

Writing as a Problem-Solving Strategy



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I have always thought of writing as a problem-solving activity. With the advent of social networking, I have to believe that a lot of problems are being solved out there in cyberspace! At the very least, there is a lot of sharing of personal experience and feelings, which gives young people the opportunity to practice self-monitoring. All the tools—blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and Google docs, combined with the ability to add digital stills and video and then share your efforts—are engaging and fun. The medium literally entices you to write. And then if you get responses and feedback, you are encouraged to write more. On the Internet you can take advantage of the long tail effect, as the potential audience is so huge that you are almost guaranteed that someone out there besides your mother is interested in your thoughts and experiences.

Writing is problem solving of the messy, ill-defined kind, in which you do not know the solution or have a specified method of arriving at a solution as you do in many mathematics problems. In writing, many solutions are often possible and acceptable, and you have to develop your own criteria for making choices.

Once you start writing, the cognitive processes you go through are many, complex, and recursive. Cognitive processes include thinking about content, audience, spelling, and grammar; making choices about what to say, who you are saying it to, and how to say it; and evaluating what you've said, and often rethinking and redefining your ideas all at the same time.

When you think of writing as problem solving, it becomes a useful instructional strategy

for all curriculum areas. All teachers can take these tools and find a use for them in their classrooms. Using these tools will engage students in a problem-solving and communication process with content for their classmates or an audience beyond the classroom.

And writing is an adventure. Sometimes when you start, you have no idea where you'll end up. Starting out this column I never would have thought I would be connecting writing as problem solving to writing using electronic tools as an instructional strategy, the latter of which happens to be the target topic of this issue.

And speaking of writing adventures—one change for this volume is a new column called Bloggers Café. Anne Davis, Karl Fisch, Doug Johnson, Tim Lauer, Julie Lindsay, Scott McLeod, Judy O'Connell, and Jeff Utecht have all agreed to reflect on their blogs and bring to *L&L* readers the latest discussions, including new insights, important issues, hot tips, cool tools, and promising practices. They represent viewpoints from a variety of job titles, including teachers, principals, library media specialists, and teacher educators. Doug Johnson will be contributing to the Bloggers Café rather than continue his Media Matters column. Tim Lauer, principal of Meriweather Lewis Elementary School in Portland, Oregon, starts the column in this issue (See p. 10).

Welcome to Volume 35 of *Learning & Leading with Technology*. We're proud to have reached another milestone volume and would like to thank all of our contributors, readers, and advertisers for their contributions to making *L&L* a valuable resource. ■

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