.

References


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USING COOPERATIVE LEARNING WITH DICKENS
Kery Kafka and Barbara Moran

During the '87-'88 school year, a ninth grade class of English Nine was team taught by an English teacher and the high school principal. The class enrollment consisted of thirty two heterogeneously grouped ninth grade students, ranging in ability from basic (have not passed reading competency) to advanced. The class was an experiment in team teaching, and was designed to use peer coaching, mastery teaching techniques, and to keep the principal actively involved in the realities of teaching at the high school level. Both teachers wanted to purposefully improve their teaching skills; to be learners as well as teachers. The curriculum for this class included units on the short story, poetry, novel, epic, and work on writing skills for a multiparagraph essay and business letter necessary for the competency test. The novel was Great Expectations. Prior to teaching Great Expectations, the concern over motivating ninth grade students from a multicultural urban background to enjoy reading Dickens was foremost in our minds.

After reading Glasser's Control Theory in the Classroom, and Johnson & Johnson's, Circle of Learning, the idea of using cooperative learning techniques to teach Great Expectations was very appealing. My previous experience of using the standard lecture and independent work model for teaching this novel had only a fifty percent student success rate.

Selecting on task behavior as the criterion for grouping students, we subjectively divided the class into nine groups. In each group, we tried to insure that there were students who were always on task, those who were sometimes on task, and students who needed a great deal of intervention to stay on task. Our initial hypothesis was that we needed to mix students from each subjective category so that they would learn to assist each other in the learning process. Three students were placed in each group, with two groups having four students.
Before we started the tasks involved in reading Great Expectations, we spent three days teaching students the skills of cooperative learning. These skills included, communicating, both verbal and non-verbal, developing trust, and solving problems. Students were encouraged to exchange home phone numbers so that communications and reinforcement of each other could take place outside of the class period.

The English text, Understanding Literature published by MacMillian, includes the condensed version of Great Expectations. The novel is divided into five sections.

Students in each group were responsible for the following:

One set of study questions per section done cooperatively and used on the section quiz. Only one set of study questions, with all the group members' names was collected.

One quiz per section that was done cooperatively, and again, handed in with everyone's name on it.

One character analysis per student developed cooperatively and used for the cast party.

One essay with a choice of three different topics was assigned. Students wrote the essays individually; however, prewriting took place in the group.

Each group had four days to accomplish the first section. As we progressed through the unit and the students became more skilled in cooperative learning, we tightened the time restraints.

The most difficult task was to foster the dependency of group members on each other. Because the students had been so thoroughly trained to function independently, some students wanted us to remove certain students from their group. Others wanted to leave the group with the attitude of "I can do this on my own." When the students found that a portion of their grades would be based on their group behaviors, they began to work on making their groups functional. The role of the teachers became the role of manager rather than lecturer. We moved around the class to each group daily and informally asked them questions about the readings. When a group faltered, we read a synopsis of the section to the group and encouraged the students to read for specific aspects of the plot. We served as mediators in problem solving with each group.

Students learned to help each other and came to believe the philosophy behind cooperative learning, i.e., "all of us are smarter than any one of us." Each student was given a check mark for staying on task, communicating with fellow group members, and working together. By the third section, the pressure to read and complete assignments came from the students, not from the teachers.

Students took the quiz as a group; however, those who were absent took it independently. This was a group decision because of the large absentee rate for the first quiz. Students were frequently heard questioning each other's absences. The attendance rate improved dramatically, especially on quiz days.

After each quiz, a class discussion took place. Teachers used objects as symbols for each character in the discussions. A "Cabbage Patch Doll" represented Pip as a child. A toy clock was Miss Havisham, a padlock was Joe, etc. This discussion provided association of the symbols to the characters helping students remember the multitude of characters.

Characterization was emphasized as we read the novel. Students were encouraged to look for character's motives. Charts with each character's name were permanently displayed around the room. When a group discovered a fact or motive, they wrote that information on the chart, so that groups were pooling information.

Each member of the group chose one character for the "Cast Party." Students had to bring a symbol of their character. The first part of the cast party was a verbal presentation of these symbols. The second part was an adapted game of Scruples, where moral questions were answered by students according to how they thought their character would respond. Also, the students explained why they felt their character would respond in a certain way.
As a result of using this cooperative structure, the students not only learned Great Expectations and gained an appreciation of Dickens, but also learned cooperative learning skills. The students were able to verbalize information about all the characters, analyze the plot lines, compare and contrast social conditions, and interpret dialogue according to relevant social issues. Ninety-five percent of the thirty-two students received a grade of C or better for this unit. Only two students who were chronically absent failed. The social growth and friendships that resulted were mentioned by students as one of the best things that happened and now want to do every class activity in this 'sink or swim together' method.

The teachers learned how to help students demonstrate responsibility for their own learning. We worked more with students as individuals within a small group setting than with students as one of thirty-two. This unit was more time consuming than traditional teaching because of the daily discussions about what was working and what wasn't. While we had the advantage of team teaching, this type of cooperative structure would yield the same benefits to a single teacher in a classroom.

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THE COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT
Mary Parido

After twelve weeks of experiencing the benefits of a student-centered, group-process writing class, I was loath, as the instructor, to lose all those advantages as we approached the obligatory research paper. I feared the students would resort to the hackneyed approaches to research, the cutting and pasting of copied sources, and that we would return the process to the academic exercise it had been previously. I wanted to fulfill the requirement and to continue the collaborative classroom atmosphere of the controlled-source assignments.

My solution, the collaborative research project, was suggested to me by Tom VanderVen of Indiana University-South Bend who assigned a common research topic in his composition class. The class in question was a college freshman composition class (W131) taught at Greenfield-Central High School where the students receive dual credit under the auspices of the Advance College Project of Indiana University. I decided to take the idea a few steps further by encouraging the students to arrive at the topic for their collaborative research. Collaboration in generating the topic would increase student learning in skills of examining a topic for workability and interest. Students will also learn to hone a general into a thoughtfully shaped approach. I also wanted to incorporate and reinforce all the steps of the writing process from invention to publication in the final activity of the semester. The following is a review of the activities occurring in the classroom as we proceed through those steps in the collaborative research project.

The project requires five to six weeks with approximately one week per stage. Because the class is taught at the high school level, we meet for one hour, five days a week. With the exception of the first week of invention, which is spent in whole-group discussion, each week consisted of four days of individual or small-group work and one day, usually Friday, of whole-group discussion of progress and particular problems. The
pace, although somewhat pressured, ensures that students do not
get too bogged down in any one stage because they have regular
and unrelenting intermediate deadlines.

INVENTION

The first week is spent in the invention stage. This stage
along with the publication stage are the two most satisfying to
me as the instructor. In these weeks I am able to observe more
clearly the learning that occurs in group-and student-centered
classrooms. These two stages in the more traditional approach to
the research paper are the lonely struggle of the student to
prepare a thesis statement and, on the other end, the isolated
responsibility of the teacher to evaluate the result. Sharing
these stages lifts a terrific burden from both.

On the first day students are asked to simply suggest as many
possible topics as they can. I try to fill eight feet of
blackboard with ideas of to have a least one topic per student in
the class. After the well-worn topics of drugs, abortion, rock
music, and anorexia go up, students really begin to strain to
fill the board. This stretch, however, produces many ideas which
provide from personal interests. I remind students that this is the
"open end of the funnel" and that any topic not suggested
today does not have a chance later. At the end of the suggestion
session, I assign one topic to each student. They are to list as
many sub-topics as they can for their assigned topic and to
identify possible sources of information. Each student is to
report to the class the next day.

The second day begins with these reports and some discussion of
each list. After hearing the lists, usually from fifteen to
twenty of them, I ask the students to vote for five of the topics
with a show of hands. The list of twenty is then narrowed to
five. Each of the five is assigned to a group of students. The
third day is given to small-group discussion of these five
topics. The group's assignment is to argue for the election of
their particular topic based on the information which they
provide to the class. They are asked to generate lists of sub-
topics, to identify the availability of standard and alternative
research sources and to argue for the topic on the basis of
interest and worth.

The fourth hour/day is used for these group reports and for
further discussion of the various advantages and disadvantages of
each topic. As the students see the field narrowing, discussion
often becomes quite impassioned. They leave the hour knowing
that they must vote on the topic the next day. I hear that some
campaigning goes on in the intervening twenty-four hours;
coalitions are formed, and I'm not sure I want to know just what
kinds of deals are made. I'm delighted, however, that the
students are involved and concerned enough with the topic that
discussion continues after the bell. One of the best learning
outcomes is that students begin to see the cross-reference
possibilities. One student who campaigned ardently for "popular
music" was won over to the "religion" party. The result was an
excellent paper on the influence of Rastafarianism on Reggae. I
have always experienced problems in getting students to open up a
topic and to see the diverse possibilities; in the collaborative
process, competition and self-interest are great enablers.

The week climaxes with the vote. Students are seldom absent
that day. The vote takes place by paper ballots to allow
students to vote as they see fit without undue peer pressure or
recrimination. The remainder of the hour is used to shape the
statement of the topic and to establish its parameters. Examples
of past topics are "Religion as an Influence on Everyday Life,"
"To Eat or Not to Eat: The High Cost of Being Thin" and "Sexual
Images and Issues."

RESEARCH AND DRAFTING

The second week is the only week devoted wholly to research.
Students seem to be much more adept in using the Reader's Guide,
card files and other indexes because they have been generating
and hearing lists of cross-reference ideas the entire first week.
Friday of the second week is a discussion session of identified
sources and particular gaps in information. The assignment for
the following Monday is an introductory paragraph which includes
the thesis statement for their individual papers. Students who
wish to work with the same sub-topic are encouraged to
differentiate their papers through their thesis statements.

The class time of the third week is given to the writing of the
first draft which is to be turned in on Friday of that week. I
require this for several reasons. First, if the students know I
will see it, they are more likely to finish the draft. Second,
I allow me to know which students are in serious trouble and
require some concentrated attention. Third, it ensures that the
fourth week, reserved for revision, will be successful with each
student participating.

The fourth week is used for revision. The students have a
revision sheet or guide, and they are asked to evaluate and
comment on at least three other students' work. Again, this
interaction facilitates discussion of the topic, provides models
for some of the students who are having trouble and contributes
to the development of each paper. The students are asked to have
the second draft ready for editing by Monday of the fifth week.

PUBLICATION

On Monday of the fifth week I review the particulars of
documentation and the list of works cited. I have asked them to
place an asterisk at points of documentation in previous drafts.
Although it may seem late to add this material, I find it helpful
because it necessitates a third draft. Students are required to
type the final draft. The students have from the beginning
of the project that their collected papers will be published in a
spiral-bound, photo-copied book. I remind them that the papers
will be published as I receive them. I believe this encourages
the students to take more responsibility for the finished
product. After two days of collaborative editing, we use the
remainder of the week to arrange the order of the papers for
publication, discussing the various possible arrangements and the
reasons for each. We settle on the arrangement as a group. The
papers are due in final draft on Monday of the sixth week.

The pressure shifts to the instructor here, but I have been so
pleased with the papers turned in that I actually enjoy reading
them. Because I do not mark on the final copy, I can read them
and respond on a separate sheet. Of course, this is not my first
interaction with the papers. I have been involved throughout the
process on an individual and group level. Comments and analysis
I have offered have aided the entire group, not just those
students who might have sought help. I really feel involved in
the topic and spend time tracking down sources or thinking of new
approaches as the students do. Because I have paced the students
throughout the process, questions and problems of similar ilk
arise at the same time. I am much fresher to the problem at hand
and much less weary of repetition. To ready the papers for
publication I type a cover page, a table of contents, and I
number the pages. The duplication is accomplished at a quick-
print office within two business days. The students pay for the
photo-copying and binding of their books; the cost has ranged
from $5.50 for fourteen papers to $9.60 for twenty-five.

The students are as delighted with the heft of the finished
product as I am. It is a tangible reminder of their involvement
in pleasant and productive collaboration. I honestly can look
forward to the last six weeks of the semester and the
collaborative research project.

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The Writing Lab Newsletter is an informal monthly publication for
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ACCOUNTABILITY IN SMALL-GROUP WORK: THE "RESPONSE SHEET"

James Beck

One of the fascinating tasks-and-opportunities for the teacher of writing today is how to actually implement the exciting new theories of the "new composition." One goal now is to involve students in more responsibility for their writing and to give them experience in judgment-making, not just blindly following formulae. One method is to increase "interaction" during the writing process. Though writing boils down to a solitary mind grappling with ideas and language in solo fashion, writing is better learned with the support of interaction.

This increasingly means small-group work, or peer-critique of developing manuscripts. Much is being written about small-group work, but surely two problems remain. How to make comments useful to the budding authors? And how to keep those comments (and the entire group session) on track and relevant? My own college freshmen tend to say, "Well, I liked your piece" (or: well, "vary your sentence structure"--mechanically), and then spend the rest of the time discussing weekend plans, sports, the weather. . . .

A ploy I originally conceived in desperation, but which matured into usefulness, is the "response-sheet." This means that I have the student-responders put their comments in writing, on a worksheet which the author takes away for reference, then hands in with the finished paper. Merely having to write down comments helps to add focus. But also, the response-sheet is not a mere mechanical ten-point checklist, but asks for critical thinking and judgment.

As for actual procedure: my students break into small groups (about three members) to critique emerging drafts of major papers. They read each others' papers silently, not out loud--this by their choice. My students claim they feel that silent reading by the audience tests the paper more; a writer reading the paper can sometimes make things clear, by tone of voice, which would not be clear to a solo, distant reader. Then the readers place their comments on the response worksheet which I distribute, signing their names, too. Of course they then confer with the writer orally (and can also mark in the draft's margins)--but the response-sheet insures that the commentary is fixed on the page, not evanescent in oral conference. My original motivation for the response-sheet was a nose-to-the-grindstone one: to make comments (A) more effective (not just "I like it"), and also (B) more relevant (not just gossip about school affairs). I can tell by inspecting the worksheets, who's been reading and responding carefully--and who's just been sliding through. But an unexpected (though actually rather logical and obvious) benefit for the student was as a memory-aid. "You can't remember all the comments all the people made in the group," noted Jeanne, "and so having them on the sheet before you when you rewrite, is a help."

But what kinds of comments do the students write? I ask them to put down basically "good and bad points" about the emerging paper--orchids and onions, as it were. But that's not all. I try to fashion or shape their responses so as to teach critical judgment, not just mechanical checklisting. Writing and reading, after all, are matters of decision-making and estimations. True, punctuation and spelling are either right or wrong; but then, is the tone of this letter of protest to Gas Hut customers too harsh or not? Should, or must, there be more supporting examples--or not--to prove the case of motel inefficiency? Might more parallelism be used to link the advantages of the metric system?

A basic issue in response-sheet design is whether a teacher specifies, or gives in advance, the points that students are to respond to or instead leave it up to the responders to decide which writing skills are important to comment on.

I tend, as soon as possible in the course, toward the latter procedure of having the student responders themselves decide which skills to comment upon. This is in line with the view that writing is less a mechanical recipe-following, than a process in which each individual paper organically presents its own problems.
and potentialities. I also believe that true education involves not simply the lower-level ability to apply a skill when the teacher instructs to do so ("look for specific detailing"), but the higher-level skill of being able to recognize the relevancy of concepts on one's own, without being told (to sense that detailing was good, or sub-standard--autonomously).

Not that many of my students wouldn't love to have me hand them a handy checklist they could whip through and be done with it. But we resist as much as possible. Admittedly, three occasions when a pre-set checklist is useful are (1) at the start of the course, when students are still getting their feet wet in the autonomy and responsibility which my way of teaching writing does stress; (2) when a particular paper-assignment is stressing a particular skill (e.g., audience-relating, or coherence and emphasis); and (3) when a particular class is, frankly, so unruly or sluggish as to require that I apply the whip of the checklist instead of the carrot of the open-form response-sheets.

But even with a pre-set checklist of skills to comment upon, I find I can still foster independent judgment from the respondents. I do this by allowing (and requiring) them to differentiate between for-sure good and bad points, and probable orchids and onions. Sometimes the sentence structure is for certain too choppy, the examples certainly too skimpy (or, too elaborated)--but at other times, we can't really know for sure that it's just the right tone, amount of detailing, degree of structure. It's a judgment-call; and students had better begin to encounter decision making amid situations of "it-depends" complexities.

I ask students to make judgments here by instructing them to underline those writing skills they mention which seem for-certain bad, or good--and to (place in parentheses) their comments which are estimating, judgment-calls as to good or bad. For instance, the respondents will take a stand thus: "Your specifics about the wreck are just plain insufficient--need more imagery and analogy to make the reader see it." Or in murkier cases: ("Are your specifics about the wreck excessive--

could you cut out the mere description and put in more about the bystanders' reactions?"") This ploy asks readers to take a stand, or at least a "vote," as to whether it's a for-sure, or a probable, bad and good point in the writing. Quite unsettling at first in class of course, this ploy eventually becomes easy for budding responders to work with.

A variant, also to teach complex judgment in reading, is to have responders use the words MUST, SHOULD, and MIGHT in their suggestions for improvement. This helps them make a judgment between egregious errors which must absolutely be corrected for the writing to be minimally effective, and on the other hand options, mere possibilities-for-improvement which the writer can accept, or not. Examples: "Your tone to the Gas Hut customers is much too crude, you MUST relate to them better or I for one would just drive out." And: "your sentences about the advantages of the metric system seem a bit choppy; you probably SHOULD vary the sentence structure unless you want this hammering effect?" And again: "MIGHT you bring in some expert testimony about the advantages of vegetarianism, besides just your personal experience?" This options-ploy seems to help reinforce the fact--over weeks of the semester--that writing is not a true-false, correct-wrong activity, but one involving judgments and degrees and estimations, depending on (A) situation--audience and purpose (class paper? letter to editor? journal entry?) and (B) taste (amount of detailing preferred; harshness of tone tolerated), let alone (C) stylistic options (can use more, or less parallelism; can use formal or informal tone; etc.).

After small-group work, the writers take along the response-sheet with the comments of the two readers, and hand in the sheets with their final drafts. But not before they've added a final comment. In the right-hand column of the paper, the "writer's response" section asks them to comment upon the suggestions the readers made, to agree and accept, or reject and not use. I stress that the writer is in charge of his or her own paper, and need not accept wholesale the directives of peers (which many writers tend to do, due to combinations of inertial
plus dutifulness). That is, typical comments here would be "AGREE that I need more detailing to prove the shoddiness of the motel rooms," but also "DISAGREE that my tone was too harsh--I feel these people won't listen until they're told off.'"

One more attempt to infuse into writing teaching today, the active involvement, initiative, accountability, and judgment and decision-making which seem so much a part of both true writing, and also real education, as against rote instruction.

RESPONSE-SHEET FOR SMALL-GROUP COMPOSITION WORK

| Title of Paper: | RESPONSING TO THE WRITING. State "orchids and onions" (good and bad points) about the paper. Referring specifically to writing concepts and skills studied in the course. Can underline "for-sure" good, or bad, comments; can (put in parentheses) "judgment-call" evaluations. Relatedly, can use words MUST, SHOULD, MIGHT OR COULD to indicate "must-improve" to be minimally good--vs. "an option to consider using" in paper. |
| Author's Name: |  |
| RESPONSING TO THE RESPONSES: (Accept the criticism--agree, and will solve the problem--how? Accept partially? Disagree--reject the criticism, why?) |

Name of Respondent #1:  
responses:  

Name of Respondent #2:  
responses:  

(Instructor's comments on the responses:)

James Beck  
UW-Whitewater


Jerald Hauser

"Alexander Mikhailovich, are you still with us?" At that moment, Alex is in grave peril because he is hiding a seditious book in a folder at his desk and his history teacher is suspicious. The book is really an ancient chronicle discovered by Alex in a tangle of rural undergrowth near a deserted sanitarium. These log entries, recorded long ago in a different America will mean the end of a comfortable and regulated life for Alex.

In Peter Wudynka's first novel, **The Past Is Another Country**, Alex is a "Russasamy," part Russian, part American. Having received a scholarship to attend Moscow University will make him more completely Russian. In Soviet America near the end of the 21st century, "there was no point in being anything else." Alex feels very good because he will go overseas (from Charleston SC) with Martina Antipova, his classmate and a superbly conditioned athlete, whose thighs, flexing tendons, and other physical assets fascinate him.

But the intriguing chronicles written long ago by a priest begin to inhale Alex into their account of a nation betrayed and enslaved. A great peace movement involving America and Russia is described. The two super powers finally agree on unilateral disarmament. But then Russia stages a preemptive nuclear strike on New York City, and the city, so sensuously described in the chronicles, becomes radiated rubble.

But how can that be? There is no city called New York! There never has been...has there? Questions breed more questions causing Alex to undertake an extensive search of the people's DAL computer system (Direct Access Library). For many weeks, and secretly, he searches the gigantic system's data base for words and references contained in the chronicles. "When was New York City?" "Who was Jesus Christ?" "What is a priest?" But the information system yields nothing. "There are 0 titles on this subject," prints the terminal.

But there is something that Alex doesn't know. The DAL system has been storing all of his disloyal questions and the state authorities have been alerted, including his father. Finally Alex is arrested, "hospitalized," and reeducated. His scholarship is rescinded, his parents are humiliated, and Martina Antipova deserts him. Yet even after torture, followed by ideological reformation, Alex clings to the insidious conviction that another kind of America once existed. He cannot stop searching...and thinking.

He searches the city and countryside and gradually clues reveal themselves. Then occurs an unanticipated meeting with Corinne, who was once their family housekeeper. She is a black woman and knows what Alex is seeking. They journey by boat to the last human remnants...of that other America.
The novel abounds with impressive merits. Wludyka's prose is sharp and sensuous. Of a fat girl in a jumpsuit, he writes: "Its zipper swerved down her stomach as if it were a dangerous mountain road. Or consider the visualness of, "I prayed until the sun sliced through the dawn haze, opening the sky as if it were the rim of a wet melon." I frequently, and with pleasure, noted his language power on almost every page.

Alex is whole and complicated with self-doubts, sexual urges and believable motives. He is a compellingly introspective adolescent in turmoil—the victim of tormenting forces at work in his soul. His conflict is which truth system to accept; that defined by his contemporary culture, which is totalitarian (but how can he know that?), or to accommodate his nagging doubts and begin to investigate another truth system in the distant past morally and intellectually superior to his own society. Alex cannot escape his own virtue and curiosity and that becomes a major source of suspense for the fortunate reader.

The Past Is Another Country deserves the attention of educated readers. It ought to have special appeal to English, History, and Social Science educators. It is an excellently crafted first novel with social, political, philosophical, religious, and historical surfaces and merits the thinking responses of well-read persons. The novel is not derived from other grim-future novel subgenres (in case certain review descriptions call forth memories of 1984, Brave New World, or similar recollections). It is a novel that will lure readers into its own unique natures of character, plot, and prose virtuosity. 

Jerald Hauser  
St. Norbert College, De Pere, WI

BOOKS FROM NCTE

MAKING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING WORK: EXPERIENCED TEACHERS OFFER STRAIGHT TALK

Leading theorists and outstanding teachers agree: collaborative methods of teaching greatly enhance students' involvement with learning. But many teachers are unwilling to risk breaking with the tradition of teacher control. In Focus on Collaborative Learning: Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1988, twenty-seven teachers who have been successful in directing collaborative learning in the English language arts offer their colleagues encouragement and practical advice.

Their first commandment: Don't just plunge in. Prepare your class and your students. Seven teachers tell how they learned through study, trial and error to risk breaking with the tradition of teacher control. "Students won't learn good group skills without specific, structured instruction and training," writes Dana Hennessey, professor of Newark High School, Ohio. She and other contributors explain how they taught their students to behave constructively in small-group work, peer tutoring sessions, and other cooperative ventures.

Developing sound collaborative approaches takes time, patience, and a willingness to trouble-shoot and try alternatives, says Richard Whitworth of Ball State University. B. Kathleen Booker of Old Dominion University recommends staging debriefing sessions to help students understand what—and how—they have learned through group work.

Further essays are arranged in sections titled "Collaborative Learning and Literature Study," "Collaboration in Writing, Revising, and Editing," and "Additional Collaborative Learning Activities." Much of the practical information offered by these teachers of English can be applied to the teaching of history, science, and other subjects.

Jeff Golub of Shorecrest High School, Seattle, who edited the volume, points out that collaborative learning is built on student talk—a startling notion to many adults and students conditioned to equate learning with silent classrooms. The teacher-authors champion classroom collaboration not just as a way to get students to take responsibility for their learning but also as preparation for leading constructive lives in a democracy. "Because our government is not a dictatorship, every decision made in our society that is not a personal decision is made by a group," Herremann observes. Learning to fulfill the roles of group member and group leader — "listening, responding, agreeing, disagreeing, clarifying, and making procedural statements" — is as basic to education as reading and writing. Specific essays throughout the book deal with topics such as: group library research and oral reporting, group papers talking about books, evaluating group work, partnerships in the writing process, ways to monitor individual progress and ensure success in peer revision groups, and grading collaborative work.

(Available from NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.)

YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE


In this book the family is funny, loving and caring. They have five children: Adine age ten, Bernice age eight, Carla age seven, Dot age four, and Effie age two. After having five girls all the Vorlofs are expecting a sixth girl. When Mrs. Vorlob goes to the hospital, smelly old cigarette loving Aunt Irene comes to visit and the life is miserable because she dislikes her Aunt, but finally is happy in the end when the baby is a boy, and Aunt Irene convinces everyone the baby's name should be Zachary, Adine's favorite boy name. The adventures the girls experience while their Mom is away will make you laugh. Even the aunt's antics are hilarious when she's trying to amuse the smaller girls. This is a wonderfully uplifting book to read when it seems everything in your life is going wrong.

Jennifer Balloni, 6th Grade, Fort Collins, CO
Scatter Patch, Pennsylvania, a company coal mining town at the turn-of-the-century, is a grim and gloomy place to live. Pat McFarlane grew up in the hard, gray surroundings of this coal mining region. He waited impatiently for the opportunity to begin working, even though his mother wanted a better life for her children, but never imagined that his first day in the breaker, a cold November day in 1901, would be in the aftermath of a mine collapse that claimed his father's life. The society found in Scatter Patch reflects the life-style of a depressing segment in American history. Child labor, natural resources under the firm grasp of railroad magnates, and the economic abuse of immigrants are among the turn-of-the-century social issues touched upon in Breaker.

The novel, filled with rewarding examples of figurative language, imagery, description, and dialogue, will provide an excellent opportunity for a classroom discussion of literary elements, but also is capable of stimulating a history or social studies discussion on the concepts of big business and the labor movement during the opening years of the 20th century. Pat, Cal, and their mother choose very different ways in which to deal with their difficulties and through those choices readers will find an example of the positive possibilities that may arise from demanding fears and challenges. Readers at junior high and high school levels will not find much light entertainment in Breaker, but they are sure to discover a important era of American history through the eyes of an interesting character and the words of a gifted writer.

Danette Olsen, Student, University of Wisconsin-River Falls


Morgan is devastated when Jimmy is killed in an auto accident. They had been inseparable friends since early childhood. And their friendship is special, interdependent. Morgan learns, however, how dependent she has been on Jimmy's upbeat nature to deal with difficult situations.

This novel offers three expressive visions. The friendship between these two teenagers is engaging; Jimmy's fun-loving, excitable nature is balanced by Morgan's reserve. It is an all-too-rare portrait of male/female friendship without romance. Dealing with grief and finding the will to retool her life is the second focus; beginning to establish an individual identity is the third. Readers confront these difficult feelings honestly and sensitively; we feel Morgan's loss and turmoil. She suffers and learns to adjust; the reader learns, too.

Nicholas J. Karolides, University of Wisconsin-River Falls


Something has happened to Mac. His life has turned sour. He has turned sour: cynical, ill-humored, neglectful of academics, avoiding his friends—even Jenny. His relationship with Jenny had taken its first tentative but quite pleasant steps. Mac's shifting moods, his distance, trouble his parents. His quarrels with his friends, his failing grades, his rudeness to teachers create enough alarm to get counseling help. He needs it: he's been sexually assualted by a doctor. The book traces Mac's struggle with denial, with guilt and fear about his identity. While not deeply graphic, enough is written to express the pain. The counselor, serving as the author's mouthpiece, clearly expresses his victimization and the need for understanding and support.

Nicholas J. Karolides, University of Wisconsin-River Falls

NEW PROCESS WRITING SERIES TO AIR ON SCHOOL RADIO SERVICE

High above the ground in a century-old oak tree, middle school students are busy creating their own weekly magazine in a new classroom radio series on the process approach to writing. "Treehouse Publications: An Introduction to Process Writing" and a companion inservice series for teachers have been developed by Education Services of the Wisconsin Public Radio and Television Networks. They will air on the Network's School Radio Service, available to schools by subscription, beginning in February.

"Treehouse Publications" is geared to students in grades 4-6. It draws on research of the past decade, in which educators have examined the nature of writing and its teaching and learning by studying what writers do when they write and translating those observations into classroom writing instruction with a process orientation.

The first of twelve 15-minute programs, "The Assignment," establishes respect for children's interests, intelligence and integrity, and discusses what children want to read and write about. In "Tell Me Why," students learn that writing takes on new meaning when it's done with a real purpose and a real audience in mind. Subsequent programs include topics such as keeping a journal, preparing to write, gathering information, the first draft, the mechanics of writing, peer and adult review, making revisions, and writers' markets.

"The Process Approach to Writing: A Workshop for Teachers" is designed to help teachers shift from the old "assign-and-grade" method to a more student-centered, process-oriented approach to teaching of writing. In this series of twelve 15-minute programs, teachers will follow a colleague through the initial steps of learning to write and then the teaching of those skills to students.
The decision to produce a new writing course emerged from Education Services' 1987 triennial statewide survey of public school teachers, conducted to determine their needs for new instructional radio and television materials. The new student series replaces "The Author Is You."

"Treehouse Publications" will air Tuesdays at 9 a.m. beginning February 1 and Fridays at 9 a.m. beginning February 24. "The Process Approach to Writing" will air Fridays at 8:30 a.m. beginning February 3.

To receive these series and other programming transmitted by the School Radio Service, schools must use a special receiver, which is included in the cost of a annual subscription fee of $35 for members of regional service units and $50 for non-members. For further information, contact your regional service unit or Ronald Unmacht, director of instructional programming, at 608/273-5824.

LAJM
THE LANGUAGE ARTS JOURNAL OF MICHIGAN
CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS--FOCUS ON TEACHING LANGUAGE

The Fall 1989 issue of LAJM, will focus on teaching language in the English/language classroom. The editors are interested in articles, review essays, and bibliographies which describe imaginative and effective ways to teach language study. Since research has demonstrated that grammar drill and piecemeal exercises in mechanics are ineffectual and often counterproductive in teaching writing, what should be the role of "grammar" in the English classroom? What should we teach about the ways the English language works and how might we teach it? How should we deal with dialect, usage, sentence structure, style? How should we deal with issues of stylistic variation, biased language, and doublespeak? What is the relationship of language study of literature and composition? Deadline for submissions will be September 1, 1989.

Manuscripts should be 4-12 pages in length, double-spaced, and use MLA style for parenthetical documentation and the NCTE Guidelines for Non-Sexist Use of Language. Send one original and two copies to either: Robert Root or John Dinan, LAJM Editors, Department of English, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48859. If you wish your original returned, please include a self-addressed envelope with first-class postage. All manuscripts will be acknowledged. The deadline for the Spring 1989 non-thematic issue will be February 15, 1989.

CELEBRATE LANGUAGE ARTS
WCTE CONVENTION
APRIL 14 AND 15, 1989

Plans are well under way for the 1989 WCTE Convention, "Encompassing the World of Language Arts." This year's meeting will take place at the Stevens Point Holiday Inn and Holdom on Friday, April 14, and Saturday, April 15, 1989. Major speakers already scheduled include Dr. Julie M. Jensen, current NCTE president and professor of curriculum and instruction at the University of Texas at Austin, Gordon Korman, writing prodigy of best selling young adult literature and Dr. Roslyn M. Arnold, senior lecturer in education from the School of Teaching and Curriculum Studies, University of Sydney, Australia.

Textbook publishers will be represented at an Exhibit Browse. An Idea Exchange has been organized. Sectionals to spark interest and dialogue are being coordinated.

As a special treat convention participants are invited to a performance by Brenda Currin, film and stage actress who will present a one woman show of the lives and times of Eudora Welty, in Sister & Miss Lexie. Fascinating characters from Miss Welty's "Losing Battles," "The Robber Bridegroom" and "Why I Live at the P.O." will be recreated by Miss Currin on the stage of the Sentry Theater at the world headquarters of Sentry Insurance.

In addition the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point will host their annual Rites of Writing on Wednesday and Thursday, April 12 and 13, 1989. By coordinating schedules to accommodate both events convention attenders will truly experience a festival celebrating language arts.
February

Our winter is earnest this month:  
Days hard and dark, trees brittle,  
Iron nights, freeze driving  
sharp spikes down.

To dwell on Spring in these heavy decades  
is furtive, rich subversion.

So cabin fever drives me out, door and vacant;  
Felt-booted, coated and capped,  
I prowl the swamp  
For the bright moon’s sake, and the goldenrod shadows  
with hoarfrost lightpoints, crunch and squeal.

This mud, soft and melodious in Summer,  
Now stone-hard down for four feet or more,  
and dry as that winter’s bones.

Then, in a breath of cold and dry,  
a whiff of difference:  
mist and old and new.

Ralph Schneider  
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire