



Failure-Proof Writing: Assignments for the Student Who Can't/Won't Write

Curriculum Unit 81.04.11
by Jyo Keakealani Teshima

Why bother to come to school

so I could get my education.

—Mary K.

I come to school to learn and

sometime I stay home because

—Caroline R.

(figure available in print form)

If you're anything like me, dear colleague, I know you're thumbing through these units with half your mind on:

- a. that stack of papers you really ought to correct
- b. that movie you're dying to see but haven't got the time or energy for
- c. the next school holiday (can it really be THAT far away?)
- d. all of the above

Why, then, should you read this unit through? This unit will not change your life or your teaching style, but it may give you an idea or two that you can use in your *own* way to help your *own* students with their writing, particularly those students classified as Developmentally Disabled, or D. D.

This unit was formulated for the teacher of Developmentally Disabled students and I will refer to and quote my

own D. D. students throughout because they usually represent an extreme end of the writing spectrum; however, there are reluctant writers in every class and at every level. The assignments in this paper are by no means limited to D. D. students. For that matter, all my students are female, but there are no inherently sexist assignments here, either.

School writing assignments shouldn't have to be merely academic exercises, but that is what they often end up being. I don't think I exaggerate when I say that this isn't just unfortunate, it's down right tragic, especially in its effects on the D. D. student. As you've noticed in your own classes, many of these students are all too aware of their academic inadequacies, and many conventional writing assignments result in the student either becoming totally intimidated by the writing process (as Caroline R. is) or becoming skilled in mechanically turning out an answer that is socially acceptable to the teacher (as Mary K. is.) Both these reactions are repugnant to me. Writing should open the mind and free the soul—not do the opposite. Therefore, in my unit I am attempting to discuss ways in which writing assignments can be formulated especially (but *not* exclusively) for D. D. students, ways to encourage these students' creativity and ways to impress upon them the joys and *uses* of mastering the written word (or at least becoming friends with it.)

Background

As in everything else, part of the solution to the D. D. writing problem lies in knowing a bit about the background of the problem itself. Although I don't think it is necessary for any one of us to become experts in medical and/or psychological theory, it certainly doesn't hurt to have some background about the students labelled "Developmentally Disabled."

"Developmentally Disabled" is simply an umbrella term which covers students who, for any of a variety or reasons, have trouble learning in a conventional classroom setting but who have been judged "teachable."

In a D. D. classroom you will likely encounter students with a staggering array of problems. I think it is important to demystify the labels that are placed on these students and their problems. These labels should only be signposts that can aid teachers in helping their students. I've found it useful to make a diagram (see following page) of the major problems encompassed by the term "D. D." This is particularly helpful in visualizing the subtle shadings and areas of overlap that cloud the essential problems that a particular child may have.

This category encompasses those pupils with actual physical brain damage, those with perceptual problems (visual, aural, motor), and the mentally retarded. Unlike the learning disabled, the mentally retarded are usually of below-average capability in all areas of learning.

(figure available in print form)

Often emotional disturbance is a result of physical problems or a learning disability. It can, however, be a problem independent of the others.

Who is the D. D. Student?

The D. D. student probably has one or more of the problems depicted on this chart.

Also known as dyslexia, or minimal brain dysfunction (although there is no physical damage.) This is the most difficult category to try to define. Learning disabled kids have some kind of developmental lag that causes disorders in

understanding language, in listening, in thinking, and sometimes in math. These disorders have nothing to do with IQ: Thomas Edison was dyslexic. Teachers are usually advised to deal with only the symptoms of learning disability and not try to “treat” the underlying cause. Symptoms include: inattentiveness, hyperactivity, memory lapses, difficulties in language and/or math.

Beginning Strategies

When I first began teaching the D. D. class at Polly T. McCabe Center, I’d go home and wish that I knew more teaching assignments and methods that would work with D. D. students. I wished I had more practical experience with D. D. students. Most of all, though, I wished that I could talk to my predecessor so I could share my feelings of discovery and frustration and know that they were *normal*. This unit is my way of “being there” for my eventual successor and other colleagues and maybe helping them a little.

Nowhere is the attitude of the teacher more important than in a D. D. classroom. These students are inclined to view one teacher as much the same as another, and for the most part school hasn’t been a good experience. Some of these students have had their desire to learn crushed by a series of teachers who viewed them as having no academic future—or worse, having no future of any kind. Some of them have had what capabilities they did have ignored or belittled out of existence. It’s easy to forget this, but no matter how these kids look on the outside, they’re broken and fragile on the inside, where it counts. The more aggressive ones are defensive and angry, and the shy ones are submissive and frightened. No wonder they can’t write.

It is our difficult job to try to revive their intellectual curiosity and their emotional confidence. This, I think, can only be done through developing an atmosphere of mutual respect in the classroom. You are likely to be from a very different background from your students. Still, you probably do have some things in common, and it is important to focus on these common points. I happen to like soap operas and comic books, and so do many of my students. You probably have other interests that you can share with your students, and even if you don’t, a sincere interest in their pastimes works just as well.

Paradoxically, however, it is also crucial to keep a gulf between you and your D. D. students. I made a terrible mistake in strategy when I began the school year by trying to be somewhat informal with my D. D. students. I gave them options to pursue, and they didn’t like it. My informality was perceived as inefficiency and ineptitude. Perhaps this isn’t a problem for you, but I am young and look even younger; I needed all the authority I could get. I learned the hard way that D. D. students need to feel that their teacher is stable and dependable. Too much unconventionality confuses and threatens them. Fortunately for me I was able to rectify my mistake, largely on account of these students’ extraordinary ability to conform to new situations. Notice I said “conform” not “adapt”—there is, I think, a subtle difference. “Adapting” indicates adjusting to new situations, the ability to change internally as situation warrants. “Conforming,” on the other hand, suggests learning to live within the externals of a new situation. The mobility of the families of many D. D. students as well as many of their educational experiences may account for their ability to conform readily. I was amazed at my students’ easy acceptance of my complete restructuring of their class time and activities. I was also amazed at how quickly, once they began to trust me, they simply disregarded some of my more conspicuous failures and willingly plunged into the next task I had for them. I like to think that they began to learn how to truly *adapt* to new challenges, and that itself was a reward well-worth teaching for.

Something that helped me immeasurably was reading books on the linguistic patterns of Black English and on the differences between Black English and Standard English. (I have listed some of these books in my teacher’s reading list.) These books have made me aware of why my students make some of the mistakes

they do. Let me give you an example of how an awareness of Black English literally made a lightbulb go on in my mind. I come from Hawaii where contact with Southern Americans is extremely limited. Therefore, it never really enters my consciousness that Southern speech is different from Northern speech. Of course I realized that people from the South speak with a lilting drawl, but because I encountered it so rarely in real life I regard it subconsciously as something that can be assumed or dropped, much like an actor would assume an accent for a role but of course be able to slip back into “normal” pronunciation at will.

In Southern speech, which is similar to black speech in some respects, the words “quite” and “quiet” are differentiated primarily by length of initial vowel. Linguistically, ‘quite’=[k w a i:t] and ‘quiet’=[k w a: i: t]. In my own speech, however, ‘quite’=[k w ait] and ‘quiet’=[k w a i et]. You can see from the symbols that the Southern speaker perceives and produces these two words much more similarly than I do. I was appalled that on a homonym test my students couldn’t hear the difference between “quite” and “quiet,” and therefore used them in sentences at random. Given their linguistic background, this is a perfectly natural and reasonable error, but one that I would have previously attributed to some kind of intellectual deficiency.

I find it a useful tool to tell my students that I sometimes make mistakes because I come from Hawaii and say things a little differently. Most of the time, my students have already noted that my inflections differ from their own and their other teachers. I encourage them to stop me if they can’t understand me and to understand if I have to sometimes question them about something they have said. I’m sure that there are linguistic patterns or expressions unique to you that your students may find confusing. They’ll appreciate and respond if you discuss such idiosyncrasies: nothing feels so good as knowing that your teacher respects you and that your understanding is important to him/her.

Warming Up to Write

CB: Did you see Monica on “General Hospital” yesterday?

AG: Girl, that lady think she so slick . . .

CB: Mmm-hmmm . . . somebody should tell her about her old corny self.

When I first began teaching D. D. students I made the mistake of thinking that I could use some thinly-disguised elementary school work with them. Wrong again. These students can scent out “baby work” like bloodhounds. They need work formulated just for them and I have found the following exercises successful. As an initial ice-breaker, I interview each D. D. student privately and find out a little interesting tidbit about her. I then make up a crossword puzzle of their names and use my information as clues. For example, the clue for 1-Down might read, “She can’t swim, but she can roller disco till dawn.” This exercise has proved very popular and not only are the students delighted to have their names in a crossword puzzle, they also learn interesting things about each other and this helps them grow closer to each other.

The next exercise helps get students ready for more lengthy writing assignments. It also gives the teacher a pretty good idea of what each student is capable of and yet is fairly non-threatening because it is essentially failure proof. My students are always discussing “the stories” and have strong opinions about the course of action each character should take. I recorded some of these comments on index cards and then labelled the cards with the name of the student that said it. I then xeroxed a simple outline picture depicting a phone off the hook (as if being held to an invisible person’s ear), bought a soap opera magazine and cut out color pictures of the mentioned characters, and made comic word balloons out of construction paper. I then had the students assemble the pictures and rewrite their own comments from the index cards onto the balloons:

(figure available in print form)

They may then color the pictures. (I always remove the darker colors from the crayon box so the picture has to be bright . . . Why do D. D. kids always choose dark, murky colors?)

Depending on the students, of course, soap opera characters could be replaced by nighttime TV characters, movie actors, or sports figures. And if the energy level of the students persists, have them go a little farther and try to have them imagine verbally what the character might reply to them. Another balloon could then be written out and glued onto the picture.

When the pictures are completed, I carefully mount them on pieces of bright construction paper and label them with the students' names. I then post them on my walls. The posting of the pictures may be the most important part of this assignment. We've all made something at one time or another that we were really proud of and that we would have loved to have had displayed to others. Yet fear of appearing egotistical and/or foolish usually prevents us from doing so. How many times have I longed to have someone say, "Hey! This is GREAT! Can I show it to ____?" In the same way, no D. D. student will ever take the initiative to ask to have his/her work put up—but I think it's important for their egos to show them that their work is significant, worthy of being displayed to others. However, I always follow two rules. I always ask the student for permission first (I may use friendly persuasion if I receive a negative reply), and I always make sure that the work is first-rate and cannot be a source of *justifiable* derogatory remarks (although a certain amount of ribbing is inevitable.)

The following six or seven exercises have been put in a kind of chronological order but you'll know the best order for your own students. I begin with an exercise in unscrambling sentences. I compose some simple sentences and break them up in discrete units. I then copy the units onto individual index cards (you can see that I find index cards invaluable!) Thus, the sentence, "Monica and Alan are having problems with their son" becomes:

(figure available in print form)

I then shuffle the cards around and put them in an envelope. I make enough of these packets so that each student can have one. I also make sure that the sentences are of varying difficulty so that even the most advanced student can feel challenged while the student who needs more time can figure out some of the sentences by himself/herself. The students use punctuation and capitalization cues to put the sentence in correct order and then copy the reassembled sentence on their paper. I give the students ample time to complete the envelope in front of them then ask them to remix the cards, put them back in the envelope and pass it to their neighbor. Eventually, every student has a chance to decode every envelope's sentence. I go around the room and assign students to write certain sentences on the board—usually every student has at least *one* correct sentence. Like posting work on the walls, allowing students to "play teacher" and write on the board is a great ego boost.

I like this exercise for several reasons. It is a "hands-on" project and students like to be able to manipulate the sentence in such a concrete way. They also derive a great deal of satisfaction from successfully unscrambling the sentence. Further, copying the sentence onto paper seems to give them the same kind of satisfaction that one would ordinarily receive from actually *composing* a sentence.

The next step is getting the student to write simple sentences. I make up a Word Search puzzle using students' names. A miniature version of such a puzzle might look like this:

(figure available in print form)

The students have to find each others' names in the puzzle and use them in sentences. I have circled some of the names in the example above; possible sentences would be:

Brenda Street has a nice dress.

Ann Doe went to the store.

Betty Mills looks happy.

The sentences will probably be very short and very simple. A warning: It is *vital* to set down the following rule when giving this assignment. Make it very clear that no sentence may contain negative comments about other students' personal habits or attributes. I have learned (again, the hard way) that this is *crucial* .

Quickly moving along to the next assignment . . . I take Scrabble letter tiles and divide them between small boxes. The students have to make short words out of the letter tiles in their box and then write sentences using those words. By this time the student is usually at ease with writing sentences. They may not be long or complex sentences (in fact they usually aren't), but the student is successfully writing down original thoughts.

I usually keep a collection of interesting magazine and newspaper articles and pictures. These are useful in stimulating students' writing imaginations. I cut out controversial "Dear Abby" letters about adolescent problems and will copy one or two on large sheets of construction paper. I post them in the classroom and ask my D. D. students what kind of advice they think Abby should give. We do a couple together on the board (I usually assign the best speller to be the secretary) and then I pass out a Xerox sheet that looks like this:

(figure available in print form)

By giving students a form to follow, the assignment becomes less intimidating. I put no more than three lines for any answer because I've found that students become discouraged if they think a long answer is required.

Magazine pictures, especially those that illustrate stories, are evocative and can lead to good compositions. I find that the best pictures are ones that show obvious conflict and strong emotions. I usually show my students such a picture and then write questions on the board for them to answer: Why is the little girl in the picture crying? What do you think her mother is saying to her? Where are they? One of my D. D. students wrote the following composition about a picture of a young boy crying:

His name is Tony. He was crying because his mother didn't come to pick him up from school. He had to wait a whole hour by himself, but his teacher told him that he would give him a ride home.

Pretty good for a girl who, only a few months earlier, used to refuse to write AT ALL. If a student cannot write her answers on paper for some reason (she can't spell, she's too intimidated to think up answers) I ask her to tell me what she thinks and I write it down for her. She can then re-copy what I've written. I realize that this may be impossible in a large class, perhaps in such a situation the following assignment may be more appropriate.

I begin this next assignment with a short drawing lesson. Many D. D. students are as afraid to doodle as they are to write. Anything that calls for original effort frightens them; I find that D.D. students are always uneasy when what is expected of them is not made very explicit. Therefore I like to use magazine cutouts and shapes cut out from construction paper. This assignment, though, can make drawing easy and painless. I pass out a large, unlined index card (yep, again!) that looks like this:

(figure available in print form)

I then pass out sheets of scratch paper that have several blank faces on them. I tell my students that these faces can be made to show a lot of different emotions by just adding a few lines and squiggles. A big smile and natural, curved eyebrows (and hair, of course!) make a happy face; an “O” for a mouth and circles drawn around the eyes (and hair, of course) make a surprised face. The combinations are endless (see next page). As you create each face on the board, ask students to help you spell each emotion: HAPPY, SAD, CONFUSED, etc. As you’re doodling, ask your students to suggest reasons why a person might look like the face you’re creating. By the time you’ve exhausted your repertoire of expressions the students should be ready to fill in their cards. These cards can be colored and decorated further if desired, and it would be nice to mount and display a range of emotions. This is an assignment even the most reluctant writer can do. After selecting an emotion to portray all you need to do to stimulate writing is to say “The last time *you* felt like that, what had happened to you?”

(figure available in print form)

After this battery of preliminary assignments the student may be ready for the challenges of a more substantial composition. Ideally, I’d take the students on some kind of field trip not only so that they’d have something special to write about, but also so that they’d be pleasantly stimulated. To make this as pleasant as possible I would not take students to a place where their behavior would have to be unduly restrained. I’d take students to somewhere like the Mystic Marine Aquarium. There would be plenty to see there and I could make sure that the students were made acutely aware of all the points of interest, supervise the students in purchasing postcards (they’ll use them in class later) and field any questions they may have.

After returning to the classroom, I’d bring out a piece of colored poster board, pre-cut letters spelling “Mystic Seaport,” pre-cut sea-life (fish, etc.), and a box of bright water-color felt pens. My students would help me place the pre-cut letters where they felt they belonged on the poster board and someone would be delegated to glue the letters in place. We’d arrange the cutout fishes and octopodes with a few of the postcards I bought and glue those in place, too. All the while we were doing this, of course, we’d also be discussing what we had seen and what each student had particularly liked. After the poster was completed, I’d hang it on the wall and have my students fill out their own postcards to be mailed to friends or relatives. I’d have stamps on hand and help the postcards. For those students who had trouble getting started I’d write the following form on the blackboard:

(figure available in print form)

I try to have as much input from the students in writing the above as possible. Through this assignment the students write almost in *spite* of themselves because the need for them to have to think of a subject to write about is eliminated. Using postcards as the medium for writing further eliminates the fear of having to write a formal essay—the students are merely telling, in written form, a friend or a relative about their day.

Selling Writing

At the completion of early assignments, students may be desensitized to the writing process. Writing may no longer be a threatening activity at this point, but it may not be a pleasant one for them either. The next step, then, should be “selling” writing to the student—showing him/her that writing can be a personally useful tool. The three major angles that I use to sell writing are:

- the practical uses of writing
- writing as a cure for boredom

-writing as a key to self-awareness

I come to school to learn because I

won't to get my Education *For I can*

get I good job for to get my baby lot

of clothes. Make my baby dress. (emphasis added)

—Angela G.

Many D. D. students are gifted in ways a teacher never gets to see. A lot of my D. D. kids are the driving force of their family—they cook the food, get the younger kids off to school, and keep the house in working order. They are urban survivors, and the practical uses of writing can be a strong selling point with them. I invested in *Free Stuff for Kids* (Meadowbrook Press) which is a catalog of free things that can be sent away for: cosmetics, booklets, etc. I brought in some prestamped postcards and gave each girl three to fill out as she wished. The students soon became adept at writing the formula that we had devised as a class: “I am writing to take advantage of your offer of” “My address is” “Thank you for your time.” We also worked on a form letter for complaining about defective merchandise or poor service. I explained to my students that many times a large company will send a refund coupon or replacement items if it receives a letter complaining about one of their products. Once a girl receives a free gift or a refund in the mail, she begins to appreciate that writing can have very concrete compensations.

The U. S. Postal Service puts out a terrific booklet called “All About Letters” (published in conjunction with the National Council of Teachers of English.) It gives many suggestions for letter-writing appropriate for adolescents and provides many useful addresses. Something that my students particularly appreciated were addresses for major motion picture studios, television studios, and recording studios. I encourage my students to write to the soap opera or nighttime television characters that they either love or “love to hate.” The least they can get out of it is a form letter from the star, and they could possibly get a signed photo.

One of the things that I dread doing every Christmas and birthday is writing “thank you” notes. Over the years, though, I’ve managed to get it down to a science. I explained to students that it isn’t that I don’t appreciate my gifts—I do; in fact, I usually like them so much that words don’t seem adequate to thank the person that thought of me. Therefore, thank-you note writing becomes a horrible ordeal, for how do you thank people enough without sounding gushy or insincere? Together my students and I came up with several guidelines, “always mention what the present was and how you’re going to use it or enjoy it,” for example. Several of my students had never written thank-you notes before although many had recently benefitted from baby showers. I encouraged them to at least try to write a few thank-you notes; they all know how much they enjoy getting letters, why not share that enjoyment with others? I stressed that perfect spelling and grammar were not the most important things in a thank-you note. Here, it is truly the thought that counts.

I come because I want to learn some
knew things And I some of my Classmates
I have, *and I get tired to staying Home*
by my Self. (emphasis added)

—Catherine B.

A second possible selling point could be that writing can be an effective way to fight boredom. Since one of the board aims of writing is to communicate, it seems natural to return to letter-writing for an initial boredom-fighting assignment. Many of my D. D. students have had to leave friends behind because of family moves or they have had friends that have moved away. I had my students practice writing a few friendly letters to friends of theirs, either real or imaginary. I then encouraged them to write to friends that live in another area and circulated lists of penpal organizations (a good one can be found in the “All About Letters” booklet).

Simple, formula-oriented poetry could be introduced as something to do in that dark period between “General Hospital” and “That’s Incredible.” I’d probably introduce poetry writing with the easy-to-understand “five sense poem” where a student picks an event or object and describes it in terms of the five senses:

Christmas is red, green and white
It tastes like hot chitterlings with hot sauce
It sounds like a parade with just bells
And smells like a freshly dripped lady in a bottle
of perfume
It looks like we’re on a cloud up in the sky
It makes me feel glad

—Kisha M.

It would be best to do one of these as a group, then pass out paper with the standard beginnings of lines already printed:

_____ is _____

(colors)

It tastes like _____

It sounds like _____

And smells like _____

It looks like _____

It makes me feel _____

Only after we'd finished the five sense poem would I start to talk about poetry with the students. I introduced the *haiku* to my students next, but depending on you students you might decide to do another kind of poem. Kenneth Koch's *Wishes, Lies and Dreams* is a valuable and fascinating guide to teaching the writing of poetry to kids. I selected the *haiku* both because I am half Japanese and speak and write a little of it and because I wanted to reinforce some lessons on syllabication. D. D. students often have difficulty in recognizing syllables. In fact, half of my class never got the hang of it. Still, since our *haiku* writing was always a group effort, everyone gave valuable assistance in creating the poem. Some kids just seemed to instinctively *feel* something from the poems, others could help by accurately pointing out when something sounded "corny" or "too high-siddity" (pretentious). The more ambitious poets even did a few *haiku* on their own.

Because I do write and speak a little Japanese, I introduced the haiku to my students by writing two *haiku* on the board:

Rain on a spring day:

to the grove is blown a letter

someone threw away.

In the river-breeze	Kawakaze ni
A cluster of soft willows—	hitomura yanagi
Spring is appearing.	haru miete
—Socho	—Socho

I even wrote the latter on the board in Japanese:

(figure available in print form)

We discussed the two poems after I had read both in English and the second in Japanese. I talked to them about how the intelligentsia of ancient Japan would have *haiku* -composing contest and how each poet would have to create on the spur of the moment. I told them that the *haiku* itself, because it was so short, was to capture the beauty of a single moment. I then read the following *haiku* :

Tsurigane ni

Tomarite nemuru

Kocho ka na

which translates in English to:

On the temple bell

Resting, asleep

A butterfly.

I asked my students to imagine how momentary the beauty of the butterfly resting was—any moment he might fly away.

I don't want to suggest that these discussions were deep or totally satisfying to me. Frankly, most of my students were more interested in hearing me say things in Japanese than in learning about *haiku*, and yet I think they absorbed *something*—if nothing more than my love of the form. I told them that all the greatest Japanese poets wrote primarily for themselves and their immediate circle of friends and were reluctant to have their poems published. For them, the joy of creating was all. I told my students that that was how they should think of their own poetry-writing. I said that those students who wanted to share their work were welcome to, but that poetry-writing was personal and that I wasn't too concerned with exact syllabication but rather with evidence of thought and feeling. This seemed to be pretty threatening to a lot of them (again, fear of not knowing what the right response should be) so I decided that individual *haiku* composition would be optional and that we would do our own haiku as a class. As I say, this was not entirely successful in that not every student understood what we were trying to do. Still the results were sometimes very lovely:

Horses are skillful

They run like wind is blowing

They are beautiful

Why I bother to come to school.

Because I want to learn and know about

things about my self.

—Tina J.

The aim of education is to make of

your mind a place where you want to spend

the rest of your life.

—President Mendenhall,

Smith College

Finally, writing is a key to self-awareness. Everything else can be seen as a natural progression leading up to this. Certainly, writing can be an invaluable tool in learning “about things about” oneself. I gave two suggestions to my students that I thought might help them see writing as a way of gaining self-knowledge. I suggested that they keep a journal of their moods and the reasons for them. I said I thought it would be interesting for them to go back even a few days later and see what they had written, how they had felt and

why. I told them that they would probably be amazed at how quickly most human beings forget their emotional ups and downs, even the seemingest intensest anger often evaporates completely in a matter of hours. I told them that it wasn't important what form the journal took—it could be just scraps of paper—and that entries could even take the form of free-flowing poetry. I read to my students from Mary Jane Moffat and Charlotte Painter's very beautiful book, *Revelations: Diaries of Women* (available in a Vintage Books paperback.) The book is a compilation of excerpts from women's diaries. These excerpts reflect life through the eyes of women who embody a wide range of ages, historical eras, and social levels. The authors also include a short biography of each of the diarists. *Revelations* is a book that I can't recommend too highly. My students responded to it in a very positive way—especially when they learned that all the women were real.

As a follow-up to journal-writing, I proposed that my students write angry, vituperative, but never-to-be-delivered letters to people when they knew that their anger could or should not be expressed in other ways. I explained that I often did this and I always felt better afterwards because I had not only vented all my anger, but I also didn't say or do things to hurt someone I cared about. I stressed that these letters (and the journal for that matter) were strictly personal and not to be shared with anyone. The suggestions I made to my students, therefore, were just that. I felt that I could not *require* or *assign* journal writing or angry letter-writing because by doing so I would violate their very essence. That is, there is no way I could assign my students to write things of introspection . . . for my inspection. I wish I did know, though, how many of them tried to do those things. I suspect that a few did. I hope so.

Since my ultimate goal in this curriculum was to get D. D. students to see that writing can be of great use, benefit and comfort to them, let this section on writing as a key to self-awareness serve as my conclusion. After all, that is what these writing assignments are all about. These assignments were meant to demystify the writing process for the D. D. student. They were meant to show the D. D. student that writing is the servant, not the master. I know that most, probably all, of my students will never write anything "worthy" of publication. Frankly, that doesn't bother me in the least. What would bother me would be if they left my classroom (or yours) thinking that they had nothing worthy of *communication*. If we can only teach them that they have things to say, then they will have the heart and the desire to learn to say them.

READING LIST

I highly recommend all the following books. Besides listing books on linguistics and learning disabilities, I have also included a section of "inspirational" books. These last are books that I turn to whenever I feel fed up with my teaching or my students . . . or both.

Linguistics

Baratz, Joan C., and Roger W. Shuy. *Teaching Black Children to Read*. Washington, D. C.: Center for Applied Linguistics, 1969.

Dillard, J.L. *Black English: Its History and Usage in the United States*. New York: Random House, 1972.

Labov, William. *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.

Learning Disabilities

Birch, Herbert G., M.D., Ph.D., and Joan Dye Gussow. *Disadvantaged Children: Health, Nutrition and School Failure* . New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970.

Korner, Jerome. *Helping Children Overcome Learning Difficulties* . New York: Walker and Company, 1975.

Velten, Emmett C., and Carlene T. Sampson. *Rx for Learning Disability* . Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1978.

Inspiration

Cuban, Larry. *To Make a Difference: Teaching in the Inner City* . New York: The Free Press, 1970.

Kohl, Herbert R. *On Teaching* . New York: Schocken Books, Inc., 1976.

Kohl, Herbert R. *36 Children* . New York: Signet Classics, 1967.

Rothman, Esther P. *The Angel Inside Went Sour* . New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1970.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>