

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM WORKSHOP

by Patty Wixon

In the original proposal four years ago the Oregon Writing Project proposed to improve the teaching of writing throughout the curriculum. Each summer this project included a few token "subject area" secondary teachers in the regular summer institute. But last year, the Project staff (full-time director, three district-based site coordinators, and the University-based director and associate director) realized it faced an extension of the credibility problem BAWP solved. We knew that teachers learn best from other teachers, but when the teaching teachers are English teachers, much of the credibility is lost for other subject area teachers. Their attitude remains, "He's an English teacher. He knows this method will work in his classroom, but what does he know about my classroom?" The OWP staff decided to risk pushing the BAWP perimeters and designed two Writing Across the Curriculum workshops.

The workshops were held simultaneously in two districts. Salem's Writing Across the Curriculum workshop was for teachers grades one through eight; Central Point's workshop was for teachers grades six through twelve. Participant "selection" differed from the usual policy of apply/interview/ select. Teachers were recommended by team leaders and former OWP participants, but also every teacher requesting on their own to participate was accepted. The interview was conducted by the site coordinator and took the form of brainstorming presentation possibilities, then going over the OWP information sheet and helping the teacher get down his/her ideas.

At the workshop each teacher's style of presentation differed, but contained areas of information common to all presentations. These included presentation title, time needed to carry out the method/unit/sequence, teacher prerequisites, setting, materials, and instructional procedures to include presentations useful for each subject area, i.e. Mary K. Healy giving her "Writing Across the Curriculum" presentation.

The usual BAWP Institute daily schedule was followed. Without either the threat or aid of English teachers in their midst, the workshop participants thrived. Their presentations were competent, the majority were outstanding. Nearly all of them were writing and working in reading/ editing groups for the first time and they worked hard. An evaluation of improvement in teachers' writing ability after a three-week workshop showed very little change, but a survey of the teachers' attitudes showed the same overwhelming response we found in earlier workshops: positive, enthusiastic, "the best teacher training I've ever had" cropped up again and again. And this is what will carry writing into the classroom.

As more and more administrators in Oregon mandate "writing will occur in every subject area," the Oregon Writing Project continues to receive more and more requests for Writing Across the Curriculum workshops. We're able to put these workshops together with confidence now, for our presenters have credibility and we've seen the workshops work.

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