

# Draftings In

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Volume 5  
Number 1 *Draftings In Thematic Units in  
English: Interaction for the Twenty-First Century*

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Article 2

1990

## Prefatory Note: Happiness and the Teaching of English

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### Recommended Citation

LaRocque, Geraldine E. (1990) "Prefatory Note: Happiness and the Teaching of English," *Draftings In*: Vol. 5 : No. 1 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/draftings/vol5/iss1/2>

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# Prefatory Note:

## Happiness and the Teaching of English

*Happiness is the full use of one's powers along the lines of excellence in a life that offers scope.*

Could the above Greek definition of happiness serve as an all-encompassing goal for teachers of English in the secondary school? If so, how could we encourage the full, excellent use of *all* of our students' talents in ways calculated to improve their public and private lives? In helping students use all their talents, would we not also counteract the perception that the quality of English instruction has declined?

*The English Coalition Conference: Democracy Through Language* (Lloyd-Jones & Lunsford, 1989) suggests that excellence in English instruction can be achieved through:

- interactive classrooms;
- use of groups and collaborative learning;
- use of a variety of written materials and media;
- analysis of students' own language and the study of the power of language;
- wide reading of various *genres*;
- systematic use of listening skills;
- extensive use of oral skills in such activities as readers' theater, reading aloud, and group discussions;
- practice of many kinds of writing;
- use of inter-disciplinary and multi-cultural materials and experiences;

and

- orderly classrooms in which there is support for individual projects, divergent thinking, and diverse students.

Also addressing excellence, John I. Goodlad in his book *A Place Called School* speaks of the necessity to transcend conventional wisdom in instruction and to make provisions for individual differences. He goes so far as to say, "I hope that future teachers will . . . be effectively separated from most of the conventional ways of teaching" (314). The authors of this issue of *Draftings* believe that the following three units do exactly that through the use of unconventional, but relevant, materials and methodology. The units also provide models for subdivisions of a complete year's curriculum.

Most of all, the creators of the units believe that the lessons will be of interest to a variety of students and will motivate them to learn. The study plans range in subject matter from the Vietnam War to collaborative learning and civic participation. They range in grade level from the eighth through the eleventh grade. They intend to produce learning via student participation and collaboration in refreshing and meaningful activities. Each unit focuses on a question of importance, and each incorporates thinking that goes beyond the boundaries of conventional teaching.

As members of the University of Northern Iowa's graduate class in English Curriculum, the authors came to believe, through reading and discussion, that the achievement of the Coalition's and Goodlad's aims might be attempted through thematic units not dependent on anthologies—units, which challenge traditional ways of teaching English and which put the teachers and students at the cutting edge of theory. Because one of the central missions of the University of Northern Iowa has been teacher education, it seems fitting that a *Draftings* volume should include secondary school English curricular materials which enlarge the scope and boundaries of the teaching

of English by integrating theory with practice and stressing such methods as collaboration and student-centered learning.

Each of the following classroom-ready units includes at least some of the features considered important for learning and for succeeding in life:

- Content reflecting cultural diversity;
- Content reflecting “real” problems;
- Schemata which facilitate the making of connections;
- Individual reading;
- Group reading;
- In-common reading;
- Work days in class, and days to record reading;
- Imaginative and expository writing;
- Problem solving;
- Motivation;
- Individualization of assignments;
- Experience in using the library;
- Development of leadership skills;
- Experience in interpersonal relations and team work;
- Encouragement of creative and critical thinking;
- Computer use;
- Evaluation demanding analysis rather than rote memory; and
- Analysis of the power of language.

Thematic units incorporating, integrating, and implementing the above components are difficult and time-consuming to create. J. Behrens, C. Nicholson, S. Savereide and I, working collaboratively, hoped that these units might serve as a springboard for other teachers whose time for curriculum development may be limited. The units are open to expansion and modification to meet different needs: teachers can alter the units for use in grade levels other than those specified; they can also add skills with which their students may need help, since all necessary skills cannot be covered in three units; each unit includes three fully developed lessons, but teachers will also need to expand other lessons with behavioral objectives, motivation, teaching procedures, and evaluation.

We recognize that no matter how these units are used, teachers will want to modify them, taking into consideration the teachers’ purposes, their students’ abilities and backgrounds (educational, socio-economic, cultural, health, and psychological), their students’ maturity, the school’s regulations, and the teacher’s own strengths and abilities. Variations in the time available for the unit and a variety of motivational activities suitable for different types of students will also lead to changes. We hope, of course, that these units will inspire ideas and plans for the readers’ own units based on their successful teaching.

Here’s to happiness for teachers and students who are using their talents along lines of excellence in a curriculum that offers scope!

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## References

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