Submission Guidelines

◆ Send two copies of each manuscript, typed and double-spaced throughout (including quotations, endnotes, and references), with one-inch margins (see address on page 42).

OR
Submit your manuscript electronically to the co-editors, Ruth Wood (Ruthann.P.Wood@uwrf.edu) and the Anne D’Antonio Stinson (stinsona@mail.uww.edu); a WordPerfect attachment is preferred.

◆ Provide a statement guaranteeing that the manuscript has not been published or submitted elsewhere.

◆ Ensure that the manuscript conforms to the Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications.

◆ Follow MLA format throughout.

The name, address, school affiliation, telephone number, and e-mail of the author should appear on the title page only, not on the manuscript. If the manuscript is accepted, the author will need to provide a disk copy of the manuscript in WordPerfect.

Selecting Reading Materials for the Classroom (Fall 2000)
Deadline: September 15, 2000

The Writing Classroom (Spring 2001)
Deadline: February 15, 2001

Co-Editor
Ruth Wood
University of Wisconsin-River Falls

Anne D’Antonio Stinson
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Production Editor
Kim Baus
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

Printing
Eagles Printing Co.
Eau Claire, WI 715/835-6631

Editors’ Note

Dear WCTELA Journal Subscribers,

This spring we hope you’ll find to be a stimulating issue. From the off-site program for secondary school curricula (Julie Monson and Marlin) to finding ways to teach writing (Michael and Prushie) and using writing to assess student achievement (Michael and Prushie), this issue contains articles that discuss innovative ideas for teaching and learning.

We hope you will enjoy this issue and gain valuable insight from what our authors have to say about teaching and researching language and literacy.

The Fall 2000 issue features guest editor Mike Prushie’s call for articles on the theme of “Students as Participants in Reading and Writing.” If you are interested in sharing your work on this topic, please contact Mike at prushie@uwrf.edu or Mike@uww.edu.

The Spring 2001 issue will feature articles on the theme of “Writing in the Classroom.” If you are interested in sharing your work on this topic, please contact Kim Baus at kimbaus@uwrf.edu or Kim@uww.edu.

Direct questions to the editors, Ruth Wood at UW-River Falls, WI 53062; or Anne D’Antonio Stinson at UW-Whitewater, WI 53191.

Deadline for submissions is September 15, 2000.

Best wishes for a stimulating and productive spring!

Ruth Wood
Anne D’Antonio Stinson
Editors’ Note

Dear WCTELA Journal Readers:

This spring’s issue of the Wisconsin English Journal features what we hope you’ll find to be some very interesting articles on different ways to deal with exceptional learners. The strategies covered range from setting up a special off-site program for students who are struggling with regular high school curricula (Julie Monroe) and planning “Differentiated Instruction” (Ormsby, et al.) to finding ways to reduce the risk factors for “at-risk” students (Pfundheller and Prushieck) and using an autobiography project that virtually every student can succeed with (Margaret Hua). Liz DeBeer offers in her article subtitled “What Every Writing Teacher Needs to Know,” a compendium of information and commentary on legal issues and responsibilities connected to the teaching of students with learning disabilities, and Nick Karolides has reviews of two novels of interest to special needs students.

We hope you’ll enjoy the range of offerings and gain inspiration and insight from what our fellow language arts teachers have learned from their teaching and research.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Fall 2000

The Fall 2000 issue of the Wisconsin English Journal will feature articles that discuss the ways in which we language arts teachers select appropriate reading materials for our students. What criteria do you use for selecting reading materials that your students enjoy reading and you feel good about teaching? What are some of the most wonderful “finds” you’ve made and how did you make them? How do you engage students in the process of selecting? How do you use your school librarians, parents, and the Internet as assistants? How do you know when you’ve found the perfect reading material for your students?

Articles on these and related questions may be submitted to Ruth Wood at UW-River Falls, Department of English, 410 South 3rd Street, River Falls, WI 54022; fax 715-425-0657; email: Ruthann.P.Wood@uwrf.edu.

Direct questions to the same addresses. If your article is accepted for publication, you will be asked to submit a disk in Word or WordPerfect along with a final edited hard copy.

Spring 2001

The Spring 2001 issue of the Wisconsin English Journal will focus on the writing classroom. We intend to publish discussions of writing approaches, assignments, and strategies that result in the best writing by students. In your articles, you might discuss the stages of preparation, from creating the assignment, to selecting topics, to managing the phases of the writing, revising, and editing, to reading and responding to final products. If you’d like to submit samples of student writing (not more than two per article) that resulted from these practices, please do so—but be sure to get permission from the students and parents to have these papers published in this journal. We can’t guarantee that we’ll publish samples with every article, but we’ll do our best to include some outstanding student work.

Ruth Wood, Co-Editor
Anne D’Antonio Stinson, Co-Editor

WE NEED AND WANT YOUR HELP
The Milwaukee 2000 Leadership Team is looking for individuals who are interested in serving as committee chairpersons and committee members. Those of you who are interested in donating your time and talent should contact Pam Schoen at pam@rjssoft.com.

FREE REGISTRATION! Donate four hours of your time and receive free Milwaukee 2000 conference registration ($105.00 value for NCTE members, $145.00 value for non-members).

Authentication

James

It seems that the graciousness of this is the only way, but this is what we have.

A youth center at General's is in high need of washers, in partnership with the Wisconsin University System Development (WUSD), a youth activist.

This individual in the WUSD was called to create a manufacturing youth application to 1000 people who could supply graphics, an example, a University of Wisconsin develop center, and a document alternative to the educator who wants to create.

The student work can be years of his education for the parent/guardian with a teacher, attending high school, and graduating. Some of these students are in a training center for a local program for the community.

General

Their pay is set by the company determined by the amount pay included is what is needed. Students who are the assurance of their diploma and are in the process of receiving it from the State of Wisconsin.
Authentic Curriculum

Julie Monroe, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

It seems unlikely that at-risk high school students would greet people with the graciousness, politeness, and self-confidence of experienced professionals, but this is what is happening in Jefferson, Wisconsin.

A youth apprenticeship program serving at-risk students is in its fourth year at Generac Portable Products, a manufacturer of generators and pressure washers, in rural Southern Wisconsin. This non-traditional program is a partnership between Generac Portable Products, the Watertown Unified School District (WUSD), and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

This innovative collaboration was sparked at a community meeting when WUSD was exploring ways to educate at-risk students. Generac had purchased a manufacturing plant in the area and offered their facility as a training ground for youth apprentices. This vertically integrated company employs approximately 1000 people in positions such as assembly, welding, shipping, engineering, graphics, and marketing. They also have a facility in Manchester, England. The University of Wisconsin-Whitewater joined the effort to offer program support, develop curricular materials, research other youth apprenticeship programs, document the program, and use this site to expose practicum students to alternative education. A graduate assistant is assigned to assist the on-site educator with planning and daily activities.

The students participating must be sixteen years old, have completed two years of high school, have the desire to work full-time, and, along with their parent/guardian, make a commitment to the program. These students have had attendance problems and large credit deficiencies, and they are at-risk of not graduating from high school. A traditional school setting proved ineffective for these students, so the classroom portion of the program is referred to as the training center, and the students themselves as apprentices. Presently, the program has nine students, but could accommodate up to twenty.

Generac Portable Products pays the apprentices for a 40-hour workweek. Their pay is not subsidized by the school district and they do not receive company benefits. The apprentices’ pay goes up and down on a scale determined by the on-site educator’s rating of behavior and academics. Their weekly pay includes six hours of classroom instructional time plus on-the-job training, as needed. The students rotate through six to eight of fourteen different manufacturing areas, such as welding, painting, assembly, public relations, and quality assurance. After twenty consecutive months, students receive their high school diploma along with six technical credits in blue print reading and manufacturing processes. The program is operated under the guidelines established by the State of Wisconsin, Governor’s Workbased Learning Board.
In a typical week, the apprentices work from 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The students must follow all company rules, but because most of the students are minors, they receive two 15-minute breaks per day and have a 30-minute lunch period. The students are in the Training Center for one and one-half hours, Tuesday through Friday, with only three to four students in the classroom at one time. It was found that Mondays and afternoons were the least productive times, so most classes meet in the morning.

Generac Portable Products is a dedicated training facility. The entire company serve as role models. With approximately 1,000 employees, every one of the employees, from the line workers to the CEO, are considered instructors. Apprentices also work as part of a team, never alone. They each have a trained mentor with whom they work regularly. This individual attention helps the apprentices to excel to their fullest potential and is key to the success of the program.

In this program, the total curriculum, including English, social studies, science, and mathematics, centers on manufacturing and integrating the apprentices’ worksite experiences. The relevance of application is always present. Ten minutes after learning a new skill, apprentices are able to apply what they have learned on the production floor. With each unit studied, apprentices are asked questions specifically related to Generac Portable Products. To answer these questions, they must go into the manufacturing facility and locate the machining processes that use these particular operations. Other times, they must consult an engineer or draftsman. They may even have to bring back a part that has a certain type of thread or fastener and show the instructor what they learned.

English studies are clearly incorporated into the apprentices’ environment. For example, as part of the literature standards, apprentices read *HeroZ*, by William C. Byham and Jeff Cox. *HeroZ* is a novel that takes place in a manufacturing setting. This book is read aloud in small groups of three to four apprentices. Concepts are analyzed and discussed as they are introduced in the novel. Students are asked to discuss and apply these points to their own work area. They put names on the “floating eyes” (the quality control in *HeroZ*), relate the text to their personal experiences, and actually put plans into action. The small-group situation facilitates motivation by constant interaction.

Reading and study strategies are also covered in the lessons. For instance, when an apprentice reading *HeroZ* comes upon a new word and other group members do not know it, the group uses context clues with discussion, as well as a dictionary, to determine the meaning of the word. Since the chapters in *HeroZ* are numbered, not titled, apprentices invent chapter titles and vote for the best one. These serve as summaries for reviews and make good references. With open discussion, the apprentices often reason out loud, helping others to see strategies. The instructor also models strategies and provides immediate feedback and reinforcement as needed.

Another way to actively involve the apprentices in novels with this curriculum is to select a portion of a book and put it into a play or role-play situation. The apprentices rehearse and put on their presentation to an audience of their mentors or other personnel. This activity aids their communication skills.
Good oral communication skills are also enhanced when there is a need to repeatedly consult with the experts in the technical fields. The Youth Apprenticeship Program (YAP) includes two technical courses: blueprint reading and manufacturing processes. The YAP uses the same textbooks assigned by Madison Area Technical College. Apprentices are given questions and activities for each chapter with corresponding competencies. In these cases, the on-site instructor is not the expert. This means the apprentices must locate a person with the knowledge and ask the appropriate questions. Reciprocal teaching with the on-site instructor and graduate assistant commonly occurs.

Apprentices are encouraged to take charge of their own learning. They select the method of reading the chapters that fits their learning styles. Options include textbooks, audiocassettes, or videotapes with accompanying graphs and pictures. The apprentices may also work in pairs. The answers to the questions and activities may be completed by hand or on computer. Many of the questions and activities pertain exclusively to Generac Portable Products. In these instances, the apprentices must again confer with a Generac employee who can help them. At the end of each chapter, the on-site instructor gives each apprentice (or two apprentices together) an oral quiz. When the book is completed, one of the engineers gives the final examination.

The YAP offers many other real-life, hands-on opportunities to hone reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Apprentices conduct tours of Generac Portable Products and the Training Center for visitors. The visitors provide a wide variety of audiences; they may be school administrators, teachers, students, parents, state officials, foreign visitors, or manufacturing vendors. The apprentices plan general or specific tours, select and explain relevant information, and respond to questions. They develop fluency and skill in choosing proper words.

Apprentices also take part in panel discussions about the YAP for various groups, attend community meetings, participate and speak at awards ceremonies, and take part in professionally produced videos. Apprentices arrange their own field trips and guest speakers, and they learn to write appropriate thank you letters. One apprentice, speaking at an awards ceremony, impressed Governor Tommy Thompson so much, that Governor Thompson asked him if he had ever considered politics!

There are many opportunities with this program that would not be available to these teens otherwise. They are learning and acquiring new skills. They are graduating from this program and securing careers in highly paid technical positions. Some are attending college. This program allows students to see how schoolwork actually applies to their jobs and their lives.

One parent summarized the program by writing, " Needless to say, it is a source of great relief to see [our son's] progress toward becoming a positive member of society. Believe me—we have only the highest praise for all involved. He would come home so dirty, but obviously content."
Pulling Out Your Hair?
Try Differentiated Instruction

Diane E. Ormsby, Debra Adrian Heiss,
Maureen L. Griffin, and Heather Beckman,
University of Wisconsin-Whitewater

It cannot be denied that some people are different. But it should be denied that
only some people are different. All people are unique and different. That is, we
are all alike in that we are all different from each other. Thus, it makes little
sense to talk about the child who is different—Who is not different?
-Author Unknown

As we enter the new millennium, educators, like other members of society,
are espousing at ever deeper levels the belief that “diversity among human
beings is actually the norm” (Hilliard 6). As this belief becomes more widely
accepted, educators move towards aligning this belief with practice. Reframing
how we view human difference has implications for how we plan and present
English instruction. Current educational practice comes from a place that can be
characterized only as the “pathology of difference”: differences are deficits to be
corrected and normalized. Children’s differences are viewed in relationship to
standardized norms. A “one-size-fits-all education” does not honor the gifts,
talents, interests, struggles, and dis-abilities among all children.

If we believe truly that all children are different, why focus on difference
from a pathological perspective? We must rethink how we view and experience
difference among children. In place of valuing sameness and viewing dis-ability
from a deficit model, educators must come to value the opportunity of difference.
From this world view, environment causes dis-ability, not a deficit within the
learner. The environment is what keeps learners from maximizing their unique
ways of learning by creating a mismatch among the learner, the task/content, and
the learning conditions. In the past we have concentrated on providing physical
access to the environment, such as building ramps and installing handrails in the
restrooms. Now we also must provide cognitive access to the curriculum by
considering instructional matches and mismatches (Kameenui and Simmons 1).

There are two compelling reasons for providing cognitive access to the
curriculum. First, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) requires that all
students, including students classified with disabilities, demonstrate basic
content, performance, and proficiency in the Wisconsin Model Academic
Standards (WMAS) for English Language Arts, which are measured through the
Wisconsin State Assessment System (WSAS). Second, the Congressional
Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
mandates that children with disabilities receive their education in the least
restrictive environment, whether in the general or special education classroom, unless otherwise
highlighted by the need for the supplemental aids and services. In the general education classroom, aids and services is different.

Educators must ask, “Are my students in my class?” In other words, the instruction will be (a) described in terms of the tasks
among the learner, the task, and the instructional content (Tomlinson, How to 38). A mosaic of professional experiences and
profiles, talents, and interests will provide the reader with an individualized instruction that ensures the access to the curriculum.

Differentiated Instruction
As teachers, our goal is to treat students as we plan instruction (Tomlinson, How to 38). This involves planning for
individual differences in the classroom, while also planning for the content, processes, and products of instruction. This
ensures access to the curriculum for all students in the classroom.

What is differentiated instruction?
- an instructional approach designed to meet diverse student needs
- individualized instruction
- a classroom model
- a way to provide instruction

According to Tomlinson, differentiated instruction is student centered, it changes the quality of activities, it provides multiple
activities, and it offers a blend of strategies that promotes a relationship between learners (Tomlinson, How to 38).

In short, differentiated instruction is a way to engage students, especially in the students’ eyes. This
content, and using activi
restrictive environment, which is assumed to be the general education (GE) classroom, unless otherwise justified. The IDEA amendments (1997) particularly highlight the need for them to have the greatest possible access to the general education curriculum (The CEC 22). Learners have the right to the use of supplemental aids and services to facilitate their progress in, and success with, the general education curriculum. At the heart of the provision of supplemental aids and services is differentiated instruction within the general education classroom. Educators must ask, "Is my instruction enabling the learning of all students in my class?" In the next two sections of this article, differentiated instruction will be (a) described in relation to creating an instructional match among the learner, the task/content, and the learning conditions and (b) applied to several English content areas.

Differentiated Instruction: What

As teachers, our goal is to promote both understanding and engagement for students as we plan instructional content, activities, and assessments (Tomlinson, How to 38). Students bring a variety of readiness levels, learning profiles, talents, and interests to the classroom. This diversity creates a challenge for curriculum planners. Although teachers always have provided assistance to individual students in their classrooms, the purpose of this article is to provide the reader with a process for planning differentiated instruction that ensures access to the curriculum for all students. This way of thinking about curriculum accessibility when planning provides multiple avenues for learning.

What is differentiated instruction? It is NOT:
• an instructional strategy or teaching model;
• individualized instruction of the 70s;
• a classroom model characterized by chaos; or
• a way to provide homogeneous grouping.

According to Tomlinson (Mapping 16), "differentiation is one piece of the mosaic of professional expertise." Differentiation:
• is student centered;
• changes the qualities of the instructional activities, not just the number of activities;
• provides multiple approaches to selecting content, instructional activities, and assessments;
• offers a blend of whole class, small group, and individual activities; and
• promotes a relationship in which both teachers and students are learners (Tomlinson How to 7-10).

In short, differentiated instruction is a way to think about the teaching-learning process (Warger and Pugach 65) that looks at curricular tasks through the students’ eyes. This process begins with knowing the students and the content, and using activities that promote both understanding (i.e., levels of
learning are clearly delineated) and engagement (i.e., activities are challenging and future-oriented). Differentiated instruction is a way to personalize instruction without pulling out your hair or having thirty-two individualized plans. So, how is this accomplished?

**Differentiated Instruction: How**

First of all, by knowing the students you can look for matches and mismatches between the students and (a) the content, (b) the instructional activities, and (c) the assessment tools. Appreciating where each student is in regard to knowledge, skill, and understanding is essential. This assessment need not be extensive or time-consuming. Besides knowing students’ interests and talents, teachers use readiness skills (background information, basic reading and writing skills, individual style of processing information, social skills, and environmental preferences as related to the content and instructional activities) to differentiate instruction. They use information gathered through class discussions, quizzes, journals, and IEP reviews to guide thinking. In other words, they consider all students’ completed work as assessments, not just as a basis for grades. If necessary, they conduct an informal assessment about the skill or topic they plan to teach.

Next, to avoid the “fuzzies,” content and activities should be connected to performance outcomes. The instructor should identify what students should know, understand, and be able to perform before consideration of differentiated instruction. In particular, Tomlinson (Differentiated Classroom 38-40) suggests that the selection of levels of learning reflect the desired outcomes. She proposes that there are five levels of learning that need to be addressed in each unit.

1. **Facts** are distinct pieces of information (e.g., questioning sentences end in a question mark; Walt Whitman wrote *Leaves of Grass*).

2. **Concepts** are categories of knowledge that help people organize, recall, and use information (e.g., tone; genre; compare/contrast).

3. **Skills** are the capacities to put to work the understandings gained (e.g., using an editing checklist for correct use of punctuation; identifying imagery in a piece of writing).

4. **Attitudes** are degrees of commitment to ideas and spheres of learning (e.g., writing is a process; all forms of text provide meaningful information).

5. **Principles** are the rules that guide the use of concepts (e.g., audience and purpose guide the form of discourse; grammar facilitates fluency and meaning).

Meaningful learning involves planning for all of these dimensions. The teacher can begin by identifying the levels of learning in his/her school’s performance standards or the WMAS. Typically, each standard reflects a unique level of learning. Students’ understanding will be richer and deeper when the teacher is clear about the content. With outcomes firmly in mind, culminated products that students can show will demonstrate the content is what students know that is accomplished. Priorities will use key skills to make sense of their vehicles through which they will be learning.

The content must be relevant to their lives by its relevance. Teachers must have real problems and projects to apply in the classroom. Once a teacher has selected and knowledge of students’ levels of abstractness, content can be differentiated for groups of students.

**Differentiated Instruction: Applying the Concepts**

Applying the concepts requires teachers to identify and understand the essential skills to understand the content of its cognitive complexity. With this knowledge, teachers design differentiated instruction, task requirements and the learning characteristics of students. They have versions of the activities within their comfort zone. Here are some examples of how to differentiate content, particularly for Literature. With the intention of strengthening analysis, let’s consider some examples of how literature.

**Literature circle:** First, students read the material. Then, the students then meet in literature circles to deeply with other students on the individual members of the literature circle. Bringing forth their views, students will share their own material. There are several ways in which the literature circle is differentiated by increasing or decreasing text complexity and using abridged versions.
teacher is clear about the intended levels of learning and subsequent outcomes. With outcomes firmly in mind, the teacher selects the content, the processes, and culminated products that move students towards attainment of the WMAS. The content is what students will learn and materials or mechanisms through which that is accomplished. Processes are the activities that will ensure that students use key skills to make sense out of the ideas and information. Products are the vehicles through which students demonstrate and extend what they have learned.

The content must be powerful and authentic, tying itself to the students’ lives by its relevance. The processes must have a focused purpose and promote higher order thinking, as well as substantive conversations among students (Newmann and Wehlage 8-10). Products require application of all key learnings, have real problems and audiences, and allow for multiple modes of expression. Once a teacher has selected content, processes, and assessment products, knowledge of students’ readiness levels will enable the differentiation of the levels of abstractness, complexity, structure, and pace of activities for different groups of students.

Differentiated Instruction: Examples

Applying the concept of differentiated instruction requires several steps. First, teachers select an activity that is engaging and will cause students to use essential skills to understand a key idea. Then they look at this activity in terms of its cognitive complexity and in light of students’ readiness levels. Next, teachers design different versions of the activity at varied levels of difficulty (i.e., task requirements and pace). The number of versions depends on the students’ learning characteristics and will vary from activity to activity. Students should have versions of the activity that will challenge them to move beyond their comfort zone. Here are three common areas of English instruction (i.e., literature, grammar, and writing) and examples of how one future teacher plans to differentiate content, processes, and/or products.

Literature. With the instructional goals of developing lifelong learners and strengthening analysis and appreciation of literary and non-literary text, here are some examples of how instruction has been differentiated for the area of literature.

Literature circles are discussions by small groups of students in which students read the same book or several books related to a single theme; students then meet to discuss their understandings with one another. The goal of literature circles is to allow students to listen carefully to and think deeply with other members to create understandings that go beyond individual members. Basically, literature circles provide a means for facilitating meaningful discussions wherein students are encouraged to bring forth their voices and experiences as well as to become experts as they share their own meanings with others. When using literature circles, there are several ways in which to differentiate instruction. Content can be differentiated by using the same book written at different reading levels, by using abridged versions, or providing books on tape. Allowing students to
choose their own books related to a theme also reflects differentiation. Because of the flexibility in reading levels and selection of books, small group composition can reflect diverse skills, interests, and backgrounds. The levels of learning for literature circles are facts (e.g., historical period, word definitions), concepts (e.g., task roles, prediction, communication), and skills (e.g., using writing or drawn notes to guide reading and discussion, evaluating one’s performance and level of understanding).

Book reports are formal products where students demonstrate their understanding of different types of literature. An opportunity for questions and answers between teacher and students should be provided to strengthen assessment. Presentation of the book varies depending on the student’s interests and strengths. Including fiction, non-fiction, and trade books provides differentiated content. Alternative products can include a poster, drawing, advertisement, puppet skit, video, the writing of letters between characters, and the rewriting of a new final chapter. The levels of learning for these products are facts (e.g., literal comprehension; title/author/illustrator), concepts (e.g., context; propaganda), and skills (e.g., considering context to make inferences; reading critically to identify faulty arguments and propaganda).

Genre/era book selection is an opportunity to integrate literary and non-literary texts into their cultural context. Students are given options to choose books from a specific genre, time, or topic. For example, when selecting books on war, teachers should include fiction (e.g., Johnny Tremain, War and Peace) and non-fiction texts. Alternately, students could be allowed to choose a war-related topic of interest (e.g., weaponry, first aid in the field, peace accords) and read a book that covers that topic. Students are responsible for bringing their key learnings to the discussions. Contributing to group discussion promotes higher order thinking and making connections. The levels of learning for book selection are facts (e.g., dates of the conflict; major battles), concepts (e.g., cause/effect, genre), and skills (e.g., writing a paragraph that describes the types of weapons used; comparing/contrasting the causes of the American Revolution and the French Revolution).

Writing. With the instructional goal of developing effective written communication skills, here are some examples of differentiating instruction for content, process, and products in writing.

Unassigned writing topics are examples of differentiated content. In contrast to formulaic writing assignments, unassigned topics allow students to write about their areas of interest as they master different forms of discourse. Topics would require teacher approval, but would promote students’ passion for the subject matter. Teachers may choose to utilize contracts and student-teacher conferences in the writing process as a means to monitor the students’ choice of topics. The levels of learning for unassigned writing topics can include facts (e.g., noun; verb; paragraph), skills (e.g., punctuating correctly; making transitions between paragraphs), and attitudes (e.g., writing takes time; I must have a clear purpose for writing).

Peer editing offers an opportunity to learn the writing process. For instance, provide feedback on spelling, but will not require students to provide critical feedback or to provide critical feedback. The levels of learning for peer editing include correct spelling, correct grammar, and skills in outlining key points. At the end of the process, the student’s checklist provides feedback on the success.

Grammar. Here are some ideas for using products with the overgeneralizing, and applying content. They are designed to meet each student based on the student’s checklist. The levels of learning for the checklist are minor, recognizing particular aspects of content. They are intended to complement the learning of grammar and are differentiated. Some students can apply the correct sentence structure to a phrase at the beginning of the phrase, while others can apply the correct sentence structure to a phrase at the end of the phrase. Learning in this area is differentiated. At the next level, the student can apply the correct sentence structure to all parts of the sentence, including subject, object, and verb. The focus is on what about our learning is differentiated.
Peer editing provides students with diverse strengths and needs the opportunity to learn together and support one another in the editing process. For instance, one student may not have strengths in punctuation or spelling, but will be able to help the other group members focus on the topic or to provide critical insights in the development of ideas. The process is differentiated because each group can approach the editing task differently. The levels of learning addressed through these groups are facts (e.g., correct spelling, use of commas), concepts (e.g., constructive feedback, clarity), and skills (e.g., using an evaluation rubric to persuade the reader; outlining key points to ensure organization and transition).

Grammar. Here are some examples of differentiated content, processes, and products with the overall instructional goal of acquiring, maintaining, generalizing, and applying principles of grammar in written expression.

Individualized editing checklists are an example of differentiated content. They are lists of editing and grammar skills that are developed for each student based on ongoing assessment of his/her writing. Thus, each student’s checklist is differentiated, containing the skills s/he needs to master. The level of learning for this task is skills (e.g., using the grammar check on a word processor; following requirements for technical writing).

Learning contracts are negotiated agreements between teacher and students that give students some freedom in acquiring skills and understandings that a teacher deems important at a given time. They can include opportunities for student choice, working conditions, and ways to apply or express information. Learning contracts differentiate content and process. For example, if the product is a five-minute presentation of a selected grammar principle as it is linked to writing skills, the content is differentiated. Selection of the principle is based on individual student’s interests and abilities (e.g., several students may be working on basic sentence structure while others may be working on the use of a participial phrase at the beginning of a sentence). Process is differentiated because students can approach the task in many different ways, using many different resources (e.g., one student is coding sentences using personalized symbols while another student is using a software grammar program). The levels of learning in this instructional task relate to skills (e.g., expressing a complete sentence, including a subject and predicate; making the verb agree with the subject in person and number) and principles (e.g., grammar tells us what is what about our language; conventions of language aid in transfer of meaning).

When using learning centers, all three elements—content, process, and products—can be differentiated. Learning centers are classroom areas that “contain a collection of activities or materials designed to teach, reinforce, or extend a particular skill or concept” (Tomlinson, Differentiated Classroom 76). Materials and tasks typically are teacher constructed and are more exploratory than other assignments. In the following table, the instructional goal for all students is to identify modifiers in literature and use them in their own writing. Indeed, the table format could serve as a tool when planning for differentiated instruction.
Table 1. Differentiated Instruction in Learning Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEARNING CENTER</th>
<th>CONTENT</th>
<th>PROCESSES</th>
<th>PRODUCTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LC #1</td>
<td>Walt Whitman</td>
<td>Examine the use of imagery and how the poet shows instead of tells the reader the thoughts and images he is trying to evoke. (advanced)</td>
<td>Examine and write about use of modifiers and how the poem would be different without adverbs and adjectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leaves of Grass</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC #2</td>
<td>Young Adult Fiction</td>
<td>Examine piece and rewrite without the modifiers. (proficient)</td>
<td>Write about the differences in the passages using as many modifiers as possible in their own writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g., C.S. Lewis, C.L. Moore, Puckon)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LC #3</td>
<td>Students' Own Writing</td>
<td>Review sentences and examples with and without modifiers. (basic)</td>
<td>Add adjectives and adverbs to their own sentences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Getting Started**

Beginning the process of differentiated instruction can appear to be a daunting task; Tomlinson (Differentiated Classroom 97) cautions us to proceed slowly—but to begin the journey. For instance, teachers can begin by designing just one differentiated lesson per unit or differentiate one product during this semester. Alternatively, they can explore the use of a differentiated task for a small block of time. Students can be provided with structured choices about their assignments, such as the use of unassigned writing topics, or experiment with the use of learning contracts. Starting with the most basic skills for students with language and writing problems is important so that they are not overwhelmed. Finally, teachers are encouraged to select a goal or two for the school year and then try it.

Based on Tomlinson’s discussions and ideas (Differentiated Classroom 96-100), other ways to help make the journey toward differentiated instruction successful include:

- Reflect on your philosophy about students’ individual needs in order to feel more confident about what you are doing and in responding to others’ queries.
- At first, plan extensively to choreograph differentiated activities and avoid unanticipated snafus.
- Be prepared for a little messiness in the classroom since a differentiated classroom does not look tidy. There will be many different activities going on around the room. Instructors need to be willing to allow students to discuss...
content in small groups. These discussions may become heated, but the
students will be engaged in the English curriculum and learning will be
heightened.

- Plan time to reflect on your differentiated activities. Make notes on things you
want to remember and use again. (You may want to carry a clipboard with you
to jot down notes.) Celebrate your successes. Examine your attempts with an
eye toward future improvements.

- Be prepared to negotiate content, processes, and products with your
students. A differentiated classroom does not diminish a teacher’s control; it
localizes it. Engaged students will have little need to act out. In differentiated
instruction you will involve your students in their learning, including
reflections and conversations about differentiated lessons.

- Begin to establish a support system with colleagues, parents, administrators,
and community members. Teachers are not expected to be experts in all fields
and, so, should utilize their peers and community volunteers to assist students
in and outside of the classroom. For example, other teachers, local librarians, or
professionals can offer expertise about topics of interest. The teacher can ask
for help from the special education team to accommodate students who have
identified special needs. He/she can also explain to the principal his/her
objectives and seek his/her guidance in developing specific activities.

- As with other educational innovations, it will be useful to eventually propose
changes to support differentiated instruction (e.g., structure larger blocks of
instructional and planning time, purchase multiple texts). Consider requesting
a summer contract to work with colleagues on a curriculum writing project to
develop differentiated instructional activities.

Resources
Here are some teacher friendly resources that can start you on your
differentiated journey:


Jones, Beau F., Anne Marie S. Palincsar, Donna S. Ogle, and Eileen G. Carr. (Eds.)
Strategic Teaching and Learning: Cognitive Instruction in the Content Areas.

Kame'enui, Edward J. and Douglas W. Carnine. Effective Teaching Strategies

Orkwis, Raymond, and Kathleen McLane. A Curriculum Every Student Can Use:
Design Principles for Student Access. (ERIC/OSEP Special Project). Reston,

Rogers, Spence, and Shari Graham. The High Performance Toolbox. Evergreen,


Here are two Internet resources that provide teachers with access to the lesson plans and thinking of other teachers. Teachers can consider these resources as a spark for planning their own differentiated instruction. The Public Broadcasting System offers teachers more than 1,300 lesson plans and activities as well as news about the latest educational programs on public television and how teachers can integrate these programs into their classroom. PBS TeacherSource is at: www.pbs.org/teachersource. A QuizLab as well as games, one of which is “Grammar Gorilla,” can be found at www.funbrain.com. This site currently receives more than 20,000 hits per day.

Summary
The stakes in education today are high. Using all of the resources at your disposal (e.g., colleagues, literature, Internet, workshops, conferences, community volunteers), differentiated instruction provides one way to meet the complex and multi-faceted challenges of teaching English in the twenty-first century. As one middle school teacher said, “I can’t believe none of my students are failing this quarter; it’s like magic—differentiated instruction changed the way my students felt about learning and how I felt about planning for active student involvement.”

References


Alternative Education Programs Licensure

Realities within contemporary schools reveal that structures, curriculum, and instruction in schools are not meeting the needs of a significant number of students. Increasingly, educators are looking for alternative methods and programs where students are more likely to be successful. In response, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction has designated a specific license endorsement for educators working in these alternative settings or attempting to adapt methods and curriculum within the regular school setting. To assist teachers in recognizing and developing the skills, attitudes, and knowledge necessary to work in these settings, the College of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater is offering a program of study leading to certification and licensing to teach in these alternative settings.

The Alternative Education Programs Licensure program at UW-Whitewater consists of a year-long sequence of five courses for a total of 15 credits. To register or for more information contact the Summer Session Office by phone at (800) 621-5376 or (262) 472-1100 or by email: continued@mail.uww.edu.
Taking the Risk out of Teaching “At Risk” Students in the English Classroom

Raina Pfundheller, Eau Claire Public School District
Jill Prushieck, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

Many of us go through our English teacher preparation programs taking literature classes, writing classes, and methods classes. Interwoven in our preparation are several field experiences set up to help us be the best English teachers we can be. We eagerly wait for the student teaching/interning phase believing we are prepared to teach all the students in our classes. We arrive at our placement and discover that we will be working with students labeled as “at risk.” We all have heard that label mentioned, but we never learned in our methods classes how to adapt our teaching to these particular students. Who are they? How can we help them in the English classroom? What advice can we give student teachers as they prepare to enter the classroom?

“At risk” students have average or above average intelligence, have no special learning problems, but are often unmotivated and unsuccessful in school. These students are “environmentally challenged.” They may not live in an environment conducive to learning, one that supports education or encourages thinking skills or school success. Their parents may be dropouts or have negative attitudes toward education. Lack of supervision and financial stability are often factors because children may be home alone while a parent works a night shift. Another factor may be an unstable home environment where there is conflict, perhaps violence, or drug or alcohol use.

Other family factors sometimes indicate a child may be at risk of school failure. Often the parents are younger than average; they may have been teen parents themselves. Instead of modeling healthy relationships, parents may be just starting new love interest themselves, one that may be unhealthy or dysfunctional. Therefore, their children are not able to learn or grow, as they are stuck at Maslow’s lowest levels of need: to feel safe and loved.

In dealing with unmotivated students, we may simply wish our school year away or put pressure on administrators to move these students out of our classrooms. Perhaps we consider moving these students into special education or onto another teacher team because of our lack of training in adapting our teaching methods to the learning styles of these students. University classes preparing students to teach English spend little or no time addressing the “at risk” population.

Raina Pfundheller, director of a program for freshman at risk in the Eau Claire Public School District, and Jill Prushieck, the Director of Field Experiences at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, have been working together for a year with student teachers. We offer some simple and specific suggestions for assisting English teachers and student teachers of students labeled as “at risk.”
First, teachers and student teachers need to have a positive attitude toward their students. At-risk students can be especially compassionate and generous, and as teachers we have the privilege and opportunity to use that good will and to return it in kind in order to positively affect their lives. To give ourselves the best chance to stay upbeat, it may help to focus on the students who are pleasant, appreciative, and polite, and remind yourself to make eye contact and smile warmly. Too often we focus on the extremely difficult kids, and that focus may make us grouchy and resentful.

Secondly, ask for assistance from others in the school. Before you call a parent, contact counselors and other staff with student concerns. To show humane concern, collect a varied array of knowledge about the student, but do be ready with a list of missing assignments from other teachers as well so you can update the parent on several classes. If a student is missing several assignments, inform the student and talk with him/her to discover what may be the problem. If the problem continues, be persistent in contacting parents. But begin the conversation positively. For example, “Hi, this is Mrs. Pfundheller, your son Jeff’s English teacher. He’s really nice boy and did a great job on his summer memory story, but he didn’t turn in the last three assignments. He said he would do them at home tonight. Would you be sure he finishes and puts them in his backpack tonight? He’ll be getting a good grade in English as soon as he gets those three in.” Again, our attitude comes into play. Most parents want their child to succeed and they will appreciate our calls and notes sent home. Many parents of “at risk” students were not good students themselves and are not comfortable or familiar with the school setting. To enable their taking the lead, set up a time for them to call you each week for an update on their child’s progress. Just as being specific with students works well, so does being specific with parents. A cooperating teacher of a student teacher can model a few parent phone calls first so that the student teacher feels comfortable talking with parents.

Thirdly, use some class time to manage the mechanics of learning. Since we as English teachers tend to teach reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in our classes, we often ask our students to keep track of a lot of material. Why not take ten minutes out of class once a week to have students clean out their folders and update assignment notebooks. Have them show you their folders when they are done so that you can praise their neatness or assist those who need further help. Set a deadline or help them devise a plan for doing their work. Get to the reason for late or missing work. Help students problem solve not only how to do the missing work, but how to prevent work from being late in the future.

Choose instructional strategies that will ensure success. For example, always give students some daily points. Many students work hard on assignments but then forget to turn them in for credit. Therefore, it may be best to collect all work at the end of the hour and grade what they have completed. If they take assignments home to complete and their homes are not conducive to studying, they are not likely to turn in anything at all. As teachers, we may know that this strategy works with at-risk students; however, you may need to help your student teachers adapt their lesson plans to work with these students.
We have seen student teachers assign the reading of several chapters or a long story to be done at home and then get discouraged when students have not completed their assignments. Student teachers’ lesson plans are usually based upon the illusion that all students are motivated and will do what is assigned. Student teachers need as much assistance as you can provide them so that they can be successful in meeting the needs of all their students.

Similarly, when assigning a major project such as a written essay or book report, give points for daily effort so that if the final project is incomplete or forgotten, students will still have earned points for their work along the way. As English teachers, we often rely on discussion as part of our lesson plan. We can keep track of those who participate and give them points. Participation points reward students daily for being there, being attentive, behaving, and responding. Daily rubrics and self-evaluations can easily be implemented to provide you and the student teacher with additional insights about the students.

Also, in boosting confidence, assign what students do well and drop what does not work. Failure has been described as continuing to do what isn’t working. This is especially true of the “at risk” student. Change some of your approaches to various units and incorporate options for projects. Many times we ask students to write book reports at home, read stories and complete worksheets, and take tests to show us that they know the material. Experiment with different methods to achieve the same objectives. Allow students to do some oral reading in class and have short discussions after particular sections. This strategy gives the students a chance to participate in class discussions and ask questions of fellow classmates. Furthermore, you can allow students to show that they know material by having them design a poster, write a newspaper article, conduct a talk show, or write a rap song. These hands-on options engage students more in the material and set them up for success.

Finally, cooperating teachers and student teachers should think about classroom atmosphere. Rather than maintaining a rigid and autocratic atmosphere, work together to create a more relaxed and democratic one. Constantly give students hints that you like them. Talk to them individually and compliment their work, participation, and behavior. Show them that you have a sense of humor. You can also display student work around the room to show that you value all of their efforts. Remember to display work of all students rather than just that of classroom “stars.” Create an environment that promotes and rewards success and you will help not only those students who are “at risk” but all the students in the classroom as well.

Teaching the “at risk” student need not be an unpleasant experience; in fact it can be quite rewarding. There is never a better feeling than when previously unmotivated students turn in an assignment on time, smile after receiving a good grade, and go on to be successful in other classes. In fact, before long those students may be back in your room to visit and invite you to their graduation. These students may take more time and effort and challenge you to rethink how you approach each lesson, but it is well worth it.
The Autobiography Project

Margaret Hua, Lincoln High School

For the past two years I have been teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) at Lincoln High School in Wisconsin Rapids. Through my program I work with students at all five proficiency levels throughout the course of my day. I teach English, science, social studies, and work one-on-one with students to assist them with homework from all their classes. I also team-teach a biology class. The majority of the students I work with are Hmong, but I also work with a few Hispanic students. During the summers, I teach English through the Wisconsin Rapids summer school program, working with seventh through tenth graders to increase their skills in all areas of English. I also teach Japanese students from Dokkyo University during the summer, helping them to better understand American English and culture.

My teaching project is one that I could use with any of these groups of students or with any other group, with some modifications in how I present the material. I have designed this project with multiple intelligences in mind, particularly in the journal writing and final project stages, so that all students will be able to use their strengths, as well as improve in their weaker areas. I have also kept this project broad enough to allow for student choices. The expected time frame for this project is one to two months, depending on the length of time spent on the project during a class period, the ability level of the students, and the expectations for students to do work outside of class. A computer lab where students can type is suggested. Also, I have found that the students I work with often do not have the money for basic school supplies so I sometimes purchase supplies which are needed for some of the final projects: cameras, art paper, albums, etc. Some of the components of the project may be removed or revised to fit a shorter time span and/or to eliminate some costs.

From my teaching experiences so far, I have found that one of the easiest topics for people to write about is themselves, especially when the students are beginning writers, such as my ESL students. I also think it is very interesting to find out about other people: what makes them tick, their dreams, their triumphs, their tribulations. Because the students I work with come from such unique backgrounds, I encourage them to write about their past so they have a record of themselves to pass on to their children. This project gives them the guidelines and the format to do that. For these two main reasons, the project I propose is to have students research their lives and write their autobiographies. This project has five parts which include different options for students to chose from as well as some required components.
The Autobiography Project

The exact time frame for this project is one to two months, depending on the length of time spent on the project during a class period, the ability level of the students, and the expectations for students to do work outside of class.

Costs include computer disks, making copies (especially if journals are copied in color), cameras and film, various art supplies for compilation projects.

I will outline the five parts of this project which include different options for students to choose from as well as some required components.

Part 1: Brainstorming

Getting Acquainted Game: Students will go around the room, mingling with others to ask them questions and find out more about their classmates as they fill in their game card. This activity gives them a chance to start thinking about themselves as they answer personal questions.

Journal: Students will be given a journal which contains decorated and titled pages for them to write about themselves. They need to choose at least fifteen topics. These fifteen writings are the rough drafts they will continue to work with and use in creating their final project. Therefore, students should think about which option they would like to complete for the final project first, so they can choose journal entries which are most appropriate.

Ongoing tasks:

Editing: Students will have the chance to share their drafts of journal writing with other students or a relative to receive constructive criticism and ideas for improvement. This is important since sharing their writing will increase their range of audience to include more than just the teacher. It will also give the students exposure to the writing of other writers if they choose to peer-edit. Thus, they will see a greater variety in writing styles and abilities. This also serves as a collaborative activity which provides new insights into writing and guidance for revising works in progress.

One-on-One Conferencing: One-on-one conferencing is actually ongoing throughout the project. Indeed with writers doing so many different things at once, it becomes difficult to teach a common theme unless it is done in the form of mini-lessons. Also, the one-on-one attention is better suited to improving writing since all students have individual strengths and weaknesses. It also enables the mechanics of writing to be taught within the context of the students' own writing rather than in separate drills and exercises.

Reading: Reading sample autobiographies is another on-going activity. Throughout the duration of the project, students will have the opportunity to read the autobiography of a person of their choosing to see what items are included in a writing format.

Part 2: The Internet

As humans, we are inclined to find out more about ourselves and our environment when the opportunity arises. Students will be encouraged to find out more about themselves and the people around them using the Internet.

Interview: Students will interview people they have contacted or met. This includes parents and relatives, friends, teachers, classmates, and other acquaintances.

1) Students will interview their parent or relative to find out more about the person's childhood experiences, family traditions, and culture.

2) Students will interview an acquaintance to find out more about their interests, hobbies, and career goals.

Critical Writing: Students will reflect on what they have learned from their interviews and use this information to write a critical essay or blog post. This activity will help students develop their critical thinking skills and learn to analyze information from various sources.
included in a published autobiography. Although this may not actually serve as a writing model, it will create an awareness of the autobiographical style and format.

**Part 2: Research**

As human beings, we often get so wrapped up in ourselves that we forget about the others around us. Therefore, even though the main purpose of this project is to find out about and report on one’s self, that would be of little significance in itself for anyone who does not know the author (especially since few of the students I have had the opportunity to work with are especially famous). It is important that once in a while we look beyond our noses and see what is happening in the world around us. This will be done through research.

**Internet Research:** On the computers, students will use the Internet to find out what was happening in at least one country during the years of their lives. Many of the students I work with are immigrants; therefore, it is interesting for those students to research the country in which they were born. The events they come up with should be of national or international importance. They will record the information on the Internet Timeline Research Sheet. They can also research local events and world-impacting geographical weather events such as volcanoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, and floods to enhance their research.

**Interviews:** There are two options when it comes to the interviews:

1) Students may choose to interview their parents and relatives to gain information about the origin of their name, information about their birth, and information about their childhood years. Students need to come up with their own questions and either take notes or record their findings. They should also consult name guides to find out the meaning, the history, and the significance of their names. At this point, it would also be good to start collecting any materials that parents saved from the students’ younger days such as drawings, photos, diaries, or baby books. All of these are great sources for further research. Since it is not always possible for students to interview their parents, given today’s many complicated living situations, students may opt to do the other interview.

2) Students may choose to interview at least two different people who know them fairly well and ask appropriate questions to gain information about themselves through the eyes of the interviewees. Students need to come up with their own questions and either take notes or record their findings.

Students may consult their journal topics listing for ideas for questions.

**Critically Evaluating Daily Activities:** Students will learn how to think critically and will try to determine how the government impacts them in daily activities. First, students will make a list of at least twenty daily activities. They will explain when each activity happens and why it is important to them personally. Then they will come up with ways that activity has been impacted by government regulations in this or any other country. This may involve research on the Internet or in government documents or interviewing people knowledgeable in the area of law such as judges, police officers, and lawyers. Students may also write to congressional representatives to either gain information or express an
opinion about a current bill or law. After the brainstorming and researching has been completed, students will be able to fill in the Government Impact Sheet and can use this chart to create a writing for the final project.

**Part 3: Oral Presentation**

Students have the option of either telling about themselves or about the person who was featured in the autobiography they read.

1) **Storytelling:** Students can tell a story about themselves to the entire class which is based on one of the original journal entries. By this time, it should be in a polished format. This story could be one they were told about themselves by a relative, or an event that they remember experiencing. The presentation should be at least three minutes long and should be completed according to the guidelines on the Storytelling Sheet. Either at the beginning, during, or at the end the presentation, the student presenter must involve the rest of the students in some activity which is related to the story being told.

2) **Autobiography reporting:** Students can relate the most important aspects in the life of the person whose autobiography they read. The presentation should be at least three minutes long and should be completed according to the guidelines on the Autobiography Reporting Sheet. Either at the beginning, during, or at the end of the presentation, the student presenter must involve the rest of the students in some activity which is related to the life of the person being reported on.

**Part 4: Creative Compilation**

Students have the following options to create a compilation of their final drafts of writing in conjunction with something else which is fitting to the topics they have chosen.

1) **Photo Album:** Students have the option of collecting old photos or taking new photos which will be compiled in a homemade photo album along with final drafts of writing. Students may include, but are by no means limited to, the following: past photos, current photos, family photos, friends, activities, home (interior/exterior/both), school (outside/locker/classroom, etc.), an important place, a scary place, a sad place, etc.

2) **Catalog Me:** Students have the option of creating a scrapbook of items cut from catalogs which have some relationship with the writings they have chosen for their final drafts. One way to make this scrapbook more amusing and personal is to replace catalog models with pictures or partial pictures of one’s self. For example, students could cut up old pictures and place their heads where the catalog’s model heads were or place cut-outs of their bodies on catalog furniture and so on, just as if they were actually the models.

3) **Silhouettes:** Students have the option of making silhouettes of important people in their lives to compile together with appropriate final drafts of writing.

4) **Family Tree:** A standard autobiographical activity for students to do is to create a family tree. However, rather than just include a tree of family members, other items must be included to add interest. These may include old photos of relatives, grave rubbings from deceased relatives, recipes from relatives,
memorabilia from relatives, personal narratives or memories told to the student by relatives, keepsakes from relatives, love letters that relatives wrote to each other, etc. Of course, how the student compiles these is his or her choice, but the student also needs to include the final drafts of writing which are appropriate.

5) Poetry: Students have the option of turning their journal entries from the brainstorming stage into poetry. They may include drawings or other materials along with the poems, but since writing poems is a creative process in itself, those are not required. However, students should include a variety of poetry formats such as haiku or the sonnet. Some free verse poem formats have been included with the plans for this project.

6) Newspaper: Students have the option of creating their own newspaper using the journal entries from the brainstorming stage and the research they had done on the computer to have a variety of information for the different items such as cartoons, letters to the editor, word events, local events, weather, etc. Students should have access to a computer program which will enable them to create a life-like newspaper.

7) Playwrighting: Students have the option of taking various journal entries and turning them into a play. The minimum length of the play is one act, but students may create a play which is longer. The play should show some aspect(s) of the student’s life and should include a setting, plot, stage directions, and acting instructions.

8) Game Board: Students can create a game board which represents their lives, including some of the challenges and successes they have already experienced. In order to include the final drafts of the writing in some format, students should put short writings on the board itself or on cards and have those writings incorporated into the playing of the game.

9) Bulletin Board: Students have the option of creating a classroom bulletin board of themselves and their lives. The display should include polished writings as well as pictures and items which will enhance the writing.

10) Original Idea: I feel it is always important to give students choices in what they do, so if a student has an original idea that I feel is a worthwhile completion project, they are more than welcome to do that instead of one of mine.

Part 5: Going Public
As indicated by the title, during this final stage of the autobiography project, students make their work public. This does not mean they have to send it off in an attempt to get it published; although that is a reasonable option, especially for anyone who chooses to write poetry. Actually, the students may share their work with myself and any other three people and have them critique it. It would be very meaningful if students would share their work with family members who may appear in the final project.
### Journal Table of Contents*

1. How my family picked my name
2. A favorite story that I remember about a family member
3. A family memory that makes me smile
4. A family member who has had the most influence on me
5. One of my favorite family recipes
6. The family tradition that is most important to me
7. Some of the most interesting people I’ve ever met
8. One of the best times I’ve ever had with a friend
9. I could not have gotten where I am now without . . .
10. When I think about the first time I was in love . . .
11. One of my longest and closest friendships
12. Some of the valuable things that I have learned from my relationships
13. The teachers that I have learned the most from
14. In my leisure time I like to . . .
15. My main source of inspiration over the years has been . . .
16. I believe I am fortunate because . . .
17. A value that I would never compromise
18. The most important things that I want to accomplish in my lifetime
19. One of the most valuable lessons I have learned
20. In the future I predict . . .
21. My favorite movie
22. If I could be any famous person I would choose to be __________
23. I think that the most important thing money can buy is . . .
24. The thing I have always feared the most
25. The way I find balance in my life

*contact the editors for the complete listing of journal topics

### Story Telling Guidelines and Rubric Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. _______ Length of time is three minutes or more.
2. _______ Story is well introduced.
3. _______ Story is well organized
4. _______ Story has a good conclusion.
5. _______ Volume and rate of speaking is appropriate.
6. _______ Pronunciation is clear.
7. _______ Eye contact is established with audience.
8. _______ Speaker faces the audience.
9. _______ Speaker uses dramatic techniques to improve the story.
10. _______ Speaker includes an activity to involve the whole class in the presentation.
College Students with Learning Disabilities: What Every Writing Teacher Needs to Know

Liz deBeer, Rutgers University

"I never knew I had a learning disability until later in my academic career. I always thought I was just not bright enough. People would always make fun of me especially when I could read something in class or had a hard time understanding something. This hindered me a lot in my learning process because in the future I would never ask questions to help me excel or understand something I didn’t know.

"I also think being LD hindered me because I never had confidence in anything I did. This led me to give up to easy on things. If I didn’t understand it, I would skip it or if it was challenging I would just take a look and say I needed help. Instead of trying to figure things out and take the time I would want someone to do it, well that what my mom used to say."

This two paragraph essay by Mark (a pseudonym) was based on an assignment I had given at our first tutorial which asked him to describe his experience as a student with learning disabilities. While he knew he would not be graded on this, my instructions stated that he was “to try to write as if you were to hand this in to an English teacher.” As Mark’s writing tutor for a community college composition class, I sought this essay to learn more about Mark’s writing strengths and weaknesses, as well as about him as an individual. I open this paper with his entire essay for the same reasons; it provides some context for my audience. Mark’s description of himself as “not bright enough” and being ridiculed offers teachers insight into the struggles many such students have living with their label, one that makes many people jump to conclusions about their intelligence, despite the fact that many college students with learning disabilities are of at least average intelligence. In fact, I have worked with students who are labeled both gifted and learning disabled. Many instructors of such students are confounded by the low self-esteem, the errors, and the inconsistency that accompany many college students with learning disabilities. Often, they wonder why such students speak so well and make so many simple writing errors, or why such students hand in strong homework and fail in-class exams, or why their spelling errors are so bizarre that spellcheck won’t recognize their words. These types of problems confront all college writing instructors, yet few of us have been trained to address them. I have met students who are afraid to tell professors about their disability due to their fear of prejudice. While I feel most writing professors sincerely want to assist students, many are unfamiliar with the laws and studies that affect college students with learning disabilities, which may cause a break-down in communication between student and teacher.
When I began to work in 1991 as a learning specialist for community college students with learning disabilities, I found several good research or survey articles describing what the writing of college students with learning disabilities looks like, such as an article by Noel Gregg and one by Carolyn O’Hearn, but I have found far fewer that surveyed other issues crucial to college writing instructors’ daily teaching, such as the law and teaching strategies. Since few instructors have time to read all the journals regarding college writing, this article’s purpose is to summarize articles pertinent to writing instructors who teach college students with learning disabilities.

These issues regarding the learning disabled population are important for all college writing teachers since this population has exploded at the college level. In 1988, 15 percent of full-time first-year college students with disabilities had learning disabilities; in 1991, 24.9 percent had learning disabilities; and in 1994, 32.2 percent had learning disabilities, making learning disabilities “the fastest growing category of reported disability among [college] students” from 1988 to 1994 (Henderson 9). Of the students with learning disabilities, 11.8 percent were enrolled at universities, 32.3 percent were enrolled at four-year colleges, 54.5 percent were enrolled at two-year colleges, and 1.4 percent were enrolled at historically black colleges and universities (Henderson 10). These statistics add weight to the words of O’Hearn, a composition instructor at a four-year school:

Certainly, composition teachers cannot play their role well if they do not know they are playing it, and too often they fail to recognize the signs of learning disability in student writing. . . . but I would argue that any composition teacher at an institution with fairly liberal admissions policies who asks “Do I have a learning disabled student in my class?” is asking the wrong question. Instead the question should be, “Which of my students is learning disabled?” (296)

As powerful as her words are, we cannot stop with this question, for identification is only the beginning. As O’Hearn observed in 1989, there is a “relative absence of scholarship in this area” (295). Eleven years later, there is still a lack of research in this field, and most research articles are published in journals specific to the learning disabled professionals. Since there is relatively little information available, it seems all the more important to look carefully at what does exist beyond just defining who is learning disabled. My intent is to present the research that pertains to college English teachers and tutors, which falls into two main categories. First, I will discuss applicable laws, as well as case laws, and their ramifications for writing instructors. Next, I will explore the practical implications for the writing teacher or tutor based on current research and hortatory articles. Lastly, I will present my conclusions, based on my experience working as a writing tutor and teacher of community college students with learning disabilities and on comparing the piles of articles on this topic that I read to prepare this paper.

**Legal Issues**

I have found that few instructors are familiar with laws affecting college students with learning disabilities, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act of
1990 (ADA) and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. I now reflect on how vulnerable I was before I was made aware of the laws; knowledge protects both instructors and students. In general, both section 504 and the ADA “mandate that institutions of higher education not discriminate against individuals with disabilities” (Scott 403). Specific learning disabilities are included as a category under Section 504, which “provides that otherwise qualified individuals with handicaps may not be discriminated against by recipients of federal financial assistance” (Rothstein 22-23). Furthermore, “reasonable accommodations” are required under the law (Rothstein 24).

While Section 504 has few words, its impact has been strong for post-secondary institutions: “Section 504, though brief, played a significant role in the 1980s in providing previously unavailable opportunities for higher education to the learning disabled” (Vogel 8). The law is broad enough to apply to a wide variety of situations, but its brevity is mainly why there is so much confusion about its implementation. Subpart E of 504 provides examples showing ways in which postsecondary schools must modify academic requirements that are discriminatory, such as providing taped texts, allowing extended time, or substituting required courses. Still the law offers no guidelines to be followed in specific circumstances. Several case laws have helped increase the understanding of what college instructors are obligated to do (Scott 403-405).

As soon as I had heard of section 504, I knew it pertained to me and my students, for I have worked exclusively at public institutions, but I have found that it affects essentially all postsecondary schools which receive any federal money, including student loans (Grove City College v. Bell, 1984 in Scott 406). Since “virtually all colleges are recipients of federal financial assistance in some department or other” (Rothstein 23), then virtually all colleges must follow Section 504. However, the case of Salvador v. Bell, 1986, “decided that a university does not violate the Rehabilitation Act when it does not know the individual is learning disabled” (Rothstein 28). Thus, it is the students’ responsibility to inform the school or instructor about their learning disability.

The case most noteworthy to individual professors was settled out of court in 1989, where an individual professor was forced to pay money to a student because the professor refused to allow extended time on an exam and “contested the existence of the student’s learning disability” (Dinsmore v. Pugh and the Regents of the University of California at Berkeley in Scott 406). On the other hand, schools may refuse accommodations and still support college students with learning disabilities. Schools must show that they evaluated the accommodation thoroughly and could support that it was unreasonable and “would result in a fundamental alteration of the program,” as in the case of the student who sought to change a medical school’s entire testing format (Wynne v. Tufts University School of Medicine, 1991 in Scott 406). The case of Dinsmore v. Pugh and the Regents of the University of California at Berkeley was different because it was based solely on an individual professor’s alleged academic freedom rights. Interpretation of the law is not easily predictable, for in one case tutoring was not found to be required for postsecondary students with learning disabilities (Rancho Santiago Community College, 1992) while in another “cost
alone" was not a sufficient defense for refusing accommodations (Barnes v. Converse College, 1977 in Scott 405).

Learning about these civil cases might make an instructor feel an urge to purchase malpractice insurance to teach college students with learning disabilities, but these cases are actually reassuring to me, for they provide some parameters. They help me to see what is permissible under the law, like upholding students’ rights to use extended time, and what is not, like changing the test format in an entire program, like medical school. Still, when it comes down to it, we all have to make individual decisions regarding each student with learning disabilities, in large part because the disabilities are so hard to generalize.

Accommodations: What’s Fair?

Even the most sympathetic instructor may feel concerned about the fairness of students’ requested accommodations. There has been some speculation in the literature about what are fair accommodations and why. In Yanok’s study involving 25 college students with learning disabilities and 25 college students without learning disabilities, students were tested before and after the two groups took the same remedial reading and study skills classes. In this study, no one received extra time to take the tests. The researcher determined that the students performed about the same on the tests, which he felt questioned “whether every student with a diagnosed learning disability is equally entitled to compensatory academic adjustments and accommodations” (172). Yanok wondered whether accommodations such as extended time for students with learning disabilities are fair to those remedial students who are not learning disabled since both groups performed similarly on the tests. Because this study was so small and because it did not include students who used accommodations (both those with learning disabilities and those with no learning disabilities), it is impossible to generalize from it. Still, I believe Yanok’s study touches a common concern of many postsecondary writing instructors that making accommodations to some is essentially unfair to others.

In contrast is Runyan’s study in which university students with and without learning disabilities were given a reading comprehension test that was given under both timed and untimed conditions. She found that extra time was only significant for the students with learning disabilities. She asked students in her study to mark how far they were on the answer sheet after 20 minutes to simulate a timed test. Then, to simulate an untimed test, students with and without learning disabilities were permitted to finish the test, taking as much time as they needed; the amount of extra time needed was noted. For the 15 students who were not learning disabled, extra time did not cause a significant change in their scores. Runyan’s data showed that when the test was timed, the reading rate was significantly higher for students without learning disabilities than for those with learning disabilities. When Runyan evaluated the students’ untimed results, she found that when all the students were given unlimited time, “there was no significant difference for the comprehension score between the normally achieving students and students with learning disabilities” (106). Furthermore, when comparing scores of normally achieving students under timed conditions with scores of disabled students, the only difference was not significant. It is this issue, when the tests are not timed, that can cause frustration among students and faculty alike. The student's test performance is diminished because of the time it takes to read. When extra time is given, students may have various disabilities that would not be considered disabilities under the definition of federal law. In the case of some students, wonder if that accommodation is fair for disabled students?
with scores of students with learning disabilities under untimed conditions, there was no significant discrepancy between the two groups of subjects (106).

It is noteworthy that students were not allowed to change their answers when taking this test. While none of the students with learning disabilities finished the exam in 20 minutes, most had correct answers. However, only two students without learning disabilities needed extra time, but not more than four minutes. Students with learning disabilities needed between four and 29 minutes of extra time. Runyan suggested that since students with learning disabilities have varying needs for extra time, a single formula for providing extra time may not be effective for all students (107). While this study was also small, it eliminated many variables found in Yanok’s study since Runyan looked at both college students with learning disabilities and those without learning disabilities under both timed and untimed conditions, while Yanok’s study leaves the reader wondering about how those students would have performed had they used accommodations.

Despite the case laws and even studies like Runyan’s, it is difficult to generalize about what accommodations to provide students. Accommodations are required by law to “be determined on a case-by-case basis, taking into account whether the accommodation is unduly burdensome financially or administratively and whether the requested accommodation involves a fundamental requirement of the program” (Rothstein 32-33). A study at a northwestern college suggests that interpretations of what counts as a fundamental requirement is likely to vary from faculty to faculty (Nelson, Dodd, and Smith 187).

For instance, 89.3% of education faculty would allow extended deadlines while only 15.8% of the business faculty would allow such extensions. Furthermore, 71.4% of education faculty “were willing to allow misspellings, incorrect punctuation, and poor grammar on examinations” while 21.5% of business faculty and 40.2% of arts and science faculty were willing to make the same accommodation (Nelson et al. 187). While it is possible that there are course-related reasons for these differences, which is allowed by the law, one cannot help but wonder whether the education faculty is more likely to understand the nature of learning disabilities, therefore explaining their tendency to provide more accommodations, especially concerning tolerance of spelling errors which are particularly common among students with learning disabilities (Gregg 335, O’Hearn 297).

Another study investigated both faculty’s and students’ perceptions of accommodations for college students with learning disabilities. The researchers found that most faculty were open to making some accommodations and considered these accommodations to be “fair to other students” (Houck et al. 683). However, the “faculty perceive[d] themselves as more willing to make needed accommodations than students who have sought such accommodations perceive[d] them as being...” (Houck et al. 683). The non-learning disabled students at the same college who were surveyed were uncertain whether it was fair for “special course-related accommodations” to be given to students with learning disabilities (Houck et al. 682). The authors suggested that this perception may cause students with learning disabilities to feel insecure about asking for accommodations (Houck et al. 683).
While these studies about accommodations help us look at the topic broadly, we are still left with practical questions about which strategies may be particularly useful to this population. I have always thought that good teaching is good teaching, but the research suggests that particular methods may be more effective than others with this population.

Remediation vs. Compensation: Finding What Works

So, there’s a student with a learning disability standing in front of you with an accommodations form in his or her hand. What can you do? Actually, the accommodation form will provide specific requests that the student and his or her case manager determined to be needed based on the student’s learning disability and data from the student’s file. Still, since we interact directly with such students, we need to determine which learning strategies are most effective. In general, we can choose from two main approaches: remediation or compensation. The purpose of remediation “is to improve areas of deficiency. In contrast, [the compensation] approach is directed toward the development of coping strategies that allow a task (within an area of difficulty) to be performed in a different manner” (Raskind and Scott 241).

Remediation is the most time-consuming approach, and it’s hard to find one strategy that is likely to work with a wide variety of students from the heterogeneous learning disabled population. Still some remedial approaches are worth weighing. The Landmark Method, named for Landmark College in Putney, VT, which was established in 1985 as an “offshoot” of Landmark High School in Boston (Gaskins 116), includes teaching to “automatization” where “students practice each skill until they are able to use it automatically’’ (Gaskins 118). Sentence combining was found to be helpful in some research (Gregg 336). Another approach to remediate students with learning disabilities is to use a “multisensory phonetic method of teaching reading, spelling, and written language...” (Guyer, Banks, and Guyer 187). This method is rather complex, but it essentially involves “reducing the English language to its basic elements, the 44 sounds and 26 letters” (Guyer et al. 187-188) as well as using color-coding, rigid lesson sequencing, and memorization techniques (Guyer et al. 188). In one study, college students with learning disabilities who were taught this method scored much higher on post tests than did control groups (Guyer, et al. 191).

The compensatory approach is favored by many instructors because it is more immediate and because many students have spent years using the remediation approaches with little or no success. Usually, an approach using both remedial and compensatory strategies is recommended (Raskind and Scott 241-242). Moreover, “a compensatory strategy can have remedial results” (Raskind and Scott 242). Technology clearly falls in with teaching students to compensate. The word processor often allows students with learning disabilities to correct their errors more easily; thus, it gives them freedom “to focus on the ‘meaning’ of their written communication” (Raskind and Scott 244). It can even lead to greater awareness of audience (Gregg and McAlexander 225). The spellcheck or hand-held spellers may help some students—but others’ error patterns may not be caught, such as homonym errors, so a tutor’s help may be needed to assist in editing (Raskind and Scott 245 and deBeer 8).
Since technology is expanding and prices are dropping, we may find our students requesting various devices that are relatively uncommon now. Speech recognition has the potential to become quite popular relatively soon: “Simply put, speech recognition allows the user to operate the computer by speaking into it” (Raskind and Scott 250). However, right now, the device may not recognize every word that is spoken (Raskind and Scott 250). Still, speech recognition “has tremendous implications for postsecondary students with [learning disabilities], particularly those students whose oral language exceeds their written language abilities” (Raskind and Scott 250). I have found that students are using this device more, especially at a college where I have tutored which has several computers that work with the speech recognition device. Further, students seem ready to use it after a few hours of training. An example supporting the use of a speech recognition device involves a student whom I tutored this fall who had hand written a paper which the instructor required to be typed; the students’ neurological problems made the typing onerous. By reading the paper aloud to the computer’s speech recognition device, he was able to hand in his paper appropriately without relying on someone else to type it for him.

One teacher wrote an article describing how a word processor helped a student with dyslexia write: He could “type without loss of meaning due to illegible handwriting...” and could concentrate more fully on his writing task (Arms 40). The instructor agreed to let other students help the student with dyslexia correct his spelling since “his misspellings are too numerous for him to grapple with without becoming despondent” (Arms 41). Another writing instructor reported her concerns about a student who dictated papers to his wife who typed them. Once the teacher observed this process, she agreed that the work was the student’s—he simply wrote aloud (Houston 299).

Other compensatory strategies include “Teach[ing] in a variety of modalities” like using manipulatives and visual aids (Gaskins 119); even writing on the blackboard, providing handouts, or working in groups falls in this category. Landmark Method uses “templates for thesis sentences or whole essays” (Gaskins 120), which provide students with a structure for tackling the assignment. Another idea is breaking assignments into small chunks or “subgoals” (Manganello 238) or, in the Landmark Method’s term, “micro-units” (Gaskins 117). Landmark Method’s “micro-units,” (Gaskins 117) where assignments are broken into small parts, may seem like an invitation to return to the days of skill and drill. Instead, while the article did not elaborate on this in great detail, I understood it to mean stating the stages of a task explicitly. (An example was given in the article stating seven steps in a summarizing assignment.) Actually, most teachers do this when teaching how to write a term paper. First, students go to the library and search for sources. Next, they either take out books or Xerox articles. Next, they read the sources and take notes. Then, a rough outline is made. Students may need to go back and duplicate earlier steps if there are holes in their research or other recognized problems.

With all these strategies in mind, it is not surprising that one study showed that students with learning disabilities who graduated had an average of four times more tutoring than students with learning disabilities who did not graduate
(Vogel, Hruby, and Adelman 39). One might assume that many of these compensatory approaches were stressed in tutoring, which might help to explain the positive results of tutoring.

A writing instructor may face another problem: the students who seem to fit the profile of learning disabilities but have not identified themselves as such. I have simply said to such students: “I’ve noticed you have a lot of spelling errors. Has anyone ever talked to you about them?” This opens up the conversation. Some students do not want to pursue it; others do. Certainly, instructors should use caution and sensitivity when considering discussing learning disabilities with such a student. O’Hearn noted:

As long as the teacher resists the temptation to label individual students as “learning disabled” and leaves such diagnosis in the hands of professionals trained in the field, I see little harm and a great deal of good if a composition teacher actively looks for potentially learning disabled students and tries to see that they receive the testing, tutoring, and counseling available to them in the institution. (301)

I never realized how important technology is to college students with learning disabilities—and students with disabilities in general—until I began tutoring students with learning disabilities. Being aware of the devices available and how they may help students automatically makes us teachers and tutors able to be advocates for the entire disabled population. Furthermore, how we grade papers, and even the types of assignments we give, are also issues to ponder when thinking about students with learning disabilities.

Grading and Assignments

When writing teachers talk to me about learning disabled students, spelling is often one of their biggest worries. Many learning disabled students do not spell phonetically. What if a student is writing at the college level in every way except spelling? Consider this advice: “Rethink grading criteria. How important should spelling be to the grade? Should surface errors weigh more than content?” (Martin 287). Another suggestion reminds teachers to comment on papers using a positive approach. “Avoid personal attack (‘You should have learned this in high school!’)” (Martin 287). It’s best to stress one major error rather than attempt to point out every single mistake, which falls into the earlier point about breaking things into small parts. That way, the student is clear on what needs to be reviewed.

The germinal work of Shaughnessy’s (1977) Errors and Expectations pertains to coping with the errors of the learning disabled college population, although she never explicitly refers to this specific population, in part, perhaps, because the definition of who falls into the learning disabled category has changed since she wrote her book (McAlexander 7). The following, which summarizes many of her points, is particularly useful advice when considering college students with learning disabilities:

While we dismiss as irresponsibly romantic the view that error is not important at all and that readers can “catch the meaning” in error-laden writing if they try, we should also be wary of any view that
results in setting tasks for beginning writers that few besides English teachers would consider important. In short, [teachers] must ask not only what [they want] but what the student is most ready to do and what, from a reader’s viewpoint, is most important. (Shaughnessy 119-120)

It seems that more meaningful than anything we write on the papers or say in class is the assignment itself. Students must be interested in their topic: “The idea that students produce better compositions about topics that interest them is not novel, but it is particularly important for the student for whom writing is a chore under the best conditions” (Newcomer and Barenbaum 591). In a study of twelve successful dyslexics (which included doctors, scientists, educators, and other professionals), all “had a passionate personal interest, a burning desire to know more about a discipline that required reading. Spurred by this passionate interest, all read voraciously, seeking and reading everything they could get their hands on about a single intriguing topic” (Fink 274-5). All these dyslexics became stronger readers and, later, stronger writers: “Of the twelve dyslexics, nine have written and published creative scholarly works. Moreover, the other three currently write on a daily basis in their professions” (Fink 276).

Fink’s article provides a basis to support Martin’s suggestion that instructors should be positive when commenting on papers. I believe that most students respond better to positive reinforcement than negative, but Fink’s study shows what incredible success some students with learning disabilities are capable of, if only we could help these students find their interest.

Conclusions

Many of the articles I read ended with a finger-wagging sermon, which is tempting to do. After reading piles of articles and reflecting on some rather unsympathetic instructors’ responses to students with learning disabilities with whom I have worked, I feel a bit like shouting too. But, I feel it is too simplistic to reduce all this research to a few sentences of sad tales and angry words.

It is hard to fault instructors who may have never been exposed to the laws or writing issues specific to students with learning disabilities. For example, on the topic of extended time, Runyan noted that “there is a paucity of research on the impact of timed exams on the performance of students with [learning disabilities]” (107). While Runyan’s study was small, it provides some data to refer to when instructors question whether extra time is fair. I feel the real question is whether speed is important to evaluating a student’s performance. This study confirms my experiences tutoring college students with learning disabilities; I found that they can often do as well as other students but that they take longer because of their processing delay. This study suggests that if we were to give extended time to all students, only students with learning disabilities would need it significantly.

I hesitate to write my true feelings on spelling, since it is not a popular stance with many English teachers, who might point to work by Guyer et al. (1993), whose research favored the test results of students taught using a “multisensory phonetic method of teaching reading, spelling, and written
language..." (187). Still, I feel strongly that spelling should be ignored for college students with learning disabilities. I have taught at several colleges and none teach spelling in their composition or basic writing classes, so that tells me, on some level, spelling is not a priority and/or that it's almost impossible to teach to many adults who cannot spell. All other areas that are graded like grammar and punctuation are explicitly taught. When members of my tutoring program attempted to teach spelling to students with learning disabilities, hoping that the students would improve, the tutors felt the students retained almost nothing. A college student with learning disabilities wrote about struggling to learn to spell:

Spending so much time on trying to teach someone with a learning disability to spell might be detrimental to that person's ability to ever learn to write.... I cannot spell today, and it is certainly not because teachers did not try year after agonizing year to teach me. They spent so much time trying to teach me to spell that no one ever got around to teaching me how to write. (Lee and Jackson 25)

This student's words reflect my own feelings about spelling, although it is hard to ignore the study by Guyer et al. While that study suggested that a multisensory phonetic method of teaching spelling was effective, it needs to be duplicated to add to its legitimacy. Further, the approach they advocate is extremely time consuming, which means it is expensive. It cannot be squeezed into tutorials.

My feeling is that students with spelling-related disabilities should be allowed to use word processors, spell checks, speech recognition devices for computers, or scribes if their disabilities support such devices. As noted earlier, these devices fall under the compensatory approaches and are supported by the clause “reasonable accommodation” under Section 504. Then, with adequate support, students should be responsible for editing but should be encouraged to use devices to correct their spelling if needed. Isn't college primarily about thinking and comprehending and less about subskills like decoding and spelling? Should the inability to perform subskills mean that there's no chance for a college degree, particularly for students who excel at primary skills? One college student with learning disabilities reflected on this:

I did not learn to write until I learned to use a computer. This sounds ironic, but in my past writing was spelling, and since I could not spell, I could not write. When I discovered a word processing system with a spell check, I finally understood that writing involved putting thoughts and ideas into some kind of written form. (Lee and Jackson 23)

Some instructors question the use of scribes, which very few students use. One instructor I know complained about the handful of students at a college who use scribes even though they are "physically capable" of writing their own papers; the concern was over the fairness of someone else spelling for the students. The English department chairperson told this instructor that she had to comply with the use of scribes for this handful of students because it was the law. While I know the chairperson was right, I have understanding for her concern, but as the study by Guyer et al. shows, scribes more often use computers to transcribe, or they have put the child on a short-term pause. DoesMillon of speech diagnosis?

Since I don't teach composition, I have not...
concern, but for different reasons. I do not care so much about spelling as long as the student is able to compensate, but I do worry about the integrity of scribing. I hate being a scribe because it's hard to become completely passive. I have put a comma in without a student stating to do it because I heard him pause. Do I erase it or do I say something? This is why I find the increasing use of speech recognition devices so exciting.

Since I know that spelling is such a contentious topic, more research needs to be done to help teachers, tutors, and students understand whether spelling is teachable to this population. Also a survey should be conducted analyzing in detail how instructors feel about compensatory devices like spell check or scribes. Such a survey should allow instructors to voice concerns about or support for these particular devices, which would be beyond the questionnaire-type survey used by Nelson et al. and involving a qualitative study using interviews and focus groups.

Some of Landmark Method's strategies (Gaskins 117) may make some people who advocate process writing balk due to the emphasis on explicit instruction. However, we can't assume that students will learn how to do something as complicated as writing a research paper or following a specific form we expect if we don't map it out. Landmark Method's templates (Gaskins 120) or what I call modeling can mean that the instructor or tutor takes some control of the student's paper, which is not popular with theorists like Elbow, who supports classes without teachers (76). But, sometimes, a student is truly an outsider to the world of academic discourse and needs some explicit guidance. Of course, students need to learn to hear their own thoughts and feel empowered to express them, but I think it's unrealistic to think that a student will learn to put a thesis statement in the first paragraph unless he or she is told explicitly. Further, if that thesis statement is needed for a passing grade, then we have an obligation to tell the students.

If a student has never written a thesis statement, then I will model it for the student. We talk about what the paper is about, and I will use his or her words and construct a thesis statement. That may sound sacrilegious, but, I feel, it teaches the student the process of how to do it. Although Murray refers to the image of the oboe teacher who "plays along with the student oboist, sharing their art" (127) as an analogy to the writing teacher writing his or her own essay as the students write their own essays, I feel his analogy serves to support modeling too. When I was learning to play the flute, my teacher would occasionally tell me to stop and would pick up her flute and play the song a bit. Then, I would try again, moving forward, for I had been pushed beyond what I was able to do on my own. Especially considering that some students with learning disabilities have spent little time learning how to write essays due to the large amount of time devoted to subskills (Lee and Jackson 25), I feel modeling helps students learn what they must do to write on their own.

The articles that discussed assignments encourage instructors to provide topics or readings that "interest" students (Newcomer and Barenbaum 591) or which reflect a student's "passionate personal interest" (Fink 274-5). These ideas fall in with those of many writers in the composition field, like Berthoff, who
advocates “developing authentic occasions for writing” (27) or Murray, who says, “We have to commit ourselves to letting our students take the initiative in the writing course. . . . we have to have faith that our students have something to say” (150). Of course, not every piece of writing will be as interesting to a student as others. Further, most basic and composition writing classes as well as other college classes have required writing topics, which means students must learn to cope with writing with less passion — or, better, to learn how to manipulate topics to create interest for both the writer and the reader. Also, students may need some guidance when teachers do give students complete freedom of topics. Some students with learning disabilities (and others too) are pessimistic or overwhelmed and may not be able to hear their inner voice as well as others. They may need a teacher to help by giving a focused freewriting assignment on a general topic to help them to find their voice.

I feel my research and work with the learning disabled population has improved my teaching skills in general. I’m more inclined to use the blackboard, to repeat instructions, to hand out written assignments, to check for clarity. I’m more open to the differences in all students. When teaching a writing class for the general college population, I often think about how my increased sensitivity to students with learning disabilities has affected how I treat other students. It seems most students need my sympathy in one area or another. The student who stutters and who doesn’t want to read aloud. The student whose wife is having a baby in the middle of the semester. The student who just arrived from Korea. The student who was mugged twice during the semester. It’s made me rethink again and again what I think is acceptable.

I’ve learned to remain hopeful about students’ abilities, although I suspect that a few students may never be able to write at the college level. In Shaughnessy’s words: we must “assume that [our] students are capable of learning what [we] have learned, and what [we] now [teach]. . . .” (292). Thus, while we may discover that some students with learning disabilities may not be able to do college work (Perin 2), we must learn all we can to ensure that our naiveté — or even subtle discrimination — is not what impedes their success.

I remember a student who was asked to write about what he would wish if a magician could make any wish come true. He wrote that he would wish he were normal, not learning disabled. I wish I could make his problems and pain disappear too. Since I can’t, all I can hope is to learn all I can, so I can help such students perform at their fullest potential.

References


---

**Join WCTELA!**

_____ WCTELA (regular) $30
_____ WCTELA (1st/2nd year teacher) $20

_____ WCTELA (contributing) $40
_____ WCTELA (student) $5

_____ WCTELA (sustaining) $50

Please help us maintain an accurate database by indicating your teaching/administrative level:

_____ Elementary

_____ Middle School

_____ High School

_____ Reading/LA Coordinator

_____ Department Chair

_____ College

NAME_____________________________________

MAILING ADDRESS___________________________

CITY__________________________STATE________ZIP CODE_____________

PHONE________________________EMAIL_____________

(TO BE PRINTED IN WCTELA DIRECTORY)

CESA DISTRICT_____________________________
Nicholas J. Karolides, University of Wisconsin-River Falls


Set in a rural Vermont community at the turn of the century—the last one—Preacher’s Boy suggests a sense of historical remoteness. Yet, as might be anticipated from Katherine Paterson, it contains universal concerns and conflicts that make this novel quite current. Indeed, reminiscent of 1999, there are predictions from pulpits (excluding that of the hero’s father) that when the clock turns to open the year 1900, the Day of Judgment will arrive.

Robbie Hewitt, mischievous, impetuous, and often hot-tempered, harbors beneath his boisterous exterior a semi-conscious rebellion against the expectations of a preacher’s son. Robbie admires his father; however, he often feels humiliated by him—his sermon against war, for example, and his breaking up a fight involving Robbie making it seem that Robbie needed to be rescued. A further cause for Robbie’s dismay: Reverend Hewitt acknowledges reading Charles Darwin’s The Descent of Man which, according to Robbie, is a “heathen” book, well known to have been “inspired by the devil himself.”

Two events occur that deepen Robbie’s alienation and anger, leading to an ill-fated decision. After an emotionally and physically exhausting evening spent looking for Robbie’s older brother who is “simple in the head,” Robbie’s father bursts into uncontrolled sobs of release and relief; Robbie feels shame for his father and sorrow for himself, for his father had never cried for him. His anger bursts into rage some days later at the swimming pond when he’s taunted—being labeled “apeist” and “monkey’s boy”; he nearly drowns one of his tormentors.

Scared and ashamed, Robbie runs away. He heads for his secret hideout only to find it occupied by a nomadic father and young daughter, he an alcoholic, she his caretaker. How Robbie gets through the tumultuous events that ensue, redeeming himself, reuniting with his family, and helping the nomadic duo, concludes this highly engaging and insightful novel. This novel, readable by middle schoolers, will kindle responses among at-risk students and those who have difficulty fulfilling expectations.
In Paula Boock’s *Dare Truth or Promise*, Louie (Louise) and Willa meet casually at work and, later, at school. Willa, a transfer student, carefully private, wears a protective shield. Louie, exuberantly self-assured on stage and among her friends and family, knows who she is, where she’s going. Soon, they find themselves noticing each other, looking for each other, thinking about each other. Startlingly, they discover they are in love.

For Louie, it is an extraordinary turnabout of her life’s expectations. For Willa, who had experienced a lesbian relationship once before that had ended in chaotic feelings amid parental threats and accusations, the discovery was tinged with uncertainty. Wondrous joy emerges; however, it is tainted by Louie’s mother’s suspicions and growing hostility. Her confronting the two in a compromising situation catapults the relationship into anguished trauma. The interior journey that Louie and Willa take—and their parents as well—to sort out their feelings and expectations is intense.

The experiences are told from two perspectives, Louie’s and Willa’s, in alternating chapters. The sensitive writing is sympathetic to both of them and expressive of understanding. The subject matter of this novel will be a draw for the curious and those literature outsiders who can identify with the situation. The intended audience is the high school student. *Dare Truth or Promise* won the New Zealand Children’s Book of the Year award.
MILWAUKEE 2000

NCTE's 90th Annual Convention
"Teaching Matters"

MIDWEST EXPRESS CENTER
MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN
November 16-21, 2000

Major Speakers:
- Frank McCourt, author of Angela's Ashes and 'Tis.
- Margaret Edson, author of the Pulitzer Prize winning play, Wit, about a dying English professor.
- Anthony Browne, one of Britain's most accomplished picture book authors and author ofVoices in the Park.

Registration Info:
The fee is $105 for NCTE members or $145 for nonmembers. Registration deadline is October 13, 2000. Registration materials will be available in July in the Convention Preview which will be sent to all NCTE members. You can find more information as it becomes available at www.ncte.org.

Benefits:
NCTE's Annual Convention in Milwaukee will enrich teachers' professional repertoire, will provide concrete assistance in meeting the learning needs of students, and will renew teachers' commitment to the profession and to their important work.

This year, Annual Convention participants will have the opportunity to choose from more than 400 concurrent sessions on topics ranging from writing, interdisciplinary studies, and Shakespeare to multicultural education, technology, and media. More than 40 authors, poets, editors, and illustrators will also deliver dynamic presentations and innovative sessions.

Participants also will have the chance to see and learn about the latest in textbooks and classroom materials at the Annual Convention. More than 200 publishers and distributors of educational and professional materials will sell and display their products in our Exhibit Hall.