I must admit, with some embarrassment, that a few years ago I probably would not have chosen to review a book with a title that used the term "workplace English." What did it have to say to those of us teaching college prep or university courses? A few months ago, however, two matters conspired to attract my attention to Carolyn Boiarsky's slim volume from Heinemann, and I am glad they did. First, the word art with workplace English seemed to me to be an intriguing combination. Did they belong in the same breath, much less a title? Second, I had become aware of the growing number of school-to-work programs operating throughout the country. What, I wondered, did their growing presence mean for traditional curricula and teaching practice?

Boiarsky quickly convinced me that "yes" was the answer to my first question, and that the answer to the second is not as revolutionary as it might initially seem. In what she describes as "a humane book," she argues for new curricula and teaching methods that will prepare students for the world of the 21st century without sacrificing the learning that has traditionally been deemed to be essential. She also aspires to make the English classroom more rewarding and enjoyable for both teachers and students. No small task, that.

Defined as "the form of communication we use outside the academic classroom" (p. 17), workplace English includes "reading, understanding, interpreting, and evaluating information in technical and scientific fields as well as communicating information about these fields" (p. 18). It also recognizes the importance of visualization (layout and graphics), oral communication, and technology. Since these are important skills for any contemporary student, what is the difference between workplace English and the traditional classroom? According to Boiarsky "in an applied English course, students have an opportunity to see how the grammar they're learning, the literature they're reading, and the papers they're writing relate to the real world" (p. 19).

How is a teacher to manage all this? Concerned about the post-academic success of all students, but particularly about that of underachieving students who routinely drop out of school or perform at minimal levels, Boiarsky advocates, in addition to some traditional methods, varying teaching methods to match students' learning styles and focusing on content relevant to their lives. She speaks of providing a scaffold for students to climb and teaching within a realistic context. She reaches back to the theories of John Dewey to recommend a "hands-on, project-oriented approach that is contextually based rather than abstract, and that extends beyond the presentation of theories and abstractions to include the 'whys and what for's'" (p. 16). Such projects can involve the competencies named by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills as the ones workers will need to succeed in the economy of the coming century: thinking, problem solving, decision making, self-management, creativity.

It is in what she suggests should be taught rather than how it is to be taught that Boiarsky may ruffle the most feathers among her colleagues. In her discussion of expanding the traditional genres she adds some that teachers may have reservations about including—i.e., the five major genres of workplace literature: correspondence, instructions, reports, proposals, and oral presentations.
How is a teacher to manage all of this? According to Boiarisky, the time has come for a review of the curriculum. Do we need to teach all the aspects of literature? Can we reduce the time spent on various texts? Where is there overlap and redundancy in our materials? With careful revision, she argues, there is room for the study of workplace English along with more traditional texts. The final chapter presents a case for collaboration across disciplines to integrate the curriculum, interweaving disciplines in meaningful and effective ways. Pushing even further, she calls for collaboration not only with students and other teachers, but also with members of business and industry.

In short, The Art of Workplace English is a book whose time has come. Although the chapter on technology is less successful than the rest, providing little that is new in the discussion since the subject is quickly dated, in general the book offers a sound approach to preparing students for the world they will enter after they leave school. It will be directly helpful to high school teachers and community college teachers, but it also has much to say to those of us who are working with college prep and college students. After all, everybody is in the workplace sooner or later.

In early July, eighteen Redwood Writing Project fellows read Frank Smith’s latest book, The Book of Learning and Forgetting. Exhausted by the battle against simplistic notions of education that seem to dominate current public discourse, we were unanimously recharged reading the views of a cognitive psychologist.

Smith characterizes the Classic view of learning as one that is effortless, continual, independent of rewards and punishments, a social activity, unprompted, vicarious, and never forgotten. He contrasts this with what he calls “The Official Theory,” which views learning as hard work, occasional, dependent on rewards and punishment, individualistic, intentional, and easily forgotten. Classic Learning is growth; the Official Theory is memorization.

Though learning is often viewed by parents, lawmakers, administrators, and yes, teachers, as primarily an intellectual activity, Smith views learning through a more Vygotskian lens, that “you learn from the company you keep.” Parents demonstrate that they know this by their concern for their children’s peer group. He has “never heard a parent say, ‘I’m not worried about the gang my son goes with — he’s a slow learner.'”

Smith refers to communities of influential people as “clubs.” Unless we experience severe childhood trauma, we all join the spoken language club. Throughout our lives, we readily identify with and continually learn from members of the other clubs to which we are welcomed. “We become who we are from the company we keep and from the company we shun or which shuns us.” Smith challenges us to question why some students are shunned from the written language club, and reflects on the historical roots of public education’s role as club admissions officer.

The industrial revolution brought production-driven, efficiency-oriented schools based on the