

Imagine a teaching landscape where the Writing and Literature Projects have never existed. Imagine teaching in a world which has never included the work of Nancy Atwell or Jim Burke or Carol Jago or Harry Nodan or Jane Schaffer. Imagine no mentor programs, no BTSA meetings, no literacy coaches. In this world computers weigh hundreds of pounds and require specialized training to use; normal people do not own them. In consequence of this, the Internet is mainly a novelty; search engines, Amazon.com, Catenet, and even e-mail as we know them are as yet glimmers in the minds of a few dreamers. In this world telephones connect to walls; a school may have three. Imagine California schools reeling from Prop 13. Every district must cut millions from its budget this year and has had no choice but to do so through massive teacher layoffs. There is no money for anything. Imagine a first-year language arts teacher arriving at the school where she will spend the next nineteen years. She is grateful to have a job, grateful for her starting salary of \$15,811.50. She is confident of her skills and preparation in all areas but one: writing. She is a good writer herself but is unclear as to just how she accomplishes this mystery and is therefore unsure of just how she'll help others learn to do it. She is determined to solve this as quickly as possible. She has no way to imagine the size of that task, nor does she understand that she has entered this landscape on the eve of a revolution. It is 1980.

In my mind's eye I see some readers shaking their heads, others nodding, perhaps smiling and adding their own memories of those years to mine. Some things never change: This year districts are again scrambling to keep budget cuts as far from the classroom as possible. This year there is again no money for anything. This year, we are all concerned about teaching writing. Then again, as long as there are language arts teachers, we will be concerned about teaching writing.

Today's new writing teacher faces a different challenge from the one I faced in 1980. Our teaching landscape is rich with ideas, voices, techniques. How do we choose? I hold a BFA in modern dance, and more than anything else, that training shapes how I answer a challenge. Good dancing is visual, immediate, spare, and above all practical. Dance requires the dancer to live an oxymoron of practiced spontaneity, controlled abandon. Dance requires an astonishing level of technical expertise to make it all look effortless. A dancer cannot be too precious about her work; if she isn't on her game, she ends up on her rump. There is no middle ground, and there is never any time. The twenty years I spent as a dancer -- from age eight to age twenty-eight -- provided excellent training for teaching.

A dancer's process looks something like this: Absorb what is wanted. Learn it. Practice it. Own it. In this way, dancers begin at the end. We form a clear visual image before we act. But I have come to understand that this isn't unique to dance; this is one means by which human beings learn. As a child, I knew exactly how a "ballerina" should look long before I learned to plié. Similarly, our students have formed imagery for a batting or pitching stance or performing rap music or strumming an air guitar or popping a skateboard trick or any number of other activities they then decide they want to try. As they move into learning and practice, they use the internal imagery they have absorbed to motivate themselves to work harder, to make judgments about their own efforts, to self-correct.

But most of our students have no equivalent imagery for the writing we ask them to do. They cannot tell us what a good essay will do, will contain, will accomplish. They have no clear idea of what is wanted, no internal picture against which they can measure their own efforts as they go. Lacking this initial imagery causes them to begin in the middle: They *learn*, they *practice* what they have not *absorbed*. We teachers have become adept at breaking up the

learning tasks, but we too often fail to understand that many of our students have no framework into which they can place these individual parts. If this were residential architecture, we would be talking about people who might have learned to design and construct a multilevel floor plan but who had failed to realize that a framework is necessary to support and surround the whole. They include stairs that lead nowhere and hallways without doors because *they lack the mental imagery for an integrated "house."* Yet we are telling them that they must build houses and that their future success depends upon this skill. Many do poorly, not through lack of ability or effort but simply because they have not seen enough houses to be able to replicate one, much less put their personal stamp on that creation.

Happily, when I offer usable imagery, when I *show* students rather than *tell* them what is wanted, then their writing does improve. I hold myself accountable for providing that imagery in the form of multiple student essays. Students read and analyze these samples before they attempt to write their own. How many essays do I actually ask them to read? Am I providing only adult-written, published models which are certain to be beyond the technical grasp of anyone their age, or do I offer them a variety of models written by students their age? Do I offer these models before they write? Am I offering multiple ways to view written text? Have I found ways to make the structure of the text, the framework, visual? Do I use what research has shown me, and am I challenging myself to find new answers? What do I require of a new method before it earns its place in my curriculum?

Out of necessity, my writing partner, Flo Ota De Lange, and I publish the resources that we ourselves have not been able to find in print: efficient, practical tools to help our students make sense of "the big picture." These are the pieces we absolutely must have to make a lesson work. However, when from this point onward I say "we," I am speaking not merely for the two

of us but also for all of the thousands of researchers, teachers, parents, and most importantly the students whose voices have gone into shaping this philosophy and approach. We think of the suggestions which follow as an ingredients list for lesson planning. Some ingredients absolutely do need to be added first. Others can be added along the way. Still others are optional.

We teachers want to help our students become flexible writers, capable of competent on-demand writing in a number of genres. However, as a long range goal, we also hope to help them grasp the underlying similarities which unite all good prose. We hope to give students imagery for a structure upon which they may build their arguments and find them sound, not merely for a single assignment or high stakes test, but for a lifetime.

Method

Students have an easier time seeing unfamiliar *substance* if it is presented in a familiar *form*. To this end, each lesson introducing a new writing genre *looks* the same and contains:

- a one-page overview of the writing genre
- scoring guide that has been completely aligned with both 1.0 and 2.0 California writing standards for the grade level being taught
- model essays with commentary (for *you*)
- the same model essays in a scoring set (more on that later)
- the prompt from which the model essays were written
- one or more graphic organizers
- peer response sheet

This in no way suggests that the ultimate writing itself should be either predictable or familiar. We are talking about *presentation* only at this point. When the above components mirror each other from genre to genre, students will quickly learn the layout and functions of each page. We

view this as a *good* thing because this familiarity then allows them to focus on the *substance* of the lesson -- the requirements of a new writing genre. Over time, familiarity with format also helps students to see connections between and among genres. Just as a working knowledge of phonics provides building blocks to reading success, so do these connections between writing genres become a means of "cracking the code."

Systematic presentation of new genre can also help students make these necessary connections about structure. We suggest the following sequence:

1. Introduce and discuss a new writing genre with a one-page description and a scoring guide; to save paper in our classrooms, we duplicate both on a single sheet of paper (front and back) and move freely between them in this initial discussion. We begin with key vocabulary(part of every overview page), then a discussion of purpose and the requirements of the genre. We also remind students that the transitional words are there for their use in creating coherence. Each overview page also contains a list of transition words, which we remind students are there for their use in creating coherence.

The most important aspect of the process is the discussion of the scoring guide and its requirements. We spend an entire class period on this step, pulling out all our jokes, stand-up comedy, and teacher tricks to maintain attention. Really. This step is key. We provide goofy examples and challenge students to come up with examples of their own on the spot. We want to give them a firm basis for comparison. What are the differences in each trait between a three and a four? A two and a three? Familiarity with the guides is like giving students a blue print for writing, and we want them to have that map *before* they start building. Also, once students understand the guides, we can use them for grading. At the end of the process, when the finished essays come to us for grading, we attach one to each essay and highlight sections of each guide

that apply. In this way, students get specific feedback on the most commonly repeated traits in a familiar format at little cost in teacher marking time, and we can spend more time on the important comments specific to individual papers. We don't mean to suggest that use of the guides in grading speeds up the process -- it doesn't -- but it does allow us to offer more specific feedback than we may otherwise do in the limited grading time we can give each essay.

2. Scoring sessions using "live" student writing played an enormous role in our own development as teachers, and we cannot overstate the value of this process in helping our students develop similar imagery. *Reading* a series of model essays helps them make necessary internal distinctions. *Scoring* a model essay lets them take a practice run before they actually have to put themselves on the line. In addition, while many students feel they cannot write a score level 4, most can do better than a score level 1, and many can top a score level 2. The models give them hope.

All of our lessons use multiple writing samples, and these are repeated twice. First, for the teacher, they are presented in order from score 4 to score 1, with commentary provided for each essay. A good source for beginning a sample collection is the STAR resource page on the CDE web-site: <www.cde.ca.gov/statetests/star/resources.html>. You can also e-mail us at HenDeLange@aol.com or access our web-site <www.delangehenderson.com> for a sample set. Secondly, the scoring sets offer the same essays in mixed-up order and without commentary to facilitate "blind" scoring. We have used these essays in numerous ways over the years. We once duplicated only one class set of the "scoring set." Students completed the group scoring process but did not mark the essays, and the stack went into the closet at the end of the lesson to await next years' group. However, as students have increasingly come to appreciate the value of a good model -- and a poor one --they have asked to be allowed to keep them or at least to borrow

the set for awhile. Therefore, depending on the status of the ongoing "paper and duplicating wars," usually tied to funding, we try to make the models available.

In our classrooms, the process looks like this: Students are asked to form cooperative learning groups. Each student is then provided with one set of model essays and the scoring guide (some will have already lost theirs from the previous day's discussion.). They are instructed to score the essays *silently*, committing themselves *in writing* to their scores on a separate sheet of paper. We do allow them to use a plus or minus but require them to come to a decision regarding score levels. That is, they may mark 2+ or 3- but not 2/3. We judge the quantity of scoring by the capabilities of the group. Weaker students may find value in scoring one essay at a time with discussion between each one. Others will find such a pace a real snoozer and tell us so. Whatever you may choose to do, the goal is productive discussion, and that does require a reasonable pace, however it is accomplished.

When everyone has a score for the first assigned models, ask them to discuss their scores by group. We sometimes require the group to come to a score consensus. In this case, a spokesperson for each group then reports the score for each essay to the class and defends it -- *from the scoring guide*. This is key. Students must be able to find *words on that paper* upon which they have based their judgment. They may not just decide a score without analysis. We put it this way: In this exercise, *they* are the teachers. Just as they expect their teachers to justify a poor score on an essay with objective data, so are *they*, as teachers, required to do so.

Alternatively, you may wish to allow each individual to place a "vote" for each essay, placing tick-marks on a grid on the board or overhead. Discussion then centers on disagreements and on objective reasons for the vote. This approach appeals to students who enjoy arguing their points of view, as in honors and some remedial groups. Remember also that disagreement is

inevitable; the value of the exercise lies more in process than in product. For the most part, however, we are impressed by the accuracy with which our students do see the models and the excellence of their reasoning. They may not yet be able to produce a score level 4 or even 3 essay, but they *can* articulate what is done well in the models, and this becomes another building block for them as writers. Finally, we try to remember that contiguous scores are of less concern than scores where, say, one hold-out swears that a 3 should receive a 1 due to some fault in mechanics or a single line in the scoring guide. Here is the chance to demonstrate that, while one aspect here or there may be out of range, a holistic score seeks to reward what is done *well* over the *majority* of the essay. (This, of course, requires us to leave our "pet peeves" at the door and do the same in scoring, yes?) The process of group scoring and discussion can be accomplished in one class period but may also require a second depending on the quality of the discussion.

3. At this point, the color-mapping techniques discussed later are often useful. You may choose to present one or more pre-mapped essays, map a sample essay with the class, or, in the best of all worlds, ask students to do so. More on mapping later.

4. We give students one to three essay assignments to *plan*, telling them that one or more of these may be assigned for possible completion. These are drawn from issues and material found in recent literature study, possibly asking for comparison or contrast of characters, themes, issues, positions, etc. depending on the writing genre. For example, we may ask students to write on a controversial topic but to take it from a particular characters' point of view, a particularly useful assignment for persuasion. We do our best to give students choices of topics on important assignments. We do hand out graphic organizers and require students to turn in a completed organizer with each completed essay, with this caveat. Some students do not know what they think until they hear themselves say it. For them, planning is moot. They may get

"some" useful information from a cluster or brainstorming session, but for the most part, they just have to sit down and start writing. That's okay with us, as long as they go back when finished to complete the graphic organizer. This will help them analyze whether or not all the required elements have been addressed.

5. We frequently will choose this point to teach a mini-lesson, focusing in on one or more preskills to writing an entire piece. With the "larger picture" in place and the writing task(s) presented, students are often receptive to any help they can get in completing the task.

6. We teach our students to read each prompt three times. They are to underline important words the first and second times, and then circle essential words on the third reading. We then ask them to construct a little graphic organizer in the margin. It need not be fancy -- a series of bullets will do just fine. But each one should contain one essential ingredient for the essay. We then teach our students to use this list in writing their essays, and to double-check their final draft against the list they made. This takes some practice to master, but it pays off for students in the long run by helping them to make sure they cover all parts of the prompt.

7. Once the students have written one or more essays in the genre, we use the peer-scoring guides on the first drafts. Again, we make use of cooperative groups of 3-5 students. Each essay is given a Peer Response Sheet. This sheet travels around the group with the essay. Students begin with their own essays in hand, and everyone passes to the left (or right). Each student then reads an essay, circles two yes/no answers, fills in one sentence and turns the Peer Response Sheet over, where we have duplicated the scoring guide. Students underline salient sentences on the guide and may, if you wish, assign a score. Then all essays shift left (right) again, and the process is repeated until everyone in the group has read all the essays. In a group of 3-5, some sentences on the Peer Response Sheet will remain blank, since there are more sentences to fill in

than there are group members. Spencer Kagan reminds us that this is where the students should focus their attention. The areas which remain blank will show possible weaknesses in the essay. In this way, no student has been asked to criticize, an important aspect of cooperative group work. The guides ask for personal responses only. Thank you, Spence.

8. Color-mapping is often useful at this point, too. By this time, students are usually ready to color-shade on their own (see next section).

9. Most students are now as ready as they can be at this point in their development to choose their best work, revise, edit, and publish.

10. But what about mechanics and grammar? Don't they count? *Unequivocally, yes!* We believe they are not adequately addressed by *any* scoring guide. Mechanics need to be marked, not scored. In our own classrooms, we address them in the editing stage, and we mark them the old fashioned way: one error at a time. This is not to suggest that we mark every error every time. This is overwhelming to both students and to us. We hold students accountable to some criteria at all times: basic punctuation, spelling, basic usage. Then we add various aspects as we study them throughout the year.

NOTE: If all of this seems like a great deal of trouble to teach a single writing type, it is, *the first time through*. After that, students quickly become familiar with the format, the techniques, and the similarities between the types. They begin to internalize the requirements, to image them, and the process speeds up, particularly if a systematic method is repeated from teacher to teacher and grade to grade. Uniformity of methodology simplifies the work for everyone.

Color Mapping

In 1984 I devised this practice as a way of making the logic of expository form more visible to my students. At that time, the idea was original, a natural step from our CAP Card posters which some "old hands" may remember. Independent of my work, others have arrived at their own versions of color mapping, most notably Jane Shaffer. While I deeply respect and admire Jane's work, the format you will find here is mine. This is a necessary distinction, since Jane has assigned other choices of color to some of the same elements, and each of us makes distinctions that the other does not make. Color mapping is powerful. Use my version or Jane's or create your own, but try it. Again, should you wish to see an example, please e-mail us at HenDelange@aol.com or go to www.delangehenderson.com for a download.

Start by listing the four most important elements of the writing style on the board or on an overhead, assigning a different color to each, for example:

- 1) Main idea or thesis (red)
- 2) Supporting points or reasons (green)
- 3) Example(s) illustrating each point or reason (blue)
- 4) Commentary about or explanation of the relationship between the supporting points or reasons, their example(s), and the main idea (yellow)

Prior to meeting with your class, take a typed model essay and place a blank transparency over it. If you are a "technocrat," the drawing program on your word processor will "paint" a thick line right over the text. Whichever method you choose, take the essay sentence by sentence, and shade in one of the colors above. Try to do one of each score level. It is amazing to us how consistently certain elements surface in all grade levels. In a Responses to Literature, for example, score level 4 essays show a great deal of balance between textual examples (blue) and commentary (yellow) as well as an overall sense of structural order. Score

level 3 essays typically show a sense of order, but commentary tends to be light or missing, creating an imbalance in the overall effect (too much blue.) Score level 2 essays display real problems in organization, visually jumping from idea to idea, often ending with their thesis. Score level 1 essays frequently retell plot (all blue). Once mapped, one need not read the essay at all to see its structure; the color bands make a clear statement.

We show students the score level 4 color transparency without the essay itself. Removing the distraction of words from this essay allows students to focus more clearly on the argument and its balance. We then continue, comparing the 4 with the 3 and then the 2 and 1 on the following transparencies. The missing or imbalanced elements of the essays are quite clear, even though, *or perhaps because*, there are no words on the page.

Showing the same transparencies a second time, this time placing the color map over the essay itself, can invite discussion of how one writer achieved a balance, how another could improve it, etc. Having first seen the scaffold of the argument, students are better able to focus on each sentence's function in the whole.

Taken one sentence at a time, most students can readily see the difference between a main idea and a reason or supporting idea. They may have a bit more difficulty understanding the difference between example and commentary. Carol Booth Olson of the UCI Writing Project offers the clearest explanation of this difference we have encountered: If you can say with certainty that this is something the author either said directly or intended the reader to understand through narrative (showing) strategies, then it is an example. The commentary then becomes the writer's own attempt to tie examples to meaning or to make draw connections and make the point. Students frequently ask us what they can possibly add by way of commentary without merely repeating the example they have just provided. They are frequently correct. In

this case, we tell them to look to their premises or assertions. Are they superficial, predictable, obvious? If a point need only be illustrated to be proven, then the point itself is probably lacking in depth, thought, originality. Good thinking requires elucidation. We tell them that the lack of necessity for commentary in their work is a sign that they need to go back to the drawing board, to keep digging, to think more deeply. And wonder of wonders, sometimes they do!

Color-mapping lends itself to many, many uses. Students may be asked to color map virtually anything upon which you want them to focus. For example, in narrative form, we ask students to map the writer's use of specific narrative strategies, assigning a different color to several of the following: showing the character in action, allowing the reader to hear the character speak, describing the characters' appearance, revealing the characters' thoughts and feelings, and showing how others react to the character. We ask our own students to hand in their final drafts with at least two different strategies included and mapped.

You may ask your students to take colored pencils, markers, or crayons to map, first a practice essay, later their own. Or you may wish to discuss a single essay as a class, deciding sentence by sentence which colors to map, while one person marks an overhead transparency. However you make use of it, this is a time-tested practice; it works! Every year we see lightbulbs go on during this lesson, and we see writing improve, particularly in kinesthetic and the visual learners. Best of all, it's fun for our students.

Results

So how do we know what works? This program really began when my high achieving middle school scored at the thirty-third statewide percentile in CAP writing. When, after intensive work, we jumped to the ninety-fifth, hovering there or higher for the duration of that test, others wanted to know what we had done. Thus began a conversation that has spanned CAT/5, CAP,

CLAS, SAT/9, CAT/6, HSEE, STAR and nearly two decades. We have seen our own progress mirrored over the years in countless classrooms. Most of the above suggestions are time-tested and generally accepted "best practices" today. STAR data is a bit tricky, since the writing tests at grades 4 and 7 comprise such a small percentage of the whole. However, districts who use our methods and who have begun to disaggregate their scores are reporting positive progress. Without exception, staff development coupled with methods and materials are key the level of success these districts can report. However, it must be remembered that Flo and I are teachers. Our interest lies less in mass trends and more in the individual achievement. We seek to improve writing instruction one student at a time. So it is that we take more interest in the recent telephone call from a veteran middle school teacher who had just gotten "the best results ever" in persuasive writing from her seventh graders after trying out our ideas and materials. Or consider this e-mail:

"I am a first year teacher. The day I used the color maps to help prepare the students for the benchmark I saw LIGHTBULBS all over the room. It was the first day that I felt like a real teacher for the entire period. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you."

This is soft data, yes. But with enough repetition it acquires a certain force. And then there are our own students. Are our efforts working? According to what we see in their writing growth, we can say yes, absolutely. Are we satisfied that we have offered them the very best we can? Never.