



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1981 Volume IV: Writing Across the Curriculum

Introduction

These days, parents and administrators agree that teachers should assign more writing to their classes. Many teachers and even some students concur. Yet assigning more writing may mean only more and more drudgery for both students and teachers unless teachers know why they want to teach writing and how best to teach it.

Although the “back-to-basics” slogan now heard everywhere offers some guidance as to what to teach, it hasn’t yet given any insight into why or how to teach, and many never do so. The fundamentally narrow and negative definition of education implicit in the slogan signals a retreat, and only a retreat. And while that retreat may be in a general direction that many want to head in, won’t the teachers of basic skills still face the same day-to-day problems that teachers face now: the overcrowded classes, the shortage of books and supplies, the chronic absenteeism of some students, the indifference of some colleagues, and our own occasional low spirits and inertia?

Almost certainly. And a recognition of the problems that can frustrate the teacher of writing stands behind each of the units brought together here. But with that recognition also stands a belief that schools will have in the future, as they have in the present, two crucial resources: the ability of students to learn and the ability of teachers to teach.

These units are meant to suggest to you, perhaps only to remind you of, reasons and ways for teaching writing. Reading through this booklet, you will come across a great variety of approaches. The seminar out of which these units developed had engaged in spirited and extended disputes that, we hope, clarified the differences among us. There are units here that regard writing as a means, and others that regard it as an end in itself. There are units that advocate the use of drills, and others that instead use poetry and art to teach syntax and vocabulary. Some units suggest using haiku, others suggest writing postcards and letters, and one even speaks of the advantages of formal outlining. Some concentrate exclusively on techniques for developing the students’ self-confidence and creativity. There are units here for teaching writing in the history and science class, as well as in English and foreign language classes. And a few units address students for whom English is a second language or who are classified as Developmentally Disabled. There are, in short, strategies here for almost any student in the middle or high school. Out of all this variety, we hope, the thoughtful and energetic teacher may discover, or just rediscover, a reason and a motive for “assigning more writing.”

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