Write, Draw, or Depict: An Activity of Choice!

by Rose Blucher, M.Ed.

This activity is designed to generate quick answers to previously learned information by offering students a variety of response choices. It can be used across the curriculum and with open-ended questions such as, "What If Questions". I prefer to use colorful Post-Its, instead of 8.5 x 11 notebook paper. The unique nature of the Post-It is highly motivating to students and encourages struggling writers to recognize that their answers do not have to be lengthy or even in written form!

The teacher can place the responses on the white board to share with the class, and can categorize responses by moving the Post-Its around. This activity has an additional benefit of providing students the "stretch" they need as they leave their seat to place their answer on the board. Teachers may also choose to have the students keep their responses at their desk instead of posting them on the board at the front of the classroom. If the student chooses to "depict" an answer by using building materials or some form of dramatic expression, he or she would simply write the word "DEPICT" on the Post-it, pass it to the teacher with the other student responses and share his response, if he/she chooses, at the appropriate time. The beauty of this activity is that it allows students to expound on their answers verbally while limiting the need for lengthy written responses!

When using this activity in a small group setting, you may have sufficient time for each student to share and elaborate on the answer. Larger groups require you to use fewer responses when debriefing.

It is important to go over what the terms *Write, Draw,* and *Depict* mean for this particular activity, so that students are clear about the task requirement. The following is a general description of each form of response.

Definitions:

WRITE = Most students understand this form of expression. However, most struggling writers tend to avoid this choice. One-word answers, phrases, or sentences are accepted. Precision of language mechanics may or may not be emphasized.

DRAW = Again, most students understand how to create a drawing; however, when I explain this response form I also include a flow chart as an option. This response option may include symbols, words, and/or drawings.

DEPICT = A depiction is more difficult to explain to students. I usually start by asking the students to think about how various people in certain occupations convey their thoughts or ideas. For example, "How does a sculptor, architect, actor, etc., express ideas and thoughts?" The students quickly learn that it is acceptable to build a 3-D model with fuzzy sticks or other materials provided by the teacher, or may choose to mime, sing, or "act out" a response to the question.

Example: ***Write, Draw, or Depict*** Activity

Write draw or depict one way in which Howard Gardner's model for intelligences/learning strengths is the same as Barsch's model (auditory, visual and tactile).

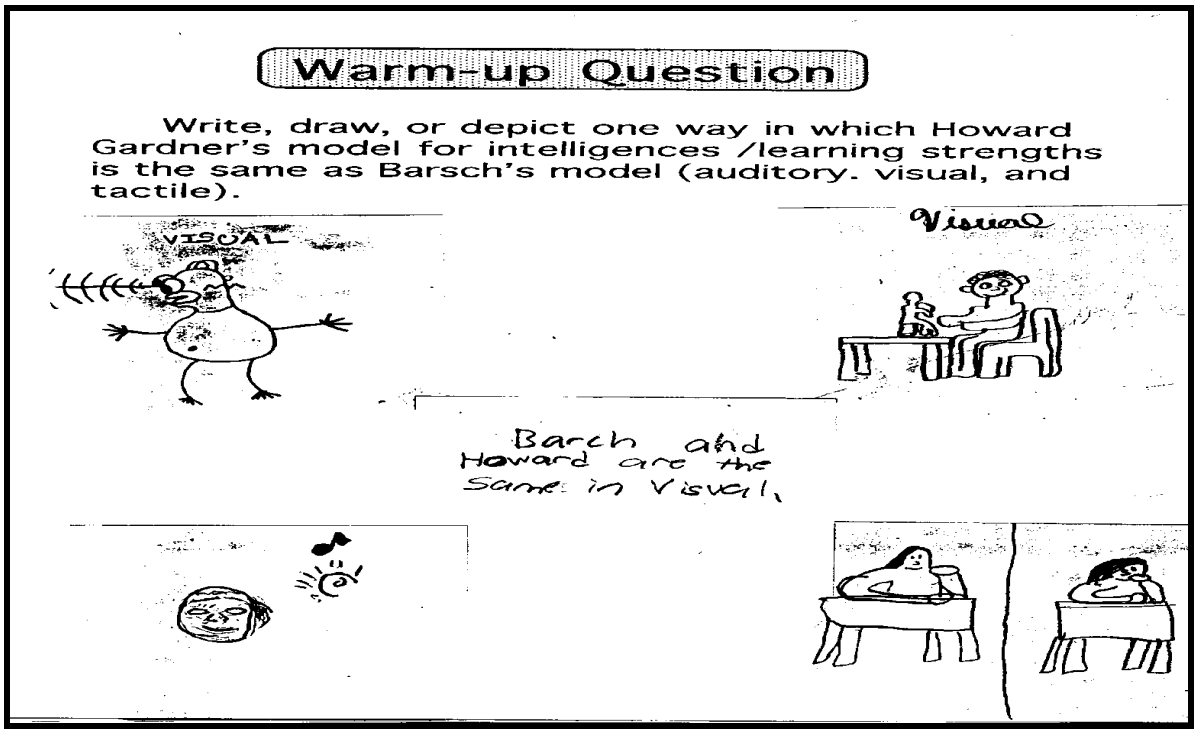

Figure 1: *Responses from a small group of 2E students, grades 2-5, attending a gifted magnet program.*

The first thing you may notice is that only **one** student out of five chose to write the answer to the question. Interestingly enough, that fifth grade child was one of the brightest of the group with excellent oral language skills and a rich vocabulary. In his response, there is no evidence of that rich vocabulary, no evidence of complex sentence structure, and no detail. The other four students chose to draw their answers. In the lower left corner, the student drew a person listeing to music, and explained that both of the paradigms had an element of auditory learning or musical/rhythmic strengths. In the upper left corner, the student chose to depict visual strengths, as did the student in the upper right corner. The student who drew a picture in the lower right was trying to make both pictures look the same, indicating that both Howard Gardner's model and Barsch's model were methods for identifying students' strengths.

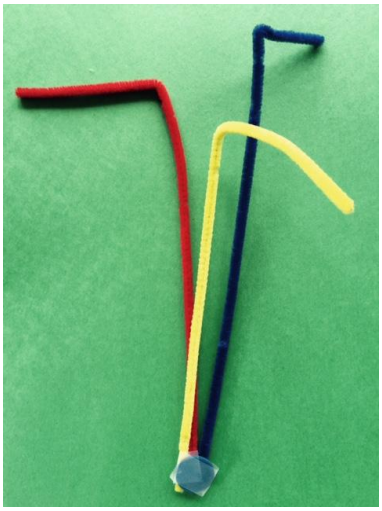

Figure 2: This assembly of pipe cleaners represents a "brain" (the student's declared strength) depicted by a second grader whose face dropped when I mentioned that he could "write" his answer. Fortunately, his face lit up when he was told he could use art or building materials to create his answer. At that point he said, "I love to build!" In describing his answer, he explained that each pipe cleaner was a primary color, "which could not be made into other colors, but can be used to create secondary colors." He went on to describe how primary colors are combined to make secondary colors (e.g., blue and yellow combine to create green).

Figure 3: Fourth graders using Legos to show how electrically charged objects push or pull on other electrically charged objects to produce motion. Again, no writing was involved in student responses.

Figure 4: In this activity, TAG Coordinator, Rob Roman of Bowie, MD adapted the ***Write, Draw, or Depict*** activity for use in a yearlong project on architecture and city planning called City by Design. Here, an elementary-aged group used clay to create model buildings for a futuristic city. Once the students finalize their designs in clay, they built a final version using more permanent materials like cardboard or plastic. In the final step of the project, the students work as a team to assemble their buildings to create the city. This was a pullout group of twice exceptional students that met weekly to address areas of weakness (in this case, organizational skills) through strategies based on their strengths.

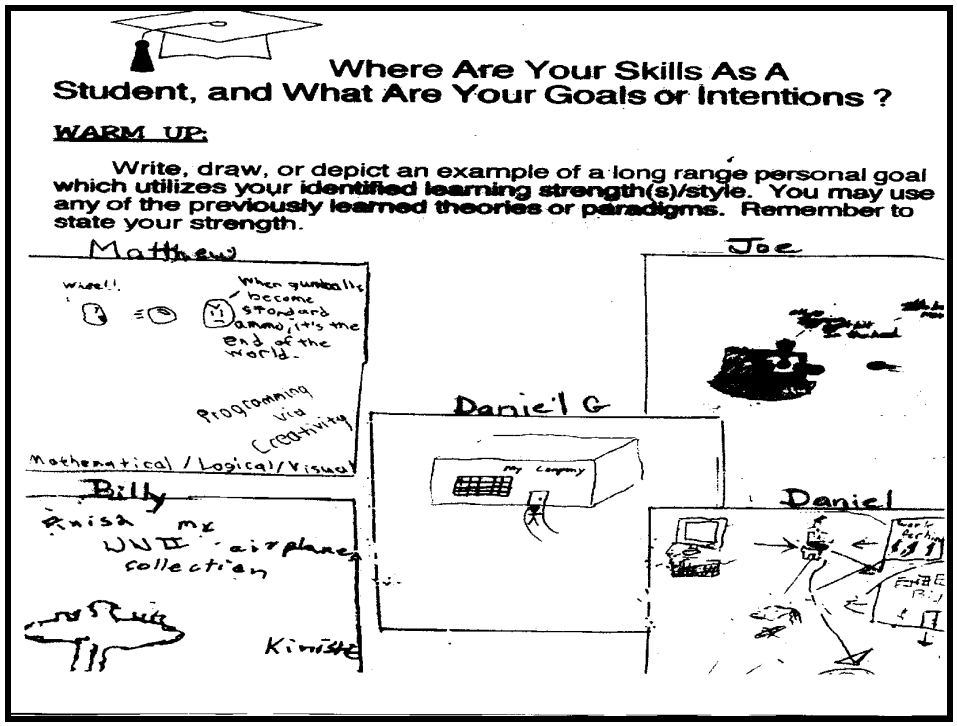

Figure 5: These responses were the culminating activity in a unit on goal setting with a group of twice-exceptional high school students. Note that, again, none of these responses involved writing in sentences.

- Daniel G. was very mathematically inclined, and a very concrete thinker. His drawing in the center shows the main office for a landscaping business that he had already started in tenth grade. Note the accurate perspective and carefully spaced architectural elements in his drawing.

- Billy's goal, shown in the lower left corner, was to become a expert in World War II history ("… my WWII airplane collection"). His stength was in kinesthetic learning.

- In the upper left corner, Matthew's picture shows his plan to use his creativity and programming skills to bring a video game to market ("When gumballs become ammo, it's the end of the world."). Matthew is a mathematical/logical/visual thinker.

- Joe was an athlete. He wanted to become a professional hockey player, so his picture in the upper right corner shows a goalie in front of the cage for a hockey team.

- Daniel, in the lower right corner, had an IQ over 140, but wasn't identified as gifted/learning disabled until he was in 9th grade when his homeroom teacher noticed he had all E's on his first quarter report card. His flow chart shows his plan to: (1) graduate from HS, (2) use his strengths in programming to write computer programs while in college, and then (3) come back to his high school, and bomb it. This picture shows how angry he was feeling and how frustrated he was because it was so difficult for him to demonstrate his advanced thinking using the methods traditionally required in the classroom.

Many social-emotional issues emerged as each student explained what their drawing represented. The students' verbal responses were a powerful demonstration of their creative abilities; these same students were less able to demonstrate their rich vocabulary and creativity when asked to respond in writing.