



## Thoughts to Page: Explorations and Expressions

Curriculum Unit 86.04.11  
by Mary Ellen McDevitt

### I. Introduction

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While many middle and high school students have difficulty mastering the stages of writing, there is a kind of student in our schools for whom expression in writing have become one more negative experience in the educational system. That is, they cannot write and the classroom serves as a daily reminder of this failure. These are my students.

When these students come to my Resource Room, the central task I face is to rebuild their confidence that what they have to say is valuable and that they can master some basic writing skills. A number of different approaches to opening up the student with limited skills exist. The lessons in this unit are based on the techniques of modeling and clustering. I believe that modeling leads the student to achieve, step-by-step, certain beginning skills in writing and expression without placing undue expectations on him (and thus creating a sense of failure once again). Clustering helps them to move from speech to writing with ease, and reinforces beginning thinking skills.

This paper proceeds through an explanation of the kind of student and his problems in learning; an explanation of the modeling and clustering approaches to learning; a brief overview of a school semester; and daily lesson plans for 8 weeks based on the above approaches.

### II. The Student and The Learning Environment

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#### A. Motivational Deterrents to Learning

There is the ever-constant struggle to alleviate the STIGMA attached to the students who are placed in my classroom part-time. I am faced, in the beginning of the school year or at any time later, with the frustration and embarrassment of a student when he enters my classroom for the first time. The students feel that they are not different than most of the other students in regular class and don't particularly like the idea that they have been singled out as "SPECIAL". On the other hand, there have been a number of regular education students who approach me in the cafeteria and hallways when they are failing, asking to get into my room,

because my students will tell them how much they are learning.

When my classroom was in the basement (it has since been moved upstairs, but other remedial classes have not), my students were definitely embarrassed to be in the basement and hated to go downstairs for class. Despite the positive forces of the remedial Resource Room, the general population of students know that to be placed in my classroom is to be sent there for extra help. The stigma is still there for these remedial students, and it is one of the things that both they and I must deal with.

### **B. Need for positive reinforcement**

When students are first sent to me, they exhibit a negative attitude and an unwillingness to become involved in the lessons. For them, at first, the situation presents an atmosphere of negativism and criticism, and they are on the defensive.

As the adult I am the one who is initially responsible for setting the tone of respect in my classroom. It is by my tone of voice, pattern of questioning, response to a student, that atmosphere of respect for both myself and my students is created. In being respectful, I am showing that I am interested in developing a positive relationship where students will become involved and share their experiences and be successful. As my relationship of respect grows, so does the respect students extend to each other. Encouragement and support is shared and pride in the group is developed. I find students thrive and feel confident in a classroom atmosphere where they feel “safe” from being reprimanded and criticized because of their shortcomings, failures, or inadequacies. I much prefer a teaching atmosphere of respect where students know they are valued for who they are and can contribute freely. They can then be themselves and I can be myself without fearing mockery, rejection or being the butt of jokes.

### **C. Goal of written expression for “tomorrow” and its value**

One of the most important gifts I want my students to receive in my work with them is the sense that what they are learning today will be able to be translated in their future goals. I feel keenly that middle school education is a preparation for tomorrow’s challenges as young adults. My experience with inner-city special education had led me to believe that many feel hopeless, socially ostracized, neglected emotionally and sometimes physically, and are convinced they are not capable of achieving successful professional careers as adults. Many of my students return and visit and update me on students I have taught in middle school. A great number drop out of school in the 10th or 11th grade. Many are incarcerated. Many of the girls become pregnant and survive on A.D.C. and welfare payments. It is a discouraging situation.

It is the typical situation for my present students that their parent or guardian is a survivor of divorce, separation, or no marriage at all. Many receive supplementary incomes. It is a rare student who has a working parent and/or comfortable, stable home environment.

I want to provide my students with valuable learning experiences, ones which will hopefully enable them to make better choices for themselves in the near future regardless of their “home” situation or role-model by their unfortunate parent or guardian.

I believe education is the only way to enable my students the possibility of breaking out of these destructive and limiting lives and situations.

#### **D. Choice of verbal expression rather than written**

Writing is one of the most difficult challenges for these students. They see little use for it either now in their lives, or in the future. It is a skill already complicated by failure, incompetency, and hopelessness. Rather than write, my student love to talk to me and each other. I am often amused at how ingeniously they will try and involve me to listen to a situation rather than become involved in writing. They will always try to alter a written task by thinking out loud, so that the written assignment will be as short as possible. I have no difficulty interacting verbally with my students, but experience such resistance when I direct them to write.

I notice immediately when they are involved in a writing situation how their body language changes from being comfortable to uncomfortable. Heads will go down on their desks, a few will tear their work ups couple of times, some will even mumble that they are not going to do it and will then try and talk to other students. Others will begin asking for spelling throughout the entire assignment. It seems as though they will think of anything to do that will keep them from actually expressing themselves in writing.

Thus this general area of discomfort is felt when we write. It seems to be caused by the following reasons. My students suffer severe skill deficiencies which interfere even with the most basic writing skills. Further, they don't know how to get these skills; they have either not been given or grasped as yet the necessary information of how to build such skills. Partly this situation exists because they are disabled learners; partly because they have never been taken through the skill-building steps slowly and deliberately enough for them to master and retain each step. In being directed to do a written assignment without previously attaining the necessary writing skills, their sense of failure is only reinforced. The major focus in teaching these students writing skills is how to present the material in such a way that they can master the beginning steps and even build more advanced skills (sometime in the future) from the initial foundation. My expectations as a teacher are doomed unless I approach a writing assignment slowly and carefully, laying a basic groundwork of thinking and organizing skills daily, step-by-step.

### **III. Approaches to Learning**

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#### **A. Modeling**

One of the most important teaching techniques I have discovered for removing this discomfort and creating a growing sense of capability is modeling. Modeling is the foundation on which each lesson in this unit is based. It provides a means of involving all of my students in the class completely in the activity, and provides a channel by which I will be able to open their thoughts and draw on any previously-learned skills while I build new skills. Modeling paces our steps together, creating an avenue to achieve successfully the stages of thinking and organizing necessary in writing.

Modeling is a valuable technique when I am introducing a new concept for my students to grasp and comprehend. There is little resistance to "new" work if I go through the process involved as a demonstration. It is also important to assess the readiness skill necessary to integrate the "new" concept or task at hand with previously learned skills. My organized presentation encourages acceptance by the students, especially when I take it very slowly, step-by-step. I try to use a consistent pattern and students easily take on their role when it is their turn to begin the exercise. Generally speaking, students are eager and willing to become involved when they understand clearly what is expected of them and are shown how to do an exercise. there are a few

exceptions and they're usually due to emotional liability.

Modeling avoids confusion of expectation. By showing them what is expected through a step-by-step process, I give them the confidence to do the exercise themselves. We do not move onto a new skill (presented through the exercises) until the students have completely mastered the current skill. Thus the "new" skills or concepts become integrated into previously learned skills and concepts, and the students begin to feel a growing competence and control over his writing. Not to build in this fashion leaves the student in a defensive and overwhelming situation where failure and negative attitudes are going to develop. I much prefer taking the time to "model" so that my students will have a positive experience.

## **B. Behavior Modification Point System**

Along with creating appropriate lessons for the skill level of the students, a good teacher has to also confront another important learning condition: an acceptable standard of behavior that affects positively the learning environment. Behavior can enhance or destroy the positive atmosphere of respect and desire to learn. Once a teacher decides what he can tolerate comfortably, he can then plan an approach to diminish or alleviate the unacceptable behavior through his own unique style of discipline.

One of the easiest ways to redirect inappropriate (unacceptable) behavior on the student's part is to initiate a group point system. I would then focus on sustaining rewarding positive behavior exhibited by the group. Discussion between myself and my students has to occur so that all understand why acceptable behavior is important. I would then share with the students what acceptable behaviors are to be rewarded and assign a number of points to each behavior being targeted for reward. Some examples are: raising hands for attention, being prepared for class, attention by eye contact, and active participation. I would then discuss how many points would have to be attained before achieving the reward. An example of a reward would be a VRC, which is popular right now. It is important to note that the group has to agree on this reward or it is meaningless to them and they will not respond and be motivated to participate.

A behavior modification point system quickly eliminates the need for correcting and directing negative attitudes and irresponsibility. Students will often pressure other students who are not positively interacting in the point system because they are being held up in achieving the reward. They will remind, support, and even pressure each other to behave appropriately. The burden of discipline, usually mine, is then relieved and shared by all in the group.

Throughout the school year the need for this point system at some time will not be necessary because the students will not need it. I would then make the decision to reward them by lots of verbal praise and surprises spontaneously given when they least expect it.

## **IV. The Program of Learning**

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### **A. Overview: Plans for the First Quarter**

In September, a number of students in Grades 5-8 who are assigned to part-time placement in special education will begin attending instruction in the Resource Room for Reading, Language Arts, and Math.

Because I am in a unique learning situation where I formulate education prescriptions designed to meet

individual students' needs, I use this first semester to develop individual programs for students. I am not bound to any prescribed curriculum, nor pressured by administration concerns with grade level competency.

It is at this time that those students assigned to Language Arts class will be involved in a series of diagnostic tests that will assess their competency in reading and spelling abilities, skill levels in the areas of punctuation, grammar, capitalization, and sentence structure. After reviewing this information on each student I will be better equipped to plan a program of remediation for their skill deficiencies. During the remainder of the first quarter my students will receive a series of assignments planned to strengthen weak skill areas.

I feel that this preparation and planning will enhance an appropriate academic readiness for introduction into the second quarter where I plan to initiate this prepared curriculum on writing.

## **B. Plans for the Second Quarter**

In the beginning of the second quarter the behavior modification point system will be introduced in order to insure positive interaction on my students' part. It will be clear to me at this point what unacceptable behaviors might be occurring that would interfere with an appropriate behavioral management in this group of 15-20 students. This time of year is filled with holiday preparations and celebration. It can be a very exciting time yet stressful because of the students anticipation and un-realistic expectations which sometimes lead to disappointment and depression. There is also a scheduled school vacation which often un-settles routine and causes a disturbance when they return to school. Therefore, a behavior modification program will greatly enhance a decrease in motivational deterrents into academic and behavioral acceptance and success during this period of time.

I will also give a careful explanation of the holistic marking system so that I will not be constantly reminding them of what is incorrect in their work. I will explain what responsibility will be theirs and what will be necessary in order to achieve a passing grade during this quarter. I feel this might better encourage a development of confidence and pride in expressing themselves creatively on paper. I don't want to get hung-up on the typical grading approach at this time. I prefer that my students open up and experience freedom in writing their thoughts, experiences, feelings, and fantasies in the exercises to be presented without focusing in on what grade will be received on each individual exercise.

It will probably be the first time they will be presented with such a grading system so I will have to be careful to assess whether they are taking advantage of the opportunity. If it goes well, I will continue this process of grading. If it doesn't, I will have to re-assess the process at that point in time.

## **V. The Lessons**

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### **A. Overview**

I am impressed with the ease and success that I have recently experienced in becoming involved in the clustering process developed by Gabriele L. Rico in her book titled *Writing the Natural Way*. In clustering, a "nucleus word" or phrase is given to the students and acts as the stimulus for attention. This word or phrase is circled and a student is encouraged to write down rapidly any images, associations, thoughts, feelings that are evoked, using a word or group of words for each. He then connects each word or phrase to the preceding

circle with a line, thus showing how our thoughts tend to “cluster.” The teacher may help students initially by also suggesting words, especially when a student begins to feel he has run out of associations. Such a suggestion may make the student aware that he does, in fact, have more thoughts. Later, students are encouraged to doodle a bit, or make lines darker, until their own associations come flooding back in (and thus encouraged not to be afraid of going “blank” temporarily). This process forms a first stage in the writing process of discovery through language; it can be used even with advanced writing as a first stage of finding out rapidly what thoughts and association one has on a given subject. The process should take about 10 minutes when learned; while the students are learning it, it will take longer.

Clustering requires no “educated” experience and is easy to use with the modeling approach. I feel strongly that the students I will be working with will experience the same relief from the frustration in thinking about what to write and will experience self-satisfaction in knowing how to approach an assignment in writing. This process of clustering will assist them in focusing their attention and call upon images from their past experiences. Upon completion of the 10 minute experience of clustering I will then follow Rico’s concentration on “vignette” writing. The vignette seems such a logical choice for taking these images evoked through clustering and bringing them together as a whole by either choosing to write a paragraph, poem, or dialogue. There is no right nor wrong but merely the experience of seeing images come together as a whole piece of written work. It also provides respect for individuality and creativity. I’m sure this will be thrilling for my students to experience.

Upon completion of each student’s work I will make copies of their work so that by the end of the semester we will have a collection of vignettes to be shared by all in the group

## **B. The First Week**

The lessons of the first week are designed to give the students direction and support in the thinking process, positive reinforcement for exploring their own ideas, and to encourage freedom of expression. Often my students don’t think that what they are bursting to say can be part of writing, but this first week will emphasize that their experiences, thoughts, and feelings are an important part of writing.

I have planned on organizing the first five days in a pattern developed around sensory experiences. I plan to involve them in this stage of writing by using their sense of sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch. Each sense will be assigned to one class during the week.

On the first day I will explore their sense of sight. I plan on projecting by an overhead a picture of popular wrestlers. A number of my students go to the wrestling matches at the New Haven Coliseum. Many of them bring in their wrestling magazines. They are always ready to share who they feel is the best wrestler. Even the girls get into the conversation or argument.

On the second day I will explore their sense of smell. I plan on having a small bag of popcorn for each student to hold. I’ll be sure to staple the opening so they won’t be able to eat it. They love popcorn. It will be interesting to read what they describe from such an inviting smell as popcorn. Upon completion of the vignette I will then allow them to eat the popcorn as a treat.

On the third day I will explore their sense of hearing. I plan on playing a soundtrack from the movie “Rocky.” Most of my students see Sylvester Stallone as a hero and have seen most of the Rocky movies. Because they admire him so, I’m sure they’ll be involved and write.

On the fourth day I will explore their sense of taste. I plan on giving each student a fireball. I have used fireballs many times for a behavior reward and the student will do a lot of work to earn a fireball. They love them!

On the fifth day I will explore their sense of touch. I plan on having a plastic bag filled with several peeled grapes inside a brown bag. Each student will be blindfolded as they take a turn placing their hand inside the bag. I will isolate the area away from the rest of the group so the curiosity level will be increased. After a student experiences the feeling they will be told not to tell another student what they think they felt. It should be a fun experience and interesting to see what they write.

At the end of the first week, I will evaluate how well clustering around sensory words motivates them to write down ideas without worry or fear that they don't have anything to say. I will look forward to experiencing the beginning of success in opening the students to an enjoyment of the writing process. I expect to see an eagerness to participate because clustering makes it possible for them to see an immediate accomplishment. Overall, I expect in the first week a new sense of discovery in each student of the possibilities of language. I trust that, because of my modeling each sensory experience along with recognition of acceptable behavior through the use of the behavior modification point system, this first week will be successful, exciting, and valuable in developing a relaxed attitude towards writing their own responses and thoughts.

### **C. The Second Week**

The lessons of the second week are designed to create respect for individual ideas, consistent writing habits and acceptable behavior standards in the writing environment, and integration of their life experiences with language skills. The emphasis this week is more on the actual writing than on verbalizing their ideas, although they will continue to verbalize through the clustering activity.

To begin the week, I will pass out to the students copies of the group's vignettes from the previous week, to familiarize them with writing activity again. I will encourage them to express how they felt during the experiences and encourage discussion for approximately 15 minutes. I will also discuss how they are doing with the behavior modification point system.

I have planned this week around the five emotions of joy, pain, sorrow, fear, and love. Each student will have had a different experience with each of these emotions; thus the activity this week will emphasize how different each individual student's ideas and experiences can be. I will continue modeling during these suggested topics so that I'm sure all students have integrated the experience of clustering and writing brief vignettes. I will present a topic by simply writing the key word on the board, then clustering around it.

The first day I will explore the emotion of joy/happiness. I plan on circling the words WINNING LOTTERY TICKET on the board. My students have many times told me what they would do if they won the lottery. Many, of course, say they would quit school. They have lots of plans for their money. I think this topic will generate a lot of ideas in writing.

On the second day I will explore the emotion of pain. I plan on circling the word INJECTION. Any time my students have to go to the clinic to receive a booster shot, blood tests, or tetanus shot they will always, if it's on their arm, show me where the needle entered and describe in great detail how much it hurt. They will have no difficulty relating to this topic.

On the third day I will explore the emotion of sorrow. I plan on circling the word DEATH. Many of my students

have already experienced the loss of a grandparent, parent, relative, friend, and pet. This might be a difficult experience for some and I will have to assess the situation as I present the topic. In general, I feel my students will become involved in this topic but I also want to be prepared for a student who might shy away from this because it is too painful.

On the fourth day I will explore the emotion of fear. I plan on circling the words NUCLEAR WAR. Throughout the year many students have raised the question of what would happen if we had a nuclear war. They are afraid of the results and are very free in voicing these fears. It should generate much writing and be very interesting.

On the fifth day I will explore the emotion of love. I plan on circling the word FRIEND. All of my students have experienced friendship. I'm sure that they will all have much to share regarding this topic.

At the end of the second week, I will evaluate how comfortable they have become in expressing their thoughts and ideas and then writing these ideas down. At this point, I'm not expecting perfection in their writing, but increasing interest in the writing activity.

#### **D. Third Week**

The lessons of the third week emphasize the ability to write independently and also encourage creative exploration. I also hope to see some pride and confidence develop from their ability to put into words their thoughts and ideas.

I will begin this week with a discussion of their writing experience. It is at this point that I will directly support those particular vignettes that I feel are exceptionally well written. I will point out why these vignettes I've selected have attracted my attention, and then I will invite student participation in choosing other vignettes that they enjoy. I want to keep this discussion positive so that no particular student will feel that his work is inferior or unacceptable. It is my hope that they will begin to develop a sense of accomplishment in becoming involved in a process that they have previously shunned or dreaded. I will give approximately 15 minutes for this discussion.

After discussion I will continue another week planned around the colors: yellow, white, red, black, and green. During this week there will be no modeling done on my part. I want to see if my students have internalized the process of clustering and vignette. I feel that after two weeks of going through the process with them they will most likely be secure in the process. If there are any students who are having difficulty I will individually respond to their needs otherwise, I will let them become independent of my direction.

The first day I will explore the color yellow. I will place on the board a piece of oak tag with a large swatch of yellow painted with no particular design. The students will be directed to cluster their own words that comes to their mind and draw images from their point of association. I'm already anticipating a connection with the image of the sun or a flower with this exercise. I hope there are many surprises in their writing.

The second day I will explore the color white. I will place on the board a piece of colored oak tag with a large swatch of white painted with no particular design. As with the first day I will follow the same plan of action in this exercise. Because the season will be winter I expect an association with snow. If by that time in December we have experienced snow I imagine that many of the students will write about that experience. If we haven't experienced snow yet, they will most likely share their desire for snow so that they might enjoy a snow day and cancellation of school. It will be interesting to read what they have imagined or experienced.



The third day I will explore the color red. To give this experience a different invitation I am going to place several different pieces of red construction paper cut out in circles in many different sizes. I feel that the students will now have the challenge of taking in more than one stimulus. Different sizes will evoke different images in their mind. They will have to choose which direction they want to take in their clustering. Some of the students will stay within the security of one image, and others perhaps will have the ability to allow several images to flow in their clustering.

The fourth day I will explore the color black. I will place several large pieces of white oak tag on the board with a different focus on each. One will have horizontal lines painted in different lengths and widths. Another piece will have vertical lines painted in wavy lines. A third piece will have a very large area of paint covering most of the area. A fourth piece will have one circle painted in the center of the oak tag. The students will be invited to focus their attention on all pieces of poster board. I will then direct them to choose whether they feel comfortable staying with all the pieces or are particularly drawn to one piece. They will have to make that determination. I will also invite the students to close their eyes and visualize in their own mind the color black. They will then have to choose a word or words that come to mind for clustering.

On the fifth day I will explore the color green. I will simply place a large piece of oak tag with the color green painted with no particular design. I'm sure this color will evoke a number of images. One image sure to come to their mind at this time of year will be the Christmas tree. Upon completion of this exercise I will place at their disposal magic markers, paint, and crayons and ask them to give shape to their image in this exercise.

My evaluation at the end of this week will look at how readily the students are able to recognize what they want to say and how readily they try to write it. I will be especially interested in how well they can go through the stages of writing independently.

## **E. Fourth Week**

Because this is the final week before Christmas Vacation, I expect the students to be bombarded by sensory input; the students will be excited and anticipating both Christmas and time away from school. The focus this week will be to stick to a single feeling or thought and develop that idea without getting off track. In this final week of clustering and vignette writing, I will present a poem, music, and a children's story, and will ask for a short, written response each day.

As this is the final week planned for clustering and vignette I have chosen a different series of exercises to be presented. It will be very close to Christmas and the students will be excited and anticipating both Christmas and vacation. I have selected the presentations for the following days around a poem, music, and a children's story.

The first day I will read to the group the Christmas poem "Twas the Night before Christmas," with which most are familiar. I will ask them to choose a word or words that came to them during listening to this poem. I will invite them to cluster and write a vignette on this.

The second day I will play a series of traditional Christmas songs that are common to their experience at this time. The students will receive a choice to focus on one or more of those songs. They will be expected to cluster and write a vignette on their choice.

On the third day I will read an excerpt from the children's story "The Littlest Angel." I think they will enjoy the story and relate to the feelings and wish of the little angel. The students will be invited to cluster and write a

vignette from choosing a feeling attached to this story.

We usually have a Christmas show in the school auditorium so I am not planning to include a plan for a fourth or fifth day.

Depending upon the day of the Christmas show, I will culminate these past four weeks of writing by presenting the group with a (movie &) VCR earned by their involvement in the behavior modification point system. I'm sure that after 4 weeks they will have earned the number of points assigned to this goal. It will be a great way to end this part of the planned curriculum unit.

At the conclusion of this week, I will evaluate how eagerly and with what ease the students organized their responses.

### **F. Christmas break**

During vacation I plan on reviewing what occurred during the first part of the curriculum. I want to assess whether or not the first four weeks met my objectives in developing this unit. A simple checklist will suffice.

Yes No direction

support

consistency

organization

integration of skills and experiences

positive reinforcement

freedom of expression

experience of writing creatively

pride

respect for individuality

acceptable behavior standards

## **VI. Second Quarter**

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Upon our return from Christmas vacation we will be approximately half-way through the second quarter. I plan to share my feelings of what positive gains were made during the first four weeks of the unit with the students. I will also invite them to share how they would evaluate their experience.

It has been my experience that for the first two days scheduled after vacation I will not enjoy full attendance. I plan on renewing those students present with a 2 day plan of exercises that will review the process of clustering and vignette work. The first theme will be an exercise on developing a vignette on vacation. The second theme will be an exercise on school. It will allow for freedom of self-expression and clear away any debris cluttering their mind at the time. It takes time for the students to mentally return to the demands and routine in school after vacation. Many of the students will voice they would prefer a longer vacation but are usually glad to return to see their school friends and even their teachers. Sometimes their vacation is filled with boredom and disappointment and school at least distracts them.

After full attendance has been reached (probably the third day) I will initiate Part VI of this curriculum unit. The major objective of the next four weeks will be to involve my students in developing a short story. I plan to

have them each develop a murder mystery. Many of my students enjoy police television shows and love horror stories. I would like to tap their imagination and ability to draw from past experiences seen in movies or television shows in writing their own murder mystery in the form of a short story.

I plan on using the clustering process as a way to free ideas and impressions on each segment of their story. I will plan on a 20-day experience during the remainder of this second quarter. My approach of this short story will be planned out by carefully taking the students through segments involved in a short story. There will be a daily assignment presented to them to develop in writing. There will be approximately ten segments.

The first segment I will introduce is the setting. I will write a list of physical settings on the blackboard for their perusal. I will direct them to choose one setting that they feel they would be able to describe easily. I will list settings such as: city, country, town. I will then ask them to cluster images to the one setting they are focusing in on mentally. They will then be expected to write in detail everything they can associate and describe.

The second segment will be exploring the main character in this story. There will be three assignments attached to this segment. 1.) The first day of this segment I will focus their attention on choosing a detective, detective team, or private inspector. They will have to give this person a name, sex, age, personality, and describe him in great detail. 2.) The second day of this segment I will focus their attention on this detective they have created and describe who is his employer. They will have to choose the name of the agency or police department, name his supervisor, co-workers, and whether he likes his job or not. 3.) The third day of this segment the students will have to describe this detective's past accomplishments, if any. They will have to decide whether this is his first homicide or has solved many other homicides. If this is not his first case, the student will have to give a description of his other cases that he solved in the past.

The third segment will deal with the person murdered. I will list a number of possibilities on the blackboard. Some of the suggestions will be an old man, young man, old woman, young woman, child or family. The students will have to decide who they want to be the murder victim. They will be expected to describe this character in full detail, noting the person's name, age, sex, employment, unemployment, retirement, and social class. They will also have to describe where that person lived in full detail.

The fourth segment will deal with the murder scene. The first day will name the murder weapon. I will propose a list of possibilities such as: knife, gun, hammer, poison, or rope. The students will be limited to one choice as a murder weapon. They will have to describe fully what was the shape, size, brand, or label of pills or liquid. The second day will deal where the detective found the murder weapon and what clues were received from the weapon. I will give suggestions like: initials, fingerprints, a piece of cloth attached to the weapon, hair, or footprints. The third day will deal with a description of the murder setting. I will provide a list of possibilities such as: a bedroom, alley, parking lot, boat, basement. The students will have to choose one setting and describe it fully. The fourth day will deal with the people who were at the murder scene when the detective arrived. The students will have to describe what the scene was like and give names.

The fifth segment will deal with the witnesses who were at the scene of the murder. The first day the students will have to describe them in terms of neighbors, friends, relatives, landlord, or strangers. They will be expected to describe them in detail. The second day the students will invent the dialogue that takes place in the interview with the detective and witnesses. I will give suggestions like: how do you know this person who was murdered, where were you at the time of the murder, what do you know about this crime, did you hear anything, or did you see anyone leave the scene of the crime.

The sixth segment will deal with the suspect. The students will have to give a description of the suspect being held. They will give him a name, age, sex, race, and personal history. The second day will deal with the interview between the detective and the suspect being held in custody. I will encourage writing it in the form of a dialogue.

The seventh segment will deal with the motive. The first day will explore the detective thinking out loud trying to come up with the motive for the murder. I will give a list of possibilities. Some might be: jealousy, revenge, blackmail, getting caught in a theft for drug money. The students will have to choose one and write a dialogue. The second day will deal with the detective going to his boss and sharing the motive he has reasoned for the murder and gives all the evidence pointing to the suspect. The students will have to write another dialogue between the detective and his boss.

The eighth segment will deal with bringing the suspect to a conviction in court. The students will have to describe what went on in the courtroom and share the sentencing in writing.

The ninth segment will deal with the detective's feeling of bringing another murder to justice.

The tenth segment will be taking all these parts written and bringing them together as a whole work. I will assist them by proofreading and giving suggestions for a better organization of parts if need be.

## **VII. Conclusion**

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Students need the opportunity to develop their innate talent and potential for thinking and language use. These proposed units describe lessons which provide strategies for opening students to their own ideas and words. The first set of lessons focus only on the beginning of the writing process, the discovery and free-writing stage. The second set of lessons focus on structuring these free-flowing ideas that all students have potential for. Thus the objectives of the unit provide the opportunity both for expression and the structuring of that expression.

## **Reading for Students**

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This teaching unit does not involve outside reading for the students (other than their own writings). The only books involved are those I will read in the week before Christmas; such selections are up to each individual teacher.

## **List of Materials**

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An annotated list of these materials exists in each of the lesson plans organized week by week in the text. For convenience, a simple list follows:

Overhead projector

Picture of popular wrestlers

Popcorn, bagged and wrapped

Tape recorder

Cassette of music from the movie *Rocky*

Fireballs

Peeled grapes

Oak tag

Paint and paintbrush

Magic markers

Crayons

Christmas music and stories

## **Annotated Bibliography**

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Elbow, Peter. *Writing with Power* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

A very useful book for opening up the teacher's mind to all stages of the writing process, the approach to teaching these stages, and the problems therein. It reads like a best-seller: engrossing, informative, and rewarding.

Flower, Linda. *Problem-Solving Strategies* . New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich

This book is not as useful a teacher's guide as the others are. It reads more like a textbook for a university rather than an independent resource book.

Holbrook, David. *English for the Rejected* . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964.

This book provided an empathetic understanding for disabled learners. Holbrook clearly explained how to recognize, understand, and meet the problems the students have in learning. It includes a comprehensive and useful bibliography.

Macrorie, Ken. *Telling Writing* . Rochelle Park, NJ: Hayden, 1984.

This book focused on "truth-telling" in writing, a form of free expression. His thesis is that students gain confidence through free-writing forms. It gives numerous good suggestions for free-writing lessons.

Rico, Gabrielle Lusser. *Writing the Natural Way* . Los Angeles: Tarcher, 1983.

This book is the handbook on clustering. It clearly explains the means of "releasing the inner writer" through the clustering process. It provides copious examples.

Shaughnessy, Mina P. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* . New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Chapter 4 of this book provides a useful overview of the language patterns of the different cultural groups teachers may have in their classes. It explains how these language patterns affect the way students understand formal grammar and how their written expression differs from these formal patterns.

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