

The University-High School Connection

Aaron Stander

Note: In school year 1979-80 the ECB provided a series of ten workshops for the English Department at Andover High School in Bloomfield Hills. The following is a brief summary of that program.

Before the first meeting between the **English Composition Board (ECB)** and **Andover High School** English teachers there was apprehension and appreciation on both parts. Fortunately, **Andover's** administration felt that this staff-and curriculum-development project was important enough to provide teachers with the released time for ten workshops, a schedule that provided the opportunities necessary for sound professional growth. Planning and communication had been extensive and thorough. But there was still concern for how the project would turn out. Although **ECB** members and the **Andover** staff shared the same discipline, they did not know whether their professional concerns and sensitivities to one another's problems would provide for meaningful and helpful communication. The **Andover** teachers wondered if the **ECB** members would be able to suggest techniques and activities that would be effective with students of high-school age.

After the introductions and initial formalities, we launched into the first topic to be explored in the ten workshops. Apprehension dissolved as it became apparent that the **ECB** had not only useful ideas for teaching composition, but also the capacity to listen to the ideas and problems of high school teachers.

The workshop sessions addressed several concerns: assessment techniques, evaluation, diagnosis of problems, methods of remediation, development of good assignments, peer grouping within classes, editing techniques, and content-area writing. Although the topics for all the

workshops had been selected before the September meeting, these were modified as the year progressed.

The **Andover** teachers were impressed by the high quality of the workshops. Each one was well-organized, energetically presented, and relevant to teachers' needs. The effectiveness of the presentations was greatly enhanced by the interest of presenters as well as their understanding of the problems of teaching English in a high school. The **ECB** staff provided excellent models of enthusiastic and effective teaching.

As we progressed through this series of workshops, there was a continued growth of rapport between the two groups. The **Andover** teachers and **ECB** members became colleagues pursuing a mutual interest, the improvement of student writing. In this collegial relationship there was the necessary trust to allow participants to discuss their concerns and problems, their successes and failures, openly.

The **ECB** presenters have an effective and, in fact, creative professional relationship with one another. They are willing to explore problems from various points of view while maintaining a mutual esteem. This model was contagious. The **Andover** staff became more open and trusting among themselves. No longer working in isolation, they were part of a team with a shared goal. As one teacher phrased it on an evaluation, "I no longer feel alone."

As a culmination of the workshops for the English department, the **ECB** presented one workshop for the entire **Andover** faculty. The purpose of this workshop was to impress other departments with the importance of a cross-curricular responsibility for the written work of students. This workshop explored specific conventions of writing in the various academic

(cont. on p. 95)

procedure is that it accomplishes two goals at once: it enables the teacher to focus on materials of his or her discipline and at the same time to teach students a discovery procedure which they can use in writing their essays.

None of these suggestions, of course, will solve all the problems of teaching writing in other disciplines. None come with any guarantee of certain success. All entail a good bit of work for us and for our colleagues. That, I think, simply acknowledges reality. Improving student writing is a difficult, time-consuming task, one that demands the best efforts of all of us. These suggestions do, however, help us focus our energies; my own experience suggests that time spent in these areas is likely to pay off. At the very least, it will preclude our having to check papers for grammar and style while someone else reads them for content.

Lee Odell, a member of the English Department at **SUNY**, Albany, has written frequently about a wide variety of topics related to the teaching of writing.

Maimon (cont. from p. 83)

also hold dormitory hours, sometimes during those bleak, wee hours when so many undergraduates are actually confronting that intimidating blank page.

The Graduate Program in the Teaching of Writing and Other Outreach Activities

Beaver offers a Master of Arts in Education with a Concentration in Written Communications. During the summers of 1981 and 1982 the **National Endowment for the Humanities** is sponsoring extended institutes on the **Beaver College** campus for secondary and post-secondary humanists who are interested in the teaching of writing.

Elaine P. Maimon is the Director of the Writing Program at Beaver College, Glenside, Pennsylvania

Stander (cont. from p. 86)

disciplines and the logical appropriateness of teaching such conventions in the content areas. Although this idea, in spite of its obvious logic, is not readily embraced by many content-area teachers, the **ECB** presentation was extremely effective. **Andover's** staff grew as a result of its relationship with the **ECB**; and it is hoped that **Andover's** writing program will be further enhanced through a continuing relationship with our **ECB** colleagues at **The University of Michigan**.

Aaron Stander is the Secondary Reading Consultant for the **Oakland Public Schools** , Pontiac, Michigan.

