

Nurturing the Individual Voice

Daniel Fader

*"English in Every Classroom" is an approach to learning based on the dual concepts of **Saturation** and **Diffusion**.... Whereas **Saturation** refers to materials used in every classroom to induce students to enter the doorway of literacy, **Diffusion** refers to the responsibility of every teacher in every classroom to make the house of literacy attractive. In discharging this responsibility, every teacher becomes an intermediary between the student and functional literacy. In order that students may come to view writing as a means to all ends, all ends pursued in a scholastic context must insist upon writing as a means through which they can be approached. In short, every teacher becomes a teacher of English, and English is taught in every classroom.*

Although the foregoing passage is taken from the original (1966) edition of Hooked on Books, it first appeared in a pamphlet called "Teaching English at Boys' Training School" which was published early in 1964 by the Bureau of School Services at **The University of Michigan**. So far as I know, the **Maxey Boys Training School** in Whitmore Lake, Michigan, was the first secondary school in North America where all teachers of all subjects in the curriculum--English, social studies, science, math, music, art, automobile shop, typing, physical education--accepted and fulfilled their roles as teachers of reading and writing.

"**English in Every Classroom**," subtitle of the original Hooked on Books and heading

of one of its chapters, was actually the proposed title of the whole book until an editor at Berkley heard me speak of my desire to get kids "hooked on books" and decided that the phrase was too good a title to miss. However good it may be, that title does not refer--as "**English in Every Classroom**," does--to the core of the program. Newspapers, magazines, and paperback books were an important **tactic** in making literacy attractive to imprisoned boys; teachers who taught reading and writing in every classroom every day were the heart of the **strategy** to make acts of literacy as unavoidable for those boys as they are for the men those boys have become.

If demanding and teaching competence in writing in every classroom was a useful option in the early sixties, it is an unavoidable necessity in the early eighties. So unavoidable, in fact, that in 1981-82 more than 3500 junior students at **The University of Michigan** will be taking writing courses in areas of concentration other than English. The reason is simple enough: The faculty of the **College of Literature, Science, and the Arts** is nearly unanimous in its belief that the quality of our students' literacy determines the quality of their learning in every subject across the curriculum. Because the faculty (and the students) find that literacy insufficient to their needs, every department and program in the **College** has agreed to teach writing to its students. This autumn, a year before the new writing requirement becomes fully effective, 43 courses enrolling 2538 students in 22 different units of the **College** are being taught as Junior/Senior Writing Courses.

As a colleague of mine pointed out, **"English in Every Classroom,"** has been one of the slowest academic travellers in history: It has needed nearly two decades to travel the ten miles from Whitmore Lake to Ann Arbor.

In those two decades we have all heard a great deal about the declining literacy of American youth, the blame attributed to everything from effective television to defective genes. In the great national search for reponsible villains, fingers of accusation pointing most often at schools and teachers, we have heard far too little about the profound loss of adult and peer models--those two most powerful sources of persuasion upon the growing child. I believe that the real urgency of **Writing Across the Curriculum** lies in its capacity to substitute in part for those lost persuasions.

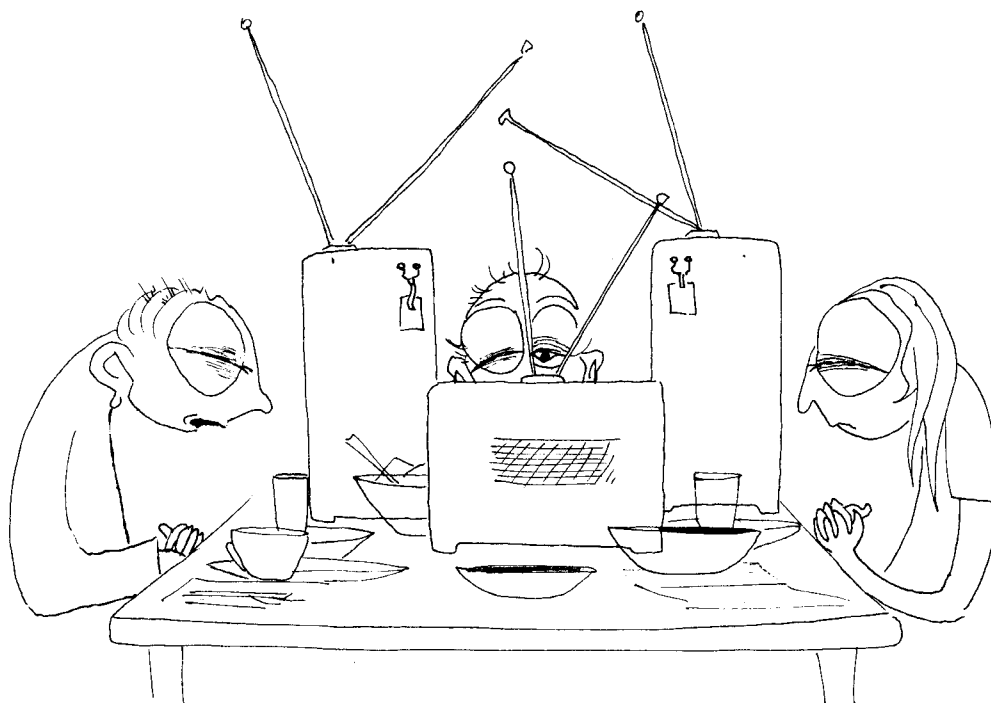
In a home in which a television set is **ON** more than six hours a day, the average home in North America, at least two customary familial acts have been replaced by two more recent activities: The family reading or writing in front of one another has been replaced by the television set projecting images to all members of the family; and the family conversing with one

another has been replaced by the television set projecting conversations in which the only familial participation is vicarious and silent. Any observer of the average American home in 1980 must remark the absence for children of adult and sibling models reading and writing, and the absence for all members of attention to each other's voices as they attend--in silence--to the television set.

What has this to do with writing across the curriculum?

Just as periods of time for reading can be set aside daily in one class or throughout the school to provide models of adults and children reading in front of one another, so can periods of activity in every subject be devoted regularly to the practice and discussion of writing. For the reluctant or inexperienced writer, the surrounding presence of the activity of writing in class after class is powerful persuasion to the act itself. To resist so much pressure so broadly applied is an heroic act of which few people are capable--especially young people, for whom peer pressure is least resistible of all.

(cont. on p. 91)



"...from thy bounty."

Fader (cont. from p. 54)

Furthermore, the use of writing in any curriculum as a means to the end of comprehending all subjects is persuasive of itself in the struggle to invest writing with the importance it possesses in the world of work but no longer claims in the home. One of the interesting social dislocations of our era is the poor fit between the decline of letter writing in the home and the increase in demands for writing in many different kinds of employment. Couple absence of practice in the home with decreasing practice in school (one inevitable result of increasing the number of students in secondary English classes--as in all others--during the last three decades), and no one should be surprised at the diminished competence in writing measured by many tests and regretted by all employers.

Finally, **Writing Across the Curriculum** offers a means for investing a young person's voice with an importance it may no longer possess in home or classroom. Homes with familial hours dominated by television and schools with all hours afflicted by large classes are unkind environments for nurturing the individual voice. The sense that one has something to say and someone to say it to, is a sense dulled by silence in the home and hordes in the classroom. That same sense, so basic to the belief that communication is worth the effort, is sharpened and expanded by the experience of writing at every opportunity. Inviting continuous, coherent participation in the process of communication, "**English in Every Classroom**" provides both student and process with an importance that nothing else in the curriculum can promise.

Daniel Fader, Chairman of the **English Composition Board of The University of Michigan**, has written extensively about the relationships between literacy and learning.

Reiff (cont. from p. 77)

not, what alternatives can I suggest for you to consider?

3. Can your paper be made more effective--in its conception of its audience, in its organization, or in its style and mechanics?

Using what they had learned from this exchange and discussion of drafts, students revised their papers before handing them in for final evaluation.

Student evaluations supported my impression that the workshop's most significant intervention in their writing was in how they conceptualized their work. One student reported that the draft exchange helped her reconceive the assignment: "I was lost on the first assignment; it wasn't until after the first draft I knew what to do." Speaking of the interchange that took place at that stage, she added, "Good criticism of my draft helped me to think. I learned to criticize and analyze--something I'd never done before."

The workshop also helped students in the **fine tuning** of their papers: They selected less awkward, often more elegant phrases, as well as appropriate punctuation. Students learned a sense of responsibility to one another as part of a community of learners. As they tried to help one another think through the problems in a particular paper, they often suggested approaches and sources of information to each other. Perhaps most important for their growth as writers, they experienced their writing as a process of vision and re-vision, in which initial ideas may be continually refined or transformed, and to which a careful reader may contribute a great deal.

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Slisher (cont. from p. 79)

Social studies teachers have implemented the idea most fully. Dan Scripsema, Chairman of the Department, uses the research booklet in assigning a term paper in his **Civil War** mini-class. In addition, he both expects and grades for good spelling, complete sentences, and paragraph structure in daily work and tests. He says the extra burden on him is no problem. He notes that the students realize these standards are important in the course.

Steve VerSluis, a history and government teacher, assigns a bi-weekly essay in