

# Writing Across the Curriculum at Shorewood High: Integrative Models, Student Investments

Steve Pearse

“How can I possibly be expected to read — much less grade — more student papers? That’s just too much.”

“What with huge class loads, more and more at-risk and non-English speakers, and another new prep this year, I’ll barely have time to grade their *tests*, never mind assign them more writing!”

“You’re asking for ‘another other,’ and I’m not going to do it.”

These and many more reactions, complaints, and declarations made over the years by non-English teachers I know are apparently timeless, if not universal. For many subject-area teachers, incorporating writing in the process of teaching has meant conducting rigorous assessments, with an emphasis upon grammatical and mechanical correctness (Fulwiler 1986). Despite assurances to the contrary, only a small minority of teachers outside the English department regularly involve their students in exploratory, expressive writing for the purpose of responding in personal ways to key concepts and content. Of course, English teachers also chafe under the rub of the ever-present paper load. Writing is, after all, a subject to be taught; all too frequently student

writing is viewed as teacher burden. Thinking of writing as process and product that know no curricular bounds and are integral to class activities as well as to authentic assessment may not be a new idea, but neither is it an accepted practice in many schools.

The notion of what writing can be and do for students has contributed in significant ways to the restructuring conversation that has begun at Shorewood High School in Seattle. Like many other schools across the country, Shorewood is reassessing its effectiveness for students' present and future needs. Over the years, its population has changed, as have the social and economic conditions and expectations that confront these students. Armed with a mission statement ("Success for Every Student") and with an eye on the SCANS Report for America 2000 and other recent reports, the staff and community have been discussing what our students need, and how we might go about delivering those many and complex services to them.

One strand of that conversation has involved a number of English, social studies, and science teachers, among others. Working individually, in pairs, and/or as contributors to schoolwide projects, teachers are piloting thematic, integrative units and programs that link writing, thinking, and other learning skills; honor individual initiative and performance; and involve students more directly in determining the what and how of their own learning. How those initiatives began and how writing-related activities contribute to their thematic, integrative nature is the subject of this chapter.

### **Philosophical Context, Real Possibilities**

Three central questions are currently driving change at Shorewood. As interrelated pieces of the same puzzle, each places teacher collaboration and a broadly defined concept of writing's nature and value *in medias res*—"into the middle of things":

- In the current Shorewood curriculum, where do our students practice and gain the identified skills and personal qualities needed for their success?
- Can Shorewood students identify, articulate, and offer proof of the skills and qualities they have mastered?
- What student learning activities can we create to enhance social and personal development?

We are beginning to develop a teaching/learning design for our students that is informed by these three questions and driven by a central goal: to deliver a curriculum that owes its design to thematic links across the disciplines (Kersh, Nielsen, and Sirotnik 1987).

Teachers involved in these projects wish to provide nothing less than a sense of unity between students and essential subject-matter knowledge and related skills. In other words, they are aiming for an *integrative* curriculum that “requires a new recognition of the interdependence of knowledge and its relevance to the life of the learner in a free society” (Tanner 1989, 11). By introducing teacher-provided structures (themes and projects) that have the potential for unifying knowledge and by encouraging students to imagine and construct models that work for them, teacher teams are designing units and programs that reflect integrative teaching and learning (Harter and Gehrke 1989).

### **Different Approaches for Similar Outcomes**

In response to the idea of making thematic, informational, and skill-related connections happen, two schoolwide initiatives were begun two years ago at Shorewood: an integrated curriculum team and a senior project team. Excursions to workshops and conventions combined with individual and committee research led to tentative directions, and a core of five to eight teachers for each project began planning for the 1990–91 school year. To complete this schoolwide portrait, several teachers working on their own have established writing-based, integrative programs for their students as well.

#### *Integrated Curriculum: Teacher Collaboration*

Choosing “diversity” as their theme, teachers of ninth-grade English and social studies planned further discussions, established several working teams, and considered ways of connecting their respective content and concepts with thinking and writing skills. The following fall a teacher-leader team organized an all-day work session so that ten of their peers could agree upon a central theme, select essential cross-curricular skills, propose appropriate key content, and design one or more concept-driven, skill-based, student-centered units of instruction.

*Honors Ninth-Grade Social Studies and English:* Jack LeGore and Kathy Agather

9/24/92

Dear Pat,

Here’s what we’d like to do. We’ll combine the Honors English 9 study of the Meeting of the Minds and Jack’s World Geography study of three cultures:

1. SW Asia—North Africa
2. East Africa and South Africa
3. Europe/Soviet Union

Students will create and become an ethnic identity/personality of a particular culture. They will, through research and immersion, identify with the ethnocentricity of a group. They will become familiar with the group's language, music, dress, values, beliefs, religions, traditions, food.

This study will produce a research paper and a fifteen-minute videotaped presentation. Students will be in the full dress of their ethnic choice. We will then enjoy a feast of food and the music of the various ethnic cultures chosen.

We'll send the plan: Skills, objectives, content, product lists to you soon. Will this be approved?

— Kathy and Jack

As Honors program director for Shorewood, Pat Hegarty was delighted to discover that these two teachers, neither of whom had team taught since the late sixties, were taking previously isolated units of study and transforming them into a single thematic vision, linking academic content with researching, reading, writing, thinking, cooperating, and performing skills. After a year of participating in presentations and discussions concerning student needs and curricular goals, these teachers were beginning to implement their own ideas for thematic, interdisciplinary, process-to-product units and projects.

Kathy and Jack had spent two days last August doing what teachers representing differing subject areas have rarely done at Shorewood: sharing, explaining, and reseeing their respective course outlines for the purpose of student-centered, thematic collaboration. Discovering that both of them wanted their students to muck around in the stuff of content as well as hone skills, Kathy and Jack began to consider ways of consolidating and coordinating their programs.

Yet the planning process did not come easily for them, nor for the other teachers who decided to establish collaborative teams. The previous year Pat and I had presented curricular models emphasizing skills and processes; engaged teachers in discussions of core content, key concepts, relevant skills, and possible student products; and suggested ways of proceeding. Kathy, Jack, and the other members of our ninth-grade planning team moved from the central theme, diversity, to relevant supporting themes ("home," "change," "culture"), and to key thinking skills (observing, recognizing patterns, comparing and contrasting).

Now it was up to each teacher team to choose essential content, assess student needs, and devise one or more units that would lend themselves to our goals. Honors as well as "regular" and "basic" students would be involved, and both process- and product-oriented writing experiences—along with speaking and presentation skills such as writing articles for submission to the *Seattle Times*—would anchor each project and program.

As for this Honors 9 pairing, Jack was concerned that his students be held accountable for the content of world geography, even as he was intrigued by Kathy's enthusiasm for multimedia (she also teaches Film Study and is actively involved in the Seattle Film Festival), performance-related skills, and individualized content. Combining Jack's emphasis on cultural studies with Kathy's interests came quite naturally. In English, "Meeting of the Minds" required each student to choose a historical figure (e.g., Helen Keller, Thomas Edison, Mother Teresa) as a focus of study over several weeks. Students were expected to conduct detailed research on that person's life, times, and legacy; engage in a variety of writing activities in preparation for a formal written and oral presentation; and present that character's essential nature and experience in the form of a dramatic monologue to include dressing, behaving, and speaking in character.

Meeting of the Minds had always implied the concept of diversity. The next step for Kathy and Jack was redefining essential content. For World Geography, students would be encouraged to select a region along with a time frame. Representing all three major geographic areas in the course outline, students' topics ranged from twentieth-century Brussels to 1300 b.c. Memphis (Egypt). All students would gain a sense of the themes of similarity and difference among three key regions. Both teachers were interested in helping students work through time and resource management, in addition to enhancing their speaking, listening, and critical thinking skills.

The essential content of this quarter of Honors 9 emphasized research theory and practice, including selecting and pursuing an appropriate research question; framing that research; drafting expository paragraphs; and establishing and maintaining appropriate voice and style. Creating original characters based upon ethnohistorical precedents, these students then presented highlights of their newly acquired knowledge of time, place, and society via carefully planned and researched fifteen-minute monologues.

Topics and dramatic characters reflected an eclectic, far-reaching span across time and place, as the following sampling of and excerpts from student projects suggest:

Fictional Figure	Ethnocentric Scene	Ninth-grade Student
Nalathi Moise, 17	South Africa, 1986	Lisa Dietrich
Paydro B. Salazan, 37	Madagascar, 1500s	Miriam Oh
Akidinimba	Ituri Forest (Congo), 1970s	Rachelle Cruz
Sasha Nikolayovna Cherdonikovich	Uzbekistan, C15, the present	Amy Carlson

## 1

**Jeff Boschee: Mursilis Amenophis, 29. Memphis, Egypt, 1300 B.C.**

It is very hard to imagine moving more than 100 fifty-ton blocks of rock. This would be a hard task today, even with cranes and pulleys. During the time the Egyptian pyramids were built, they didn't have either. Tools were also lacking, but they didn't let that intimidate them. The early Egyptians built more than eighty pyramids: smooth, perfectly shaped pyramids . . .

Once the pyramid was completed, they started removing the sand around the base; at the same time, they would smooth the outside. They continued slowly down, removing brick and ramp until they reached the base and the pyramid was completed. . . . It is an amazing accomplishment for these people because of their primitive tools. Seeing one of these massive buildings would be like a trip into the past. This proves that Egyptians spent much time preparing for their after-life. It also demonstrates that the Egyptians were very innovative people.

## 2

**Miriam Oh: Paydro B. Salazan. Madagascar, 1500s**

Uniqueness is what tells them apart. No one group is like the other. Classing traditions, distinct characteristics, and opposed tastes divide these societies into eighteen growing cartels. Describing the 18 ethnic groups of Madagascar distinctly allows outsiders to distinguish which one is which and informs strangers of their way of life compared to their own . . .

Along with the Bezanozano and the Betsileo, the *famadihana* is essential to these people. Below, a woman describes her account of this tradition:

There was a lot of activity in and around the tomb, and soon a group of six men came out carrying our hostess's great uncle. His bones, dusty and dry, were now held together in a polythene bag, the old *lamba mena* having disintegrated long ago. They brought him to a special shelter, wrapped him in a vastly expensive, beautifully embroidered new white *lamba mena* (*mena* means red) and laid him in the midst of guests (Bradt 15).

. . . The Tsimihety (Those-who-do-not-cut-their-hair) number 700,000 [according to] Kent (184). . . . Of all the tribes that I know about, the Tsimihety is my favorite. Because of the fact that a great king died, let alone from another tribe, these people show such endearing respect for him and not cut their hair. It is just impressive.

Though I have only reported on half of the eighteen ethnic tribes, I can clearly comprehend that despite meager similarities, these groups are indeed individuals of their own time and culture.

With diversity as their controlling theme, these students explored

such related concepts as home, change, and culture through careful research and observation. Kathy and Jack's emphasis upon recognizing patterns and accounting for similarities and differences is evident in learning logs as well as class discussions and presentations.

*The Senior Project:  
Cross-Disciplinary Process-to-Product*

Belly Dancing: Its Origins and Cultural Meanings . . . Fifty Years of Doll History: Porcelain Portrayals . . . Designs & Possibilities: Alternative Fuel Engines . . . Self-Defense for Women: Tae Kwon Do.

Nearly fifty students—representing Honors English and philosophy classes and regular program courses in creative writing and home economics, as well as some independent-study students—volunteered to present papers, products, and performances in late May, 1992, our second year of involvement in the senior project (Summers 1989). Preparing for rehearsals these seniors wrote reflective and process-related pieces that chronicled their discoveries. They revised and edited essays, original short stories, and other documents and products, even as they began to choreograph twenty-minute presentations that ranged from dramatic performances to rock-climbing demonstrations to Macintosh multimedia productions.

*Process and Purpose:* For the teachers and administrators who elected to research, then implement a senior project component at Shorewood, two long-term goals have driven all other considerations and activities: to provide a focus, a *showcase*, for our buildingwide efforts to establish thematic and skill-related links across the curriculum; and to work toward a truly student-centered, integrative culture of teaching and learning (Kersh, Nielsen, and Sirotnik 1987; Tanner 1989). We believe that if high school teachers are to establish a climate that supports student initiative and nurtures connection making across departments, topics, and skills, the greater community must also invest in that goal. To that end, community members—including parents, business managers, university professors, museum curators, and craftspeople—are involved in the process. Granting interviews, providing access to art collections, conducting workplace tours, reviewing students' initial ideas and findings, and serving on project committees, these adults become major contributors to student growth and accomplishment. As Deanna Chadwell (1988) has stated,

School is for society. In order for our form of government, our form of economy, our level of prosperity to continue we must have a well-educated populace. The community contributes to this end. . . . Parents contribute by disciplining, nurturing and encouraging their children. Teachers contribute by preparing and presenting the subject

matter and by holding students accountable for learning. Students contribute by cooperating, disciplining themselves, learning the material and skills taught. (Far West EDGE, 1988)

Working from process to product, demonstrating self-discipline, making commitments—for many Shorewood seniors, including Honors students, these performance-based concepts are daunting. Whereas class discussions, teacher-student conferences, and on-task checks have been helpful to most participants, reflective, process-oriented writing has contributed in affective as well as cognitive ways to many students' feelings of competence and confidence. To support their efforts, some senior project students have been required to complete "process writes" on a weekly basis. Combined with large-group discussions and admit slips, individual conferences, and small-group sharing, these frequently reflective pieces add up to a **process portfolio** that was submitted as partial fulfillment of project requirements. Key segments from a document providing directions for these students follows:

**Your Process Portfolio: Keeping Track of that Senior Project!**

Dear Seniors:

From imagining to researching, planning and preparing, writing and revising, gathering and managing, and rehearsing and presenting . . . it is time to document the process beyond Works Cited and preliminary lists. For each of these final eight weeks before you will be presenting your Senior Project, I'd like you to maintain a series of 8–10 record/responses in the form of a **Process Portfolio**.

*Purpose:* To guide your thinking and planning for this project, and to serve as a kind of *anecdotal model of performance* for future projects you will most certainly be initiating and completing in many forms and for a variety of purposes during your post-SW career!

*Designs:* Since the idea is to conform to your needs and interests as you continue to refine the *what*, the *how*, and the *why* of your Senior Project, choices matter! Consider the following ways of *thinking and responding* to your Senior Project process . . .

Reflective writing suggestions include such writing to learn strategies as metaphorical questions, soliloquies, dialectic notebook entries, biopoems (Gere 1985), as well as charts, maps and sketches, letters, and guided imagery. Some specific student examples follow.

As they research ancient Hawaiian culture (including a trip to the big island), Courtenay Brooks and Emily Ackles picture themselves in performance, replete with native costumes, authentic dance (hula), and a hint as to the planning and choreographing that remains to be done in this brief overview:



Wearing a *pa'i* (red) with a blue overskirt, I *oli* onto the stage. I sit down, beat my *ipu* on Teri's *pa'i* pad, and hit Emily and Pam in. I chant *o'panaewa* or another *ma'i*, and they exit. I talk for seven minutes, and end with a modern song to show the difference. Then I am done!

A week later, Courtenay considers the *how* of this team presentation. Reflecting upon the choices available to her, she completes a “questions needing answers” write:

What costume do I want to wear? Should I bring my modern costumes as an example of how hula has changed? In particular, should I show my tinsel skirt? Should I have someone dance a *hapa haule* song as an example of Hollywood's influence on the hula, or do I have time to spend on that? . . . How can I enlarge a map to chart size so that I can trace the migration route of the Polynesians for the Committee to see? Will Jeri let me borrow an *epu* pad? Or, better yet, will she trust me with one of her good *epus*?

Designing interview questions, pouring over telephone directories, and conducting an ERIC search on preschool education in the Northwest, Erin Hart completes what might be called, for want of a better description, an “affective admit” slip for her third process write:

Well, I've managed to get in touch with a few people and lay a bit of groundwork. Mostly this week I've been on the telephone, going down my resource list of preschools. . . . My second phone call was a little more pleasant, but yielded pretty much the same result [no help!] I really had a bad feeling when I had finally gotten to the Chelsea House preschool number. But my experience there was such a joy. My first triumph came in merely talking to a human being—as opposed to cold receptionists and answering machines. The next thrill was that the owner/head teacher was available to talk to at that very moment. By this time I was so very excited I nearly dropped over dead when she was excited at the prospect of being interviewed and insisted that I come and visit for the morning. I hung up feeling very satisfied.

Never one to be deterred by any sort of setback, Erin wrote this reflective response the following week. Clearly, she knows what she is after and why:

After having been continually frustrated by the lack of documented information on our country's preschools available, I have decided that the only way I am going to learn anything is to make contact with as many people (including children) in the field of preschool as possible. . . . I have compiled documents, intended to aid me in my quest for preschool knowledge. These will help me to keep track of the people

and the information I encounter in [a] somewhat organized way. First, with the help of Mr. Pearse, I developed a questionnaire. I intend to conduct phone interviews with the teachers/directors of the various preschools I contact. . . . On this questionnaire are questions dealing with affiliation (Montessori, religious, etc.), basic philosophy, curriculum, atmosphere, and other related information. . . . This questionnaire will help me to keep all of my information straight (I hope).

A final example of students' use of writing to define, describe, and otherwise make sense of the process of planning and presenting is Phil's weaponry project. Dedicated to returning to his ancestral home in England and refurbishing it with the first fortune he makes in this country, Phil is also an avid, well-informed fan of English heraldry and weaponry. Shortly after having written this complaints and frustrations response Phil found the solutions to the problems he describes here, and much more. Using the Xap Shot disc camera, he took numerous slides of weaponry, spoke to professors and their graduate students, and was stunned when two students offered to stage a mock battle, complete with authentic armor and weapon replicas as a backdrop for Phil's multimedia presentation:

I am having trouble coming up with ideas because there is only so much I can do using pictures from texts and the information from those texts. As I'm sure you know, it is rather hard to come up with authentic weapons as they are quite rare. I'm going—when I have time—to the UW [Seattle] and will try to set up an interview with a professor there. Hopefully he may know of some weapons which I may be able to film or even bring in as demonstrations, even if they are replicas.

### *Individual Teachers & Their Classrooms: Self-Contained Yet Integrative*

*ESL (English as a Second Language) at Shorewood: The Diary of Anne Frank:* Shorewood is a comprehensive high school. Its students reflect the community's ethnic diversity as well as its occupational, educational, and religious multiplicity. The more than eighty Shorewood students enrolled in ESL classes learn interactively in Trudy Lothyan's class, and writing is part of nearly every lesson. Just as Pat Hegarty's ninth-grade English students explore the concept of home or culture as a focus for the theme of diversity, Trudy's students approach course content first from the meaning-making context of their own experiences and perspectives. It is fitting that, of all Shorewood courses, the ESL program strikes the clearest balance between writing as a mode of learning and writing as a means to improve the quality of students' written expression.

Even though the majority of Shorewood's ESL students are of Asian descent, *The Diary of Anne Frank* speaks to them. Issues of justice, complicity, persecution, sacrifice, evidence, documentation, and atrocity have figured in many of their lives, too, if only through stories told them by their Korean, Taiwanese, or Russian elders. (These students are also now American teens, noted for their abiding interest in issues of fairness in its many forms and applications.) For this unit, Trudy has devised a series of writing activities that dovetail in cognitive and affective ways with reading, discussion, and vocabulary study. (To repeat a key premise for this discussion, truly integrative teaching and learning involves teacher provided structures that unify knowledge, and it empowers students to imagine and construct models that work for them and are their own.)

Beginning with a presentation of the big picture, including the historical events that frame Anne Frank's story, Trudy involves her students in personal ways with the excerpts from *Anne Frank* that the class has read together:

Pretend you, like the Franks, are a German Jew whose ancestry in Germany dates back hundreds of years. Write a short essay describing your feelings about being persecuted and being labeled "non-German." Include such things as your reactions and questions related to you and your family's military service record, the law forbidding you to attend public schools, and the seizing of your property.

Soomin, a Korean girl with a clear sense of the power of dialogue, denouement, and of the concepts of persecution and brutality, drew a compelling word portrait, as this closing segment demonstrates:

My child John asked me, "Mom, I want to ride my bicycle with my friend. I'm going to come back early, Mom."

Oh, I forgot to tell him that Jews couldn't use any transportation. I answered to John, "My dear, I'm sorry. You cannot ride your bicycle. Jews cannot use any transportation."

My child, John, asked me, "Why, Mom? Oh, I know. Because of the Nazis, right?"

I just said that I'm sorry.

Following this instructional sequence, Trudy introduces several additional writing-speaking activities that help students articulate key concepts and recognize important literary features (e.g., descriptive detail, characters' roles and relationships) and devices (e.g., imagery, narration). One such lesson calls upon students to create a chart that reflects the connections among theme, plot, and characterization as they pertain to their own lives:

**Who are the People in the Annexe?**

Make a chart showing members of your family and/or others you might wish to save in a similar circumstance. Write a short paragraph about each person, detailing their strong points and weak points that might make it difficult to live together closely for two years like the Franks.

Chun-peï's response communicates her sense of herself and of her family in a most compelling way. Clearly, Chun-peï has seen and understood some of the universal mysteries of human behavior portrayed in the *Diary* mirrored in her perceptions of her own family:

My parents would have diffent [*sic*] opinions from each other, because they are stubborn. They both think they are right, and hurt each other. And my sister would be caught in the middle between the fight, because when they become frightened my sister will say who is right, who is wrong. But it won't solve the problem, and maybe even will cause more of it. My brother and I will stand aside, not because we don't care, because in the end they will [be] peaceful and loving again. It will be like nothing happened. Even so, my parents would be like everybody's friend they have met. My brother, and sister will easily get along with other people. Especially my sister, she will talk, talk, and talk. . . . And I try to be peaceful and not let anyone be angry with me.

*Ninth-Grade Geography: Process and Product:* As a teacher of English and social studies at the ninth- and eleventh-grade levels, Karen Hansen brings expertise to the building goal: to deliver an integrative, student-centered curriculum that owes its design and impetus to thematic, generalizable links across the disciplines (Kersh, Nielsen, and Sirotnik 1987). Piloting the ninth-grade theme of diversity across the several required units of World Geography, Karen has combined a variety of writing activities with class readings, panel discussions, videotaped and audiotaped documentaries, assorted maps, and other resources.

Karen's students write frequently in journals, and she has begun to involve them in selecting individual pieces to be kept in their process portfolios. (Several of us hope that most members of the class of 1995 will be involved in the senior project program; therefore, the processes of learning are at least as important as the products that demonstrate learning.) Writing for Karen's students follows the general process of previewing, forecasting, and assessing the nature of their assumptions and (mis)understandings, followed by responding to new learning, especially as it informs students' own awarenesses and interests.

Recently, Karen's ninth-grade students began to consider the

extent of their knowledge about Africa. Unlike Jack LeGore and Kathy Agather's Honors classes, classroom rosters are not the same across Karen's ninth-grade social studies and English classes. Because it has not been possible this year to team in a direct way across regular classes, Karen has directed student thinking, writing, and speaking activities in response to Africa's political, economic, cultural, environmental, historical, and geographic diversity.

Before assigning her students to read "Trail of Shame," a *Time* magazine (October 16, 1989) cover story tracing the greed and devastation of the ivory trade in Kenya and Tanzania, she asks them to complete a learning log write: "What comes to your mind when you think of Africa?" Few students, it turns out, go beyond the bounds of stereotypical images perpetuated by Hollywood and television, and only a very few offer comments that relate to personal experience or interests. Jennifer's response is typical:

Africa—I don't know much about Africa, but I think Africa has a very hot temperature. I saw something on TV that was about Africa. The people there were skinny, the adults wear long skirts and women wear veils around their heads. Jungles, forests, starvation, hot temperatures, straw or cabin-like houses, are things that come to my mind when I think of Africa.

Michelle's response, although even less informed than Jennifer's appears to be, nonetheless reflects her teacher's emphasis upon diversity as both integrating concept and viewing lens:

I don't know a whole heck of alot about Africa. I know we took slaves from there and it's kinda safari like. When I think of Africa I think of lions and girafe [sic] running loose. I'm sure that's what alot of uneducated Americans think.

Students frequently share their impressions with one another in Karen's classes. As a result, issues are raised that serve as a focus for the discussions or projects to follow. Jen's entry, for example, moves environmental, economic, and social differences to the front burner, igniting a classroom discussion. In addition, her reference to comparative qualities of apparently distinct cultures anticipates her teacher's objectives even as it establishes the student-centeredness of activities to follow:

When I think of Africa, big open spaces come to mind. Spaces of dried grass and sand, on which elephants and other wild creatures roam free. I think of half naked people, who don't give a thought to modesty, wearing little white cloths over very little of their bodies. These people strike me as friendly and naive. Maybe it's the comparison of our society to theirs. Somehow I feel we are linked, as if we're the same in more than just the obvious ways. I like their culture better, its says "home" to me. Being brought up in Brazil probably

has a lot to do with the way I feel. I get lonesome when I watch African movies.

### Some Closing Comments

Writing student profiles, interviewing parents about their beliefs about schools in general and this school in particular, holding faculty discussions about curricular priorities and student needs—these and other “pre-restructuring” activities occurred at Shorewood during the 1991–92 school year. Many teachers continue to express concerns about the pressures they are experiencing as they continue to puzzle out where we should be taking our students at the close of the twentieth century.

An apparently endless—and probably cyclical—series of questions has been raised, answered, and reviewed during these past two years: Is the stuff of content in jeopardy as we concentrate on the skills of process, the activities of reflection and metacognition with our students? Do we risk slighting a common core of content and skill if we continue to encourage students to pursue their individual interests? Should we be developing true alternative assessment measures that include but go beyond projects, portfolios, and presentations?

Yet because of the work a number of teachers and their students have done, two strands of the conversation have achieved nearly universal community support: the value of student—and teacher—teaming; and the possibilities of writing as a cross-disciplinary, reflective, integrative learning device. A core of Shorewood science, social studies, and English teachers have provided models of teaching that invest heavily in interactive, thematic learning. And, although it is true that content of various kinds is central to each of the projects and units described in this chapter, it is *connectivity* in the broadest sense, after all, that is at the heart of students’ thought and action. As Robert DiYanni (1985) states in *Connections: Reading, Writing, and Thinking*:

All learning involves making connections, linking new information and experience with what we have previously learned and, in the process, readjusting our understanding of what we know. From this standpoint, learning is less a matter of accumulating information and adding one bit to another than a way of re-envisioning and re-conceptualizing our knowledge. . . . Learning proceeds by a . . . revision and reconstruction of what was previously known. (Preface)

### Note

p. 91 Admit slips:

brief written student responses often collected as tickets to “admission” to class. Collected and read aloud by the teacher with no indication of the

authorship of individual students. Frequently used for community building. (As noted in Gere, Anne, *Roots in the Sawdust*, 1985, p. 222.)

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