



WRITING LAB NEWSLETTER



Vol. III, No. 9 (May, 1979)

After all the excitement of the 4C's, those of us who attended have returned home to mull over what we learned, to read through those piles of handouts we kept collecting, and to write to new friends we made. Since each of us carried away our own impressions and conclusions from all the sessions on writing labs, it would be useful to us all if some of our members who attended would write articles (short or long) gathering up some of these threads or collecting into lists bits of information we've gleaned on the present status and future promise of writing labs.

Having challenged you, I hereby offer my "report":

1. Writing labs are thriving and, while still in a state of growth, have already become one of the major areas of concentration in the field of composition. In the 1979 4C's program, writing labs were listed as one of the seven major topics dealt with in multiple conference sessions. In addition to the five sessions on writing labs so adeptly coordinated by Janice Neuleib (Illinois State University), there was also the Special Interest Session on Writing Labs which attracted over 150 people! From all this, I have a strong sense not only of the continued growth of labs but also of the establishment of labs as integral parts of composition programs.
2. But, despite the recognition that facilities for individualized instruction in writing skills are needed in every writing program, some labs still exist at the periphery of the academic structure. The result, too often is less pay, less job security, and no access to tenure. Because of this, some lab directors at the 4C's business meeting expressed interest in introducing a resolution at next year's 4C's conference which

would address these problems. Certainly the newsletter can serve as a forum in which to begin discussing such a resolution. If someone is also interested in taking on the task of perhaps polling members of our group and organizing an effort to propose an appropriate resolution, I can include in the June issue of the newsletter (the last one for this semester) any article or announcement received by May 15th. Whatever arrives after that date will be included in fall issues.

3. The coordination of next year's Special Interest Session on Writing Labs is in the capable hands of Lil Brannon (Univ. of North Carolina at Wilmington), and her call for papers appears on page 2 of this issue of the newsletter. Because of new program deadlines for next year's 4C's, deadlines imposed by the NCTE, it is imperative that your responses reach Lil Brannon within the next few weeks.
4. There is a readily apparent, perhaps even an acute need for more publications on labs and the whole process of tutorial instruction in writing. We need more books, more journal articles, and perhaps even a refereed journal devoted to articles on research and methodology in labs. As a beginning, a call for manuscripts for a proposed book of articles on labs is included on page 4.
5. Helen Naugle, who has done a superb and much appreciated job of supplying our membership list to anyone requesting it, will be leaving the country for awhile and will be unable to continue handling this responsibility. Several people are investigating the possibility of taking on the job, and by next month's issue we should be able to announce more details.

6. Literally dozens of people took a few moments from their busy schedules during the 4C's conference to introduce themselves and to tell me how useful they have found the newsletter to be. I herewith convey these tributes to the appropriate people, the contributors to our newsletter who provide us with all the useful interchange of ideas and suggestions.

If we are to stay in contact with each other as a group and to continue exchanging information, then we need your articles, reviews, suggestions, and announcements. I look forward to hearing from you, especially during the summer when there just might be a few quiet moments in which to write an article, a review, a letter, or whatever.

Please send your articles, names of new members, and donations of \$2 to help defray duplicating and mailing charges (with checks made payable to me) to:

Muriel Harris, editor
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The January, 1979 issue of the Wisconsin English Journal is focused entirely on writing labs, with articles describing a variety of approaches and also a variety of writing laboratories in Wisconsin. Single copies can be purchased, for \$1.75, from:

Dr. Nicholas J. Karolides
University of Wisconsin--River Falls
River Falls, WI 54022

At the CCCC in Minneapolis, a supply of pamphlets I brought along, "The Writing Lab" was quickly exhausted. Muriel Harris suggested that I run off more copies and make it available through WLN for any persons who wish a copy. The six-page pamphlet is a compilation of sources of information for developing a writing lab and includes a listing of key areas for decision making in setting up a lab or rethinking its direction. To get a copy, send a stamped (15¢), self-addressed envelope to:

Mildred Steele
Skills Coordinator
Central College
Pella, Iowa 50219

Call for Program Participants
Special Interest Session
for Writing Lab Directors and Staff
1980 CCCC's (Washington, D.C.)

Because of the extreme success of the 1979 Special Interest Section (thanks to Muriel Harris's energy), Lynn Troyka, the 1980 program chairperson, has asked that I organize another session for next year. After discussions with Rudolph Almasy and Muriel Harris, past chairpersons for the session, I decided to continue the session using the same format that has been established--the exchange table of materials, two or three formal papers (15 minutes), and small special interest workshops. I need your help. If you would be interested in being a keynote speaker for our session, organizing the material exchange table, or conducting a 45 minute workshop, please contact me no later than June 1. (Workshop leaders please send detailed abstracts; speakers please send completed papers). If you have any ideas on how to improve the the program format, or any special topics you wish covered, please contact me also. I look forward to hearing from you.

Lil Brannon
Director of Composition and
the Writing Center
University of North Carolina
at Wilmington
Wilmington, N.C. 28401



Report of the 1979 Special
Interest Session Discussion
Group on Evaluation in
Writing Labs

The group first discussed record keeping. Everyone generally agreed that the key to effective evaluation is efficient record keeping. We need precise records on time spent with students as well as about what we do with students. Deans always want specifics.

The group then discussed evaluation forms. Do we give evaluation forms to every student



or to students at random? One lab director sends out forms to every tenth student who has come to be tutored in the lab. Others pick a day toward the end of the semester or a week and give evaluation forms to all who come within that period.

I mentioned the Association of Personalized Learning Programs in Illinois. That group is developing a system of interlab visitation and evaluation within the state so that we can evaluate each other--rather like a kindly INCATE review!

The group asked about emperical studies and discussed how hard it is to do emperical research in a lab. Control groups are difficult to define, and variables more than multiple.

Some of the participants discussed the granting of credit in the lab so that we can prove that we are carrying our load of credit hours. Others argued that lab can never do what it is intended to do and also generate enough credit hours to compete with regular classes. Even composition classes cannot do that.

We discussed methods of showing our effects on students' grades. Faculty and student reports were mentioned, as well as computer searches were suggested. The problem here is still a control group. Who is to say that other similar students did not improve just as much?

Finally, we talked about letting people know we exist. Ads, faculty seminars, posters--all were mentioned.

Discussion group leader:
Janice Neuleib (Illinois State)

Recorder: Anne Hibbard
(University of Minnesota-
Minneapolis)



Book Review

Cases for Composition by John P. Field and Robert H. Weiss. Little, Brown and Company, 1979, 256 pp., \$4.95 paperback.

Cases for Composition is not the typical workbook or programmed material so often found in use at Writing Labs. It is, however, a provocative and imaginative presentation of writing tasks. It is my belief that Writing Labs, Workshops, or Centers,

must encompass and associate themselves with the entire writing process: invention, writing, revising, and proofreading. Labs must not isolate themselves. Labs must therefore be equipped with materials like Cases for Composition, which can be used individually or in small groups.

Cases for Composition is very different from the typical freshman reader; it is intended to be so. Field and Weiss have written a tidy, compact and useful book wherein the readings are "cases" and the assignments are real communication "tasks." The writing situations, or cases, are presented as realistic situations which draw the reader/writer into the role of active participant. The book could be effectively used in the Writing Lab as well as the regular classroom.

Cases for Composition contains fifty actual cases accompanied by 148 writing assignments based on the cases. Each of the cases can easily be read in ten to twenty minutes and is followed by two or three writing assignments. A typical case describes a problematic situation; for example, in case #23 a student is suddenly thrust into the role of representative for a newly formed yoga club and is asked to write to the Dean on behalf of the club. The assignments usually call for the writer to respond to the problematic situation (keeping in mind audience, context, and purpose) by writing letters, composing statements, writing essays, drafting reports, etc.

The introduction to the instructor provides this information: "With cases, students sometimes have to switch roles or voices, to view a task from several perspectives, and, as in real writing situations, to write about the same subject to different audiences and for different purposes." In addition to a rhetorical glossary, the book contains a final section which groups the cases into useful divisions based upon traditional rhetorical modes and contemporary thematic concerns.

The cases allow teachers or tutors to emphasize pre-writing heuristics as means of exploring, analyzing, and ordering a given situation. The book does not dwell on proofreading skills and would probably best be used in conjunction with a grammar handbook or workbook. Its design and content are flexible enough to be applicable to any freshman writing class, but Cases seems particularly suited to the basic or developmental writing class or writing lab situation.

A potential danger of Cases for Composition is that it often places students in artificial situations, although many of the cases resemble real-life experiences students are apt to have. A possible antidote to the artificiality of the cases would be to allow students, once they are familiar with handling the cases, to design, write, analyze, and respond to cases they write for themselves and for each other.

Paul G. Bator
Writing Workshop
Wayne State University



In the Spring 1978 issue of Community College Frontiers (pp. 4-7) is a challenging article by Karl Taylor, a member of our newsletter group and Chairman of the Adult Basic Education program at Illinois Central College. His article offers suggestions both for administrative structures and services that learning centers need to develop in order to remain "the cutting edge of college instruction." He has kindly offered to send copies to anyone interested in read-

ing the article. Write to:

Karl K. Taylor, Chairman
Adult Basic Education
Illinois Central College
East Peoria, Illinois 61635

Call for Manuscripts ✨

Manuscripts are invited for a projected book on writing labs, to be edited by Muriel Harris and Donald Gallo. Articles should be of use to college and/or high school educators interested in starting a lab or expanding existing facilities and should focus on topics such as starting a lab, selecting and training tutors, explaining or evaluating a lab's effectiveness, integrating it into a composition program, or expanding the uses and services of a lab, plus discussions of various kinds of structures of labs, effective materials, etc.

Please send two copies of a manuscript, with a stamped, addressed return envelope before January 1, 1980 to:

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