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Writing across the Curriculum: Toward the Year 2000. ERIC Digest.

This "digest" summarizes the more than 300 items in the ERIC database concerning writing across the curriculum (WAC) published between 1990 and 1992. The "digest" offers six broad categories of material about WAC, and discusses one or two pertinent sources for each category. The "digest" is a companion piece to an earlier ERIC/RCS "Digest," "Encouraging Writing Achievement: Writing across the Curriculum" (Sorenson, 1991).

ADVOCACY

The number of recent additions to the ERIC database that primarily advocate WAC is small, as might be expected of a maturing and evolving educational movement. Many of the materials in the other categories devote some space to explaining why WAC is worthy of attention, and then move on to issues such as training, implementation, and effectiveness. Maimon (1991) suggests that the undeniable virtue of WAC is that it is a wedge into a reform pedagogy and provides a way for students and instructors to connect. WAC provides, she suggests, a way to engage students' diverse responses within an academic community. Ammon (1990) advocates using WAC in a content area, arguing that writing can be a rich source of information for science teachers who wish to take their students' present understandings into account as they plan and carry out instruction.

ACTIVITIES

While writing activities have been developed for many subjects in the curriculum, activities associated with mathematics instruction at all educational levels are the most numerous in the ERIC database. This reflects the publication of numerous articles in such journals as "Mathematics Teacher," "Arithmetic Teacher," and "College Mathematics Journal" that discuss many WAC activities that can be used in the mathematics classroom. Matz and Leier (1992) present a method of employing student-written playlets and a technique called "stage freeze" to help students identify appropriate operations during problem solving. Gopen (1990) describes an experimental college mathematics course that requires writing assignments as a regular part of the course. Procedures found to be effective in the course include peer response, double submission, and efficacious instructor responses.
Johannessen (1991) describes some methods and content-area-classroom-tested activities found to be successful in teaching students the complex thinking skills involved in making and supporting generalizations, producing arguments in a composition, and creating extended definitions. He includes sample materials involving a variety of different subject areas. Journal writing, reading logs, and other such student-generated frequent writing assignments are also often mentioned in the literature on WAC (Wauchope 1990). In addition, numerous journal articles, conference papers, and other material in the database discuss journal writing in its own right.

RECENT RESEARCH

Research on the effectiveness of particular WAC programs or activities has been conducted in a variety of instructional settings. Winograd (1990) examined fifth-grade children's cognitive behavior as they wrote, solved, and then, in small groups, shared original math story problems. Findings suggested that the children's original math story problems provided an important alternative to the textbook and teacher-generated story problems. Walvoord (1990) presents a naturalistic study of college students in business, history, psychology, and biology. The seven-year study examined teachers' expectations about "good" writing in each discipline, the kinds of difficulties students encountered in trying to meet those expectations, and how teachers' methods and students' strategies helped or hindered progress.

IMPLEMENTING NEW WAC PROGRAMS, DESCRIBING EXISTING PROGRAMS

This category complements the "advocacy" category, since many of the items that describe successful programs or discuss implementing programs also implicitly advocate WAC as a useful and effective means of educational reform. Carson (1992) notes that although the WAC movement has grown to be one of the most successful educational reform movements in the United States, long-term strategies for sustaining WAC programs are needed. Carson goes on to describe the writing-across-the-business-disciplines program at Robert Morris College, noting that where communication was clear and open the program flourished, but where institutional communication was weak and closed, the program had trouble.

Dealing more directly with implementing WAC programs is Weiser (1992). He argues that WAC program administrators who wish to work amicably and effectively with faculty would do well to remember two principles: work first with the type of writing that already exists in the curriculum; and try to speak a language to the faculty outside the field of composition in which all participants are on an equal footing.

FACULTY TRAINING

Materials whose main focus is the training of faculty in WAC principles and activities also often provide program descriptions and research results. Whitworth College (Washington) attempted to provide all faculty with updated skills on how to help student writers through a two-year faculty development program ("Writing across the Curriculum," 1992). The college's report also discusses the theory and practice of WAC as presented in faculty workshops, the climate of trust that developed, sample assignments, and assessment procedures.

Shapiro (1991) describes the effects of a one-day marathon session and biweekly seminars designed to bridge the gap between WAC truths and the assumptions of the engineering faculty concerning writing processes and writing to learn. She notes that the engineering faculty and the physics and chemistry faculty (who joined the seminar the second semester) realized that the English department had not failed, but that they could not even agree among themselves about the objectives of a written laboratory

report. What has sustained the seminars is that faculty began to see improvement in student learning.

THE YEAR 2000

Interest in writing across the curriculum shows no signs of abating. Mounting evidence and reports of successful implementation of WAC programs suggest that the movement will continue to be important in the year 2000.

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