DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 231 JC 930 454

AUTHOR Dollieslager, R.; And Others
TITLE Exciting Them to Excellence: Publishing Student Work.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Southeastern Conference on English in the Two-Year College of the National Council of Teachers of English (Chattanooga, TN, February 25-27, 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Computer Uses in Education; *Educational Innovation; English Instruction; Program Implementation; *Student Motivation; *Student Publications; Student Writing Models; Teacher Student Relationship; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students; *Writing (Composition); *Writing Processes

ABSTRACT

Drawing from the personal experiences of faculty members from Thomas Nelson Community College (TNCC), this paper presented by three panel members explores methods of publishing student work, some of the problems and rewards inherent in doing so, and ways in which other composition instructors may provide a broader audience for the writings of their students. First, the experience of one faculty member (Rick Dollieslager) in preparing a student literary publication is related, covering issues including jurying of the pieces, printing, student and faculty responses, and the unwillingness of other faculty members to participate in the process beyond recommending student papers. Other projects discussed include a class-produced newspaper, with students fulfilling the roles of researchers and writers and the instructor acting as manager, and a bi-monthly two-page newsletter reproducing selected student writing assignments. Next, a second faculty member's (Vic Thompson's) experience in the organization of a class periodical is described, highlighting the motivation that students experienced by seeing their work in print and its usefulness as a model for other students. Twelve suggestions for implementing a similar project are also provided. Finally, the development of a weekly classroom newsletter incorporating student assignments is discussed by a third teacher, Christine Pedersen, stressing the benefit of providing a "real" audience for students and presenting seven suggestions for implementation. (ECC)

Exciting Them To Excellence: Publishing Student Work

Submitted
By

R. Dollieslager

(from, a presentation to the 1993 Southeastern Conference on English in the Two-Year College. Panel members from Thomas Nelson Community College, Hampton, Virginia: Rick Dollieslager, Vic Thompson and Christine Pedersen)

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R. Dollieslager:

Introductory remarks

We would like to informally describe some of the ways in which we have been publishing student works, discuss some of the inherent problems and rewards of doing so, and make some suggestions which might help other composition instructors who are interested in providing a broader audience for the writings of their students. With all the research that has been done describing the benefits of publishing student work, we are assuming that our audience agrees with us that this is a very worthwhile endeavor, so we will only briefly touch on that discussion and spend little time in trying to persuade you of the benefits. Rather, we will focus on several methods of publication, some which are relatively inexpensive and not very labor-intensive for the instructor, some which are more costly and complex to coordinate.

A Faculty-Submitted Student Literary Publication

Several years ago, when I was teaching a creative writing course at a community college in Iowa, I decided that I would try to provide an outlet for my students' work by putting together a publication. I discussed the idea with my colleagues, and they liked it and asked me to expand it to include papers written in

other English classes as well. I readily agreed, partly because I liked the idea of opening it up to more students and partly because I knew that paying for printing costs from our meager department budget would be much more palatable to everyone if this were a project sponsored by the whole department.

The jurying was very simple: I included all of the pieces which my colleagues submitted and let each of my creative writing students choose his or her favorite short story to be published. The result was a booklet with a dozen or so short stories and about as many essays. The Department had 600 copies printed for a total cost well under $300 at our college's printing office. We distributed 200 in that spring semester and retained the rest to pass out as supplemental readers to the fall composition and creative writing courses thus justifying the printing costs.

It was an instant success both with the students and the administration. It was very uplifting to me that the piece was so well received by the administration because I was already planning ways to stick the instructional support budget with the printing costs the next year. That is easier to accomplish when the instructional support item is regarded as essential.

We decided to publish annually and that the criteria for inclusion would be simply that the writings were good student examples of the types of assignments we typically gave in our classes. The next two years, we collected writings in the same way and published them for approximately the same costs, a bill which was picked up by the instructional support budget.

The students were very proud when their pieces were selected, the possibility of being published inspired some to higher achievements than they otherwise would have aimed for, and the writings were terrific models for discussion and analysis in other writing courses. The publication was relatively inexpensive, and the selection process was fairly painless. When we had too many examples of one sort of assignment, we would choose a couple from them or negotiate a little.

There were some pitfalls, however. While my colleagues were very eager to submit their students' writings and suggest inclusions when there were too many, that was the extent of their interest in the production of the piece. About half of the submissions were on computer disk, but the rest had to be typed. I ended up spending about 50 to 60 hours typing, editing, laying out and coordinating production of the 30-page publication. I spent spring breaks in the student newspaper office gazing at a *picture* of Myrtle Beach. After three years, my enthusiasm for publishing student works had waned considerably, and I turned over the task to my reluctant colleagues, ". . . *should you decide to accept the mission.*"

A Class-Project Newsletter

Since I teach most of my composition courses in the computer classroom, I am fortunate to be able to take advantage of the publications potential that word processing equipment offers. A couple years ago, I got an idea for a class project because of an interesting mix of students in one of my freshman comp. courses.

The course comprised students who had been through our developmental program in the fall semester, "early release" high school seniors who wanted to get a taste of college before they could officially matriculate, and a remaining group which had finally mustered up the courage they had lacked when they wanted to sign up for the fall semester but couldn't quite bring themselves to it.

So they all had one thing in common: this would be their first real college experience, and they were pretty anxious about it. I decided to put their anxiety to work for them, and for others who would follow, in the class project that I proposed. They began working collaboratively on a series of articles that would help incoming students to get to know the college and learn how to be successful in it. After I pitched the idea and gave them the theme for the newsletter-format publication, they brainstormed it and decided on the content. There were nine essay-length pieces in the end, covering such subjects as teaching and learning styles, study skills, activities and socializing, the facilities, and co-op. The only piece which I suggested was on learning disabilities.

In triads they gathered the information for seven of the articles from personal interviews, college publications and library research. I operated as a manager, helping them to make their contacts, find their sources, and divide up the work when needed. For two of the essays, half the class collaborated on one topic, half on the other. I gave them a series of small,

linked assignments, which they did individually, and helped them to take the best out of these when they reworked them as a writing committee into a unified piece. The resulting essays on teaching and learning styles and on staying in school were surprisingly good, for writings produced by committee.

Coordinating the production was not difficult, as it only took a few hours of my time to transfer the documents onto my disk and format the publication by copying the essays into the template I had made. I put on a logo and headlines, and the project was ready for printing. Three hundred copies of the nine-page newsletter were printed and distributed the next semester to the developmental students, placed in the counseling center, and even used by the college's recruiter when she went out to area high schools.

The whole project took about six weeks, and the students were working on other assignments concurrently. When they saw the publication, even the two most jaded teen-agers for whom "school ain't cool" were openly pleased to see their names in print and realize that their work would be useful to someone else. This wasn't just another stinking writing assignment for another stinking writing instructor to read. They learned a lot about collaboration, and they learned much, much more about researching, rethinking, reshaping and revising a piece of writing.

This semester I have two practical writing classes working on a similar project. One chose the theme of improving Thomas

Nelson Community College. The other group decided to research on-the-job writing in the fields they are going into, by interviewing people in positions they aspire to hold and writing descriptions of the types of writing they will do and the skills they will need to have. Both publications should prove to be useful to a mass audience of TNCC students.

A Bi-Monthly Two-page Newsletter

A third type of publication, and one that is very easy and inexpensive to produce, is a two-page newsletter (one sheet, front and back) that I have printed for my developmental writing classes every couple weeks. Depending on length (paragraphs or essays) I'll select two to four good examples of the assignments they have been writing in class, copy them onto my disk and call them into a three-column template document. In format, it looks like a newspaper, and the banner is *The English Crier*. Admittedly, the title is a somewhat perverse little joke, but no one seems to take much notice here on the history-steeped Virginia Peninsula, where *Crier* is not an altogether uncommon name for a newspaper.

I'll edit only the errors which I think might cause the student embarrassment, so very little work is required on my part. I always ask the student if she feels comfortable with my using her piece as an example and have not yet had someone decline. And I try to ensure that, by the end of the term, everyone has had something in the publication.

Again, I have numerous good examples of responses to the

writing prompts or assignments I use in the courses, examples the students relate to very well since they are written by classmates. But the best reward is the satisfying feeling I get at the obvious pride and pleasure a developmental writing student has at seeing his name on an exemplary work in a slick little publication that his and several other classes will read.

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Vic Thompson:

Early History: *The Thomas Nelson Review*

In an effort to find examples of competent and accessible writing for students to use as a models and inspiration, I asked the faculty to submit essays for publication in a periodical to be called *The Thomas Nelson Review*. However, I soon realized that most of the writing on campus was being done by students rather than by faculty. My repeated requests for faculty to submit model essays led to only three or four responses, but my desk was overflowing with student writing. The solution to the problem was obvious: let the students write their own models.

Many of my colleagues, however, were not convinced and had some very serious reservations about the whole project.

1. The quality of all student papers was too low to be worthy of publication of any sort. To publish such things would only give the students a false sense of their worthiness.
2. Students would plagiarize papers from the publication, particularly if more than one volume existed. After all, how could teachers be expected to keep up with such a large number of

papers? Student work was generally so poor that plagiarism would be difficult to detect.

3. Teachers of English were so busy grading papers, that they had no time for anything else.

With the help of some supportive full-time colleagues and many adjunct colleagues, however, I pushed such doubts aside and began the production of *The Tenth Muse at TNCC*. We asked teachers to submit the best work they had received for various assignments and then began to sift through the hundreds of essays. In our editing we tried to find the best-written essays but we also tried to include examples of all the most common assignments in composition classes: narratives, comparison/ contrasts, research papers, explications and analyses of literary works. After the publication of the first issue, I was soon convinced that the advantages far outweighed the disadvantages.

1. At last students could see a final product for all their efforts. They understood that writing was not just an exercise; it produced a tangible and valuable product. Those students whose works were published discovered a new pride in their work. Those who weren't published still had hopes of being published some day. In the semester after the first issue appeared students asked me if I would submit their work for consideration.

2. At last students had models that they could understand. They were written by their peers on actual assignments given by actual college instructors. Most examples in most texts seem either irrelevant or unapproachable. Most examples written by

instructors are too intimidating. I wrote an essay on one of my assignments and gave it to my students as an example. The results were disappointing but, in retrospect, not surprising. Students felt that they needed to slavishly imitate the work of the master, or else they felt that their work could never measure up. Few were able to see my model and then push off on their own.

3. Instructors across the campus can now answer the second most frequently asked question: Do you have any examples of the assignment? The number of copies printed did not nearly meet the student demand. Teachers kept asking for more copies.

Advice for Publishing a *"Tenth Muse"*

1. Find at least three or four colleagues who will enthusiastically help.
2. Try to sell the idea to the department and keep asking for submissions. Supply department members with release forms for the students.
3. Don't be discouraged if response is small.
4. Set a deadline for submissions and call a meeting of the editors.
5. Sift through the submissions and stack them according to class and type of essay.
6. Let each editor make his or her choices for each category. Then compare the lists of all the editors. Debate the selections, and, if possible find one or two for each category for publication. If all the essays in a particular category are weak, have the courage to delete the category.

7. Divide the stack of final essays into two piles and have each editor proofread half of them.

8. Have the essays typed by the campus word processing office and have all the editors proofread the essays that they didn't read for the first proof.

9. Ask someone in word processing to help with the layout, cover, and design.

10. Have the now proofread essays retyped in the format for publication.

11. Let the word processing office finish the job. Have them make as many copies as your division can afford. (At TNCC we have over 3500 FTE's and over 7000 head count. Two hundred and fifty copies were not nearly enough. Students had to share copies and rely on copies on reserve in the library).

12. Wait for your colleagues to praise what you and your students have produced. (Some may note that the general quality of the essays is somewhat inferior to those written by Charles Lamb, but ignore them).

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Christine Pedersen:

Producing a Classroom Newsletter

In most English classrooms, discussions of targeting writing to a specific audience tend to have the tacit acknowledgement that the *real* audience, the only one that counts, is the teacher. Yet this kind of writing leads to an arid wasteland of purposeless sentences and paragraphs. How can we as English

teachers help our students broaden their writing skills to include audience awareness? One avenue is a classroom newsletter. A newsletter can serve as a forum for student ideas and a showcase of student writing; perhaps more importantly, it can also provide students with an immediate and concrete sense of audience.

In my classroom, I publish a weekly newsletter that I call *The 112 Gazette*. I require students to turn in two paragraph-sized articles a week: one is on an assigned topic, and the other is the student's choice. I grade these articles on completion only, and I give bonus points to students whose articles merit inclusion in the *Gazette*. Although publishing the *Gazette* can be time consuming, the timely feedback I get through *Gazette* articles is invaluable. I also find the newsletter a useful place to post reminders of due dates or special events.

Student response to the *Gazette* is positive. After the initial discomfort of putting their words on the line in front of their classmates, students begin to enjoy seeing their names in print. The peer exchange of ideas and perspectives helps students to know they are all in this writing situation together, as evidenced by the spontaneous written dialogs--and friendships--that develop via the *Gazette*. Most of all, students have a well-defined, "real" audience, and their awareness of the audience reveals itself in more carefully crafted writing.

Here are a few ideas for a classroom newsletter that I have used successfully in *The 112 Gazette*, as well as some ideas I am

intending to try:

* Establish a "Critics Corner"--students review readings as if they are Siskel and Ebert, giving works we read "thumbs up" or "thumbs down."
* Allow students to use pseudonyms--students turn in articles in a manilla folder with their names (for credit) and use a *nome de plume* on the articles themselves
* Publish the next week's *Gazette* topic in the current edition of the *Gazette*--students find out the topic when they read the *Gazette*.
* Publish the *Gazette* electronically--students can post their articles onto an electronic bulletin board.
* Use student editors on a revolving basis or a student editorial board making joint decisions.
* Expand the format: include a section for letters to the editor, a "mystery student" section, and a section for more advice on handling assignments.
* Publish a once-a-month *Gazette* supplement that has contributors from classes taught by other instructors.

The 112 Gazette is a flexible teaching tool--it is literally tailored to the interest and needs of each class every semester. It fosters a sense of ownership: students realize that they have a voice and a stake in the class. Also, when they see that the teacher is interested, involved, and is "going the extra mile" to publish the *Gazette*, they seem more willing to put forth extra effort in the classroom, too. As we all know, papers written

with an audience in mind tend to have a spark of life to them that papers written for a teacher's eye alone generally do not have. Publishing a classroom newsletter is one way of providing an easily accessible audience, in hopes that students can use one writing situation to springboard more successfully into the next.

* * *

Conclusion

Word processing classrooms and labs, and laser printer technology make publishing student works easier than ever. If your college hasn't yet made the computer classroom available to the English department for classes, write a proposal to the appropriate dean in order to gain access. If necessary, negotiate with the computer science, math, or business departments to schedule English classes when they aren't in the computer classroom.

If your institution has sufficient support services, such as academic typing and printing, get as much of the work done on-site as possible. Farm it out to colleagues who are interested in publishing or are otherwise willing to help. If necessary, turn to student government for willing workers or possible funding.