

TEACHING WITH WRITING

THE OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY WRITING INTENSIVE CURRICULUM (WIC) NEWSLETTER

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PRE/VIEWS

By Vicki Tolar Burton, WIC Director

A recurring theme in the Advanced WIC Seminar for faculty, which met during winter term, was the connection between good thinking and good writing. WIC teachers search constantly for ways to challenge and teach their students to think more deeply and critically about the subject matter of their disciplines.

In-class writing that interrupts student passivity continues to be an important tool. In this issue is Sociology professor Mark Edwards's in-class exercise on writing an abstract. Edwards prepares students to write an abstract of their own research papers by leading them through a sequence of activities that include modeling, analysis, writing-to-learn, use of a web resource, and critique. Students conclude the in-class exercise with a draft of their own abstract. This exercise is adaptable to any discipline.

My thanks to Mark and the other eleven faculty who shared ideas and struggles in the five-week seminar. Their names are listed on page 3.

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A Capacity for Connectedness: Parker Palmer on Teaching

By Vicki Tolar Burton

In the days after Parker Palmer's two day visit to OSU in February, nearly every conversation among teachers that I heard sooner or later turned to Palmer's ideas of good teaching. In workshops for faculty and a public lecture, Palmer, a sociologist who is one of the top public intellectuals in higher education, laid out his philosophy, which focuses not on the mechanics of teaching but on the spirit of teaching and learning. Many of his ideas fit very well with the goals, challenges, and struggles of teaching Writing Intensive Courses in which we are asking students to deal with our subject areas in depth.

Community

Good teaching is not about technique, Palmer observed, it's about community and the capacity of teachers and students for connectedness. The best teachers are often the ones who can evoke a sense of connectedness in students—connectedness to the teacher, to other students, and especially to the subject matter of the course.

"The teacher is a bridge between scared students and a daunting field of knowledge," Palmer observed, noting that the teacher who changed him most was a demanding sociologist who expected students to become co-researchers with him in the field of his academic pursuit.

Palmer described the Circle of Inquiry model now being used in some medical schools, where instead of memorizing facts from endless lectures, medical students learn in a small group which gathers around a real person with a real medical problem. This

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person's problems become the hub at the center of student learning, driving their inquiry which extends out like spokes from that hub.

Capacity for Connectedness:

Five Principles

Palmer recommended that teachers examine their teaching in light of five principles:

1. An epistemology of connectedness--How do our assumptions about how we know what we know drive our teaching?

There is a movement today from detachment to engagement. This way of engaged thinking is illustrated by geneticist Barbara McClintoch, whose research on corn brought her a Nobel Prize. McClintoch said she had to learn to think like maize. To do great science, you have to have a feeling for the organism. McClintoch said she had to "lean into the kernel." Palmer called this "an intimacy that does not annihilate."

2. The brain operates best when it sees patterns of connectedness. It operates worst with isolated bits of data. How does my teaching encourage students to see patterns in knowledge?

3. Because emotions are tied to cognition, evoking affect and learning improves motivation for learning. How is emotion connected to learning in my courses?

4. Effective learning evokes the mind of the gathered group and honors multiple intelligences. How does my teaching evoke the varieties of gifts in my class?

5. Learning works best when a group is gathered around a vivid and morally compelling reality. What morally compelling center have I offered my students?

A study of two sections of students in the same course revealed that students in the section with a service learning component did better in the cognitive work of the course than did the section with no service learning.

Palmer urged teachers to "let your students know the subject is vivid and morally compelling for you."

Palmer also offered a model for faculty development in which small groups of

teachers help each other examine the good and the bad experiences they have in the classroom.

Sponsors of Parker Palmer's visit were the Advancement of Teaching Committee, the Provost, InterACTION, the Department of English, the Luther House and the Newman Center.

Books by Parker Palmer

The Active Life: A Spirituality of Work, Creativity, and Caring.

The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life.

Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation.

To Know As We Are Known: Education As a Spiritual Journey.

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Parker Palmer, whose workshop for teachers I describe in the lead article, offers us the challenge of improving learning by improving "capacity for connectedness" and by inviting our students to "gather around a vivid and morally compelling" subject. Palmer believes this will improve the quality of student thinking and knowledge. If our WIC teachers are correct, such engagement will also improve the quality of writing.

Correction to the fall issue: The name of Sharon Rosenkoetter, Human Development and Family Sciences was omitted from the list of fall seminar participants. I regret the oversight.

**SPECIAL WIC WORKSHOP:
STRATEGIES FOR USING ONLINE
WRITING AND DISCUSSION**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 19, 3 TO 5 P.M.

AUTZEN CLASSROOM, VALLEY LIBRARY

Jon Dorbolo, Distributed Learning Director and teacher of Interquest, an online philosophy course, explains techniques for bringing electronic writing into the classroom. Topics will include using email and Web-boards for student learning (for example, peer review), as well as techniques for managing the volume of student responses. The workshop will focus on how technology can make some WIC work more effective as it improves teaching and learning.

Limited to 25. Reservation by email to Smills@orst.edu.

Twelve Faculty Complete Advanced WIC Training

The Advanced WIC Seminar for faculty during winter term addressed issues of particular interest to participants, including technology and the teaching of writing, responding to student writing, designing good assignments, and making connections between critical thinking and writing.

The participants attending the Advanced Winter 2000 WIC Seminar were: Brad Cardinal, Exercise & Sport Science; Jean Caspers, Valley Library; Barbara Cusimano, Exercise & Sport Science; Moira Dempsey, Center for Writing and Learning; Jon Dorbolo, Communication Media Center; William Earl, Speech Communication; Mark Edwards, Sociology; Eric Hanson, Forest Science; Larry Lev, Agricultural & Resource Economics; Judy Li, Fisheries & Wildlife; Dwaine Plaza, Sociology; and Greg Rorrer, Chemical Engineering.

About Teaching With Writing

Editor: Vicki Tolar Burton

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Teaching With Writing is the newsletter of the Oregon State University Writing Intensive Curriculum Program. As part of the Baccalaureate Core, all OSU students are required to take an upper division writing intensive course in their major.

The content of the WIC courses ranges from radiation safety (for Nuclear Engineering majors) to golf courses design (a Horticulture option). While subject matter differs by department, all WIC courses share certain commonalities defined by the Faculty Senate:

- Informal, ungraded or minimally graded writing is used as a mode of learning the content material.
- Students are introduced to conventions and practices of writing in their discipline, and the use of borrowed information.
- Students complete at least 5000 words of writing, of which at least 2000 words are in polished, formal assignments.
- Students are guided through the whole writing process, receive feedback on drafts, and have opportunities to revise.

For complete information on WIC guidelines, contact Vicki Tolar Burton by email at Vicki.TolarBurton@orst.edu or consult the OSU Curricular Procedures Handbook.

Writing Abstracts

An exercise by Mark Edwards, OSU, Dept. of Sociology

1. Read these 3 abstracts:
(Edwards gives students three abstracts of recent journal articles in the discipline.)

What do these three abstracts have in common? Make a list of six things they have in common in terms of what they cover, the common elements that establish the tone of the writing, and/or the physical features of the abstracts.

2. Now, read the following handout that is on the web. It's located at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. <http://www.rpi.edu/dept/lc/writecenter/web/text/abstracts.html>

3. Now, read this abstract and tell me what makes this a decent abstract. What needs to be changed or improved? (Recall that it was written before the paper was written.)

"Home-ownership blurs occupational class lines in America. However, important occupational differences in home-ownership rates persist. The age-gradient, within occupations, for achieving home-ownership is also important because of the possibility that some occupational groups might have to anticipate much longer delays for achievement of this socially prescribed goal. Using standard demographic techniques to analyze Survey of Income and Program Participation data, I examined how home-ownership rates and trajectories have differed by occupation and age in the early 1990s, and identify several important theoretical implications of the findings."

4. Start drafting an abstract for your paper and show it to me before leaving class today. I'll give you a couple ideas on how to improve it and you can then work on perfecting it until the due-date.

SPRING WIC EATING-TO-LEARN SEMINARS

Lunch seminars are from noon to one. Come and leave as your schedule permits. All are in Waldo 121. Reservations to Vicki.TolarBurton@orst.edu by 10 am on the day of the lunch. All faculty are welcome.

Friday, March 31 **Students doing online research.** WIC librarian Jean Caspers shares ideas about how we can help students use electronic sources responsibly. Vicki Tolar Burton discusses information on how little training OSU students currently receive on using electronic sources. What needs to change and how do we change it?

Friday, April 7 **How can learning outcomes help teachers and students in WIC courses?** Robby Robson, Director of Educational Reform, will bring us up to speed on using learning outcomes in our teaching.

Wednesday, April 19 **SPECIAL WIC WORKSHOP ON ONLINE WRITING LED BY JON DORBOLO. 3-5 PM. PREREGISTRATION REQUIRED. SEE PAGE 2 FOR MORE INFORMATION.**

Friday, April 28 **Helping our students become plagiarism-proof and dealing with it when they are not.** Vicki Tolar Burton leads an open exchange on the best ways to help students learn to avoid plagiarism and the best ways to deal with plagiarism when it does occur.

Friday, May 5 **Writing Before Students: Modeling Academic Writing in a WIC Course.** Mark Edwards tells us how he writes along with his WIC students, working on a conference paper or journal article as they work on their course project.

Friday, May 12 **NO WIC LUNCH.** WIC faculty are encouraged to invest their faculty development hours this week attending one of the university-wide **workshops (Thursday or Friday) on educational outcomes** led by Tom Litzinger, Director of the Leonhard Center for Enhancement of Engineering Education at Penn State. Articulating learning outcomes will be an important part of the university accreditation process, which occurs every ten years and is now underway.

Friday, May 19 **Conversation with teachers of Business Writing (WR 214) and Technical Writing (WR 327).** This session is an opportunity to learn more about what students are expected to learn about writing in these two courses that are required for many majors across the university.

Friday, May 26 **Grappling with Grammar.** Vicki Tolar Burton leads a discussion of the challenges of dealing with issues of correctness in student writing. How is a WIC teacher who is not an expert grammarian to cope? How can we help students to improve this area of their writing? How much should correctness count in our grading?