

DaedHeads in Michigan: The ECB and Computers

At the University of Michigan, writing instruction in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts is heavily supported by a dedicated formation of writing teachers/scholars called the English Composition Board (ECB). Organizationally, the Board consists of a director, several associate directors, and fifteen or so writing specialists, most of whom carry Ph.D.'s, all with impeccable teaching records. Together, they play substantial advisory, instructional, and assessment roles in the College's cross-curricular writing efforts. More than half teach in the program's dedicated Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment (DIWE) classroom. This edition of *Wings* explores some of the ECBers' approaches to computerized writing instruction on DIWE, including some interesting critiques and important self-discoveries, as well as an important outreach effort coordinated by Daedalus member and ECB instructor, Wayne Butler, that put DIWE in a local Ann Arbor public high school.

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Perhaps the most recurring theme in the present submissions is that using computers to teach writing won't bring about world peace or any other high-minded educational goal. People like Wayne Butler, Lester Faigley, and Alison Regan have already argued quite persuasively that computer classrooms don't break down traditional barriers of difference, and they don't make people any more productive or generous or intelligent than they were when they walked in the door. In fact, teaching with/on/through computers tends to generate a unique set of difficulties, both pedagogical and human, that are often situation-specific.

At the University of Michigan, computers may be available and relatively prolific, but access doesn't necessarily mean easy assimilation. Peter Elbow says that education is violence; it makes us change, whether we like it or not, which may scare us into embracing fear or risk. If learning to write on computers dramatically heightens a student's learning curve, imagine the meta-pedagogical trajectories of those who are learning to *teach* writing on computers. That is, imagine—as the ECB teachers and Robin Wax do—the fears and the risks.

Overall, I find the essays in this present edition of *Wings* especially striking in their focus on a kind of self-reflective practice that takes classroom inquiry, technology, and pedagogical philosophy seriously. I imagine this has something to do with the role the ECB plays at the University of Michigan—unlike many writing programs across the country, curriculum designers come to the ECB for expertise on writing instead of the ECB going to curriculum designers in order to find some kind of fit. Because of its authoritative position, then, the ECB also determines placement criteria for student writers (including innovative assessment methods such as portfolios) and has helped university faculty to design courses that will teach students how to write in specific disciplines. It is also playing a significant role in educational outreach, specifically its past work with Pioneer High School and its beginning work in inner-city Detroit public high schools. Clearly, the people who teach writing in this setting garner a level of cross-disciplinary and institutional respect that many writing teachers can only dream about. But they also remind us all that writing professionals are especially primed to teach the educational community about access—to technology and, thus, to the articulation of change as it happens through language.

Nancy Peterson
Editor, *Wings*

Focus on . . .

University-High School Collaboration: Writing-to-Learn, Student-Centered Learning, and Computer Technology

I have taught American History for twenty-five years, the last twenty-three at Ann Arbor's Pioneer High School. My strengths as a teacher are an extensive knowledge of my subject, an ability to transmit ideas, information, issues, and conflicts in an interesting way, and an abiding love of a wide variety of students. For most of my twenty-five years, my classrooms have definitely been "teacher-centered." I lecture, lead discussions, and take responsibility for making sure learning takes place. My twenty-five years have been good ones. My able students have learned history and appropriate related skills, have gotten into good universities, and have come back to regale me with stories of successes in the 'real' world.

But there is a flip side of all this. For part of my day, I deal with students who have been designated "At-Risk." I have never had trouble developing a bond with these students and assuring them that my classroom was a safe haven from a school environment where they were rarely successful and often alienated. But I have never pretended that I have made great strides in helping them academically or really providing useful skills for their futures. Extensive reading of Hilda Hernandez, Sonia Nieto and James Banks has convinced me of the need to create a multicultural environment in classrooms and in schools if we are to meet the needs of this diverse group of students—a combination of special education students, ESL students and those with discipline and personal problems. But, to be perfectly honest, going beyond making the curriculum multicultural and making all cultures feel welcome in the classroom seemed impossible.

Help came from a seemingly unlikely source. When the University of Michigan's English Composition Board (ECB) wanted to set up an outreach project involving high school students, I bit my tongue, held my breath, and said, "Let's try something with the 'At-Risk' population, not the college bound successes." Debbie Keller-Cohen, then director of the ECB, contacted Wayne Butler, then at the University of Texas, and asked for permission to use the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment (DIWE) at Pioneer High School. The Daedalus Group graciously granted us a site license. We set up an ambitious plan for using networked computer discussions, writing essays on word processors, and linking University of Michigan students with my

great but I was really nervous about changing teaching techniques which had provided twenty-five years of comfort and relative success. Writing-to-Learn, collaborative learning, and student centered classrooms all sounded fine, but could I construct the course content and assignments to fit these new models, be interesting to this particular student population, and maintain the academic integrity of the history and the skills the students learned?

Teaching history always demands making decisions about what to leave in and what to take out, whether to 'post-hole' or skim through loads of material. For this newly configured course, I chose units to study based on the criteria of how important an era or series of events was to understanding the overall fabric of American life. I designed each unit with a strong multicultural emphasis and bias toward content which could most easily be made relevant to contemporary concerns. As a result, we covered fewer topics, but the students learned more about each.

I have always struggled to balance the teaching of skills and of content, particularly with an at-risk population. Too often content is pieced together during the teaching process but then pulled apart in the testing process because at-risk students seem unable to handle too much in one gulp. The result, unfortunately, is a curriculum that rarely speaks in whole sentences and does nothing to help learners who have trouble making connections anyway. I was very skeptical of suggestions that Writing-to-Learn could work with this population. All of the literature I reviewed sounded great but the examples given of writing in the Social Studies curriculum were rarely content-based. Teachers in history classrooms reported having kids "pretend" they were "going west" or "writing the Constitution," but they didn't ask that the content be based on what really happened. There was an apparent assumption that writing needed to be fantasy.

I discovered, however, that Writing-to-Learn could serve as a natural link if the historical content could be bolstered. It turned out to be easy to fit. My students do research and write a review of some sort based on information gathered. The technology has empowered my students, given them access to the educational process and systems in a way not possible in the traditional classroom. We are not just word processing, we are engaging in discussions, reading and responding to each other's work, and communicating

Robin Wax was named one of five winners of the 1993 Christa McAuliffe Educator Award by the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education Association

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TEACHER TALK



“Take My Hand, I’m a Stranger in Cyberspace”: Personal Relationships in the Computer/Traditional Classroom

Much has been written about the high participation rates of students in electronic conferencing, both real-time and asynchronous. But how that participation affects traditional class discussion has received far less attention. In my peer tutoring training seminar this semester, our on-line relationships seemed to delay—if not displace—the in-the-flesh interpersonal relationships of our class members and, by extension, our off-line class community.

While our peer tutoring class was originally planned as a traditional seminar of fourteen students, I added an electronic component to the syllabus after the first month. My goal was to habituate peer tutors to an electronic tutoring environment, preparing them for our fledgling on-line writing lab (OWL) next year. For two months, our class would meet in the networked classroom and participate in an electronic forum (called Confer) for 30-40 minutes each class period. Then we would repair to the seminar room for the second half of the period. All told, we spent approximately eight class-time hours (although four students regularly accessed the conference outside of class) in our electronic conference, producing 212 pages of transcript.

The class immediately developed something of a split personality.

During the electronic segment, the class was personal and social, playful and thoughtful, supportive and challenging. Sitting in a darkened room with just the glow of computer screens eerily illuminating their silhouettes, students talked about a wide range of topics (as well as workshopped each other’s papers): from Kramer’s sex appeal and their favorite Seinfeld episode (the “can you spare a square” episode was most often named) to childhood reading habits and adulthood legal problems. They helped one student plan her wedding and hotly debated their personal tastes in junk food, fat-free diets, coffee-drinking, and sushi. Throughout all these “safe” topics, they dropped pieces of personal information, exposing their vulnerabilities.

But as soon as they left the computer room, they

would fall into an awkward silence, like strangers on the street. In class, my efforts to generate spontaneous class discussion invariably fell flat. Typically, students would greet my open-ended questions with averted eyes and shifting bodies. Eventually, someone would raise her hand and wait to be recognized before responding (even

though I told them they didn’t have to raise their hands to speak, the practice persisted). The response was always directed to me, and that discussion thread dropped, students rarely responding to one another.

It was this class personality—the insecure, reticent, polite one—that dominated the first month of the semester before we started our electronic forum. What surprised me was that this personality lingered, shadow-like, alongside the social, intimate class we’d come to know in the computer classroom. In the electronic conference, students had much to say about their evolving sense of community and how the two settings affected their relationships with each other:

Feb03/94 18:54 StefaniedeJong:
what do you guys think about the class so far? Does anyone else feel a little strange about how the class is going? I felt better when we were working on Alea’s paper but before that I felt like we were just talking at each other and no one was really agreeing or disagreeing with each other. Is that making sense? Does anyone know what I mean? I don’t feel like we’re as much a community as we should be by now?

Feb09/94 17:47 18:14) JulieWexler:
Actually I want to respond. I know what it feels like to get no response from someone and have people look at you with blank stares before moving on to something completely unrelated. It all goes along with your earlier concern about how none of us really know each other in class. If only we could say to each other, “Damn it, tell me what you think” or just “Tell me exactly what you are feeling at this very moment” I think we could have some fun (and get to know each other some more). Maybe we could do this someday. . .

Mar03/94 13:40 25:11) JenniferKildea:
. . . I feel like we are really getting to know each other. In fact, this class seems really open on the conference. Everyone has the chance to establish closer relationships with classmates.

Mar06/94 18:48 1:24) Alea Brown:
. . . i don’t know if anyone has noticed but i’m not the most outspoken or talkative person. i prefer communicating—when possible—on paper so i’m excited about the opportunity to communicate with everyone somewhat intimate and more removed setting.

Mar14/94 00:35 25:39) AmeliaNatoli:
I think it’s easier to be ignored in real life rather than in writing. No one can write louder than me and drown me out.

TEACHER TALK, cont'd

Mar15/94 13:56 25:45) EileenMombianco:
Ya know, sorry to break the flow, but a thought just came to me, just sitting here. I mean, here we are in this classroom, all together in one room, typing on our little computers. And we're talking to each other, about personal things, about personal opinions, about our personal thoughts, and yet, when we all stand up, and leave our terminals, some of us act like we don't know any of the things about other people that we have just read. What I mean is, our verbal communication with each other hasn't changed drastically, in the same way that our electric communication has changed. I don't know, this just struck me just now, because I realized that I wasn't "talking" to the person sitting 1 centimeter away from me, but rather pressing buttons on a cold medium.

Mar15/94 17:47 25:47) Sahil Desai:
ditto. seems kinda funny to be sitting next to somebody and turn to them and go, "how do i do that [discussion item] thing again?" and then go back to typing your response to their item!

Mar17/94 11:20 25:48) Julie Wexler:
I know what ya mean. Even if I am having a really great conversation with someone on the conference, I may see that person on campus and just say hi as if we have never spoken in our lives but just know each other as acquaintances. It's funny but we really aren't much more than acquaintances to each other in person, but on the computer, we are like old friends almost.

Mar19/94 11:40 25:49) Alea Brown:
. . . its really creepy to have carried on conversations with people via electronic communication that i haven't talked to face to face yet. i've learned a lot about ande and how he feels about writing, etc but yet we've never sat down and talked. . . .

Mar19/94 22:24 25:51) Amelia Natoli:
I personally understand that it's difficult to explain something verbally sometimes. Maybe that the distance of the confer is a good idea. It is strange that we don't have the same level of conversation in the classroom as we do on the computer. I was thinking the other day that I felt a little more comfortable talking to people in class since we started conferencing. . . .

Mar22/94 13:12 25:55) Elise Pressma:
I also feel like I exist in two worlds in this class. On one level, I feel very comfortable talking to all of you over the computer. On a second level, I feel like it is an illusion and find myself less able to open up in person. Cyberspace is somewhat of a virtual reality, in that it mimicks human interaction, but remains distant from the essence of what it means to be a social animal. My roommate and I had an entire discussion about the libido. In addition to powering our sexual drives, it actually has a broader meaning. Humans require physical interaction. The computer can't provide that.

Mar22/94 13:36 25:59) Amy Finkbeiner:
I think that computer conferencing has really let me get to know people better. I don't think I would know most people in this class as well as I

think I do now. It's easier for me to open up more on paper (and conferencing) than verbally. Now that I have said more and more through conferencing, I could talk to most of you about personal things. . . .

Mar31/94 02:53 25:75) Alea Brown:
. . . i definitely don't feel as if i was somehow cheated or robbed of the opportunity to talk directly and face to face with my classmates because i feel that confer created a level of comfort that made talking and sharing feel a little more natural and safe. . . .

The last day in our electronic conference, I entered the computer classroom to find students turned around in their chairs, responding face-to-face to online remarks. Only after we shed our virtual selves did the class begin to emerge as an actual community. I'm not sure if our virtual intimacy/anonymity personalized and protected us, enabling our eventual sense of community—or prevented and postponed our developing face-to-face friendships.

Students shared this ambivalence about the relationship between our virtual and actual communities, as they expressed in their portfolios:

"The class was a lot like the Breakfast Club. We came in separate, but we all left together. That was a great feeling. It was a feeling that I had not experienced here at UM. The entire class opened up and we became one—even if it was only truly on confer." —Jon

"Most of the class has commented, at one time or another, on how we are closer and more personal in our conference than in our day-to-day interrelations. Why? Because the computer provides safety. It cloaks us in a kind of anonymity; its impersonality is precisely what makes us feel at home." —Sahil

"In a way, the conference acted as another existence for our class. We would leave our busy schedules and enter a quiet, dark room. We would sit down, relax, and then become part of a virtual community. In this community we were able to expand on whatever was on our minds, from the most meaningless of things to our own personal obsessions. . . . We were curious, honest, and uninhibited. However, the most striking part was that we were complete strangers outside of this virtuality. Inside and outside of cyberspace were like two different worlds. It was even difficult, at times, for individual students to recognize the relation between the two worlds. . . . As our computer experience was evolving and growing, our classroom interaction remained stagnant. . . . Confer gave the feeling that we were only intimate with each other on a virtual level, but what we didn't realize was that the conference was developing in our minds a more intimate concept of each others' true personalities inside the classroom as well." —Julie

**Barbara Monroe, Instructor
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The Rhetoric of Responding: Daedalus Mail and the Discursive Response

The first year after my institution installed the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment (DIWE) in our computer classroom, I learned to use InterChange. The second year I learned to use Mail. We'll see what happens next year. I'm told I'm not unique; other people have undergone the same process, learning and using one component of DIWE at a time rather than the whole system. However, I wouldn't mind being unique about something just once.

Daedalus Mail is a dream come true, and in saying this I realize once again that I am not being unique. Daedalus Mail provides a new way for students to share papers and respond to one another in writing. It dramatizes peer review, lending to it the technological pizzazz that so readily attracts people these days—the Trekkian thrill of sharing text without ever printing it out. Writing classes become communication odysseys where we are as likely to engage someone on another continent as we are someone across the room. But this is not what I want to expand upon now.

I want to write about what occurred to me in using Daedalus Mail, a behavior that I observed in myself—in my regular and traditional practice as a teacher rather than in a behavior resulting essentially from the wonders of technology. That I am reluctant to give easy credit to technology is not shocking considering assumptions that I hold (perhaps cynical assumptions) about the general role of technology in education.

I hear people talking about computers like they will solve every educational problem we have. My guess is technology will only solve the problems that technology has introduced. So it was not surprising when in using DIWE I found myself taking a hard look at how I taught, especially at how I communicated with my students about their writing, rather than at anything specifically technological.

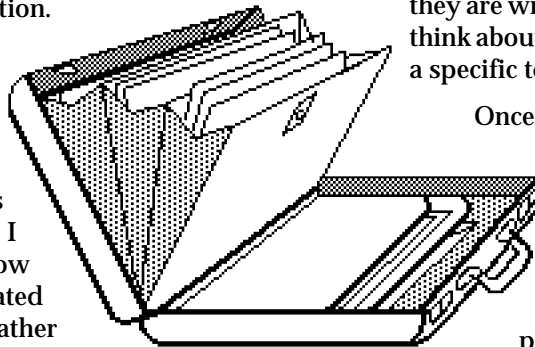
I learned about responding to student writing from Nancy Sommers who, in a May 1982 CCC article, argued that teachers' comments, especially those marginal comments that speak to a variety of different kinds of issues in students' papers, do not lead to quality revisions. She argues that such teacher comments do not provide students with an inherent reason for revising the structure and meaning of their texts since the comments suggest to

students that the meaning is already there, finished, produced, and all that is necessary is a better word or phrase. (151)

Until I read Sommers' article, I pretty much wrote all over students' papers, but little did I think that students might take my corrective gestures as a sign that the process was at an end, that I had justified their grades. To say my remarks were haphazard is too severe, but I didn't take into account the relative importance of a comma splice compared to a poor integration of general and specific information. This is not to say I was negligent in my commentary. I was very conscientious but had only a vague, distant idea of how a student might use my remarks in revision. I had a bunch of little ideas rather than a big picture.

Both at once Daedalus Mail gave me something and took something away. As I became more adept with the Mail Conferences, my students turned in their papers on disk. I did not see hard copy except in conference, during which time we scoured the paper for sentence level problems and talked in general about how the paper was developing. My most thorough written response to students was conveyed over the network. I wrote a three to five hundred word response to each student and sent it off to the appropriate Mail Conference for students to read. This took from me the opportunity to write notes in the margins, to comment on specific miscues of language, to write "awkward." I felt a little less like a teacher than I did when I could with every sentence instruct, encourage, and critique. But Daedalus Mail also forced me to think about each paper globally. I had to determine the one or two most significant aspects of the paper, the revision of which would lead to the most improvement. I had to, in

Sommers' words, provide some thoughtful commentary which will help students to engage with the issues they are writing about or which will help them think about their purposes and goals in writing a specific text. (154)



Once again this is not unique. I had typically written end notes that addressed a student's paper globally. But Daedalus Mail added a feature to the arrangement and style of my responses that the dynamic of printed product had allowed me to ignore. I often began on a positive note

before zeroing in on what I thought to be the most important problems: "This is really a very good paper, but . . ." "Wonderful beginning, but . . ." "The ideas you have generated are compelling, but . . ." I'm sure you recognize the pattern; I had recognized the it before using DIWE. To some degree it was a natural pattern, but it was also

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jumping off

Renegotiating Empowerment: Moving a Collaborative Writing Assignment into Virtual Space

The only valid reason to use computer technology in teaching writing (or anything else, for that matter) is that the technology allows us to do something useful that we could not or would not have done in the absence of the technology. Computer-mediated communications fits that definition, for me, precisely because the way my students work and learn in that environment far outstrips what happens when I use the same assignments and approaches in a traditional classroom setting. And when I construct a virtual classroom as an extension of my computer-equipped classroom, thus reducing the limitations of time and space, I lead my students into an environment that is close to the ideal for a writing class. In this new environment, where students communicate synchronously and asynchronously, students must renegotiate themselves, the classroom, and their assignments. As a result, students rely on themselves and on each other more than on their teacher (me); they learn to work with a wide range of source materials; they gain experience bringing order out of large and seemingly chaotic sets of information; and they begin to break out of what Freire calls the banking system of education, opting instead for active involvement in their own education.

Let me justify the above claims by using an extended example, a six-week assignment that prompts students to study discipline-centered academic writing. During the first week of the assignment, students find and interview a person who is, ideally, actually employed in the student's chosen field (i. e., a doctor, a lawyer, an engineer, a social worker, an actor, a pharmacist, etc.) However, the subject must at least be a graduate student in that field. The students ask a set of questions that elicit an accurate sense of the role writing plays in the chosen field: they ask the subject how s/he uses writing in his or her job or studies, what kinds of writing s/he does, how much writing s/he does, how much freedom s/he has in choosing topics, whether s/he typically writes alone or in collaboration with others, what audiences s/he writes for, what sorts of deadlines s/he works under, what percentage of time on the job would s/he estimate s/he spends writing, what

tools s/he uses in doing the writing, how important writing is to his or her success in the job, whether the s/he was a "good writer" in college and whether that training helped on the job, etc. This information goes into a two- or three-page report that summarizes the information gleaned in the interview. That report is posted in Daedalus Mail, so that all the students in the class can access it, and at some point after the deadline for posting has passed, the class holds an InterChange session to tease out the surprises students encountered in their interviews.

This first step, in my class of sixteen students, creates between thirty-two and forty-eight pages of information about writing on the job in several disciplines, and students immediately begin to compare these results, both directly and indirectly. Since in any given class there are sure to be two or more aspiring engineers, doctors, or lawyers, for example, the class can make direct comparisons of subjects in the same career but in different jobs or at different levels of responsibility. And since an undergraduate concentration could lead a student in one of several directions, the data contain information that students find fascinating. They also find the data surprising, since the interviewees always do more writing than the students—especially in science concentrations—expected to find in that field. The most important factor, though, is that the postings involve the students with each other as sources. Students begin to care deeply about their performance on this part of the assignment. Those who posted fully developed, detailed summaries act as models for those who didn't, and I often find that students who post short or perfunctory summaries revisit this part of the assignment and post a fuller, more useful summary, not wanting to let their classmates down. The implicit peer review involved in juxtaposing one student's response with another's prompts all the students to take more responsibility for their research, to see themselves as members of a learning community. Students can see that if one member lets the community down, then the resources available to the community as a whole suffer.

The second phase of the assignment involves another collaborative creation of resources. This time, students locate the two most influential professional journals in their fields, examine the two most recent volumes of each, and perform a kind of content analysis. They look for what

kinds of articles appear there, what major topics are discussed, and what kinds of studies, methods, etc., are prevalent. They also try to describe the writing in the journals, looking for differences from one journal to the other, whether the writers seem to follow one or a few identifiable formats and what, besides articles, is in the journals. Then the students select two articles of interest and read them. Again, the output is a report in which students describe the writing they find in the journals, as well as the experience of reading those articles.

At this stage, students begin to develop the sense that our large, seemingly uniform academic community actually comprises many distinct discourse communities. The reports, posted again in Daedalus Mail, reveal how writing in one discipline differs from that in another, and they begin to realize that “academic writing,” different and difficult as it may be, is not a monolithic mystery, but a composite of the kinds of writing that are produced by specialists in a field “talking” to each other. Their descriptions are thick with discoveries: academic writing differs markedly from what students find in their textbooks; academic writing is filled with jargon and specialized terms that mystify the uninitiated but seem to make perfect sense to the professionals; when experts write to one another, they generate large amounts of writing about narrowly constructed subjects; academic writing involves intensive reading, as well as active engagement with a wide variety of ideas from a wide variety of authors. If I were to lecture about this topic, class would be extremely dull, and I could not begin to cover the breadth that a classful of students can. But following the Mail messages with an InterChange session allows students to develop a working definition of academic writing that is at once more detailed, more interesting, and more credible than anything I could possibly tell them or show them. This stage of the assignment engages students because they are actively involved in producing what is for them new knowledge, and they have a stake in doing a good job because, again, they belong to a learning community.

Stage three involves the students in a comparison of publications aimed for different audiences. This time, the students search for a popular magazine that includes articles from the students’ chosen fields of concentration, and they perform the same kind of analysis they did for the professional journals. This time, the reports focus on the differences in language, in contrast to the journals, and differences in the kinds of articles. Students compare the experience of reading these magazines, which are written to include the novice, with the experience of reading the journals, where the language seems geared to exclude the novice. At this point, the students begin to understand where the boundaries of academic writing are, as well as

the factors that distinguish academic writing from other forms. Finally, they are able to make critical comparisons, assessing both the strengths and shortcomings of writing in and for the academy, as opposed to writing in the workday world or the popular press. Again, reading the reports in Mail and following up with a synchronous discussion in InterChange allows students both to build and then to explore, or process, a large and complex information resource.

After building a resource base that has grown to more than two hundred pages’ worth of writing, students write an essay that seems almost an anti-climax. But here they learn to sift and winnow, to sort through massive amounts of data, to ask more questions, via Mail, in order to clarify vague or incomplete entries. They struggle to impose order on a large and often chaotic set of information, to find a structure that will allow them first to discover what they want to say and then to write the essay. And, of course, the process of communication and sharing continues as they post their drafts for review in Respond.

When I construct a virtual classroom as an extension of my computer-equipped classroom . . . I lead my students into an environment that is close to the ideal for a writing class.

This assignment can be used—indeed, I have used it—in a traditional classroom, without benefit of networked computers. However, in that setting, the logistics are daunting, the amount of paper involved (each student distributing a copy

of each stage’s report to sixteen classmates) is staggering, and the time available for interaction is limited. More important, though, is the fact that in the traditional classroom this assignment results in a lot of teacher talk, which means that students still rely on me as the organizer, the catalyst, the one who really knows what is going on. When I use DIWE, I rarely have to say anything. Indeed, my contributions, in comparison with the students’, are negligible. They are in charge. Their materials make up the book-length resource; their replies to the messages raise the issues for discussion; their contributions to the InterChange sessions define and direct that process; and their reviews of each others’ drafts carry great weight (since each of them has just written a similar kind of essay, each has a kind of credible expertise to offer in peer review). Thus, an assignment such as this one fulfills the “prime directive” for using computers in a writing classroom: the technology allows us to do something useful that we could not or would not have done in the absence of the technology. Using the technology, I can watch my students become a learning community—indeed, a discourse community in their own right—and I can watch as they begin to write academic writing, not just read it or read about it. Those important steps do not happen when I use the same assignment in a traditional classroom setting.

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with others. This non-traditional discourse draws in and includes under-represented views and voices from history and from my classroom. Students who never talk in the traditional setting or develop ideas or use higher level thinking skills do so on the computers. Being on the computers also disarms a lot of other problems. Discipline is much easier and the computer allows a safe medium for interaction. Students feel very special that they are on computers, that they are part of a special class, one that's not Special Education.

My classes have emerged as special social units. As new kids are added to the class (a constant occurrence with this kind of group), kids help each other, give support, tell about the class, and even "get down" on each other for absences, tardies, pregnancies, coming to class late or stoned. Each class is a collaborative learning community. When assignments are announced, the first question is, "How can we help each other?" This does not seem to happen because they think it's easier but because they learn more. The caliber of work they do collaboratively has improved dramatically and their insistence on good input from each other has escalated.

My more careful selection of a multicultural content has made the course more meaningful and focused, and this, combined with how the material is now taught, has made it take hold in a more concrete way. The kids' goals for themselves have changed. In September, many questioned whether they would graduate from high school. More now feel they will and might go into computers or junior college. Most no longer list history as their least favorite class and most liked more ways of learning by March than they did in September.

There are still many problems. Almost 25% of the students have a 20% absentee rate, and this is apparently unchanged by the project. Most students have poor reading skills and an inability to retrieve information from text and cannot be counted on to accurately gather information independently and share, which means that I have to transmit information and check all work done before collaboration occurs. There are still some of the usual interactions with students who have not had success in school. Comments like, "Do I have to do this?", "I'm too tired to work today," and "You made us work yesterday, too," persist. And there are a few pregnancies, arrests for drug use, and suspicion of drug use causing inappropriate behavior and fights to keep life interesting.

What role has DIWE played in all of this? The Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment and the thoughtful, patient guidance of Wayne Butler (who miraculously took a job at the University of Michigan's ECB) have allowed me, as a history teacher, to create the multicultural classroom environment my students so desperately need. The use of Writing-to-Learn methods with the history curriculum has pulled together ideas rather than separated them. The use of DIWE has given legitimacy to all voices, those of my students and those of the historical figures they study. The format of computerized instruction makes access to ideas and to other learners and to means of expression easy, fun, and permanent. In other words, it works.

Robin Wax, Chair
Social Studies Department, Pioneer High School
Ann Arbor, Michigan

DIWE E-mail User Forum

TEACH@daedalus.com

Now that we have an Internet connection, we are maintaining an electronic mailing list dedicated to the issues associated with teaching with DIWE. Instructors using DIWE and the developers of DIWE (current version and developmental versions) discuss issues of interface, pedagogy, and theory.

To subscribe, send an electronic mail message to:

sub-teach@daedalus.com

After that, you can participate by sending e-mail to

teach@daedalus.com

Virtual Reality Classroom

Another service we are now able to provide is a virtual space in which you can interact with other Daedalus users, bring your classes on field trips, collaborate with our software developers on the next generation of software, and generally get to know your way around CyberSpace. To visit the DaedalusMOO, you'll have to use a machine that is connected to the Internet. If you're at a unix prompt, you'll type `telnet daedalus.com 7777`

On VAX machines, `telnet daedalus.com/port=7777`

Once logged on, make yourself a character by typing `create <name> <password>`. To see who else is visiting the MOO, type `@who`. If you see someone you know, type `@join <character>`. And don't forget to enjoy yourself!

Frequently Asked Technical Questions about Daedalus Software



Macintosh Questions

When using InterChange, students cannot scroll back to the beginning of the messages. This usually happens during a particularly long InterChange session. Have the missing messages been lost?

The missing messages are still stored on disk but, due to the inherent limitations of standard Macintosh text editing, only 32K of text can be displayed in the InterChange window. When the InterChange session is "compacted," the resulting text file will contain all the messages. However, you will only be able to display the first 32K of messages if you open the file with Daedalus Write. You can use a more powerful word processor to open the file and display the messages in their entirety.

When I log into DIWE as the Administrator and try to send a message using InterChange, I get an error message saying, "Could not complete your request because of a program error." Also, if I try to send a message using Mail, the program hangs and I have to restart the computer. What's going on?

DIWE fails in its attempts to send messages because it cannot find the folders named "InterChange" or "Mail." Those folders may have been accidentally removed during the compression process that squeezes DIWE onto a few disks. To solve the problem, you can recreate them in the folder "Instructors:Staff:Administration." This problem only affects the Administration class; any new classes you create will have the needed folders.

Jeff Lafitte
Macintosh programmer, The Daedalus Group, Inc.

If you have questions you would like to see addressed in Wings, drop us a line or send e-mail to wings@daedalus.com



DOS Questions

DOS DIWE had been working well until recently. Now when the program starts the usual banner screen appears, then when we press any key to bring up our instructor and class list, the program crashes with a runtime error of 216 in the 286 version or with an error of 203 in the 8086 version?

The file which contains instructors and class lists can get stuck in an unusable state if Instructors or Supervisors attempt to make DIWE configuration changes while anyone else is using DOS DIWE. Administrators with access to the DIWE installation directories can fix this problem. There should be a file in the \DIWE\RECORDS directory named "TEMPYYYY.REZ". Rename this file as "CURRINST.REZ" and the problem should be fixed.

How can we eliminate the blank sheet that is produced at the end of each of our Laserprint jobs?

By default DOS DIWE sends a pagefeed command following printouts which end with a partial page. There is an option that was added in our most recent minor maintenance update (April 94) for eliminating these pagefeeds for network setups that already produce their own end of print job pagefeeds. If the numeral "0" has been entered in the Printer Options Dialog for the number of copies to print, the Print command will produce one copy without a following pagefeed. And of course a supervisor may make this option your default setting by making the same change in the Printer Options Dialog within DIWE Supervisor Utilities. Updates from Daedalus for sites needing this solution may be acquired by mail or through Internet.

Paul Reavley
DOS programmer, The Daedalus Group, Inc.

supported by good pedagogical practice, for me exemplified in the lessons of people like Peter Elbow. If you are going to criticize someone's writing, do it in a nice way. Believe they know, even if they don't demonstrate their knowledge perfectly.

But in responding to them I assumed that for the most part students didn't compare my comments, even if they did compare the grade; so to any suspicion of being formulaic—or worse, that my comments were unclear or rendered meaningless by degrees of repetition from student to student—I could remain immune. On Daedalus Mail, however, students have access to all of my comments. Students read my responses to their own work and to the work of others, providing opportunities for them to examine and question the responses' form, content and appropriateness.

The effect of this was twofold. I learned something about myself and about what it means to meet a student's needs. Twenty responses to students, one after the other, revealed the same respondent at work. To be so consistent was reassuring in its way. My comments reflected the values and qualities of writing that I promote in class conversations and in the assignments that I create. But the formula of my response and the attention I gave to similar features of writing across very different papers made me wonder if I wasn't more immersed in a dialogue with myself than I was a dialogue with an individual student. Of course, six or seven students out of twenty might have problems with transitions or with the development of particular ideas, but were the problems as similar to each other as the nature of my response indicated? Was I perhaps blinded to the uniqueness of each problem by the limits of my constructed response? And did the formula of my response undermine my attempt to give each student a genuine and individual comment?

The second thing Daedalus Mail provided me speaks to the same issue in a less problematic way. Let's say my responses represent a particular writing problem accurately in every case. Under traditional circumstances, students can benefit from only that set of responses their particular writing problems and virtues elicit from me. One paper does not represent a full range of a student's problems and virtues, however, and students can learn mightily from the work of others. DIWE helps promote this kind of learning. Along with reading a paper written by a peer, students using Daedalus Mail can also read my responses to that paper, learning about a set of problems and virtues that they themselves did not create, and one that their own writing—and the kinds of questions they choose to address—might not easily expose to them for months, maybe years.

Although the openness of DIWE caused me some pause, I came to view the openness as a strength. I began to instruct my students to read two or more of my responses to others and compare them. "Do they make sense?" I would challenge them. "Does my response to Julie's essay compare favorably to your own assessment of it? If not, why not?" And this became the subject matter for another conversation on good writing. Not only can the teacher's comments become a departure point for informative discussions about good writing, but revealing them to everybody demystifies the evaluative process. Comma splices are pretty easy to fix because the rules are relatively straightforward. But I have found that students can become suspicious when my sense of how thoroughly they develop the context for an argument differs from their own. Many of the qualities of writing that teachers respond to are abstract and subjective. There is no clear right and wrong. In cases such as these, a variety of examples is necessary to help the student recognize the shape of an abstract problem in writing, when a transition is thorough, when a position is well supported, when a purpose is established with force and an audience sufficiently recognized. In this way, Daedalus Mail helps eliminate some mystery from writing—including the written response—and provides a landscape where teachers and students can learn from a wide array of each other's writing samples.

George Cooper, Instructor
English Composition Board, University of Michigan

Voices We Hear and Voices We Silence: Gallop Through InterChange

What is true is that we make choices . . . that we choose voices to hear and voices to silence. If I do not speak in a language that can be understood, then there is little chance for dialogue.
—Bell Hooks, *Talking Back*

The first time I used InterChange, the experience of reading the screen and following the conversation while I typed my own response felt like moving with the rhythm of galloping horses. As a participant in a teacher training workshop, I was part of a team of horses: I bowed my muzzle to the screen and galloped full force ahead, determined to keep pace with my colleagues.

Later, when teaching my own students how to use InterChange, I was pleasantly surprised that instead of becoming the jockey who steered our direction with spurs and whips, I was still just a horse. I tried to keep the discussion on track by writing responses that summarized comments and moved the discussion forward, but students

could choose to follow or dismiss my cues, and more often than not, they followed their own lead. I liked the way InterChange virtually erased the teacher-student hierarchy by encouraging students to listen and respond to each other without relying on me to fill in the gaps.

As I became more comfortable with my role as a horse, so did most of my students. Because they could take as much time as necessary to compose their responses before posting them to the class discussion, I expected InterChange to encourage some of the quieter participants to speak their minds more forcefully than they did in oral discussion. And they did. Although their computer-assertiveness did not always translate into oral-assertiveness, I was glad some of the quieter students had found at least one forum in which to make their voices heard.

But not everyone did. Despite the advantage of providing a forum in which some of the quieter students can "talk," I am concerned about students who can't keep pace with the galloping speed. In my experience, these students are slow readers and writers, and InterChange gives them a double-whammy by forcing them to not only write quickly, but to read quickly. Slow readers seem frustrated with InterChange because it assumes that all participants can read the responses at about the same speed. I have watched these students read the class dialogue and start to compose their own responses, but by the time they are halfway done, they glance at new responses and realize the full discussion has moved to another point. They have ideas; they just can't keep pace in time to share them.

I might not have realized this difficulty if a student hadn't come to me after class and said, "Sorry I didn't write anything today. I'm a slow reader and I couldn't keep up." After hearing this, I reread the discussions from previous classes and traced the responses of students who I perceived to have the most difficulty with reading comprehension. Sure enough, three of these students were the same people who didn't seem comfortable with InterChange. Their responses seemed either to lag behind other students' responses or to be brief and undeveloped.

The next time we used InterChange I asked students to write their responses beforehand and bring them on disk. We began class by copying our responses onto InterChange, then reading and responding to them. This helped the slow readers insofar as each person's initial response had an equal opportunity to be read and heard, but it continued to privilege fast readers over slow readers: watching twenty responses posted to the screen was more overwhelming than simply following a dialogue-in-progress.

One alternative to using InterChange during class is for students to log onto InterChange outside of class time so they can read and write at their own pace without the pressure to perform as quickly as other students. Although

this method is a viable alternative, it tends to resemble a typical computer conference instead of the real-time rhythm of InterChange, and I want to preserve the excitement InterChange inspires without the pressure to read more quickly than one's capability.

A different method that does not seem to discourage slow readers is something you probably already do in your classrooms. Everyone posts a response at the beginning of class, but instead of reading all the entries, students read and respond to the entry above and/or below their own, thereby developing a dialogue with one or two students instead of with the entire class. An alternative suggestion is to involve students in one-to-one on-line peer editing; another method a colleague suggests is to create several sub-conferences instead of one main conference. While sub-conferences can be grouped either randomly or by ability, such groupings highlight pedagogical questions about the effectiveness of separating slow readers from the rest of the class. One solution is to alternate between random and specific groupings, thus addressing some of these pedagogical concerns.

Regardless of which method you use, the point is that it is important to keep in mind which methods seem specifically accessible to slow readers. Using the above/below, one-to-one on-line editing, or sub-conferences method encourages more students to participate at a non-threatening pace. Some students will gallop and others will trot, but by being conscious of which methods we use, hopefully all students will be able to participate in meaningful dialogue.

Emily Hughes, Instructor
Department of English, University of Michigan

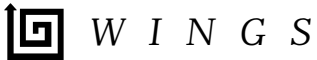
Call for Contributions

Wings invites you to react and respond to any part of this newsletter. If you have a short (400-600 words) response or a longer, more complex contribution (1000-1500 words), please send it in disk form (3.5") in Microsoft Word (ver 4 or 5) for Macintosh or plain ASCII format to:

The Daedalus Group, Inc.
1106 Clayton Lane, Suite 280W
Austin, TX 78723
512-459-0637

or send it via e-mail to wings@daedalus.com

If we accept your submission, we will pay \$25 for short pieces and \$50 for longer pieces.

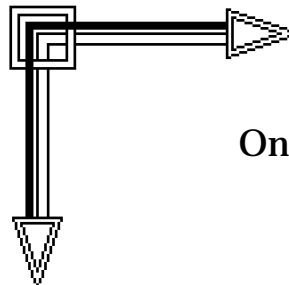


W I N G S

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Wings is published once every long semester (usually in October and April). It is designed to provide teachers and users of Daedalus software with tips, stories, and resources, both technical and pedagogical. Wings is sent to everyone on the Wings mailing list. If you are just seeing a second-hand copy of this newsletter, please drop us a line or write to us at wings@daedalus.com to be placed on the mailing list. It's almost impossible to know who needs a copy since DIWE is sold to institutions, so it's important that we have your address.

Wings (the current edition, as well as previous ones) is also available via anonymous ftp, through our gopher server, and from our Mosaic home page, all of which reside on daedalus.com.



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These materials are also available through our new Gopher server, which can also be found on daedalus.com.

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