How Well Does Writing across the Curriculum Work?

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For over a year now my colleagues and I have been assessing the impact of Michigan Tech's six-year-old writing-across-the-curriculum program. We have surveyed, interviewed, and questioned both faculty and students, and we have measured, collected, and scored whatever and wherever possible. Some of these data, once analyzed, may confirm or deny with numbers that our program works. However, numerous unexpected problems and benefits are already apparent. It is these I wish to report on here.

This essay is my attempt to set down, as frankly as possible, some of the lessons I have learned from overseeing a writing-across-the-curriculum program and conducting faculty workshops for the past six years. The goals and objectives, the theories and the successes of writing-across-the-curriculum programs have been fully described elsewhere in books, periodicals, and conferences; this essay will try not to repeat those assertions and descriptions. Suffice it to say that I believe the programs do work and that the interdisciplinary writing workshops are the very best way to introduce those programs to college and university faculties.

We attempted from the beginning to influence faculty first—through the writing workshops—and students second—through attending classes taught by faculty who had attended the workshops. We believed that to improve student writing we had to influence the entire academic community in which writing takes place, to make the faculty sensitive to the role of writing in learning as well as to the relationship of writing to other communication skills—reading, speaking, and listening. We began our program in 1977, based primarily on the ideas of James

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Britton and his colleagues (*The Development of Writing Abilities, 11-18* [London: Macmillan, 1975]), to introduce faculty from all disciplines to a variety of ideas and strategies for using more writing in whatever courses they teach. We conducted intensive, two- and four-day writing workshops off campus for fifteen to twenty-five faculty at a time to introduce them to these general concepts: 1) that writing can be used to promote learning as well as to measure it; 2) that the writing process can inform all assignments and evaluation; and 3) that students write poorly for a variety of reasons—including poor motivation, immaturity, inadequate rhetorical skills. To date, spring 1983, we have conducted twelve such workshops for approximately 200 faculty and staff at our university. In addition my colleagues and I have conducted similar workshops at numerous colleges and universities throughout the country.

Teaching writing in English classes or outside of English classes remains more art than science: we still know very little about what happens at the moment of insight, inspiration, or ideation. Nor do we know predictable routes of faithful translation from thought to language, from pen to paper. So in every attempt to “teach” others to teach writing more often and more thoughtfully in their classes, problems arise with translation, motivation, situation, assumptions, pedagogy, terminology, personality, and turf. At the same time we who started such programs hoping to amplify the lessons of freshman composition soon found that we had stumbled into fertile territory for pedagogical research, faculty development, institutional cohesion, and personal growth.

The following personal reflections address two central issues which may never yield answers solely in numbers: what didn’t work that we thought would—and why didn’t it; and what happened that we didn’t expect, but liked when it happened.

**Problems**

In the course of conducting some forty workshops, both at Michigan Tech and elsewhere, I encountered numerous questions for which I didn’t have good answers. Sometimes I used language that conjured up inappropriate images; other times I hazarded solutions to problems with which I had no direct experience. But I learned and I think my answers have become more accurate, qualified, and careful. While some of these problems are institutional, others are specific to the disciplines or personalities of workshop participants. All nonetheless need to be dealt with, one way or another, by people who plan and conduct writing-across-the-curriculum programs.

**Terminology.** From the start we designed our program around a particular unified set of ideas and hoped to stick to those ideas consistently from workshop to workshop. We did so hoping the entire academic community would soon share common assumptions about writing and terminology to describe those assumptions and perhaps assign and evaluate student writing with a good measure of consistency. In particular we introduced our colleagues to James Britton’s scheme for explaining the functions of writing: “expressive” (personal, informal writing to yourself to find out what is on your mind); “transactional” (writing to
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inform, instruct, or persuade someone about something); and “poetic” (writing used as art, where form, structure, and style may be more important than content). We felt this schema made sense, was easy to explain, and pointed toward certain overlooked solutions to the underuse and misuse of writing throughout the curriculum; namely, that more expressive writing in all subject areas would help students both to learn better and to learn to write better.

Often, however, we had trouble explaining exactly what the term “expressive” writing meant: to many teachers “expressive” connoted a dangerous freedom of language that suggested all sorts of educational license. We could usually dispel these anxieties over the duration of a several-day workshop, but the problem kept surfacing when people who had attended workshops tried to explain the ideas to colleagues back at campus or when we made brief presentations using that term without having the time to explore it fully. As a colleague in the School of Business recounted later: “Toby and Art Young came over trying to sell the department on workshops and then we got involved in the expressive-transactional argument again. And I think that the whole department has gotten a negative attitude.” No matter how hard and lucidly (we thought) we explained the crucial distinction and relationship between the two functions of language, a number of faculty would never accept the idea that informal writing to oneself had anything to do with formal communication to somebody else—teachers, for instance. My School of Business friend tried to explain his colleagues’ misconceptions: “I think the attitude of the School of Business for the most part is that transactional writing has been replaced by expressive writing, poor sentence structure and no concern for spelling.”

This fundamental misunderstanding lasted for over three years until we finally arranged a special exam-week, two-day workshop for his whole department and cleared up the problem once and for all. Some of my co-directors substituted terms like “exploratory” or “speculative” writing to avoid some of this terminology problem; however, the concept of informal, personal, or journal writing is of questionable value to faculty outside the humanities and no matter what language you describe it in, you must be prepared for some unsettling questions. Ironically, I had fewer problems with this problem on campuses where I came in as an “outside consultant”: my pedestal was higher and so my word less debatable.

Resistance. We learned right away that writing workshops cannot inspire or transform unmotivated, inflexible, or highly-suspicious faculty members. Participants must volunteer with an open mind and be willing to share ideas, rather than compete with them in order for the workshops to work. Some people seem to be constitutionally uncomfortable with workshop-style activities which require a lot of participant risks, such as reading aloud one’s own writing to colleagues or generating consensus ideas or writing in a personal journal. These same teachers may never feel comfortable generating classroom dialogue, assigning journals, or trusting students to evaluate each other’s writing. Such people often attend with good intentions, but cannot adapt the informal workshop style to their own learning and teaching styles. One person, for example, from mathematics could not identify with any activity that encouraged multiple drafts as
the route to good writing: he always wrote well in one draft and could not understand why others could not also. I believed that he spoke truly about his own writing process, but his vocal resistance was such that many in the workshop found him difficult to work with and I had a hard time being patient with his intolerance. The mode of writing and learning we presented in our model did not match his model at all.

Other participants who have been ordered by their department heads to attend the workshops and who do so out of resentment rather than personal interest often pose more serious problems. These professors most often block things by negation, by what they won’t do: they won’t keep journals, they won’t try freewrites, they won’t share writing with colleagues or revise or participate in peer group exercises that would affirm the value of the workshop. While such participants have been few, I can vividly remember each one of them. Their participation—or lack thereof—puts such a strong damper on workshops that we think leaders should go to great lengths to insist that participants attend voluntarily. Yet we realize that if only the already-committed attend, we are not reaching out as widely as we would like.

Turf. People sometimes ask me, with a twinkle in their eyes, what disciplinary group is the most difficult to work with at workshops, from which disciplines do I expect trouble. I could generalize (dangerously) and say that philosophers and English teachers, on whose language turf the workshops most obviously intrude, raise the most skeptical questions. “How do you know Britton’s theories are correct?” “What empirical evidence proves that journal writing facilitates learning?” “The ideas of Quine and Chomsky contradict what you are saying.” Philosophers especially question every assumption and argue fine points of terminology and language use. In the process they have taught me to stay closer to ideas verifiable by personal experience and to stay away from too much theory, which is always debatable from one point of view or another anyway. English teachers, especially those who view their proper domain as literature, often do not believe that their colleagues in other disciplines can teach anything about writing; consequently they often want to instruct them on how to do it—which gets dangerously close to telling them how to teach—which raises severe problems in all sorts of directions.

To be fair, I could also say that some of the most helpful people in workshops have been astute philosophers and savvy English teachers. Critical colleagues with open minds who raise questions of concern to all are the very best people in a writing workshop; however, people out to celebrate their own wit and wisdom cause problems and often incur the wrath of the other participants who are confused by too much disagreement among experts. All this is, of course, predictable; the remarkable fact is how well most of the mixed discipline people get on most of the time.

Translation. A good workshop offers a smorgasbord of strategies, practices, and techniques to improve both writing and learning, and participants are free to adopt those that suit their personality, pedagogy, or situation. But it doesn’t always happen the way we expect, predict, or prefer. As a group, mathematics teachers seem to have the hardest time figuring out how workshop ideas apply to
their teaching. One mathematics teacher, for example, who seemed to understand theoretically most of what went on at the workshop, stated later that the only thing he could think to do, practically, was send all his 150 calculus students to tour the writing lab—under penalty of failing the course. He did, and they all went, but we believe such translations are as likely to make students resentful of the lab as to seek help in it. Another mathematics teacher who enthusiastically used writing in a small upper-division project-oriented course found it virtually impossible to include it in her several first-year calculus courses: “The course material itself is not very conducive to writing. You can have students read a story problem or maybe make up some of their own, but . . . they don’t have the mathematical sophistication, because they’re just starting out, to create story problems.” So, while I may think writing workshop ideas translate to all disciplines, my colleagues often tell me differently, and I have learned to accept that.

Numbers. Professors who teach courses with enrollments larger than fifty or sixty, often several hundred, report major difficulties in including more writing in their classes, even though, in theory, there are ways to do this. I have stopped arguing with them. Large classes are lousy places in which to ask for writing, unless well-trained graduate assistants or “readers” are available to help out. A colleague who teaches electrical engineering technology, when interviewed a year after attending a workshop, described his situation this way: “Labs are part of our teaching load each term and generate approximately 80 labs [reports] a week. Correcting these labs makes it very difficult to be motivated to ask for additional writing assignments.” A mathematics professor who teaches in a fixed three-term calculus course, one of many such sections offered by her department, explained that “not only is the class large, but our courses are so full of material that must be covered and because the students have to take these courses in sequence, the engineering departments tell us we have to cover a certain amount of material in a certain amount of time.” In other words, general ideas only translate into specific practices when an instructor perceives the conditions are right and appropriate. Although there are a variety of non-graded writing assignments that do work for some instructors, large numbers of students in a class remain a problem.

Trust. Perhaps the most difficult practice for teachers across the curriculum to use is peer review, where students read (aloud or silently) and critique each other’s papers in a draft stage and then revise them for the instructor’s review. An otherwise successful forestry professor, after trying peer review in his class, called it “a lead balloon”—explaining that some good students “suffered because his peers didn’t do a good review.” Another colleague in civil engineering noted: “Some students take it kind of lightly and they don’t do a very good job. And then the other student that’s being reviewed, of course, resents that.” He went on to say that even when students take it seriously, they do not like to hurt their classmates’ feelings: “Most of the time they’re afraid to be critical.”

I fully understand that problem. Peer review only works for me when I trust both the process and the students enough to work them hard, that is, when I return to the process more than two or three times during the term in the same
groups of four or five. Used less than that, students simply do not have the time to develop trust in each other or to develop that critical, skeptical eye so important to good revision. The teacher in content-area courses who tries this once or twice, with or without specific guidelines, will have a real problem making it work. The teacher who makes peer review work—and several of my cross-curricular colleagues do have good success stories here—modifies his or her course substantially to make enough time and room for it to happen.

**Dabbling.** I've come to believe that you can only teach a writing process approach to process-oriented people. This implies first, that some colleagues, already on our wavelengths, are already doing some of the things we suggest and use the workshops primarily for reinforcement. That's good. But it also implies that many others who attend have a rather product-oriented approach to the whole teaching business: students must learn that what counts in the real world is the final report, the finished letter, the completed project—not the evidence of effort as one struggles to get there. (My own bias shows strongly here.) For these teachers, no matter how much we stress techniques and strategies to generate good final products (journal writes, freewrites, multiple drafts, etc.), the workshop produces only superficial change in their attitudes or practices. (Six months after she attended a workshop and told us how much it meant to her, a professor who teaches in forestry said that the main things she looks for on papers are "spelling, style, and neatness." While we don't dismiss these items, her answer dismays us.)

On the one hand, we are not surprised when product-oriented teachers leave the workshop with one or two ideas, but no real commitment to process-oriented education. On the other hand, we are surprised when the process-oriented teacher can't get a good process-idea to work. And this problem haunts a lot of really good committed teachers. If we only try peer reviews a few times they will fail; if we don't keep a journal ourselves the journals will seem like busywork; if we don't carefully plan papers to come in at different draft stages, they'll all come in at once at the end of the term. The point is that lots of good ideas fail because we don't fully commit ourselves to make them work; we don't or can't spend the requisite time to make them work. Large classes, or too many classes, or research and publication pressure—whatever the reason, teachers need to be awfully dedicated to make a new idea a regular part of their pedagogical repertoire. We don't mean to, but we often do, dabble rather than commit ourselves.

**Location.** On a related note, it is instructive to examine the colleges where writing-across-the-curriculum seems to work best. It doesn't get too far at large, research-oriented universities where teaching is not a high priority. Or if it does, the program is shaped like that at the University of Michigan, where one upper-level writing course and one committed teacher per discipline is the solution; no attempt is made to make most teachers pay attention to writing. Nor is writing across the curriculum needed at certain places—at well-endowed small liberal arts colleges with high SAT students and low teacher-student ratios—because writing has been an integral part of instruction all along: teaching was always valued and writing remained a natural way to teach well. The places where such writing-across-the-curriculum programs seem most likely to be needed and have
a chance of success are the public schools where faculty have fairly high teaching loads and medium to low research and publication pressure. But these same institutions, like my own, work their teachers hard, and good ideas therefore need to be awfully practical and good teachers awfully dedicated to get writing back into the curriculum.

**Overselling.** I learned that when I strongly endorse one idea which works well for me, I can set up other teachers for failure: no idea will work for absolutely everyone every time. This has happened several times with journals, for example, an idea which I probably oversold at earlier workshops. A business teacher who tried to use journals found herself feeling silly asking classes of 100 students to "take out your journals"; it's a phrase you actually need to practice to feel comfortable saying out loud. Another colleague in metallurgy collected student journals from all of his three sections at the same time and was overheard cursing me out loud in his office, 180 journals piled high on his desk: he overdid what I oversold and the result was not good. To teach journals well, teachers need to keep one themselves and learn how it works first hand. The same is true for multiple-draft assignments: teachers need to watch their own writing process to know how to assign and evaluate best. And while a workshop of several days allows some opportunity for teachers to learn what it takes to write and read certain kinds of assignments, it's never really enough unless a teacher is sympathetic to begin with. This last point is crucial: the teachers who take the most away from a workshop are always those who were already doing some of the things we talked about. Perhaps the greatest value of the workshops is reinforcing one's current predispositions and practices. But even those sympathetic to a good idea know better than I when an idea won't work in their classes. One teacher explained that journals had no place in her course because "In mathematics, at least at the stage we're talking about, something's either right or wrong—there's seldom an in-between. You don't offer opinions about it in the same way you would discussing D. H. Lawrence, Hemingway, or Shakespeare."

**Follow up.** Short-term attitude changes do not guarantee long-term pedagogical changes. We already know that ideas which seemed bright and shiny in the workshop light have dimmed considerably after a year and two in our long, dark Michigan winter, due to increased teaching loads, large classes, administrative responsibilities, lack of collegial support, pressures to research, publish, write grants, and the like. We would be naive to believe we could maintain workshop-level intensity throughout the academic year. As my co-director Cynthia Selfe put it: "Of course they write and think about writing in the pine-scented wilderness that surrounds Alberta [where we do our summer workshops]. What else is there to do?" So while some teachers change their syllabi to reflect a new awareness of the role of process in assignment making, others do not. While some teachers immediately try out journals, others do not—and some who optimistically assigned journals one term find them too much trouble to assign the next.

But just as many follow-up problems can be traced to those of us who lead the workshops. Some years we have had alumni reunions, winter workshops, guest speakers, discipline-specific seminars with individual departments and informational mailings—one year we even published a monthly newsletter. Other years
we, who were supposed to keep the writing spirit alive on campus, initiated nothing at all, for whatever reasons, because we were careless, overworked, lazy, or forgetful. In fact, it is hard to assess "blame" here; universities are busy places with lots going on, pulling all of us in multiple and different directions. We don't believe a writing-across-the-disciplines program can maintain white heat (or even red) throughout its term of operation. At the same time we remain convinced that these programs only work when they are long-term; that is, follow-up activities must continue no matter how difficult it becomes to find something new to do or how discouraging when no one shows up. As Art Young, the co-founder of our Tech program, puts it: "Ours is a model that will need continual care and thought—even after the five-year period [of external funding]—because it is primarily a faculty program rather than curricular." In other words, the teacher-centered model depends on teacher energy and informed pedagogy to work and keep working.

Carrots. At the very time we initiated our writing-across-the-curriculum program, with the strong encouragement of our deans and academic vice president, these very same administrators were encouraging higher standards for tenure and promotion, asking for more research, more publications, and the generation of more external money. Over the past six years these competing movements have actually pushed faculty at our university in opposing directions, suggesting that they spend more time assigning and evaluating student writing, on the one hand, while asking them to research and publish more of their own work on the other. Mixed messages. One colleague in mechanical engineering wearily described himself in a double bind: the better his teaching, which included using lots of workshop ideas, the further behind he fell with his own research, and the less recognition he received from his department or profession. This, again, may be a faultless position, one of the many double binds that serious teacher-researchers face all the time. I have no doubt that the pressure to be a publishing professional modifies, to some extent, the energy available to be an innovative teacher—which doesn't mean that the two roles cannot be kept in some sort of positive balance. But it isn't easy. A colleague in anthropology confided: "I have been, as you know, an enthusiastic supporter of student writing assignments, but to be honest, I'm souring. It's taken a lot of time and I feel it's not rewarded. Hence I have decided that next year I won't spend so much time 'teaching'; I am going to spend those 30 hours of student conference time doing my own writing. I agree it was valuable for them . . . it's just not so for me."

Unexpected Benefits

When we initiated our writing-across-the-curriculum program, we articulated our central concern as "improving students' writing ability." We soon learned—as we should have expected—that "writing ability" was related to all sorts of social, intellectual, and emotional domains which involved the entire campus community. As soon as the business of teaching writing, as well as the act of writing itself, was placed in this larger context, and as soon as we decided to offer our workshops as "explorations" rather than "conclusions" about the
teaching of writing, we opened a much larger door than we ever anticipated. This part of the essay describes some lessons we didn’t expect to learn and testifies to the power of an open-ended model to continue to stimulate and inform all involved.

Community of scholars. We all learned, after the very first workshop, how wonderful it was to join with one’s colleagues to discuss substantive issues of mutual concern without the everyday distractions of phone calls, mail, meetings, and memos. Prior to the writing workshops no such mechanism for promoting collegial interactions existed in a regular way on campus: neither department, senate, and committee meetings nor special-topic seminars provided the focused time for social and intellectual stimulation across disciplinary lines. As one colleague put it: “The support of colleagues has been magnificent. I appreciated the opportunity to become better acquainted with my colleagues, the opportunity to form friendships.” Another said: “Many faculty members who did not know each other or did not understand each other’s discipline now feel a common bond. I think this will be useful and valuable to the college in a number of ways . . . committee assignments, interdepartmental projects, advice, etc.” The chance for such interaction, even more than the reason for the interaction in the first place, has proved the most powerful reason for the program’s success. The workshops actually remind some people why they became college teachers in the first place—before they retreated to separate buildings, isolated offices, and competitive research.

Environment. There has been a noticeable, but difficult to measure, shift in the general campus atmosphere about writing. It crops up in lunchroom talks, when colleagues joke that they’d better get out their journals for a quick entry now that I’ve arrived. But the jokes suggest to me an increased and not unpleasant consciousness about writing that did not exist before. In a conversation I had with the president of our university, Dale Stein, who had helped initiate the program in 1977, he said that recruiters had been telling him recently that MTU graduates were better at both writing and speaking than in former years. I mentally raised my eyebrows in disbelief, not willing to accept that such a generalization, nice though it was to hear, could possibly be true. But President Stein added that he firmly believed that an attitude shift had occurred which elevated writing to serious business in the campus community and that this was reflected in the communication skills of graduating seniors. I want, of course, to believe in such an improvement—but it remains difficult to prove. Informal clues like this tell us that something is at work here that may never show up in one or two concrete assessments of teacher attitudes or student writing abilities.

Teacher writing. By being asked to write themselves, many participants gained confidence in their own writing ability, or at least an awareness of why they were nervous about it. As one participant wrote: “I was quite apprehensive about attending this workshop when I found out that we would be writing a lot. . . . Writing has not always been my strength. . . . But I found that the apprehension was unwarranted; I found I could write OK, even my colleagues in the English Department said so. This was a pleasant surprise and morale/ego booster.” Another wrote: “I now see that much of my hesitancy and anxiety
about writing comes from a fear of censure from . . . my professional peers. I've assumed that all my writing must be witty, intelligent, elegant, etc., so that composing takes on crisis dimensions. This is something I will have to grapple with." What this teacher sees is how unwitty and inelegant his colleagues can be too. Such insights are, I believe, crucial for progress in one's own composing skills as well as for increased empathy for student writers.

Sometimes those of us who teach English, who enjoy using language and do not fear writing, forget how many of our colleagues have had unpleasant experiences themselves at the hands of English teachers in high school or freshman composition classes. Sadly enough, our profession has become better known for its concern with conventionality and correctness than for its celebration of joy and risk-taking in writing. Not only do current students fear our "red pencils," so do all our past generations of students who are now PhD's and who now teach biology, history, geography, and business in many university departments. Some of them too, along with carpenters and shopkeepers, exclaim when they meet us: "Better watch my grammar." It's not enough to come back with a flip, "It ain't so." The John Simons and Edwin Newmans have terrified us all.

One of the really nice things that happens at these workshops, sometimes, is that our colleagues gain confidence in their writing which extends to their professional work. A participant from political science who attended our first workshop later credited that session with giving him the confidence to write a book—which was published two years later. And my colleague, Art Young, received a letter from a workshop participant who wrote: "You probably don't need at this point further proof that your workshop processes work, but I thought I'd write and tell you that my essay that I wrote during the 1st August College workshop . . . "The Poor Man's Word Processor" was just accepted by [a professional business journal]. And I did it with almost no further revision other than that suggested by you and the other readers in my group. . . ."

Teaching methods. Some teachers learned that they could still learn something about teaching. We suspect that, at the college level in particular, teachers often assume they are talking to adults and that all they need to do is impart knowledge in some matter-of-fact way and it will be learned. And of course no college teacher worth his or her salt will ever admit to having taken an "education course" during college—whatever the merit of such courses. As a consequence, the model of the faculty workshop, which is inquiry based, and in which problems are posed for group solution and answers generated by participant interaction, offers a process view of teaching quite different from the traditional lecture and discussion format to which many teachers are accustomed. One geography professor told me a year later that ideas from the workshop ("WAC ideas") changed the learning atmosphere in his class: "When I have used WAC ideas, I have found my courses, especially the larger enrollment courses, are less stiff, formal, and dependent on lectures. Especially the use of freewrites has been a great help in stimulating discussion and class participation. I have been more likely to plan a class so that discussion will occur." Such translations occur when sensitive teachers watch how they themselves enjoy learning and in turn pass those "lessons" on to their students.
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We interviewed a forestry professor six months after he attended an August workshop and found that he had already tried out a lot of specific workshop ideas in his fall classes: some worked well, like the “field-trip journals” he required in place of field notebooks, and “audience-specific assignments” in which his students wrote reports for multiple audiences in the forest management industries. But more than applying any specific practice, the instructor reported modifying his basic pedagogical approach because of the overall learning model introduced at the workshops. In his own words he began moving “away from the evaluation approach and more toward the process. I feel more attuned to teaching thought processes.” Along with Dewey, Piaget, Bruner, and Britton, we believe strongly in the power and authenticity of discovery learning and are pleased when this larger translation occurs, but we do not expect it.

Tenure and promotion. One administrator told us that the workshops should improve overall faculty performance: “I am frankly most impressed by the potential for faculty development that stems from this program. Granted the students will benefit, but I will be much surprised if the individuals who have completed the experience do not perform better as researchers and in their service activities, as well as in the classroom.” We know this is true in cases where the workshops give teachers more confidence about their writing ability, but I would also propose that the workshops have been stimuli for new pedagogical research questions in a variety of disciplines. In our own department there has been a documentable rise in faculty publications since the project began, most of which stem from the project work itself. In particular, a number of collaborative research-in-writing projects have developed involving an English instructor and someone from a different discipline. Of the projects I know about personally, here are some of the more interesting ones.

Biology: two of my colleagues have been working with three biologists to find out which of several teaching techniques—modeling, revision, or guidelines—helps students learn to write more careful and comprehensive laboratory reports; results of this experiment were delivered at the 1982 NCTE convention in Washington, D.C.

Civil Engineering: one colleague and a civil engineer have been experimenting with the effect of asking students in a junior-level engineering class to keep “project journals”; an article based on this experiment has been accepted for publication by Engineering Education.

Electrical Engineering: another colleague working with an electrical engineer and two graduate assistants is running a controlled experiment to find out which of two techniques—quiz and discussion or frequent expressive writing—prepares students better for a final examination.

Psychology: an English teacher and a psychology teacher are experimenting with the effects of asking students to write poetry and fiction in an Introduction to Psychology class. They want to find out if such “creative” writing assignments have a measurable effect on how well students learn certain concepts; results of this experiment were reported at the 1982 Conference on College Composition and Communication in Detroit.

Philosophy/Geography/English: I am collaborating with two colleagues to find out how well students learn material in these different disciplines when their sole writing and testing assignment is to keep an intensive “dialogue journal” which they
share regularly with their teachers. My geography colleague described this as a "term-long interactive essay examination."

Mathematics: two different English teachers have been working with a mathematics teacher in two different sections of a calculus course, looking at the differences in student learning generated by journal-writing assignments which place higher and those which place lower cognitive demands on the writer.

While these experiments are in different stages of development, their net effect has been increased social and intellectual inquiry among our faculty.

Cohesion. Neither Art Young nor I entered the project with the idea of writing a book, nor could we have predicted that the department, as it was formulated in 1977 when we began the project, could author a book. But that is what happened. As we recruited new faculty for our department, who had varying specialties from "technical writing" and "reading" to "problem-solving" and "conferencing," we realized that we did, in fact, have the material for writing a book aimed at workshop participants from all disciplines. Consequently, the process of planning, writing, and editing this book, *Language Connections: Writing and Reading across the Curriculum* (Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1982), helped unite a dozen teachers on our staff in a collaborative effort providing both intellectual and social cohesion among the participating writers. Constructing this book gave us a common concern, apart from teaching and conducting workshops; in some cases, it actually provided colleagues with their first substantial professional publication. And it gave us a goal to shoot for: finishing the manuscript.

The collaborative book became a symbol of the collaborative activity and research which this project inspired from the beginning. The workshops are always conducted by teams from our department, which rotate from year to year. Other department members make guest appearances to present special workshops on "reading" or "speaking" or "the language laboratory" within the larger workshop. New teams were created to visit different departments and publicize and recruit for the workshops. Through it all we met off and on, as a group, planning what to do next to make things work. The net professional effect of this cooperative effort were numerous joint teaching experiments, collaborative grant proposals, and co-authored articles: for example, I have co-authored articles with eight different colleagues in the department over the past five years.

I think that, in general, the scientific and technical fields do more cooperative research and scholarship than those in the humanities, though there are notable and admirable exceptions, usually promoted by NEH. This project taught us well about the fruits of working together on funding, teaching, researching, and writing to effect positive changes in both our university and the profession at large.

So we did not know when we started our program in 1977 that what began as an effort to improve student writing skills would develop into a comprehensive long-term program to develop more fully all the interrelated learning and communication skills of the whole campus community. Nor did we realize in how many different directions research and evaluation questions would take us, nor
the degree of local cooperation and national publicity we would receive. Nor did I know, personally, that this project would become the substance of my professional life for the better part of a decade.

As a department we will continue to monitor and nurture the program which now possesses a life of its own. Remember, there are two hundred or so of our colleagues out there doing all sorts of stuff in the name of "writing across the curriculum." I believe that most of it is beneficial to students and teachers alike. The empirical measures that are sought by my statistically trained colleagues may eventually demonstrate conclusively that the program is a howling success—or they may not. As I said at the outset, the program we have conducted is amorphous, hard to pin down, and impossible to keep total track of. As my dissertation advisor, Merton Sealts, used to say when I wanted to try something off-beat or experimental: "What works, works." To which I add, "But not all the time, nor for everyone, and sometimes better than we guessed."