Response

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The Workshop as Classroom and Classroom as Workshop

In reading Eric's chapter, I kept thinking about applying his drawing activities in my own and in colleagues' classes across the disciplines. Likewise, I thought of using the same drawing techniques to involve teachers and faculty in my writing and WAC workshops. So what I responded to most in this chapter (besides the fact that it's fun) is the following:

- *The activities are hands-on.* Whether running a workshop or a classroom, for faculty or for students, I find experiential learning the most powerful means for introducing new ideas or skills. Eric's activities can work spontaneously with a minimum of resources or with elaborate preparation; the methods can be part of a syllabus, but anyone could also take advantage of the "teachable moment," asking students/faculty to take out a sheet of paper and start drawing—now!
- *The activities are transferable.* I can think of many ways to use the exercises to "draw" out and draw in students at all levels. After working with colleagues who teach elementary school, high school, or college, I have begun to see how drawing, like writing strategies, can work across levels to motivate and teach abstract or concrete concepts. When Eric's "draw the grammatical/mechanical rule" is used in a multidisciplinary setting, teachers discover that we all forget the "rules," that the reasons are sometimes easier to draw than to articulate, and that once drawn, they are easier to articulate. Likewise, students (as well as teachers) learn that drawing helps them think through a concept, or it shows them—vividly—that they really don't know what they thought they did. From there, learning can take place.

- *Some of the exercises help teach revision,* one of the most challenging aspects of textual production in any discipline. I intensely dislike many aspects of revision, and that's probably one reason I insist on it with my students, and (like Eric) it's also probably why I have sometimes taught it unsuccessfully: It is difficult to teach well what you yourself don't like to do. The drawing activities open up another way of visualizing my work, and another way for me to visualize and talk to students about their work. As Eric points out, working in a writing center has taught us the value of mapping, grouping, drawing, and other visualization strategies.

Thematic Variations

Planned or Flexible

These writing activities can be spontaneously adapted by a teacher during class or carefully planned and integrated into existing syllabi. I recently planned to incorporate the storyboard into a course on teaching writing across disciplines and levels but (unexpectedly) used the grammar sketch one day when we were discussing the use of writing conventions in light of dialect, language learning, and definitions of literacy. The planned storyboard likewise produced some surprising results during a faculty workshop on visuals and classroom practice, though I used the idea to produce different ends (see below). Like many of the practices in this book, these activities are flexible enough to complement disciplinary objectives, motivational enough to enliven a dull classroom and reach the day's learning objective, and adaptable to long-range curricular goals: the storyboard can work as an organizing tactic for students developing and researching projects over the course of a semester.

Across Levels

Eric has focused on the importance of creating a collegial group that encourages new pedagogy. After doing a workshop with Eric in which he went through these exercises with faculty, I began to look for ways in which I could create such a community and draw a group of faculty to using visuals in their classrooms. Excited by the thought, I volunteered for a Friday morning presentation on the use of visuals in the classroom before I had really thought the project through. Stumped, I asked myself how visuals work across the curriculum. Would the astronomy faculty member care about punctuation, or the biologist care about revision? (I knew the humanists and social scientists would!)

The one common visual denominator we all rely on is the drawing given us in textbooks. The writing center collects assignments and textbooks from classes in order to work with the students, and I paged through them, copying a few visuals from each text.

The day of the presentation, using an overhead projector, I displayed the visuals, which I had arranged in order of least to most confusing (to me) one by one. As we examined the visual and the accompanying text, small gasps were audible in the audience as faculty discovered in one case that a common trajectory drawn in a physics textbook was incorrect, and in another case, that the table in a political science text was missing a column of information. Sometimes fortune smiles on the ignorant presenter; what I as an outsider had gathered as examples of visuals I found confusing turned out to be confusing for more reasons than I could have foreseen. As faculty began their discussion of what we had discovered, we began to talk about our blind reliance on visual information: on how we don't question what may (or may not) be before our eyes. It was easy to move from a discussion of how visuals could deceive—though they should be helpful—to how we could use visuals in our teaching.

Near the end of my presentation, I introduced Eric's third exercise, by asking faculty to draw six panels explaining how they got to the workshop. Through much comfortable kidding about our lack of colored pencils and some attention devoted to faculty who worked with their tongues sticking out, participants began in midsketch to see how drawing processes could be useful in their classrooms. A sociologist commented that students had a difficult time understanding the varied steps by which grassroots organizations come to power: drawing these steps in a flow chart would show options and alternative routes. A political scientist also used the flow chart idea for students designing a database, not really an original thought, but one he hadn't used because he hadn't seen its value. A physicist decided that before referring students to textbook pictures, he would have them draw their own trajectories, and perhaps even create their own "word pictures" as problems for other students to solve. In each case, the idea was local, contextual, related to one particular classroom—but it opened up other possibilities for colleagues. Eric's workshop had given me the idea for the presentation to begin with and his storyboard produced a broad range of ideas for professors in their classrooms.

In a similar situation, teachers taking a writing-across-levels-and-disciplines class (teachers of children in grades two through twelve) were asked to do Eric's grammar rule exercise. As they struggled with both the drawing and the interpretation, we began to talk about Mina Shaughnessy's work with basic writers. Teachers wondered if their

students (especially younger students) would be able to use drawing to express rules they had constructed prior to entering school, rules based on oral speech, which didn't translate to written communication, or rules that governed dialects rather than academic English. One of the second grade teachers suggested that her students might draw the grammar rules and compile them into a book for next year's students; another teacher thought that her fourth-grade students might be able to compile a similar book for second graders as part of their "community service" project.

Meanwhile, curious to see what would happen in my composition class if students were asked to draw their most common grammar or sentence "problem," I asked my students to humor me by doing so. Of course what resulted was a half-finished series of drawings as many of the students asked in frustration, "How can I draw it if I don't know how to do it?" That in turn led to a discussion not only of rules but of ways students remember or proofread for certain writing conventions.

Besides working as a method for creating a narrative, Eric's storyboard idea is another way to analyze a picture or a graphic or media presentation. Students often deny that they are manipulated by commercials, news programs, or even MTV. They claim that they already know the media controls, tricks, and draws reviewers into a trap. Yet, when asked to reproduce their "favorite" commercials in storyboard panels, from memory, students were surprised at what they couldn't remember: the setting, the colors, the name of the product. One of two things tends to happen: they remember peripheral pieces of an ad or a commercial, or they remember little except the large main parts of the ad or commercial. I then asked them to draw a storyboard while watching the commercial or the ad. Invariably, students watch again and again, and begin to discover subtle cues they had not "seen" before but to which they have obviously been exposed and have registered unconsciously. Such a task leads students to cultural analysis, textual analysis, or creating effective visuals for communication.

Revision, "Re-vision"

We tell students to look again, reread, proof, revise, but many of them, pressed for time, do "just enough" and miss the point of lifelong learning. To "re-vision," means to look again, to think about what is missing and what is there, to anticipate how another might see and interpret so you, in turn, can again "re-vision" its presentation. Getting outside one's own personal knowledge of a paper is very difficult during the best of times, but it is especially so when there is little time to put a text down, let it sit, and then pick it up again. The storyboard,

narrative, and zoom, the last in particular, give students the distance they need during this all-important stage of production. I'm trying to avoid the word "writing" here, because I have seen the storyboard work when students need to create a visual product: when they create a plan, write about it, zoom in on its parts, and then restructure their original idea. This works in art history design classes, but it is also what the political science professor saw as a potential resource for students working with data bases, or the biology professor for students designing hypotheses and experiments to test them, or the history professor for students tracing and charting their family tree.

Picturing a structure, seeing ideas in a spatial arrangement, and then focusing on one part at a time, creates a less painful medium for many students. Drawing proves especially valuable in student conferences or writing center tutorials. In trying to understand a paper's organization, you can have them draw the paper in sections, or if you choose, you can draw your version of what you have read. This often leads to a clearer view of the glitches, bare spaces, lack of evidence, needless repetition, places in which the writer/designer is speaking only to him or herself. Since the difficulty of revision is to get out of our own heads, drawing the structure of our papers or zooming up close on our details can put the words or design that exists in "perfect" order in our heads in true perspective. It can help us "re-vision."

Postscript

Our responses to these chapters revealed to us, even as we composed them, how much using visuals has already permeated our own classrooms. Much to our delight, we also encountered colleagues (besides those presented here) who have discovered the effectiveness of visuals in teaching. Just as writing across the curriculum stresses that writing should be folded into the curriculum, we have found ways in which visuals can be part of our teaching methodology. We also found ourselves focusing more and more on how to "read," analyze, and create effective visuals. We believe, like Gunter Kress and others who write on the subject, that all the evidence around us shows that visuals no longer just augment text; now, the text augments the visuals. To ignore the visual evidence, or worse, to ignore our students' needs—to respond intelligently to and produce visuals—is to antiquate this thing we value most: reading, interpreting and communicating in all their forms, the forms we have now, and the ones yet to come.