Each product humans create embodies the forms of thinking that led to its realization, each one of them provides testimony to what humans can achieve, each one represents a silent but eloquent statement concerning the scope and possibilities of the human mind, and each one comes into being through the use of one or more forms of representation.
—ELLIOT W. EISNER

chapter 8

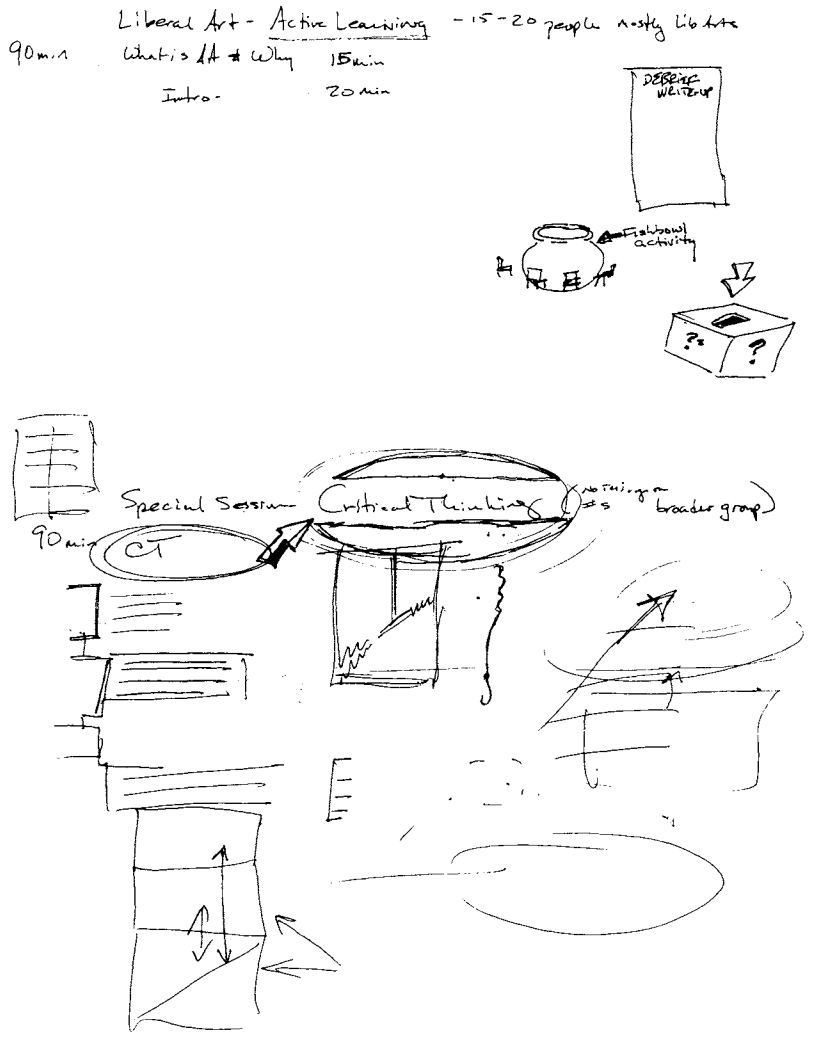
Drawing Students into Writing
A Faculty-Development Workshop

ERIC H. HOBSON

For highly visual learners like myself, sketching and doodling are often more productive prewriting, problem-solving activities than many of the invention heuristics presented in composition textbooks. The rather nondescript page from one of my notebooks (see Figure 8–1) is richer than it may appear at first glance. Doodled during a planning meeting for a series of two writing-across-the-curriculum workshops, a meeting that had lasted two hours without anyone feeling that, although we had accomplished much, it was a complete success. The first workshop would include a series of mini-lectures punctuated by active learning activities, beginning with a "fishbowl" task and ending with a "question box" writing activity that would serve as an opportunity to debrief participants. By considering this drawing, my collaborating colleague and I were able to recognize that something was missing from the record of the meeting in his notes: workshop 1 was coherent and fairly well developed; workshop 2 was still amorphous and ill-defined. Seeing this imbalance, we shifted our attention to finding a focus around which to construct the second workshop.

Drawing, not writing, had led us to a crucial insight about the structural shortcomings of the text we were developing; the drawing illustrated the incomplete relationship, in the second workshop, between ideas that seemed adequately linked when recorded in words. Nonverbal forms of communication and representation like drawing offer writers tools for discovery, planning, revision, and

Figure 8–1
WAC workshop meeting notes



problem-solving. This is a power worth exploring at length to help developing writers increase their communicative flexibility and effectiveness, and to explore and integrate visual activities in verbal educational settings. If teachers can recognize that they too draw and doodle in an attempt to express meaning, even if they are not always

consciously aware of this activity or its usefulness, they have found a starting point for building visual-verbal bridges.

The previous chapters have presented many practical applications for teaching writing in a visual culture. These applications demonstrate that a visually informed approach to writing instruction has much to offer teachers in disciplines other than English. Implicit in these presentations, however, is the assumption of some level of consistent community support for such departures from the traditional, exclusively verbal language and writing class. And, make no mistake about it, community support is a decidedly important element in creating an environment that works to augment, not undermine, the visual-verbal integrations modeled in the preceding pages. Gaining the support of colleagues takes work. To help in this effort, this chapter presents an outline for a faculty development workshop designed to help teachers (principally, English and language arts teachers) see the possibilities that exist for writing instruction in using visual and visual-verbal activities.

Visual-Verbal Integration in the Writing Class

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, when I lead faculty development workshops that explore the relationship and transferability of writing and the visual arts, I usually ask participants to begin the session by taking five minutes to complete Activity 1, the "draw student X" task. And, as I noted in some detail, writing teachers at first find this task difficult, particularly for reasons linked to their own comfort and confidence in their ability to express themselves through writing and to their lack of confidence about using other forms of communication (musical or mathematical notation, for example) as effectively. The time allowed is limited, and as a result, the drawings tend to be less-than-perfect—rushed, simple, and highly idiosyncratic. These characteristics are not liabilities or limitations, however. Instead, they are exactly the responses I look for because they help me to establish several points I hope the workshop supports in theory and illustrates in practice:

- Drawing and writing involve similar processes.
- This similarity can be used to help teach many students to write more effectively.
- This strategy is particularly applicable to students whose personalities and learning styles do not mesh well with dominant methods of teaching writing.

Drawing as Process

By looking at drawing as both a tool and a process for exploring and articulating ideas, not just as a means for creating "Art," it is easier to convince writing teachers that the composing processes that drive the creation of the plastic and two-dimensional arts have much to offer students cut from various cloths. A useful observation at this point is Golden's comment that "the way in which a painter moves from sketch to completed painting could serve as an analogue for a way of progressing from draft to final paper" (1986, 59). The understanding that the composing processes across different media are similar; the basic algorithms are not as disconnected as we in the verbal fields believe. Golden's statement also supports our conviction that we need to provide a means for students to tap into their own ways of conceiving the world and translate those visions into various communicative forms, including writing.

Although we have tended to isolate drawing and writing in separate corners of the curriculum and separate corners of our lives, they are not alien, antithetical activities. Visual artists write; verbal artists draw. There has been a long history of this crossing over and cross-pollination, even if it has not always been highlighted or used as an argument for incorporating elements of both in the teaching of each. Pointing out the visual creations of artists remembered entirely for their literary efforts—such as Emily Bronte, e.e. cummings, Edgar Allan Poe, or William Faulkner—opens the minds of workshop participants to the possibility that the traditional gulf between the verbal and the visual arts is not necessarily natural. It is understandable that teachers often cling to the belief they do not have the ability to use drawing in their writing.

Worth stressing at this point in the workshop is that writers who draw and visual artists who write are using these media as tools for exploring their thinking. Our students, too, can use these alternatives to their advantage, making writing a more productive activity.

Drawing Is Invention

For the artist and the writer, invention is an essential activity. Verbal texts, like pictures and other types of visual texts, do not spring fully formed into the world. Rather, a time and a place for exploration, play, and invention help verbal and visual artists alike discover what they are trying to say and explore their options for saying it. Sketching, the visual artist's primary medium for participating in a wide variety of invention heuristics, is necessary for

- playing with initial ideas
- discovering what one already knows
- identifying gaps in one's knowledge
- developing solutions to problems
- retaining and retrieving images

By this point in the workshop we have used drawing as a form of discovery, invention, and early problem-solving, albeit within a very limited, low-risk context. I then ask workshop participants to complete Activity 2, a more stereotypical "English teacher" task. This task is alien in only one respect: participants aren't allowed to use writing while they are engaged in it. Otherwise, because they are dealing with words and the familiar task of explaining grammar and mechanics, it is perceived as fairly accessible and only moderately risky.

The drawings that result from Activity 2 are often cursory, basic, rough, and highly idiosyncratic. Most responses resemble the example in Figure 8–2 which represents the concept "parallelism."

As rudimentary as these drawings are, however, they have much to offer on a number of levels:

1. **Workshop:** By sharing these drawings, participants experience success in explaining highly abstract, even arbitrary, features of language without using a single word. For many of us, this is quite a revelation.
2. **Individual/Personal:** Teachers need to experience visual activities of this sort in order to gain confidence that they can use visuals. They also need to feel the different levels of comfort/

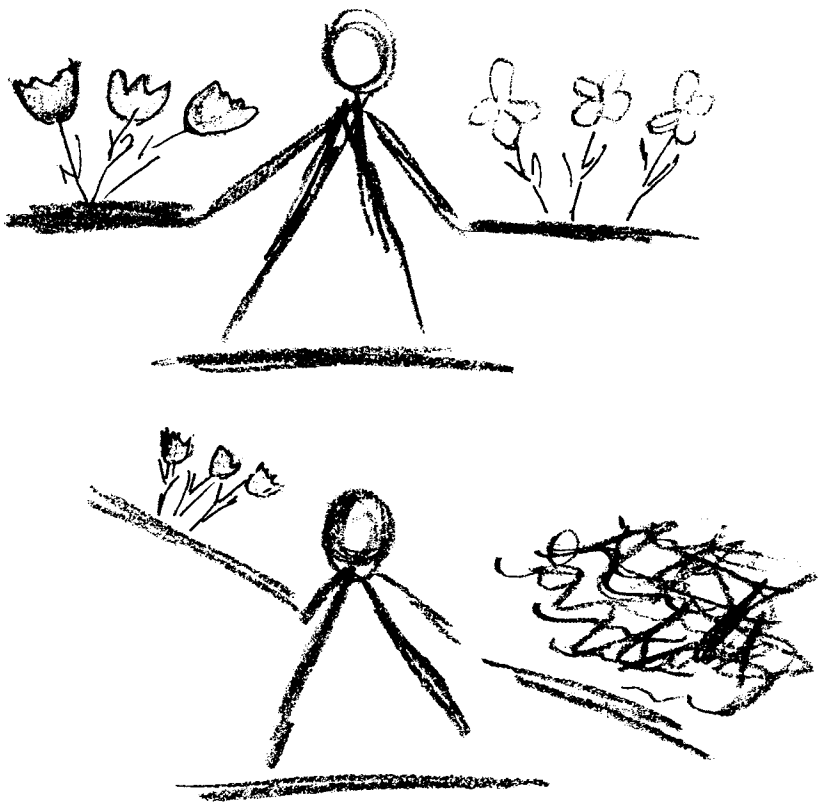
Activity 2

TASK: Doodle a picture or a description of one of the following grammatical errors or problems:

comma splice	split infinitive	subject/verb disagreement
fused sentence	misplaced modifiers	mixed metaphors
possessives	parallelism	double negative
tense shifts	person shifts	repetition

TIME: 10 minutes
TIPS: Sketch quickly
Trust your instincts
Make changes: perfectionist impulses are limiting
GOAL: Regardless of how primitive the drawing, try to be able to explain the resulting visual text to another person.

Figure 8–2
"Parallelism"



discomfort students experience when they are asked to use media for which they have little skill or history of success.

3. **Teachers:** Activities like this offer teachers alternative and specific ways to help visual learners and concrete thinkers understand the abstract rules of grammar and usage they encounter in class and in their textbooks. Building from this base, they can create visual-verbal bridges for these learners.

Drawing Aids Revision

Revision is the most difficult aspect of the composing process to teach. I preach the virtue and value of revision as *the* essential tool

in the writer's toolbox, but, I am never quite convinced that my students value revision much beyond my course. I find Golden's (1986) words somewhat comforting: "Often when college students are asked to revise their drafts, they insert, delete, or change material without considering the effect on the entire composition. Current approaches to revision, although beneficial, frequently remain too abstract for Introductory Composition students who cannot recognize the absence of harmonious connections between paragraphs or identify expressions that might convey a vague meaning to a reader" (59).

Perhaps the abstract nature of my discussion of revision—the how and the why—fails to achieve the desired effect with my students. A much more tangible approach is to engage students in the revision process through drawing, a medium that they can see and physically manipulate. Using that awareness as a starting point, there are a number of ways to apply strategies and algorithms developed by visual artists to help student writers learn to control the process more productively.

Activity 3 (and, in conjunction, Activity 4 and Activity 5) provides one strategy for introducing revision in a systematic, tangible way, one that leaves a record of the steps taken and the decisions that prompted them.

Many writers—especially those who function in a concrete operational way—have difficulty dealing with the abstract nature of the activities we ask them to undertake in a writing course, even tasks as easy as "tell me how you got here." Sketching events allows struggling writers to

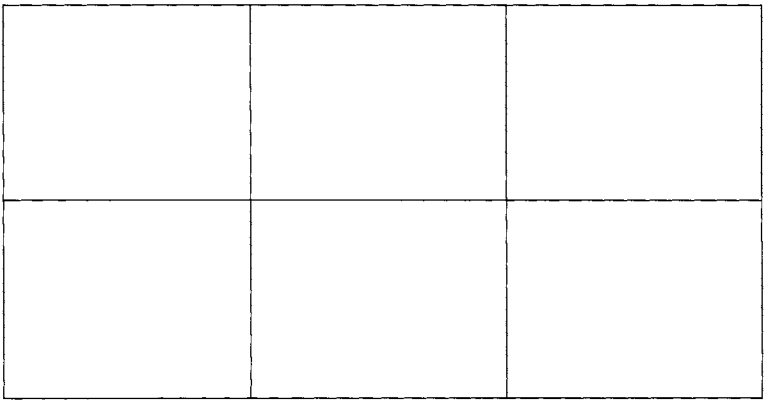
- deal more effectively with chronological time
- make the abstract concrete
- pin down fleeting images and memories for further reflection and development

In addition, sketching provides composition teachers a convenient and inclusive forum for discussing and modeling abstract revision strategies. Reporting on one teacher's use of drawing in an elementary language arts classroom to encourage better writing, Ernst (1996) notes that "Darcy concentrated on helping her third graders understand the connection between picture making and revision. She discovered that once a picture was revised, her students naturally revised their writing about the picture as well. Revision is literally reseeing; a picture makes this difficult skill concrete" (147).

Activity 4 demonstrates the validity of this observation and its applicability.

Activity 3

TASK: Draw a storyboard of at least six one-frame cartoons that recounts "My Trip to This Workshop Site."
TIME: 15 minutes
TIPS: Sketch quickly
Trust your lines—the sketches are "writer-based" and must make sense only to you
Go for a broad overview rather than minute detail
Emphasize the sequence of events
GOAL: Be able to describe the event to someone else using *only* your sketches.



Reluctant writers of all ages often face potential writer's blocks that reinforce their apprehension about their writing abilities and reenergize their resistance to taking any risks, especially the type of risk from which learning moments arise. As it is, many are pleased to survive the first draft and do not intend to go through the process again. When it comes to revising their initial drafts, they have trouble seeing their texts from the perspective of a potential reader who needs details that support the author's claims in order to come to agreement with the author's thesis. These writers need help in learning to recognize the types of details that readers appreciate having available as they read. Sketching provides an alternative to yet another lecture about the need for details and illustrative examples in successful texts.

One of the most useful aspects of Activity 4 is that, in completing the directions as given, students must consciously consider their ini-

Activity 4

TASK: Use the storyboard to plan a narrative rendition of your journey to today's workshop.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS:

1. Separate frames/sections and, for effect, rearrange in something other than strict chronological time.
2. Delete any frames that are not absolutely necessary to the narrative.
3. Add any details or resketch any frames where more information is available/needed/relevant.
4. Insert any needed words to act as memory prompts.

TIME: 10 minutes

TIPS: Storyboards (grids) with at least six (6) distinct drawing spaces work best
Sketch quickly and confidently
The images need only make sense to you

tial sketches in terms of missing information. For many visual learners, looking at their emerging "text" while it remains in visual form allows them to recognize important details they have overlooked, assumed were obvious, or only just remembered. Once they recognize the problem, most writers—and all workshop participants—go back to their sketches to add needed information. Workshop discussion can focus on the ease with which one can segue from this revision task to written texts.

Olson (1992) suggests a further step to help students identify and provide the types of additional information readers need. She asks students to engage in any of the following "special effects" tasks: drawing from a strange point of view, drawing gradual transformations or metamorphoses, or "zoom" drawings (36). I find the "zoom," close-up task particularly apt as a tool to develop awareness of how to create that level of detail. I have used this type of drawing repeatedly with students in writing classes and with clients in the writing center. Within the workshop setting, however, I require participants to take part of one of their drawings in Activity 4 and do a close-up. (see Activity 5).

The previous activities take workshop participants through most of the writing process, but in a less familiar medium. Only when they have completed Activity 3 and 4 (Activity 5, too, when I decide there

Activity 5

TASK:	**1.** Choose one panel from your narrative about getting to this workshop and, in the space provided below, zoom in on the most important or most interesting part of the scene. Draw this part of the panel in as much detail as you can.
	2. When you complete the close-up, list the specific details you included in the drawing.
TIME:	15 minutes

is time to include it), do I allow them to translate their narrative into written form. By delaying their use of verbal communicative tools, I hope that the workshop participants

- experience how it feels for their students to attempt complex communicative tasks in unfamiliar mediums
- recognize that a writing-based invention and revision activity is not the exclusive way to create a first draft
- consider experimenting with visual composing activities alongside standard activities in language arts and writing-across-the-curriculum classes

Conclusion

What is it about a drawing that can unlock a storehouse of past experience? By returning to images I have drawn, I am more likely to remember snippets of conversation, the movements and reactions of people, and the mood of the surrounding environment. Images offer learners like me a "thicker" record of past events.

Although a predilection for images fits the learning styles profile of visually dependent people, mounting evidence from cognitive research bolsters my belief that visually based activity offers all students a way to make their writing processes more flexible and efficient. Much of human cognition is imagistic and impressionistic, more linked to general gestalts than to specific words. Visual images lie at the root of human thought and subsequent communication. This model intuitively makes sense because images would seem to be more compact and efficient storage units than words. Supporting this intuitive leap, Sereno's research into the origins of human language use

suggests that visual images serve as the base for a logical reason: the *wiring* in the brain that produces language is built on long-standing visual processing systems put to new use (for more on Sereno's research, see Chapter 6).

As the discussions in the preceding chapters have demonstrated, integrating visual elements into instruction across the curriculum affords benefits to all involved. We are convinced that carefully articulated and constructed uses of visually enhanced pedagogy are extremely powerful teaching and learning tools. As Shuman and Wolfe remind us, "It is the galvanizing of thought through the use of any form of creative endeavor that contributes to learning; ideally, then, students should be permitted access to all of these composing, meaning-making processes. In a classroom where students are encouraged and permitted to use many different forms of composing and creating, the potential for learning seems greater than in classrooms where only limited forms are employed or allowed" (4–5).