

CONFESSIONS OF A WAC (WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM) GROUPIE

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Where do I begin to tell the story of my love affair with WAC? The bug hit me ages ago when I was a shorthand/transcription teacher. How exciting to teach the mechanics of grammar and punctuation while teaching the arcane language of Gregg symbolic shorthand. Professional Business Education conferences dealing with the subject of shorthand abounded in tips and techniques for teaching punctuation, sentence structure, and grammar to the would-be stenographer/secretary.

Fast forward years later when Gregg/Pitman symbolic shorthand “bit the dust” and left all shorthand/transcription teachers lamenting: Where are the students going to learn grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation? Everyone knows that shorthand is THE only place to learn the secrets of mechanical writing.” That thinking always left me wondering, did the English departments go out of business when we shorthand/transcription teachers were drumming the mechanics into the ears and fingers of our students? Now with the demise of symbolic shorthand, whence cometh our help? Well, when CUNY embarked on WAC, a mere century ago, I began to attend the meetings or workshops at Hostos. A small cadre of faculty came together at Hostos to discover the importance of WAC and to experience the writing transformation of our students. Those of us brave enough to venture into the foray of creating a Writing Intensive course were armed with a writing fellow, a stipend, and support groups via workshops and CUNY conferences. There I stood in fear and trembling—the shorthand/transcription teacher who had taught the mechanics of writing and a teacher of Business English—all mechanical writing, of course. Definitely, not a Hemingway, Morrison, O’Neill, or Steinbeck. I could write clear and concise sentences and write essays that had an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, and I could teach my students to do the same. Easy, yes? So, why was I so afraid, and why did I take two years with two writing fellows to create my first WI course?

Simple. Shorthand/transcription teachers no longer had the market on writing mechanics. Now, we had to view our work in light of all the research. In addi-

tion, many of us had to flee to other courses in the Business Education arena because symbolic shorthand had gone the way of all flesh like Latin—another course that developed “expert” writers. So, here we are with all of the other non-English disciplines attempting to incorporate writing in our syllabi and encouraging our students to enjoy the tedious task of revising. Our workshop gurus made the revision process look so easy and seem so much fun. I had a great time in the workshops but ask me how enjoyable the experience was for my students and we get another response. But, I am getting ahead of myself. Back to the point—fear and trembling.

For two years, I agonized over my courses. What do I include? What do my students need? Why is this not coming together? Finally, I had a summer in which I had time to reflect: What did I do in shorthand/transcription that I can work in my computer classes? My perceptive base—what did I know? What did I want to get across? New lesson, and how do I know if my students learned anything? Summary. Once I couched the WAC experience in these terms, I was good to go. Now, you couldn’t stop me from talking in the workshops. I was all fired up. I saw the light. Add to the WAC, my new-found conversion to asynchronous online teaching, and you couldn’t stop the old Figs. Now, I could combine a WI with my asynchronous online teaching, and I could comfortably work with my students.

I have attended workshops, presented at CUNY WAC and CUNY IT conferences on the value of WAC and asynchronous online teaching. I have worked with excellent writing fellows. My work with WAC has enabled me to move into General Education and see the value of Gen Ed across the curriculum, and I have come to the point where I can bravely ask colleagues to observe my class. So, when I hear a WAC workshop, conference, or CUNY conference, I am one of the first to sign up. When I hear Gen Ed workshop, conference, or CUNY conference, I am one of the first to sign up. I am unabashedly a WAC groupie!!

My experiences are no small feat. How long will this last, you ask, and where will this lead? Only one place—research: How do I know that what I am doing is working, what works, and, of course, why and for whom? Now, I have come to the point of all inquiry and curiosity—let’s examine. After all, isn’t that the point of research?