

BOOKS

Writing Instruction for Verbally Talented Youth: The Johns Hopkins Model. B. Reynolds, K. Kopelke, W. G. Durden. Aspen Systems Corporation, 1984. \$27.95.

So many publications that purport to help teachers teach writing actually provide little more than activities for generating story ideas or figures of speech. *Writing Instruction for Verbally Talented Youth* is different. Authors Reynolds, Kopelke, and Durden assume that highly verbal youngsters already have ideas and some experience in expressing them in writing. What they offer goes beyond this elementary level to the real work of writing, critique, and revision.

The book describes the method and exercises used in an introductory writing course at Johns Hopkins University's Center for the Advancement of Academically Talented Youth (CTY). While the method and exercises were developed for use with verbally talented youth, for whom they are especially appropriate, they are also applicable to average-ability youth.

A central feature of the method is the workshop in which students critique and edit each other's work. The authors describe in helpful detail two workshop formats designed to move the group from teacher-led discussions of strategies and techniques in professionally written model essays to peer evaluation of student-authored work in an environment that is psychologically supportive to young authors. To handle such a workshop effectively, the teacher must initially be a strong model for constructive inquiry into content and form in literary work, then gradually shift to a nonleadership role when students reach the point of being able to teach one another, a goal of the workshop technique. Obviously, much of the success of a writing program using this method rests on having such a teacher, which the authors do not hesitate to point out.

Writing Instruction for Verbally Talented Youth has 13 chapters, divided into sections

entitled "Preparing to Write," "Writing," and "Rewriting." Each chapter is a lesson with clearly stated objectives, notes for the teacher, exercises, examples where appropriate, concluding comments and/or post-assignments, and references. As the authors state, the lessons need not be used in the order presented; rather, they will be most effective when used in response to writing questions and problems arising in the workshop sessions.

The 4-chapter section entitled "Preparing to Write" includes lessons designed to help students (a) break out of familiar patterns of perception—both about writing and about the world—and (b) develop an effectively functioning group.

"Writing" is a 6-chapter section that guides close examination of words, sentences, paragraphs, and figures of speech. Additional lessons focus on effective beginnings and endings. Strategies and techniques to accomplish the writer's purpose are brought out in each workshop discussion.

An especially important feature of the Johns Hopkins method is that revision is incorporated into each lesson. Seeing revision "at work" as an essential component of the writing process will help students overcome the common reluctance to revise "creative writing" and the common misconception that once spelling and punctuation are correct an essay is perfect. The "Rewriting" section further reinforces the importance of revision through student participation in "re-seeing" and "re-thinking." After experiencing the Johns Hopkins method, students are bound to understand what Hemingway meant when he said, "it is in rewriting that writers are made."

The appendices contain helpful material. One includes sample student essays with teacher comments illustrating that honest and specific feedback can be given without harshness. Another has some very sensible and sensitive helps for evaluating student work. There is also a list of professionally authored essays to use as models for classroom critiques.

A feature of the book that makes it especially appropriate for verbally talented youth is that,

in the level of instruction and examples, it doesn't "talk down" to them. The authors' stated attitude toward young writers, that "you know more than you think you know," is fundamental to this method in which, through group exploration, students discover the forms and functions of written language.

The attitude is apparent in the authors' selection of sophisticated literary examples. Whereas metaphor is frequently taught using cute (often cliched) animal comparisons, Reynolds et al. choose their examples from effective, "real-life" language (e.g., Reverend Martin Luther King's "the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination") and thereby illustrate not only the form of metaphor but also the power of connotation. When explication of poetry is introduced, the model is Wallace Stevens' "Study of Two Pears," a poem full of subtle perceptions and language. (With less verbally talented youth, an instructor might begin with less sophisticated examples and work up to Stevens, but the nature of the group inquiry in the workshop would remain the same.)

Writing Instruction for Verbally Talented Youth is not a primer. It assumes that the teacher has some sophistication in literary analysis and in the writing process. The value of the book is in its approach to the teaching of writing, and the exercises and materials that will enable the knowledgeable teacher to guide students through the writing, critique, and revision processes. It should be a welcome source of ideas and direction for the secondary-level English teacher or the faculty sponsor of a school literary publication. It would also be a good addition to an instructional methods course for English majors who will teach writing at the secondary (including junior high) or college level.

In the preface, the authors state that this volume describes the introductory course of a 3-year program in writing at CTY. Courses on analytic writing and fiction follow. Here's hoping Reynolds, Kopelke, and Durden will share more of their instructional expertise and ideas in a sequel.

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Psychological and Educational Perspectives on Learning Disabilities. J. K. Torgesen and B. Y. L. Wong, Editors. Orlando, FL: Academic Press, 1986. 460 pp. \$24.95 paperback, \$49.50 casebound.

Psychological and Educational Perspectives on Learning Disabilities is an edited text synthesizing selected areas of learning disabilities investigation conducted within the past decade. With roughly equal attention allocated to basic and applied research, Torgesen and Wong have targeted an audience of researchers, graduate students, and experienced practitioners, with the purpose of presenting current, scholarly reviews of recent developments in the study of learning disabilities. For the most part, the papers are well written and informative, with sufficient documentation and examples to inform research and to guide practice. Consequently, this book represents a solid contribution to the learning disabilities field.

The volume is organized into three sections. In the first, issues concerning definition, research methodology, and assessment are discussed. Wong reviews procedural and conceptual problems of definition, upon which Senf amplifies with a discussion of sociological and scientific perspectives on definitional and methodological issues. Then, Tindal and Marston present a direct and repeated assessment methodology as an alternative to traditional assessment models. These chapters concerning definitional ambiguities and alternative directions for study and assessment of learning disabilities provide good background for and define a set of themes to recur in many of the remaining chapters of the volume.

Part II focuses on psychological characteristics of learning disabled children. Stanovich and Mann each discusses language-processing problems and the role of phonological processing abilities in the acquisition of early reading skills. Krupski reviews research on attention problems; Pearl, Donahue, and Bryan discuss social skills, and Licht and Kristner synthesize literature on motivational problems of learning disabled students. These chapters draw on concepts and methods from developmental and experimental psychology and represent scholarly, well organized integrations.

The final part of the volume presents research on six intervention techniques. Pelham analyzes studies on psychostimulant drug therapy;