

Overview

RON BRANDT

Writing About Our Problems



This is an experiment. It was inspired by my participation in a workshop sponsored by the Institute for Writing and Thinking at Bard College in Massachusetts, one of the institutions vigorously promoting "writing across the curriculum," which I had heard about but hadn't really understood.

One purpose of the workshop was to explore the idea that educators could use writing to address professional problems. At several points during the day our group leader asked us to write freely for five minutes. We observed that it actually helped us find out what we thought about the topic under discussion. When we read aloud what we had written (sometimes we wrote just for ourselves), the process gave us a feeling of equality, because each of us had our turn.

Clarifying thoughts through writing wasn't a revelation for me because I frequently use writing in my work. What was new for me was writing continuously. You see, I have fallen into the habit of revising as I write. I can't write more than five or six words without immediately editing myself. As a result, writing for me is a laborious, painstaking process.

For example, I'm not particularly happy with saying "wasn't a revelation" back there, because it's not exactly right. I'm finding it hard to resist the temptation to fix it *right now*. But I'm not going to, because at the workshop I wrote without stopping for the first time in years. I wasn't writing for anyone but myself, so I just let it flow—and the feeling of self-expression was exhilarating.

I am determined to write this overview the same way: straight through

without stopping. I'll probably revise it later, so what you read won't be a verbatim first draft, but I hope it will have continuity and coherence.

Now you know what I meant by referring to an experiment in the first sentence. The habit of stopping every few words to review and improve my writing has become so ingrained that I'm finding it very hard to keep going. But if some people can quit smoking, surely I can quit kibitzing myself.

Writing in bits and starts may not be your problem, and it's probably not your students' problem either, but few of us write as fluently as we could. Adults might be more comfortable with writing if our teachers had expected us to write repeatedly, and informally, as a regular part of every class. So if I were a teacher of social studies or science or home economics, I would start having students write about their learning, as the authors in this issue suggest.

As it is, I'm going to recommend to those I work with that when we've got a problem, they try writing about it. I'll write too—not necessarily in an organized, impersonal memo, but in handwriting on a lined yellow pad, or on a word processor.

I know I can do it, because I just wrote this piece from beginning to end without once stopping to second-guess myself. The experiment succeeded! I feel like writing about it.

Ronald S. Brandt
Executive Editor

Nancy Carter Modrak
Senior Editor

Al Way
Art Director

Jo Ann Irick
Associate Editor

Pamela Dronka
Associate Editor

David Gibson
Editorial Assistant

Elaine C. Dull
Production Manager

Teola T. Jones
Advertising Manager

Deborah A. Johnson
Administrative Assistant

February 1985

Volume 42

Number 5

Educational Leadership is intended primarily for leaders in elementary and secondary education but is also for anyone interested in curriculum, instruction, supervision, and leadership in schools. ASCD publications present a variety of viewpoints. The views expressed or implied in this publication are not necessarily official positions of the Association. Copyright © 1985 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.

ISSN 0013-1784
Feb 85 Stock No. 611-85544

Copyright © 1985 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.