

CHAPTER 4.

JOINING THE WRITING RESEARCH CONVERSATION, 1977–1987

Until the 1960s the teaching of composition was traditionally performed by the literature faculty, but then composition began to become a discipline of its own, with its own research, scholarship, professional associations and publications, its own professional heritage and teaching methods. The University of New Hampshire was a leader in this new discipline and pioneered the process approach to the study of composition.

– Donald Murray, English 501 Report

My own revelations, perhaps better called confessions, are merely the speculations of one writer, and they should be suspect. They are not conventional research findings . . . I am not a researcher. I am a writer and a writing teacher. I realize better than my critics how eccentric this may be, but I hope it can be a starting place for more authoritative research.

– Donald Murray, “Reading While Writing”

If central developments impacting Donald Murray’s work during the first half of his second career were his collaborations with NESDEC and his work reforming the teaching of writing at UNH (and beyond), a critical context of his work during the second half of his second career occurred with the rise of the writing process movement, nationally, and, locally, at UNH. As numerous disciplinary historians have shown, the 1970s, what Henze et al. dub “that formative decade in the development of composition studies” (4), was a critical period of growth in and expansion of the modern field. Daly Goggin describes the 1970s (and 1980s) as a time when teachers and scholars of writing began to shift their attention away from “practical and pedagogical issues in writing instruction (i.e., the ‘what I did’ and ‘how we do it here’ projects)” and towards empirical and theoretical efforts to try to understand “discursive practices and learning processes more broadly conceived” (79). Such a “search for explanations,” as Berlin has called it, would require new mechanisms for studying writing and writers. Accordingly, in the 1970s and 1980s new journals were created, new conferences held, new doctoral programs established, and new professional organizations born. Daly Goggin captures a sense of the significance and magnitude of these

changes in her assertion that composition and rhetoric became during these years a *wissenschaft*, i.e., “an endeavor for creating knowledge” (103).

In this chapter, I explore Donald Murray’s work at UNH and his changing role in composition during its early *wissenschaft* period, from the mid 1970s to the mid to late 1980s (Murray retired from UNH in 1987). During these years, as composition and rhetoric evolved, Murray did too. His primary questions, however, remained largely the same: What happens when writers write? And how can we draw on this knowledge to inform writing’s teaching? Anyone offering new answers to these old questions had Murray’s ear, including and especially his colleagues at UNH, which became, from the mid 1970s on, a nationally recognized site of innovation in composition research. By 1987, a robust community of writers, teachers, and scholars had grown up around Murray at UNH. While he would always maintain that Carroll Towle was the originator of UNH’s writing tradition, for most who came to the university and, more broadly, to the field from the 1970s on, it was Murray, but also, as we will see, his friend and colleague Donald Graves, who were responsible for UNH’s modern writing tradition. Murray and Graves, the “Dons” as they were called, were at the center of all that was writing at UNH from the mid 1970s through the early 1990s (Graves retired in 1992).⁵⁵

In this chapter, I begin by exploring the Dons’ work together and the process by which they put UNH on the map as a center of research and scholarship in composition and literacy. I then move on to examine Murray’s late-career efforts to adapt and contribute to the emergent conversation in composition and rhetoric about writing and its teaching as the field (and he) evolved in the direction of *wissenschaft*.

“THE TIME IS NOW”

While UNH had long been an institution with a special devotion to writers and the teaching of writing, largely of the “creative” sort, it wasn’t until 1973, when Donald Graves arrived as a faculty member in the Education Department, that the university became, in the area of writing, a *knowledge-creating* institution in

55 Born just six years apart (Murray first) in towns located less than an hour from one another in southeastern Massachusetts, The Dons were both poor students who struggled in school and were, as a result, skeptical of education, traditionally conceived. Both came to the professoriate late, Murray, as we have seen, after a first career in journalism, Graves following careers as a school-teacher and administrator and as an educational minister. The nature of their work together was such that by 1984, when Murray set about writing a second edition of *A Writer Teaches Writing*, he added an additional dedicatory note to Graves, thanking him for the opportunity “to learn to write and teach” together. A decade later, Graves returned the favor, dedicating his book *A Fresh Look at Writing* to Murray, whom he called “a writer’s writer.”

the traditional sense of the term. As we see in the second epigraph above, Murray understood that his own work represented only “the speculations of one writer.” Graves, however, was a researcher first and a writer second—a researcher of children’s literacy, to be exact, whose 1973 dissertation on the composing processes of seven-year-olds won NCTE’s Promising Researcher award. Ten years later his field-changing book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* won NCTE’s David H. Russell Award. Graves was nothing short of a superstar in the field of children’s literacy and his presence at UNH was both affirming and sustaining for Murray, who found in him a colleague with the knowledge and skill to carry out the kinds of research of which he was incapable, but had long argued was needed in the field. Graves’ arrival in Durham was among the most significant events in Murray’s professional life and among the most important moments in the process by which UNH became an institution devoted not just to the teaching of writing but to its study, as well.

Murray and Graves’ collaborations began around 1975 when Murray invited Graves to travel with him to participate in the seminars at Buffalo and Rutgers mentioned in the last chapter. Graves returned the favor by enlisting Murray in an early research project with teachers in Peterborough, New Hampshire. A key event that shaped the trajectory of their work together, however, occurred in early 1976, when they appeared on a local radio station to address the controversy brewing nationally and in New Hampshire over *Newsweek’s* cover story, “Why Johnny Can’t Write.” The phone lines were so busy with New Hampshire callers wanting to discuss the nation’s “literacy crisis” that the original half-hour show was extended an additional thirty minutes and then, when the hour was up and the phones were still ringing, concluded with a promise that the Dons would return another day to continue the conversation (Center for the Study).

It would be hard to overstate the significance of “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” in New Hampshire and beyond, to discussions of literacy education and research in the 1970s (see Varnum for a detailed discussion of the article and the crisis it manufactured).⁵⁶ The article instigated a climate of animosity in America where teachers and schools were blamed for students’ supposed illiteracy and yet it also created an opportunity for teachers, scholars, and other stakeholders to press for change in literacy education and to professionalize in response to a shared threat (i.e., conservative pedagogical retrenchment). According to Henze et al., in the wake of “Why Johnny Can’t Write” teachers and scholars of writing worked to increase attention to “remediation, process, and individualized

56 As Maureen Daly Goggin points out, a full two decades after “Why Johnny Can’t Write” was published it was still being anthologized and new books were still appearing invoking the crisis it created (107).

curricula” (24). Perhaps most famous of those to catch the spirit of this moment was Mina Shaughnessy, who delivered her “Diving In” speech at the December 1975 meeting of the MLA, just weeks after “Why Johnny Can’t Write” was published (Maimon in Henze et al. 56). Walker Gibson, too, found, in the “public brouhaha about literacy” “Why Johnny Can’t Write” manufactured a kairotic moment for literacy reformers and urged teachers and scholars to seize the opportunity “to do something useful, to make the teaching of writing, both in school and in college, a respected activity” (Gibson, qtd. in Henze et al. 72).

At UNH Murray and Graves heeded Gibson’s advice. In early March 1976, just weeks after their radio appearance, Graves penned a memo to his department chair and to Murray, in his capacity as English Department chairman, to make the case for the creation of a new center on campus for the study and promotion of writing, its study, and its teaching. “Over the last six months,” Graves writes, “unusual focus has been placed on the writing habits of Americans in school settings.” To date, however, media coverage has been “highly negative” and centered on “entirely the wrong issues.” Specifically, too much attention has focused on what Graves calls “the accidents of discourse” while “the processes used to create effective writing” have been “left in the dust.” Having identified the problem, Graves proposes a local solution: since UNH possesses “unusual resources in both the English and Education departments” they should collaborate to create a center for the “better understanding and application of good writing.” “There is a readiness to deal with this in public education,” Graves writes. “The time is now” (Proposed Writing Process Center).

That spring The Center for the Study of the Writing Process, later known, simply, as The Writing Process Lab, was established as a joint venture between English and Education. With Murray tied down by his responsibilities as English Department chairman and Graves the rising star in literacy research, it was he (Graves) who served as the center’s first director. According to early correspondence the Lab would serve as a place for faculty to come together to discuss “the writing process and writing research.” Further, it would disseminate findings of university researchers to the wider state and national community and provide resources to teachers and school districts on writing and writing pedagogy. “Members of the laboratory travel throughout the United States and abroad sharing research data through speeches, workshops, and publications,” an early history of the Lab explains, describing work that was carried out largely by Graves, whose reach in evangelizing trumped even Murray’s, carrying him to Canada, England, Australia, and New Zealand (Graves “A Short Review”). By the mid to late 1970s, then, spurred on by the *Newsweek*-fueled literacy-crisis, *both* Dons were on the road, preaching the gospel of process to congregants in the U.S. and abroad.

“A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PERSON”

While Murray played a largely behind-the-scenes role in the birth of the Writing Process Lab his contributions were still significant as he supported Graves in his efforts to get the center off the ground and offered critical input and advice along the way to its founding. And Murray was, once the lab was established, an eager participant and active member. Critically, Murray was also involved in early efforts to secure funding for the lab, which commenced around late 1976/early 1977 when he and Graves met with representatives from the Ford Foundation to discuss grant opportunities. These efforts yielded fruit in 1977 when Ford awarded Graves a grant to investigate what he called “the imbalance between sending [i.e., writing] and receiving [i.e., reading]” in literacy research and teaching (5). A year or so later Graves published the results of his investigations in *Balance the Basics: Let Them Write*, written as a direct response to *Newsweek’s* “Why Johnny Can’t Write” (Murray served as a paid consultant on the project). More than a little Murray can be found in this report and so I’d like to linger on it for just a moment to give a sense of Murray’s influence on Graves, but also because Graves’ work in researching and writing the report was a critical early development in the process by which UNH expanded its existent writing tradition into the area of research.

In *Balance the Basics*, Graves takes an entirely different tack in discussing the literacy challenges facing the nation from that taken by the authors of “Why Johnny Can’t Write.” “People want to write,” he announces in the very first sentence of the report. “The desire to express is relentless” and yet “most of us are writing less and less” (4). Why? “People do not see themselves as writers,” Graves argues, believing that “they have nothing to say that is of value or interest to others.” This, he argues, is because in school students are taught that writing is largely “a form of etiquette” in which one’s primary job is to “arrange words on paper to avoid error” (4). For Graves, then, the concern facing the nation was less a generation of so-called “semiliterates,” as the authors of “Why Johnny Can’t Write” argued, than it was an educational system which failed to tap into students’ intrinsic desire to express and communicate. If, for the authors of “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” the literacy crisis was about the “accidents of discourse” found in the writing of too many of the nation’s high school graduates, the problem for Graves in *Balance the Basics* was the schools that stifle the creation of literate and engaged citizens. “People want others to know what they hold to be truthful,” Graves writes in *Balance the Basics*. “They need to detach themselves from experience and examine it by writing. They need to share what they have discovered through writing. They need the sense of authority that goes with authorship.” Schools, Graves argues, with their outdated curricula and

ineffectual teaching methods, rob students of the possibility of authorship and the sense of empowerment that follows. “Writing,” he asserts, in a sentence that nods to Murray and captures the ethos of the larger movement in which they both were key participants, “is important not as etiquette, not even as a tool, but as a contribution to the development of a person, no matter what that person’s background and talents” (6).

Beyond speaking back to traditionalist arguments about literacy development advanced in “Why Johnny Can’t Write,” Graves also argues in *Balance the Basics* for a new approach to composition pedagogy, what he calls the “process-conference” approach, which, he asserts, will empower students to achieve authorship and its benefits while simultaneously bringing balance to literacy curricula. “The main task of the teacher,” Graves writes, “is to help students know what they know” (22). One accomplishes this, he explains, by initiating brief but frequent conferences with students *during* the writing process, rather than by “assigning topics in advance of writing” and making corrections “after the work is finished” (19). The emphasis in this approach is on helping students “discover what [they] know” and then guiding them through multiple drafts which help to “amplify and clarify” a topic. In the end, Graves explains, the overarching purpose of a conference-process approach to composition pedagogy is to help the student develop “the sense of knowing and authority” that is “valuable to any learner” (22).

Published in 1978, five years into his tenure at UNH, *Balance the Basics* played a significant role in the process by which Graves’ gained stature in the writing process movement and contributed to UNH’s growing reputation as a key site in writing research. And as we have already seen, there is a good deal of Murray in the report. Murray can be found in the claim that children will write easily and copiously if freed from the constraining apparatus of traditionalist literacy instruction. He can be heard in the argument that teachers who don’t write will not teach writing well. His presence can be felt in Graves’ analysis of the problems of teacher-education programs (i.e., they privilege instruction in teaching reading over teaching writing). And he can be detected in Graves’ characterization of the current state-of-affairs as regards writing pedagogy (i.e., “teaching etiquette”). Finally, Murray is there in Graves’ over-arching articulation of the purpose for teaching writing in the first place, i.e., personal empowerment and the development of authority. In sum, in *Balance the Basics* we find numerous echoes, and in some cases direct restatements, of arguments Murray had, by 1978, been making for well over a decade.⁵⁷ For his part, Murray seems not to have minded or have

57 Murray played an essential behind-the-scenes role in the report’s writing, as this brief anecdote illustrates: In the early stages of drafting *Balance the Basics*, Graves experienced intense writer’s block. Murray gave him a cardboard box that was taped shut, but with a slit cut into the top. Graves was to deposit his writing in the box at the end of each day and deliver it to Murray

been troubled by Graves' borrowing or by the fact that his name appears nowhere in the report (a curious omission). "In all my investigations into the writing process," Murray writes in his 1975-76 faculty annual report, "Dr. Graves has been a stimulating colleague. He has taught me a very great deal. . . . His work and mine has become closely intertwined [sic], and his status on this campus has been extremely important to my work" ("Faculty Annual Report, 1975-76").

GROWTH OF *WISSENSCHAFT* AT UNH

In *Balance the Basics*, as we have seen, Graves makes the case for reform in the teaching of composition and greater parity between funding for reading and writing research. He was immediately effective in the latter as he was awarded, later that year of 1978, a \$240,000 National Institute of Education (NIE) grant (nearly \$1 million in today's dollars) to conduct a three-year study on children's writing that became the basis for his book *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*.⁵⁸ Based on comments Graves makes in his final report to the NIE, Murray appears to have played some role in this project but was not a primary participant in carrying out the research or a significant partner in writing the book (Graves, "A Case Study" 3-4). While Murray and Graves collaborated on numerous ventures during their years of work together, they maintained, except for a single co-authored article,⁵⁹ largely separate research and writing agendas. At the local level, however, they worked closely to expand UNH's writing profile in the direction of *wissenschaft*.

Beyond the creation of the Writing Process Lab, an early development in this regard came in the spring of 1982 when Graves' education department put forward a proposal for the creation of a doctoral program in reading and writing instruction, a combined effort of education, English, and psychology. In making the case for the program, the proposal's authors point to the fact that UNH was now "recognized as one of the major centers for the study of writing in the United States and Canada." To substantiate this claim they point to numerous sources of evidence, including inquiries UNH received from prospective students wishing to study with Murray and Graves; letters from colleagues around the

so he could read it that night and give feedback for the next day's work. This approach worked and soon Graves was relieved of his writer's block, having found a way to write himself out of the "dissertationese" he had been producing prior to getting Murray's help. (Newkirk, "Why Donald Graves Matters" 4).

58 Graves' career is easily deserving of its own book-length investigation, but none has been forthcoming. Thomas Newkirk and Penny Kittle have published an excellent edited collection of his work, however, *Children Want to Write: Donald Graves and the Revolution in Children's Writing*.

59 See "Revision: In the Writer's Workshop and In the Classroom."

country and the world expressing interest in coming to UNH to spend summers and sabbaticals; calls and notes from alumni in and around New England wishing to pursue advanced graduate study at the university; and informational inquiries from the numerous K–12 teachers around New England who had come to expect “both research data and the continuing opportunity for involvement” in literacy research from UNH. In highlighting these requests, the proposal’s authors clarify UNH’s growing reputation among writing and literacy scholars at this time (Proposal for a Doctor of Philosophy in Education).

And yet, the rise of research in writing did not lead to the decline in teaching of writing at the university. In fact, the opposite happened. Research and teaching, theory and practice, went hand-in-hand as writing faculty doubled-down on efforts to extend and expand the university’s commitment to teacher education and outreach. Perhaps most visible in this regard was a 1980 grant Thomas Newkirk secured from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to launch the New Hampshire Writing Program (NHWP), a summer institute for K–12 teachers held at UNH for the first time in the summer of 1981 (and still in existence today).⁶⁰ The grant, funded to the tune of \$150,000 (or roughly half a million dollars in today’s dollars), was an immediate success, attracting the interest of almost two hundred applicants in its first year (for just sixty spots). Building on and extending Murray’s earlier approach to professional development, the NHWP focused on making writers of teachers and drawing classroom pedagogies from informed writerly practice, becoming, in the process, a central means by which the university continued to engage with classroom teachers and, now, attracted potential doctoral candidates.

Another means by which UNH expanded its *wissenschaft* mission during these years was the establishment of a second doctoral program, this one in the English Department, in composition. The doctoral program in reading and writing instruction in the Education Department began to accept its first students in 1984;⁶¹ five years earlier, however, Murray, Graves, Newkirk, and others

60 Newkirk, the first compositionist to be hired at UNH, joined the English Department in 1977.

61 UNH Education School graduate students had begun to produce theses and dissertations prior to the establishment of the program in reading and writing instruction. In 1981, for example, Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater defended the first writing-oriented M.A. Thesis, a composing process investigation of the revision strategies of first-year students (in 1988 she defended her dissertation, an ethnographic investigation of the literacy practices of college students). In 1982 and 1983, the first dissertations were defended, one of which was by Linda Rief. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the number of students defending dissertations had reached its peak. Four were defended per year in 1991, 1992, and 1994, respectively. These were written by now well-known scholars in the fields of composition and English Education, including Bonnie Sunstein, Tom Romano, Danling Fu and Donna Qualley.

in English had begun to discuss the possibility of what they called “pedagogical dissertations” within the department (Memo from Don Murray to Jean Kennard). As early as 1982, advanced graduate students in English at UNH began to take steps towards making composition an area of specialization and by 1984 a new option in writing pedagogy was added to the existing doctoral program.⁶² Thus, by the early to mid 1980s, UNH boasted not one but two doctoral programs—one in education, one in English—to train a new generation of composition and literacy researchers and teachers.

A final means by which UNH became, in the words of the authors of the doctoral proposal in reading and writing instruction, “one of the major centers for the study of writing in the United States and Canada,” was the creation of a biennial conference, held at UNH each fall, focused on writing research and literacy scholarship. Whereas Murray, Graves, Newkirk, Fisher, and Carnicelli had been holding workshops and professional development seminars on process-oriented approaches to composition pedagogy for years, the first UNH writer’s conference, a weekend-long affair held in 1984 and entitled “Relating Reading and Writing in the College Years,” aimed at something more. Dedicated to examining “the interactions between the processes of reading and writing” from a variety of perspectives, including “historical, cognitive, biographical, and critical,” the conference featured nationally known speakers in composition, including David Bartholomae, Anne Berthoff, and Richard Ohmann, and included sessions in areas such as “Research in Composition,” “Theoretical Problems of the Reading/Writing Process,” and “Reading and Writing and Other disciplines.” The subsequent 1986 conference, “New Directions in Composition Scholarship,” continued in this vein, bringing noted compositionists such as Flower, Shirley Brice Heath, and Andrea Lunsford to campus while offering dozens of sessions on a wide-range of scholarly topics including research into writing and literate development across K–college contexts, technical and professional writing, writing across the curriculum, and teacher-education. While composition pedagogy was still an element of these conferences and teachers and instructors from the elementary to the college level did attend, the focus was largely on *wissenschaft*, broadly defined and expansively imagined.

In her lovely remembrance of the period during which the major initiatives described above were developed at UNH, Sunstein recalls “a rich and productive

62 The first composition dissertations were defended in the English Department in 1987. Throughout the 1990s well-known composition scholars such as Sherrie Gradin, Lad Tobin, Bruce Ballenger, Michelle Payne, and Bronwyn Williams successfully defended dissertations in English composition at UNH.

63 The historian Robert Connors joined the UNH English Department in 1983, thus deepening the department’s bench in the area of composition and rhetoric.

intellectual moment” (121) when writers—of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, journalism, and academic work; teachers—of elementary, secondary, post-secondary, and non-traditional age students; and researchers—of writing, reading, thinking, and learning, came together to create new understandings of literacy and composition. “The Dons are not the whole story in UNH’s influence on composition,” Sunstein writes, and yet Murray and Graves were either behind or key players in all of the major *wissenschaft* developments at the university during these years. If, in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, under the leadership of Dr. Carroll Towle, UNH became a “writer’s university,” it expanded, during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, under the leadership of the Dons, to become a writing researcher’s university, as well.

ADAPTATIONS AND CHANGING ROLES

In early 1978, a semester shy of completing his three-year term as English Department chairman, Murray stepped down from his position.⁶⁴ Reflecting on his time as chair he writes,

In a department as large as ours, as many as 90 persons . . . the job of administration is a seven-day-a-week, 12-month-a-year operation, during which time the faculty member is expected to teach and to publish. I found it a demanding, debilitating, thankless job. (“Faculty Annual Report, 1977-78”)

Once free of his chairmanship, Murray cashed in on a delayed sabbatical that spring of 1978, but his time away from campus was still busy as he continued to travel to give lectures and workshops on writing and pedagogy. In March, he gave talks in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Minneapolis. In April, he was in Cleveland. He was in Berkeley and Burlington in July and Virginia and Connecticut again in August. As to writing and research, Murray worked on his long-unfinished novel, wrote and submitted six new poems for publication, and drafted or revised four articles on writing that spring and summer of 1978, including three of his most significant pieces, “Write Before Writing” (*CCC*, 1978), “Teach the Motivating Force of Revision” (*English Journal*, 1978), and “The Listening Eye: Reflections on the Writing Conference” (*College English*, 1979). It was the time he spent with Graves in the Writing Process Lab, however, that he seems to have found most valuable. “Since I was released from other

64 In a resignation letter to the dean tendered in the spring of 1977 Murray cites “radical changes in governance” as the official reason for his early departure as chair (Letter to Dean Allan Spitz). Elsewhere he cites the “personal abuse” he received from his colleagues as further cause for his decision to step down early (“Faculty Annual Report, 1977-78”).

responsibilities,” he reflects in his sabbatical report, “I was able to pursue areas of academic exploration which became clear because of the intellectual stimulation of many of my colleagues . . . principally from Professor Donald Graves of the Education Department. My travels this year have reinforced my belief that he is doing more than any other single person to explore and understand the writing process” (Sabbatical Report).

When Murray returned to campus in the fall of 1978 he re-engaged with administrative work, assuming the role of chairman of what had now become the English 501 program. “We have 34 sections of the course this year,” Murray writes in his yearly review from 1978-79, “30 of them taught by lecturers and teaching assistants” (“Faculty Annual Report, 1978-79”). In addition to serving as English 501 chairperson, Murray’s service commitments at UNH continued to expand in these years. In his 1981 review of Murray’s performance, his department chair notes that Murray “is presently serving on at least 7 major University and Departmental committees [including] College Promotion and Tenure Committee, the University Master Plan Committee, [and] the President’s Committee to review intercollegiate programs” (Annual Evaluation). Murray’s travel schedule, too, was considerable during these years, as this sampling of his “endless number of writing workshops,” as his chair put it, illustrates:

- August 23: Workshop for administrators of Nashua Public School System, Nashua, NH
- August 24–25: Workshop for writing program in Stamford School System, Stamford, CT
- September 4: Presentation on the writing conference for Freshman English staff, UNH
- September 5: Keynote speech opening day program in the public schools of Townsend, MA
- September 14: Two presentations for undergraduates and graduates at Whittemore School of Business and Economics, UNH
- September 18: Consultant to Ford Foundation study by Cernal, Inc., St. Louis, MO
- October 4 and 11: Presentations to graduate students in the Institute of Natural and Environmental Resources, UNH
- October 12: Presentation to interns, home economics department, UNH
- October 21: Keynote speaker and workshop director at the South Carolina English Teachers Conference, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC
- October 30 and November 6: Workshop for language arts teachers, Dover School System, Dover, NH

- November 10–11: Workshop for representatives from 14 colleges in the University of Wisconsin system, Madison, Wisconsin
- November 17: Workshop for Nashua High School English teachers, Nashua, NH
- December 5: Reading, Writer's Series, UNH
- December 7: Panel member, Writing Program Seminar, UNH⁶⁵

In sum, following his brief, unhappy stint as English Department chairman, Murray was not, it seems, prepared to slow down or ease into retirement.⁶⁶ Quite the opposite. Amidst his efforts to serve the university; reform the teaching of writing, the field of English and the larger educational system; and help grow the nascent field of composition and rhetoric, a new series of unanticipated opportunities opened up during his post-chair years in what had once been his primary area of interest, journalism.

While Murray had never completely divorced himself from the world of news and newspapers and had taught journalism courses throughout his years at UNH, he found himself back in an actual newsroom for the first time around 1979-80 when he signed on at *The Boston Globe* to serve as a writing coach. This work was, he writes, “of immense professional stimulation” (“Faculty Annual Report, 1979-80”). Beyond satisfaction the work led to a good deal of new consulting gigs in both journalism and journalism education. Of the twenty-five talks or workshops Murray delivered during the 1980–81 academic year thirteen were with groups associated with newspaper work. In October, he traveled to Florida to meet with writers and editors at the St. Regis Paper Company. In December, he was in Connecticut to deliver a talk at the New England Society of Newspaper Editors. In March, he met with writers and editors in Massachusetts and again in Florida. And in late May, he barnstormed Alaska with consulting gigs at the *Ketchikan Daily News*, *Juneau Empire*, and *Anchorage Daily News*. Murray published his first article about newswriting in 1981 and began drafting what would become his first book about journalism, *Writing for Your Readers*, which he later published in 1983 (“Faculty Annual Report, 1980-81”).

65 In his 1975-76 Annual Review, in which Murray was asked to estimate the number of hours he spends per week engaged in teaching, research, and service he arrives at the number 74. Having studied his Annual Reviews I am not surprised by this number, but apparently Murray was concerned that his colleagues and superiors might have been, so he included this note as an addendum to his tally: “If I were you I’d be suspicious of the 74 hour week. Don’t be. I can document it as an average. I start at seven each week-day, end at 6, spend two hours at least each evening, three at least on Saturday and six at least on Sunday when I’m not traveling—and I do a lot of traveling.”

66 In his 1976-77 “Faculty Annual Report,” of his never-ending travel schedule Murray writes, “I have been extremely active in working with groups interested in the teaching of writing. . . . I shall continue it because I am evangelical (75%) and because I need to supplement my income (25%), with two and possibly three children in college in the next few years” (Faculty Annual Report, 1976-77).

In addition to this new work as a journalism coach and consultant, Murray began to write and publish his own news-related pieces again around this time, as well. At first these were just short essays placed in local papers, but in 1983 he published a feature article on wind turbines in *The Boston Globe* that he had researched during a sabbatical spent in Wyoming in 1982. In the years that followed, Murray penned additional features for the *Globe* and then in 1986 was invited to write and publish a regular column, “Over 60” (later, “Then and Now”). Ostensibly about the aging process, “Over 60” ranged over all matter of senior citizen terrain—from visits with grandchildren to memories of early life to the challenges of caring for an ailing partner.⁶⁷ At first Murray published the column only monthly, but once freed of the university and its obligations in 1987 he accelerated the pace of his work, publishing weekly until his death in late 2006.

During the years that Murray re-engaged and expanded his professional profile in journalism his commitments to composition and pedagogy continued apace. In 1984, he published his first college textbook, *Write to Learn*. The following year he published a completely revised edition of *A Writer Teaches Writing*. The year following that, 1986, he published a second college textbook, *Read to Write*. In a re-assessment of one of Murray’s major articles published during this period,⁶⁸ Thomas Newkirk suggests that the years 1978–1988 were an “intellectually productive period” during which Murray made “his most significant contributions to the field of composition” (Newkirk, “Donald Murray and the ‘Other Self’” 47).

There at the beginning, when none of the institutional infrastructure for writing research and scholarship existed, Murray found, by the latter years of his career, that he was now surrounded by a growing community of writer/teacher/scholars interested in pursuing some of the very questions about writing and its teaching that he had been asking since the early sixties. It was a happy development, at least initially. Once a self-proclaimed expert who, in the absence of a body of scholarly knowledge about writing built his authority on the foundation of his experiential knowledge, Murray was inspired, during his final years at UNH, to adapt and evolve as a new generation of writing researchers began to construct a new foundation of scholarly knowledge about composition and its teaching. The expansion of *wissenschaft* in the field during these years forced Murray to rethink his role and identity. In the early 1970s, he had issued his first call for researchers to draw on the methodologies of “the social sciences and the sciences” to “contribute to the study of the writing process” (Murray, “The

67 Murray’s wife Minnie Mae, about whom he wrote a great deal in his columns, died in 2005 after a protracted battle with Parkinson’s disease.

68 i.e., “Teaching the Other Self: The Writer’s First Reader.”

Interior View” 21). Imagine his surprise, satisfaction, and gratification, in the late 1970s and 1980s, when a proliferation of such research began to appear in the field’s literature, pushing Murray into the unfamiliar but perhaps oddly satisfying position of needing to learn from *others* about what happens when writers write. Imagine his astonishment, in 1982, when he became a participant in this new research, himself, teaming up with Carol Berkenkotter to carry out a naturalistic case study of the composing process.⁶⁹ In two decades, Murray had gone from a writer *teaching* writing to a writer participating in research *about* writing.

And yet, while Murray was happy to play the “lab rat” to Berkenkotter’s “scientist” he was not yet done, in 1982, playing the writer teaching and investigating writing. Far from it. A careful reading of his work during the years Newkirk identifies as having been significant suggests, however, that there was a question weighing on Murray at this time, and that was what role there was for a writer without scholarly credentials to play in a field increasingly comprised of writing researchers. To his credit, and as we will see, Murray discovered several possible answers to this question. He could serve as a participant in writing research, and did, with Berkenkotter and, a few years earlier, with Graves. He could serve as an advocate for various disciplinary causes, including, in one publication, the need for readable research reports (“Write Research to Be Read”) and, in another, the need for greater respect within English for writing program administrators and instructors (“The Politics of Respect”). He could serve as a publishing guide and mentor, sharing the secrets to his writerly success with teachers and scholars who wished to increase their scholarly output (“One Writer’s Secrets”). He could serve as a commentator and prognosticator, taking stock of key developments in the field and offering predictions about its future (“REFLECTIONS: The Child as Informer” and “Facets: The Most Important Development in the Last Five Years for High School English Teachers of Composition”). He could serve as an academic scout (perhaps his favorite late role), pointing the new generation of writing researchers towards potentially fruitful areas of unexplored territory (instances of Murray playing this role are too numerous to count). And he could serve as a kind of educational “exhibitionist,” publicly “undressing” his writerly

69 Murray relates the humorous details of his participation in Berkenkotter’s study in a note included with their article in his edited collection *Expecting the Unexpected*. After hearing Berkenkotter give a talk at a conference he introduced himself and, with a few others, discussed Berkenkotter’s research but also that of Linda Flower, whose controlled laboratory studies of the composing process Murray felt failed to account for social or contextual variables that inevitably impact the writing task. “After I had made my case,” Murray recalls, “Carol introduced me to one of the other people in the group, Linda Flower” (254). Accordingly, Berkenkotter “called [Murray’s] bluff” and suggested they conduct a research study together in which she would investigate his composing process in a naturalistic setting. “I didn’t have a chance,” Murray recalls, and with that their collaboration was born.

practices,⁷⁰ routines, customs, habits, obsessions, anxieties, passions, and fears to reveal to the teachers who continued to flock to his workshops, seminars, and lectures the process by which he used writing to, in his words, follow language towards meaning.

With changes in Murray's role came changes in his thinking and writing, as well. For all that has been written, pigeon-holing Murray into the narrow straight jacket of expressivism, the fact is, as with most of us, Murray evolved a good deal in his thinking over the course of his long career. In what follows, I examine several of his key works from the years 1978–1988. Specifically, I revisit several of Murray's most frequently cited articles from the period, according to Google scholar.⁷¹ Simultaneously, I highlight the ways in which Murray worked during these years to situate his writing within the new social science paradigm that was becoming prevalent in numerous of the field's major journals and publications. The pieces I discuss below illustrate Murray's efforts to adapt and adjust his thinking and writing so as to continue to contribute to the field's literature during his final years of active involvement in it.

WRITING LIKE A RESEARCHER (1978–1988)

Of the several papers Murray reports delivering at professional gatherings in his 1975-76 faculty annual report, "Internal Revision: A Process of Discovery" nicely exemplifies his late-career efforts to contribute to the growing knowledge base of the emergent field. Collected in Charles Cooper and Lee Odell's NCTE collection *Research on Composing: Points of Departure*, "Internal Revision" stands as Murray's most frequently cited piece from the period 1978–1988. In it he speculates about ideas that would later become codified as important threshold concepts in composition and rhetoric, training his eye, in particular, on what he calls "rewriting," "one of the writing skills least researched, least examined, least

70 My diction here is intentionally provocative and intended to be amusingly allusive. Around the time that Murray began publicly "undressing" himself, Graves was coming to be known as a "professional nudist" for his criticism that English teachers were too comfortable "wandering around [their] rooms, fully clothed" while their students were "exposed" via their writing and then criticized by teachers at the very moment they were most vulnerable. There's nothing more upsetting, Graves writes in one memorable articulation of this line of thought, "than to have someone walking around fully clothed in a nudist camp, and that often is the teacher, saying 'Hmnn, well, that's a funny navel', 'Hmnn, didn't the Lord give you a better body than that one?' I think that's immoral" ("Renters and Owners: Donald Graves on Writing," *The English Magazine*, NIE Report Package 474). Murray would not be accused of immorality. If he spent his first years in the field with his clothes on, *telling* teachers what writers do when they write, he spent his final years in the field undressing himself publicly so as to *show* them.

71 Unsurprisingly, his most frequently cited article, which I will not revisit, is his manifesto "Teach Writing as a Process Not Product."

understood” and, therefore, “least taught,” despite the fact that most writers accept it “as a condition of their craft” (123).

Written for a scholarly, and not necessarily a teacherly, audience, Murray opens “Internal Revision,” as any researcher must, by reporting on the results of his literature review and by defining his key terms, i.e., internal and external revision. “Although I believe external revision has not been explored adequately or imaginatively,” he writes, “it has been explored.” As such, he will concentrate his efforts on “attempting to describe internal revision, suggesting opportunities for research, and indicating some implications for the teaching of writing” (131). Internal revision, as Murray explains it, differs from external revision in that the latter focuses largely on “editing and proofreading” as the writer prepares to share his/her work with an audience whereas the former entails a process whereby the writer “use[s] language, structure, and information” to find out what he/she has or hopes to say (130). With internal revision, “the audience is one person: the writer” and the purpose is “discovery.” The latter part of this is the idea, articulated by Heidi Estrem in the threshold concept “Writing is a Knowledge-Making Activity,” that writers “don’t simply think first and then write,” they “write to think” (19) or, in this case, write and rewrite to think. It’s a notion captured, as well, in the threshold concept “Revision is Central to Developing Writing,” in which Doug Downs explains that “while writing, writers usually find something to say that they didn’t have to say before writing” (66). Much of Murray’s work in “Internal Revision” (and before, and beyond) anticipates these two threshold concepts.

Murray’s article “Writing as Process: How Writing Finds its Own Meaning” offers a second useful illustration of his efforts to contribute to the project of the new writing researchers during the latter years of his career. The lead essay in NCTE’s collection *Eight Approaches to Teaching Composition*,⁷² “Writing as Process,” which Murray presciently describes in his 1978-79 faculty annual report as “a major piece of work,” anticipates yet another of the field’s contemporary interests, knowledge transfer (“Faculty Annual Report, 1978-79”). In this piece, Murray’s second most-cited article from the era, he is interested in identifying and articulating a transferable model of the writing process that, as he puts it, can be “adapted by our students to whatever writing tasks face them” (26).⁷³

72 In his 1983 review of *Eight Approaches*, James C. Raymond argues that Donovan and McClelland were wise and correct to make Murray’s piece the book’s lead. Murray is “a superb writer” Raymond writes, and unlike other journalists who move into composition with “disdain for theory and pedagogy,” Murray is, he writes, “well-informed, scholarly, and as inventive in theory as he is admirable in performance” (228). So enamored of Murray’s contribution to the collection is Raymond that he argues that it “alone would be worth the price of the book” (229).

73 As we have seen earlier, this is the riddle that Murray spent most of his career trying to unravel.

Towards these ends he identifies three steps or stages he suggests most writers pass through most of the time when composing: rehearsing (a term he borrows from Graves), drafting, and revising. What's new here, aside from the fact that pre-writing has been replaced with rehearsing, is Murray's recent understanding of the recursive nature of the writing process. When it comes to the steps or stages of composing, he writes, "We are talking about a process of interaction, and not a series of logical steps" (7). Murray points to the work of Perl as having influenced his thinking in this regard. Before Perl, he confesses, he thought that writers move through the three steps in a roughly linear fashion. After Perl he came to understand that there is an "instantaneous moving back and forth" between the steps or stages of composing (10). Minute by minute, Murray writes, echoing Perl, the writer may be "looking back and looking forward" (10).

Having explained this change in his thinking Murray then goes on to build on and extend Perl by examining the four forces that he claims, "interact as the writing works its way towards its own meaning," i.e., writing, reading, collecting, connecting (11). He returns, in the end, however, to the claim he made in the beginning: "There is no clear line [in the writing process] between the stages of rehearsing, drafting, and revising" (17). It's a correction about which, it seems, Murray wanted the record to speak clearly and it's one of at least two important reversals he made during his career (the other being his understanding that the process writers follow during composing is situationally dependent). In the end, while Murray's portable or transferable model of the composing process likely seems antiquated to our contemporary ears, it serves, nonetheless, as an important illustration of one theorist's early attempt to investigate a key contemporary concern of the field.

As I noted earlier, following Murray's death Thomas Newkirk and several others offered critical reconsiderations of several of his key works (see, for example, Qualley; Ballenger). Newkirk focused on "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader," published as the lead article in the May 1982 issue of *College Composition and Communication*. This is another late-career piece that nicely illustrates Murray's efforts to reposition himself as a writing researcher in the spirit of Graves, Perl, and others. As Newkirk reminds us, the task Murray gives himself in "Teaching the Other Self," his third most cited article from the period, is to speculate about what he (Newkirk) calls the "dialectic" between the "self" that writes a text and the "other self" that reads and monitors the text as it's being written (Newkirk, "Donald Murray and the 'Other Self'" 48). The term monitoring, used repeatedly in "Teaching the Other Self," calls to mind Murray's interest in explicit reflection. In "Teaching the Other Self," he revisits this interest as he works to describe the numerous metacognitive functions "the other self" performs while "the self" composes. These include acting as a

“supportive colleague to the writer,” playing the role of the “critic,” and serving as a project manager to observe, organize, and make sense of the writing process as it unfolds (142). In his articulation of “the other self,” Murray anticipates several important contemporary threshold concepts, including and especially Charles Bazerman and Howard Tinberg’s “Text is an Object Outside of Oneself That Can Be Improved and Developed.” “Becoming aware that the text exists outside the writer’s projection and must convey meaning to readers is an important threshold in developing a more professional attitude toward the act of writing and what is produced,” Bazerman and Tinberg write (61). It is this, precisely, that Murray wishes to convey to his readers in “Teaching the Other Self,” an article that, despite its theoretical focus, also has a good deal to say about pedagogical matters. In helping student writers gain awareness of and cultivate their “other self,” Murray asserts, teachers will help them on their journey to develop “more professional” attitudes and dispositions towards writing. Initially, the teacher may have to play the role of the other self because, as Murray warns, students “may not know that the other self exists” (147). Over time, however, and with careful mentoring, students can be made aware of the other self’s existence, learn of its value, and experience the gains in writerly productivity that its cultivation can enable.

Beyond Murray’s efforts to contribute to the emergent composing process research of the seventies and eighties by theorizing from his own experience and observations, nothing may signal his commitment to and interest in the field’s new investigations more than his participation in an actual study of composing process research. Twenty years into his career, Murray’s involvement in Carol Berkenkotter’s naturalistic research offered him the opportunity to make visible to someone else that which he had been examining himself all those years. The resultant article, “Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer,” with an addendum, “Response of a Laboratory Rat—or, Being Protocolled,” is Murray’s fourth most cited piece according to Google scholar. “In the absence of more proper academic resources,” he writes in his addendum, “I have made a career of studying myself while writing.” When Berkenkotter asked him to “run in her maze,” he reports, he “gulped” but “did not think [he] could refuse” (169).

Berkenkotter’s sixty-two-day deep-dive into Murray’s writing process contributed to and extended the work of previous writing researchers in at least two important ways.⁷⁴ First, it was the first study to investigate a professional writer

74 It’s worth pointing out that Murray, himself, conceived of the project as an extension of the work of others, writing, “we have developed a method for studying professional writers under naturalistic conditions, something that has not been done before, and extends the pioneering work done by Flower and Hayes at Carnegie Mellon University” (Faculty Annual Report, 1981-82)

composing in a naturalistic, as opposed to a laboratory, setting. Second, it was the first study to combine think-aloud protocol analysis with the writer's own testimony or account of composing, thus allowing the participant a voice in the research process, a crucial step forward in the ethics of writing research. The study yielded interesting results but also shed light on what Berkenkotter calls Murray's "distinctive work habits" (159):

Unlike most writers who hand draft or type, Mr. Murray spends much time making copious notes in a daybook, then dictates his drafts and partial drafts to his wife, who is an accomplished typist and partner in his work. Later, he reads aloud and edits the drafts. If he determines that copy-editing (i.e., making stylistic changes in the text) is insufficient, he returns to the daybook, makes further notes, and prepares for the next dictation. (158-59)

Having studied Murray intensively for two months Berkenkotter offers several interesting observations about his methods, the most notable of which, perhaps, is her finding about the role of audience-awareness in Murray's process. *Audience* is not a word Murray used with great frequency in his writing about writing, preferring, instead, the perhaps more journalistic term *reader*. A full consideration of readers and how their needs shape all aspects of the composing process was not typically a primary interest or concern for Murray, though. As we saw in "Internal Revision," Murray frequently conceived of writing as a process whereby the needs of readers enter into the composing process rather late, after the essential details of discovering meaning and purpose are already worked out. For Murray, the exigence for writing almost always originated within the writer and his or her need to communicate, and this makes a kind of sense, especially given Murray's experience as a freelance writer prior to his transition to college teaching. That a writer's meaning and purpose might be shaped, first and foremost, by the needs of his/her audience was not a way of thinking about writing that Murray wrote a great deal about or in which he seemed much interested.

And yet it's this, precisely, that Berkenkotter discovered when she peered behind the curtain of Murray's composing process: Murray *did*, in fact, think about audience, about his readers, during the writing process, and she goes so far as to call him out on this point in her article where she asserts that writers do not "only consider their audiences when doing external revision." Rather, as she explains, writers' awareness of audience shapes their writing and revisions to a significant degree in the beginning, middle, and at the end of a writing project. Some of Murray's most significant revisions, in fact, "occurred as he turned his thoughts toward his audience" (166). Humbled but perhaps still in disbelief,

Murray speaks to this point in his “Lab Rat” follow up. “I was far more aware of audience than I thought I was during some of the writing,” he concedes. “My sense of audience is so strong that I have to suppress my conscious awareness of audience to hear what the text demands” (171). Perhaps. Or perhaps Murray was so aware of audience because in all acts of writing such awareness is essential to discovering the available means of persuasion (and reversing one publicly is always hard).

In his addendum to Berkenkotter’s article, Murray makes clear his sense of what he thinks their work together contributes to the field. “What I think we have done, as rat and ratee,” he writes, “is to demonstrate that there is a process through which experienced writers can be studied under normal working conditions on typical writing projects. I think my contribution is not to reveal my own writing habits but to show a way that we can study writers who are far better writers than I” (172). There is, of course, a paradox here. Murray’s criticism of composing process research published before his and Berkenkotter’s study, a criticism that led to his collaboration with Berkenkotter in the first place, was that in placing writers in labs and giving them artificial writing tasks, the authors of these studies failed to account for the social or “naturalistic” contexts that shape composing. As Berkenkotter puts this, echoing Murray, “If we are to understand how writers revise, we must pay close attention to the context in which revision occurs” (156). The irony, of course, is that a writer who would soon be criticized for failing to account for the role of context in composing wanted to make sure that writing researchers would account for the contexts which shape the composing of their research participants.

CONCLUSION

The years 1978–1988 were a period during which Murray made some of his most important and interesting contributions to the growth and development of composition and rhetoric—locally, at UNH, and nationally, on the lecture circuit and in the pages of the field’s growing literature. Simultaneously, Murray re-engaged with his roots in newswriting during, discovering yet another new professional role, journalism coach, and a new outlet for his writing (i.e., his *Boston Globe* column). He retired from UNH in 1987, having served on the faculty for 24 years, just shy of a quarter century. His relationship with UNH, however, extended back forty-four years, to the time when he was briefly stationed at the university for basic training ahead of his deployment to Europe during World War II. “The Army delivered me to Durham, by train, in 1943,” Murray recalls in his final annual report to the university in the spring of 1987. “I was marched to my dormitory on Main Street. . . . I applied to be admitted to the University

if I returned from the war. I felt this was a place where I could write and learn to write.” Of his time as a student at UNH in the forties, Murray writes, professor Carroll Towle and other members of the English Department faculty inspired him to “question, doubt, speculate, to learn in response to my own questions.” Of his time as faculty member from the sixties through eighties he expected, he explains, that he would be a teacher, but found that he was a student—of his own and his students’ learning. “And the university allowed this,” he writes, with evident astonishment and satisfaction. In the years ahead, in his retirement, he forecasts, he intends to become a “student emeritus” as he continues to learn his trade (Annual Report for the Academic Year of 1986-87). Murray made good on this promise—writing, speaking, and publishing on writing and its teaching until his passing in late 2006.

Death, it seems, was the only thing that could put an end to his evangelizing.