

# **BASIC WRITING**

**SPRING/SUMMER 1984**

**TRAINING TEACHERS  
PART II**

FOR DISPLAY ONLY

**VOLUME 3, NUMBER 4**

**1984 Harper & Row English books:  
the best in reading, writing, and thinking.**

Dianna S. Campbell  
Terry Ryan Meier

**EASY WRITER**

**Basic Sentence Combining**

*Second Edition*

1/84. 288 pages/tent. Paper. Instructor's Manual.

Sarah D'Eloia Fortune  
Barbara Quint Gray

**EXPERIENCE TO EXPOSITION**

**A Guide to Basic Writing**

2/84. 384 pages/tent. Paper. Instructor's Manual.

Alan G. Gross  
Clement S. Stacy

**WRITE AND REWRITE**

**The Craft of College Composition**

11/83. 160 pages. Paper.

Betty Rizzo

**PRIORITIES**

**A Handbook for Basic Writing**

3/84. 384 pages/tent. Paper. Instructor's Manual.

**To request examination copies,** write to Suite 3D, Harper & Row, 10 East 53d Street, New York, NY, 10022. Please include course title, enrollment, and present text.



**Harper & Row**

# JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

**Editor**

Sarah D'Eloia Fortune

**Assistant Editor**

Robbin Juris

**National Advisory Board**

Edward P. J. Corbett

Frank D'Angelo

Janet Emig

E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

Lee Odell

Edward M. White

Joseph M. Williams

**Associate Editors**

Barbara Quint Gray

Leonard Kriegel

Robert Lyons

Sondra Perl

**CUNY Advisory Board**

Sally Heaphy

Patricia Laurence

Nancy Lay

Marie Jean Lederman

Marilyn Maiz

Marylea Meyersohn

Betty Rizzo

Volume 3

Spring/Summer 1984

Number 4

The last issue published was Vol. 3, No. 3 (Fall/Winter 1981).

Unsolicited manuscripts are welcome. Please enclose two copies with a stamped self-addressed envelope. Authors should note that each issue of the *Journal* is devoted to one topic. The next issue will be titled BASIC WRITING AND SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH. The following issue ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC WRITING is described in a call for papers on page 76. Inquiries should be directed to:

The Editors  
Journal of Basic Writing  
Instructional Resource Center  
The City University of New York  
535 E. 80th Street  
New York, New York 10021

\$8.00 per individual subscription  
\$12.00 per institutional subscription

Cover design by Jamie Ross

Copyright © 1984 by the *Journal of Basic Writing*

---

*Britannica Films presents*

---

*a 16mm sound film or videocassette for  
Language Arts, Creative Writing, English*

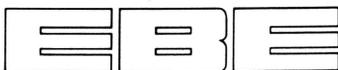
---

# Before the First Word

A professional journalist and two high-school students tackle the same writing assignment. A comparison of approaches used by each writer demonstrates the use of inquiry, speculation and interpretation—elements which are essential to good reporting and improved expository writing.

According to James Gray, Director of the National Writing Project, Berkeley, California:  
**"Before the First Word is quite simply the finest film on writing I have yet seen."**  
The film will **"open a window for teachers in despair over miserable essays written to formula. It will show what the writing process is all about."**

**ENCYCLOPAEDIA BRITANNICA  
EDUCATIONAL CORPORATION**  
425 North Michigan Avenue • Chicago, Illinois 60611



Color • No. 3793 • 29 minutes • 16mm film, \$535  
Videocassette, \$425 (please specify format) • 1-week rental, \$75

---

To preview, rent or purchase

**CALL TOLL FREE 1-800/558-6968**

---

(In the Continental U.S. exclusive of Wisconsin.)  
In Wisconsin, call collect 1-414/351-4488

---

TRAINING TEACHERS  
OF BASIC WRITING PART II

Sarah D'Eloia Fortune, <i>Introduction</i> .....	1
Sara Garnes, <i>Preparing the Ideal Teacher of Basic Writing</i> .....	4
Christopher Burnham, <i>Recruiting, Training, and Supporting Volunteer Basic Writing Instructors: A Working Program</i> .....	14
Lil Brannon and Gordon Pradl, <i>The Socialization of Writing Teachers</i> .....	28
Lou Kelly, <i>Writing as Learning for Basic Writing Teachers and Their Students</i> .....	38
Irvin Y. Hashimoto, <i>Sensitizing Beginning Teachers of Writing</i> .....	55
Betsy E. Brown and John T. Harwood, <i>Training and Evaluating Traditional and Non-Traditional Instructors of Composition</i> .....	63
NOTES AND STRATEGIES	
Patrick Hartwell, <i>Choosing Your Doctoral Program</i> .....	74
Request for Information: Research on Grammar Instruction.....	75

The *Journal of Basic Writing* is published by the Instructional Resource Center of The City University of New York. It is the membership publication of the Conference on Basic Writing Skills, an affiliate organization of the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

The *Journal of Basic Writing* publishes essays reflecting a diversity of approaches and opinions. Publication does not imply endorsement by The City University of New York, the Conference on Basic Writing Skills, nor the Conference on College Composition and Communication.

## INTRODUCTION

Part I of *Training Teachers* focused on doctoral programs for training college teachers of basic writing and in-service training for college and high school English faculty. Part II presents programs for teaching assistants in English departments or faculty or part-time instructors from other disciplines.

The issue begins with Sara Garnes' identification of the three qualities she considers necessary for the ideal basic writing teacher--qualities she keeps in mind in screening and training the doctoral candidates and lecturers who teach in the Basic Writing Program at The Ohio State University. She describes the content of the basic writing practicum and weekly staff meetings, showing how certain kinds of knowledge about language and writing and such activities as staff "write-ins" and grading sessions, guest lectures, and the publication of student work develop and support these qualities.

At Stockton State College, volunteer faculty from outside the English department are recruited to teach the intermediate level basic writing courses on a rotating basis. In the highly desirable situation Christopher Burnham describes, this service in the basic skills program meets contractual obligations for teaching general education courses, is rewarded by modest training stipends, and considered in tenure and promotion decisions as evidence of commitment to the educational mission of the institution. Two one-day seminars positioned strategically at the beginning and end of the summer preceding the first teaching assignment are followed up by regular meetings, a one-to-one support system of mentors drawn from the core skills faculty, tutoring for students at the skills center, and pre/post scores of holistically graded writing samples to be used in an advisory capacity at the time of the final grade.

Training for the graduate students in New York University's Expository Writing Program focuses on immersing those students in their own writing. There, Lil Brannon and Gordon Pradl have students write personal histories of their evolution as writers and study their own composing processes. Their students form reading groups outside of class for sharing work in all their courses; analyze teacher comments for their usefulness or uselessness to the revising writer; and practice glossing their texts marginally for content, intended effect, and strategies. They complete their own writing assignments in order to turn up ambiguities, hidden assumptions, and other problems.

Student immersion in writing is the linchpin in Lou Kelly's program of instruction at Iowa State also. Over the semester, the writing tutors in her practicum help basic writers work gradually through subjective personal

narratives toward more objective expository modes based on personal experience. The tutors simultaneously keep extensive course journals of their own, in which they explore the issues raised in class and in readings and their problems and successes in teaching. Kelly believes those journals are crucial to the effectiveness of the course. They encourage the tutors to engage in an active dialogue with the experiences of their lives and help graduate students revive the personal voice they have often lost in their over-accommodation to an "academic" style.

While at Idaho State, Irvin Hashimoto used error analysis as a technique for training teachers of basic writing. Using the comma splice as an example of a method that can be transferred to other errors, he shows how to break the beginning teacher's dependency on the simple handbook rule which the basic writer will not know how to interpret or to apply. Students in his classes first learned to recognize instances of the error. They were led to speculate about various sources for the error and to identify the different teaching strategies which would be necessary to address different problems or perceptions on the part of basic writers. Then they tried to isolate what was central and what tangential about actual usage so that they could teach in ways that address the complexity of sentences basic writers use and encounter, without overwhelming them with exceptions and subtle distinctions.

At Penn State, the shallow pool of writing teachers necessitates using non-traditional, part-time teachers in many freshman writing courses. Betsy Brown and John Harwood describe a study evaluating the effectiveness of three groups of teachers new to the composition program there--those with several years experience teaching college-level writing, those with B.A.'s or M.A.'s in English but no teaching experience, and those lacking both graduate training in English and experience teaching writing. When inexperienced writing teachers are given a two-day orientation, a year-long weekly seminar in the teaching and evaluation of composition, and one-to-one supervision in a collegiate, supportive atmosphere, it would appear that the worst effects of inexperience and previous lack of training can be overcome: there were, in their study, no significant differences in the quality of student writing nor in the grades given. There were, however, significant differences in student attitudes. Experienced teachers of writing were more able to inspire confidence in their students as writers, in themselves as teachers, and in the existence of objective and "fair" criteria for evaluating writing.

There are, however, other issues to consider. It is important to remember that fruitful insights for the basic writing teacher do not reside exclusively in linguistics, cognitive psychology, error analysis, and speech act theory -- nor necessarily in well-articulated training programs. Just as often, the meaningful connections are those we forge for ourselves between the work we do as scholars and critics of literature at typewriters and in seminars and libraries and the work we do as teachers of skills in the basic writing classroom. As Burnham points out, the use of non-traditional faculty, properly trained and supported, can have many positive effects for an institution. Over time, any short term liabilities of

inexperience can be overcome, the curriculum and faculty collegiality strengthened. On the other hand, there are real problems with using large numbers of non-traditional and particularly part-time teachers. Not the least of these is, as Harwood and Brown point out, the unemployment of English Ph.D.'s. In addition, staff and student morale is certain to suffer in any situation where instructors do not sincerely prefer to teach part-time. While the challenge and pleasure of learning the job will buoy teachers through a semester or two, the inequities of status, pay, benefits, and workload will rankle increasingly. And, as Wayne Booth pointed out in his MLA address of December, 1982, whenever the writing courses are displaced onto junior faculty and lecturers, established scholars miss an opportunity--indeed, betray a responsibility--to communicate to the masses of students who pass through our institutions the humanistic values that brought them to teaching, language, literature, and scholarly inquiry in the first place.

The issue concludes with a short note of strategy excerpted from Patrick Hartwell's address to the Conference on Basic Writing Skills at 4 C's in Dallas, 1982. It gives practical advice to persons seeking doctoral training in teaching writing and is suitable for passing along to students.

Kindly note the request for information about research on grammar instruction.

The editors mourn the death of our colleague and friend, Doris Fassler, a co-founder of the *Journal*, on January 21, 1984. We will remember her for her forthright manner, her caring, her confidence in students' abilities, and her sympathy and connection with students who, like herself, want to learn and have to struggle with material circumstances.

## PREPARING THE IDEAL TEACHER OF BASIC WRITING

Training basic writing teachers is a task which deserves careful attention since, like a chain, a basic writing program is only as strong as its teachers are. Surely, teachers are the key ingredient in any course of instruction, but particularly so when they instruct the high-risk students who typically populate basic writing classrooms.

In preparing basic writing teachers, consideration of the ideal teacher is instructive. If the characteristics of the ideal teacher are well-defined, teacher training can focus on activities which will foster those characteristics. The characteristics of the ideal teacher of basic writing can be captured by three C's (separate from, but no doubt influenced by the journal in our field): commitment, curiosity, and confidence.

The ideal basic writing teacher must be committed to the task. The teacher must have volunteered freely to teach the high-risk yet potentially rewarding basic writing student. Early in the development of The Ohio State University's basic writing program, Andrea Lunsford conducted a survey of basic writing programs, a survey which revealed that one of the primary keys to successful programs was that teachers teach in them voluntarily.<sup>1</sup> The lack of coercion is important in teaching basic writers because such teaching assignments are, almost by definition, destined to tap human resources that are perhaps only latent at best. While students in regular freshman composition classrooms are more capable of teaching themselves regardless of teacher intervention, basic writers desperately need instruction. They have not "caught" composition in their previous twelve years of schooling, as their regular freshman composition counterparts tend to have. They have not developed basic command of that variety of written language taught in colleges and universities, referred to by a range of names: academic prose, expository writing, Edited American English. Moreover, it is not at all the case that basic writers represent the *tabula rasa* which they may have when they entered the educational system

---

*Sara Garnes is an Assistant Professor of English at The Ohio State University where she is currently Director of the Section of Basic English, having directed the Writing Workshop, OSU's basic writing program, from 1977-80. She is preparing a text for teachers on the development of basic writers. The author gratefully acknowledges the Special Research Assignment awarded by The Ohio State University's College of Humanities which supported the writing of this article.*

<sup>1</sup> "Remedial English: A Descriptive and Evaluative Report" (Unpublished report prepared for The College of Humanities, The Ohio State University, July 1, 1976), p. 50.

at the age of five or six. Perhaps if a time-machine could enable the college teacher to become the first teacher of writing, the task would be easier. But since no magic formulas can be invoked, the stark realities of accumulated experience must be dealt with. The varieties of students and of their respective experiences with literacy make the task of teaching them basic skills in their late or post-adolescent years more difficult. Only teachers who are truly committed to this monumental task need apply.

Commitment should not, however, be interpreted as requiring a missionary zeal for saving souls or for saving the English language. Since such a path to salvation would begin in the basic writing classrooms and would, by necessity, involve coming to know students and their language intimately, the missionary could too easily become disenchanting. Only an understanding of the development of basic writers, or a desire to acquire that understanding, combined with the two other characteristics, curiosity and confidence, allows the proper attitude of commitment to the learning process required of the ideal teacher of basic writing.

Commitment to teaching basic writing does involve willingness to invest a great deal of time and energy in the task. It is preferable that the basic writing teacher not be secretly longing to escape to some other discipline, in order to emancipate time, even though that discipline be related by departmental fiat to composition. A genuine interest in the subject is a determining characteristic of the ideal teacher of basic writing.

Commitment, then, combined with a good measure of courage, is one of the principle characteristics of an ideal basic writing teacher. A second, but no less important characteristic, is curiosity. Since the basic writing teacher is primarily a teacher of language, a keen curiosity about all aspects of language facilitates language teaching. It naturally follows that those who are curious about the varied facets of language structure, use, and development will be sensitive observers of language.

The ideal basic writing teacher is especially interested in language variation. Understanding the factors which affect language variation provides a basis for teaching the particular variety taught in college classrooms. A sense of curiosity may arise from observing the ways in which languages change over time. The study of prior stages of English, traditionally divided into three periods--Old English, Middle English, and Modern English (but note the large number of glosses necessary to read and appreciate authors even as recent as Shakespeare)--reveals the inevitability of language change. The sound and spelling systems change, as well as the morphology, syntax, and vocabulary. Examination of manuscripts also reveals the variability of conventions of writing such as punctuation and paragraphing. Realizing that the passage of time guarantees language change provides perspective for basic writing teachers who can only benefit from culling examples illustrating language change from texts to share with students.<sup>2</sup> But most important, the diachronic study of language

---

<sup>2</sup> Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 27.

engenders a healthy attitude towards the synchronic manifestations of language since it allows teachers to envision from a distance, as it were, the relativity of their daily classroom activities. Language changes. We are teaching a code which will change. Only the most prescriptive and anachronistic could maintain that older stages of English are inherently preferable to Modern English.

Curiosity about causes of synchronic linguistic variation provides another rich context for ideal basic writing teachers. The study of sociolinguistics is especially important since, frequently but not accidentally, many basic writers do not speak Standard American English, the spoken variety most closely identified with Edited American English. Socioeconomic factors are typically important variables in sociolinguistic studies. Of course, within socioeconomic levels, additional factors cause variation. Linguistic variables create a range of linguistic styles or registers within socioeconomic strata, depending on the situation, purpose, and audience. Relatively formal styles may be observed when situations involve formal settings, e.g. a job interview, or a conversation with a respected, older audience such as one's minister or preacher. The purpose of the communication act, e.g. persuading an opponent, in contrast to greeting him or her, also governs certain linguistic variables.<sup>3</sup> Curiosity, accompanied by keen observations of variation in language, allows basic writing teachers to tap the linguistic skills their students bring to the writing classroom. Awareness of stylistic variation grants teachers recourse to introducing the notion of appropriateness. A particular piece of writing may be extremely inappropriate in a collegiate essay, but suitable in a letter to one's younger sibling. With some prompting, students can make explicit some of their implicit knowledge about appropriateness of language use.

Sociolinguistic studies investigate both language varieties and attitudes toward those varieties and their users. Studies which report listeners' attitudes toward bilingual speakers reveal the sorts of distinctions people make every day simply on the basis of spoken language. A bilingual individual may be judged to be intelligent or undependable based entirely on which language the individual speaks and on who the listeners are.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Peter Trudgill, *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction* (Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books, 1974) provides a thorough introduction to sociolinguistic study. Particularly informative studies for basic writing teachers are presented by William Labov, *The Study of Nonstandard English* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1970) and *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972); Walt Wolfram and Ralph W. Fasold, *The Study of Social Dialects in American English* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974); and Pamela Downing, "Factors Influencing Lexical Choice in Narrative," in *Pear Stories: Cognitive, Cultural, and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production*, ed. Wallace L. Chafe (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1980), pp. 89-126.

<sup>4</sup> W. E. Lambert, R. C. Hodgson, R. C. Gardner, and S. Fillenbaum, "Evaluational Reactions to Spoken Language," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 60 (1960), 44-51.

Awareness of attitudes toward speech is an especially important characteristic of the ideal basic writing teacher. By recognizing the worth of individuals, regardless of how well they command certain styles of written discourse at the beginning of a basic writing course, by being sensitive to the tremendous human tendency to form negative attitudes toward speakers of less valued varieties of English, and by acknowledging that such attitudes are also possible toward writers, ideal basic writing teachers can become aware of their own attitudes toward the prose they are destined to observe as their students begin to write.

Curious basic writing teachers will also want to become keen observers of the development of their students' writing abilities.<sup>5</sup> Studying the development of spoken language can also be instructive, if for no other reason than observing that as children master the semantic, morphological, and syntactic systems of their first language the number of errors they produce increases. Through the process known as overgeneralization, a word such as *daddy*, at first used appropriately, is subsequently used inappropriately to refer to any adult male, as a child's contexts expand. By the same process, irregular noun and verb forms such as *feet* and *sang* become regularized inappropriately as *foots/feets* and *singed/sanged*, as the child observes regular alternations such as *cat/cats* and *help/helped*, and then generalizes the rules.<sup>6</sup> The presence of errors in first language acquisition, thus, is an indication of growth, and the ideal basic writing teacher should be aware of the similarities that may exist between the development of spoken and written language, regardless of the basic writer's age. It is also fairly well documented that adults who are determined to elicit correct speech from children but are unaware of the natural course of language development and who correct children's incorrect, but developmentally predictable utterances can unintentionally cause children to stutter. Because of prior classroom experiences, some basic writers may be scribble stutters. Thus, some basic writers have learned or come to believe that they cannot write correctly, and thus they hesitate to write at all. These students have learned that regardless of what they put on the paper, they are destined to err, and thus they retreat from the act of writing. They hesitate, make false starts, and give up, convinced of their inability to develop into fluent

---

<sup>5</sup> James Britton, Tony Burgess, Nancy Martin, Alex McLeod, and Harold Rosen, *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)* (London: Macmillan, 1975) and Walter Loban, *Language Development: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> Victoria Fromkin and Robert Rodman, *An Introduction to Language*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978), pp. 252-254; the following authors present helpful introductions to language acquisition, psycholinguistics, and cognitive development: Herbert Clark and Eve Clark, *Psychology and Language* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978); Jean Piaget, *Six Psychological Studies* (New York: Random House, 1967) and "Intellectual Evolution from Adolescence to Adulthood," *Human Development*, 15 (1972), 112; and Lev S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, ed. and trans. E. Hanfmann and G. Vakar (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1962).

writers. Understanding the possibility of the cause and effect relationship between attitudes toward basic writing and basic writers' writing prepares ideal teachers to shape their responses to basic writers sensitively and wisely.

Ideal teachers of basic writing temper their curiosity with wisdom. In order to determine productive pedagogies, ideal, genuinely curious basic writing teachers will remain open to new methods of teaching, blending the experience of others with their own. Many NCTE publications, including the NCTE journals, publish material which is helpful not only for providing classroom activities but which helps the ideal teacher understand the reasons for success and failure of certain approaches, as our profession heightens its understanding of all that is involved in literacy. The presence of the *Journal of Basic Writing* has eased the task of keeping current. And since teaching basic writing often calls for work with each individual student, whether or not in the physical setting of a lab, the *Writing Lab Newsletter* is an additional helpful resource.

Determined openness and curiosity, combined with the third C, confidence, further define the ideal teacher of basic writing. Ideal basic writing teachers are imbued with confidence; they are confident in their students' ability to succeed, confident in themselves as teachers, and confident in their own abilities as writers. Yet confidence should not be blind; it must be fully informed. Confidence in students' ability to succeed comes from at least two sources. One source is the case studies of basic writers. Mina Shaughnessy's final chapter in *Errors and Expectations* presents excellent support for belief that most basic writers will eventually be able to learn to write expository prose.<sup>7</sup> Case studies documenting basic writers' progression, and sometimes regression, over a period of time illustrate the processes involved in acquiring basic writing skills. While such case studies document progress, they also provide insight into the diversity of basic writers and show that occasional regression often precedes dramatic gains, leaps which basic writers must make given the distance they need to cover in relatively compressed time periods.<sup>8</sup>

A second source of confidence comes from realizing the viability, the salience of the self-fulfilling prophecy. In one study demonstrating the self-fulfilling prophecy, teachers were told that certain of their students were "late bloomers." Testing had shown that these late-blooming students were due to burst forth soon; they were latently bright students. Although the identified students had been randomly selected, they did, in fact, advance far beyond normal expectations during the course of the study.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Shaughnessy, pp. 275-284.

<sup>8</sup> Sara Garnes, Timothy J. Evans, Elizabeth A. Flynn, and Mary E. McGann, "Report of the Writing Workshop: Basic Writing at The Ohio State University" (unpublished report prepared for The College of Humanities and the Department of English, 1979); the report describes the students, the courses, the staff, and an evaluation of effectiveness.

<sup>9</sup> M. A. K. Halliday, *Language as Social Semiotic: The Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning* (Baltimore, MD: University Park Press, 1978), p. 233; Frederick Williams, "Language, Attitude, and Social Change," in *Language and Poverty: Perspectives on a Theme*, ed. Frederick Williams (Chicago: Markham, 1970), pp. 48-49.

Among the attitudes which the teachers transmitted to the students, one must have been their belief that the identified students could and would succeed. It would be naive to think that "believing can make it so." However, teachers' confidence that students do possess the ability to learn to write, combined with informed syllabi, course objectives, and writing assignments, can make the difference for many basic writers.

The old adage, "nothing succeeds like success," if applied to the ideal basic writing teacher, indicates the importance of teachers' own past successes in teaching writing. For several reasons, experienced, if not seasoned, writing teachers are more likely to feel confidence in their teaching abilities. At some point, of course, all basic writing teachers must be beginners. However, if they have taught regular freshman composition, a typical route for many basic writing teachers, and have been successful, and have, even more important, observed with a great deal of curiosity the writing of those students who are relatively easy to teach, they will not only be able to articulate more fully the expectations which basic writers need to meet; they will also have accumulated a store of confidence to draw from while they begin the challenging work of teaching basic writing.

Although it may seem obvious, it nevertheless requires mentioning that ideal basic writing teachers are confident in their knowledge of English. It is not uncommon for those who have passed through the educational system in recent decades to be able to write correctly themselves, but to lack an explicit grammatical knowledge about what they are doing. Understanding the structure of Edited American English and knowing recommended and actual usage practices prepares teachers to speak confidently to their students.<sup>10</sup> Since many requirements for studying English grammar have been waived, ideal basic writing teachers will have volunteered to learn grammar, whether by taking coursework or by studying on an informal basis. Regardless of the means of instruction, ideal basic writing teachers are confident in their knowledge of the range of discourse structures common to edited American prose.

Finally, ideal basic writing teachers are confident in their own abilities as writers. Writing teachers must write. Although it would be uncommon for students to enroll knowingly for music lessons from a teacher who was not a musician, one who could not perform, it is not uncommon for students to study with writing teachers who write very little or have poor images of themselves as writers. Simplistic as it seems, encouraging writing teachers to write can be one of the most efficient means of improving their students' writing--witness the Bay Area Writing Project. A large part of the success of the BAWP and similar writing projects is attributed to the emphasis placed on having participating teachers write.<sup>11</sup> Teachers who are

---

<sup>10</sup> Joseph M. Williams points out the inherent dangers of overly prescriptive usage practices in "The Phenomenology of Error," *CCC*, 32 (May 1981), 152-68; nevertheless, there are limits. Teachers should, for example, be able to instruct students to use sentence terminal punctuation marks such as the period.

<sup>11</sup> James Gray and Miles Myers, "The Bay Area Writing Project," *Phi Delta Kappan* (February 1978), 413.

also writers know full well the difficulties of writing; they are able to be introspective about the writing process and to facilitate students' learning the process. Such teachers not only know whether a piece is well-phrased and in tune, they also know how to tell the student how to make it so.

Although it is helpful to consider the qualities of ideal basic writing teachers, we must return to reality--to those actual individuals who do the day-to-day work in the basic writing classrooms. The inherent diversity of those individuals who teach basic writing is no doubt matched by the diversity of training programs. Each program director must make choices under the constraints of time, money, and applicants for teaching positions.

We at The Ohio State University have tried to foster commitment, curiosity, and confidence in our basic writing teachers in a variety of ways, many growing out of the circumstance that most of our teachers are not faculty members. In 1980-81, for example, over ninety percent of the 180 sections of basic writing were taught by graduate students and lecturers. (Although lecturers hold master's or doctoral degrees, they are hired on a quarterly basis and receive few benefits.) In 1981-82, the percentage of sections taught by faculty members has increased to slightly over thirty, but the majority of the sections continue to be taught by graduate students and lecturers.

From the beginning of the program, we have sought volunteer teachers, reserving our right to be selective. Most graduate students who teach in the basic writing program have master's degrees and are pursuing work at the doctoral level. Some of these graduate students have come to us from the Communications Department where they are specializing in rhetoric, or from the Linguistics Department where they are specializing in syntax or discourse analysis. Most of them, however, are English majors who have chosen rhetoric and composition as one of their four areas of specialization. As such, they have studied classical rhetoric with Edward P.J. Corbett, have taught freshman composition, and have taken the freshman composition practicum course with Frank O'Hare. These graduate students have excellent preparation in both the classical and modern traditions and usually bring a great deal of enthusiasm for rhetorical and stylistic analysis to a second graduate-level practicum they take, most often the quarter before they wish to begin teaching in the basic writing program.

In the basic writing practicum, we combine theory with practice. *Errors and Expectations* is the principal text, supplemented by a variety of readings which have evolved as our understanding grows, but which usually include topics on language and cognitive development, language variation, rhetoric, composition, composing processes, discourse analysis, and reading theory.<sup>12</sup> The practical work of the training course involves visiting a basic

---

<sup>12</sup> We supplement works cited above with Janet Emig, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1971); Sondra Perl, "A Look at Basic Writers in the Process of Composing," in *Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators*, ed. Lawrence N. Kasden and Daniel R. Hoeber (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1980), pp. 13-32; Frank Smith, *Understanding Reading*, 2nd ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1978); Gary Tate and Edward P. J. Corbett, ed., *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

writing class on a regular basis, tutoring one of the students in that class, and keeping a journal of these activities. On occasion, the practical work has also involved teaching a unit in a basic writing classroom or preparing an exercise which would address a writing problem of the tutee. The resulting exercises and modules inject vitality into our program and serve as important resources to our staff.

Probably the most important activity in the practicum, however, involves the close analysis of texts. Students of literature are particularly skilled in analysis and learn quickly to apply Shaughnessy's methods to basic writers' texts. The graduate students also practice forming a hypothesis about the etiology of a student's difficulties with writing and propose a starting point for work with the student. Based on features in the text or on conversations with the student, future basic writing teachers formulate fruitful pedagogical strategies.

One five-hour course can never prepare potential teachers for the diversity of writing problems they will encounter in the basic writing classroom. In order to provide continuing support to the basic writing staff, we hold our version of *Sixty Minutes*. These hour long, weekly staff meetings are designed to provide the support basic writing teachers need. Staff meetings range from formal presentations made by guest lecturers to informal workshops led by basic writing staff members. At one meeting last year, for example, Edward P.J. Corbett presented a paper, "A Literal View of Literacy." Both our Dean and Provost have attended staff meetings. Additional support is provided by colleagues from throughout the University; thus, a psychologist and a speech pathologist have informed us of resources available for students plagued by writing anxiety or by severe personal problems, and by dyslexia or dysgraphia. In order to facilitate articulation with writing programs preceding and following our students' enrollment in basic writing courses, concerned high school teachers have shared with us their perspective of the writing crisis and discussed samples of their students' writing. Similarly, Frank O'Hare and Ron Fortune have discussed the freshman composition course and sample essays written by students enrolled in the course.

Most frequently, however, the topics raised at staff meetings are immediately applicable in the basic writing classroom, topics such as invention, revision, and grading. Other topics have dealt with preparation and use of audiovisual materials, with models of development and argumentation, and with teaching techniques staff members have found particularly helpful. Perhaps one of the most instructive staff meetings is our quarterly "Write In" at which we all grapple with the same topic, compose our responses, and share our written products. At these sessions, we not only gain firsthand experience with the writing process, but we become vividly aware of the tasks we require daily of our students.

Frequently, we spend sessions sharing our students' writing. Since we have found these sharing sessions especially useful we have recently collected the most helpful materials and duplicated them in a handbook, the longest section of which contains examples of students' graded work and teachers' comments on paragraphs and essays written in each of our three

basic writing courses. Also included are examples of the revision process, consisting of several drafts of a single essay including the final copy. This lengthy handbook (152 pages) also includes a description of the freshman English curriculum, placement procedures, and resources for students such as information on the Writing Skills Laboratory, which is open to all University students for tutorials on an individual basis; the Reading/Study Skills Center, which offers short courses and individual assistance; the Office for the Physically Impaired, which provides support services for dyslexic students; the Learning Resources Center; and the Counseling Center. It also contains writing projects, topics, and exercises; a selected bibliography on writing and basic writing; a summary of the results of the annual evaluation of our effectiveness; materials, aids, and forms frequently used in our program; and appendices of course syllabi and accompanying annotated syllabi for staff.<sup>13</sup> Having a common reference at hand decreases the administrative time needed to integrate new staff members into our program, but most important, the handbook provides them with exemplary models of the writing process and of teachers' responses to writing and with various clear examples illustrating the care with which we attempt to execute our duties.

Since we found that sharing materials with each other was helpful, we thought that it would be useful for students to share also. Thus, an editorial committee prepares weekly editions of a student newspaper, *Inprints*. *Inprints* consists mainly of student writing, from works in progress to finished pieces. We have now printed a collection of the best of *Inprints* in a volume entitled *Reprints*. Both the weekly newspaper and the collection have become valuable resources to students and teachers alike.<sup>14</sup>

The staff meetings, handbook, and publications of student writing help to provide support for our teachers. But a more personal type of support comes from classroom visitations. The director visits classes on a prearranged basis. Before the visit, the director discusses the goals for the class with the teacher. In a followup session, the director describes to the teacher what he observed, and discusses how effectively the teacher achieved the goals laid out in the pre-observation interview.<sup>15</sup> Just as we encourage teachers to share experiences and materials, we encourage them to visit each others' classes. In effect, we strive to establish an ambiance of informality and openness.

---

<sup>13</sup> Nancy Woodson, ed. "A Handbook for the Basic Writing Program" (Columbus: Writing Workshop, Department of English, The Ohio State University, 1981-82).

<sup>14</sup> The assistant director of the basic writing program in 1979-80, Phil Boshoff, initiated our publications of student writing, based on his positive experiences with such publications at Purdue University.

<sup>15</sup> Edward Lotto, director of our basic writing program, observes classes using a system described by Michael Flanigan in "Observing Teaching: Discovering and Developing the Individual's Teaching Style," *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, 3 (Winter 1979), 17-24.

We view the preparation of basic writing teachers as an ongoing process. While we began that preparation in a formal course, we have found that continued support eases our tasks and makes possible the realization of our common goals to become better teachers of basic writers, sensitive to their problems, yet aware of their potential; eager to share in their frequently rapid progress, yet strong enough to endure their inevitable backsliding; confident in our program, yet open to discover even more successful pedagogical approaches.

## RECRUITING, TRAINING, AND SUPPORTING VOLUNTEER BASIC WRITING INSTRUCTORS: A WORKING PROGRAM

Five years ago, Stockton inaugurated a basic skills competence requirement. Since then, freshmen unable to prove their competence in writing, reading and critical thinking, and basic mathematics on a placement exam have been required to take courses in their areas of deficiency. In outline, nothing in Stockton's program distinguishes it from hundreds of others trying to guarantee that students have the basic skills needed to take advantage of a college education.

When devising the program, Stockton acted on the premise that the requirement would succeed only with a major institutional commitment to teaching and reinforcing basic skills across the curriculum. Not only the common sense of "practice makes perfect" underlines this premise. Long ago Albert Kitzhaber described the consequences of the "message" institutions send through their requirements. His analysis of the curriculum of Dartmouth College indicated that freshman English, whether it taught freshmen how to think, read, and write or not, did convince freshmen that writing was important--but only for a little while and in particular courses. Students learned their lesson so well, in fact, that many would apply only what minimal effort they believed was required when writing in subsequent courses. In many courses, therefore, samples indicated that students were writing with less proficiency than before the required English course. The English requirement taught students how to manipulate language, but the curriculum did not require them to perform at any consistent level of proficiency.<sup>1</sup>

The whole of Kitzhaber's analysis of institutional efforts to teach writing merits attention, but his greatest contribution is illustrating the importance of the "message" sent through the requirements. Total institutional commitment allows a requirement to have power. Students must practice the required skill regularly across the curriculum. Faculty must consciously reinforce the requirement by demanding frequent performance at a consistent level of proficiency.

When Stockton devised its basic skills requirement, the institution was sensitive to this problem of "message." Certain features, including a policy to dismiss students unable to reach competence, were included to reflect

---

*Christopher C. Burnham was Director of Writing at Stockton State College (Pomona, N.J.) from 1975-81. He is now Coordinator for Writing at New Mexico State University.*

<sup>1</sup> Albert Kitzhaber, *Themes, Theories, and Therapy: The Teaching of Writing in College* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963).

institutional commitment. The college believes that with intensive instruction, extensive support, and extraordinary commitment, severe deficiencies can be remedied in a short time. Instruction and support are provided by the institution, and the dismissal policy serves to enrich student commitment. Students invest great effort in the program since they have so much to gain--or lose--as a result of their performance.

In addition, as a young institution, we were free to deal with basic skills in new ways. Foremost among these innovations was a plan to staff basic skills courses with faculty from across the college. Such staffing would show students that basic skills are fundamental to every discipline. More important, faculty participating in the program would return to discipline courses with a practical understanding of basic skills and how to reinforce them in their discipline courses. While such a staffing plan might cause problems, the college believed the outcome justified the effort.

At Stockton, basic skills courses are not staffed by overworked skills faculty, underpaid adjuncts, inexperienced teaching assistants, or discipline "retreads." We staff the courses with volunteers from across the college. These faculty are trained by a small core of skills specialists and supported by a Skills Center staffed with trained peer tutors. We call these volunteers "rotating faculty." After training and with support, they teach in the program on a semester-by-semester basis. A volunteer contributes a course every year or so on a rotating basis. Volunteers range from dance instructors to chemists, and both junior and senior faculty participate in the program. The program depends on the idea that faculty members are professional writers, having generally earned their credentials through research and writing. Our training program raises these skills to consciousness and develops them so they can be channeled for instruction. The balance of this paper will outline our program for recruiting, training, and supporting rotating faculty for basic writing courses.

## RECRUITING FACULTY

One of our tasks while recruiting is providing rotating faculty with a description of Stockton's basic writer. Not only does this help volunteers decide whether to participate or not, it also begins to prepare them for the task.

Roughly a third of all entering freshmen take a basic writing course. We use the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test to determine which students will take the course.<sup>2</sup> Placement depends largely on a holistically scored impromptu writing sample. All who score below the state-wide median automatically enter basic writing courses. In terms of verbal SAT

---

<sup>2</sup> Two publications describe this test in detail, especially the writing sample. *Interpreting Scores on the New Jersey College Basic Skills Placement Test* (Princeton: E.T.S., 1980) and *Scoring the Essays* (Princeton: E.T.S., 1980) are both available from the Basic Skills Council of the New Jersey Department of Higher Education, 225 West State Street, P.O. Box 1293, Trenton, N.J. 08625).

and high school class rank, however, our basic writers do not differ radically from our regular freshmen.

Stockton's basic writers fall into two categories, the unskilled and the untrained. Our unskilled writers show little awareness of the structure of written English sentences and paragraphs, little sense of purpose of their writing, few strategies for making a statement or representing an idea in writing, little familiarity with words, little reading experience, dialect interference--the list can go on. Within this group are the basic writers studied in Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*.<sup>3</sup>

Unskilled writers, however, represent a small percentage of Stockton's basic writers. As a service to rotating faculty and to students, the unskilled writers are homogeneously grouped into enriched sections taught by professional skills faculty.

Most of the other students taking basic writing are untrained. These students cannot develop paragraphs or arguments. They sometimes write irregular sentences primarily because they have received little instruction or practice with sentence boundaries or punctuation. They will spell poorly because they don't recognize certain English spelling quirks, like the *y* to *i* plural change. They can't use apostrophes because they've not been made to use them since grammar school. Our untrained writers are the victims of poor backgrounds where writing was used infrequently or where content was stressed without requisite attention to the structure and conventions of standard edited American English. More significant, many of these students are unaware of the process of composing. They are without strategies for inventing, arranging, or expressing ideas. Often these students like to write; they keep journals and write letters to friends and poems for themselves. But they lack practice in the kinds of writing college will demand of them. Given direction and practice, however, they can become proficient writers. These are the students we prepare rotating faculty to teach.

A characteristic of many basic writers at Stockton is lack of motivation. Many view school, and especially writing, as tedious. Their first response to even the most exciting material is boredom. Their most common attitude toward writing is boredom, but this boredom generally serves as a defense. Their boredom conceals a fear of writing rooted in previous failure. One of my students described paper corrections as "bulletholes." She resented having her papers shot-up. Other bored writers reflect the attitudes of previous teachers who did not read or respond to papers. One student admitted that she directed an obscene comment to her teacher in the middle of each of her papers. The comments went without notice. Why should she write, she asked, when her teachers aren't reading. These are only some of the reasons why students dislike writing. Since these are the students rotating faculty will encounter, the primary criterion for recruiting is enthusiasm. Basic writing instructors must be able to excite students, to

---

<sup>3</sup> Mina Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

involve them in their own education, to show them the joy of learning and the power that comes with assuming interest and control of their academic experience.

We get information about prospective teachers in many ways. Students know faculty reputations, and they are not reticent when asked about a particular teacher. Formal student evaluations are also available. Finally, coffee talk in lunch rooms and at parties can help identify instructors with the skill to motivate students.

Once the best instructors are identified, core faculty approach the prospects personally, asking if they've considered teaching a basic writing course. We start with a compliment. Potential rotating faculty respond favorably to positive reports about their reputations. Next we appeal to program purpose. One of our goals is to maintain the integrity of the whole curriculum by guaranteeing the competence of all our students. A good way to increase the effectiveness of upper level instruction is to bolster the strength of the foundation. Participation in the program is service to the institution.

Faculty will participate for reasons other than service to the institution. Often good teachers are interested in becoming even better teachers. They view teaching basic writing as a means to acquire greater awareness of the role of writing in their content courses and to gain increased confidence when evaluating writing or reinforcing skills in content courses. Several faculty have taught basic writing courses because they wanted to improve their own writing. What better way to improve writing than by teaching writing? These faculty report success and cite published articles as proof of the positive effect teaching writing has on an individual's writing. Some faculty participate from a genuine sense of mission. Our basic writers are students clearly in need of quality instruction. As a state college with basic skills and critical literacy among our expressed missions, many Stockton faculty view participation as a right and a duty.

This three-pronged appeal--service to institution, self, and students--is reinforced by faculty and administrative support. Participating faculty feel themselves part of an elite corps. In addition, they are members of a network supporting each other as they teach. Administrative support comes in various forms. The administration recognizes teaching a basic writing course to be a significant contribution to general education. At Stockton, most faculty owe a third of their contractual workload to general education through the General Studies curriculum. Teaching basic writing helps meet this requirement. Administration also supports faculty by paying \$50 stipends to participants in training workshops. Most important, however, both faculty and administration illustrate their commitment to the program by considering participation in tenure and promotion actions. In general, the program maintains a high profile in the institution, receiving the implicit and explicit support needed to make it attractive to faculty and thereby successful.

The breadth of faculty participation illustrates the success of the program. While the basic skills competency requirement went into effect in 1976, 1977 was the first year of extensive rotating faculty participation and

the beginning of the training program. Since then rotating faculty account for 40 percent of our basic writing instruction. Generally, they teach six of the fifteen sections offered each fall. Currently, more than ten non-writing faculty are prepared to teach basic writing. No one division of the college contributes more rotating faculty than the others; volunteers come regularly from business, the social sciences, the natural sciences, and the arts and humanities. Rotating faculty offer one section for two consecutive fall semesters and then take a year off. We add an average of two new recruits each fall. Perhaps as a result of effective recruiting or successful training, no rotating faculty have indicated they will never again teach a basic writing course.

On an experimental basis we are recruiting volunteers to teach intermediate writing courses. In addition, we use the rotating faculty model to staff advanced composition courses in particular disciplines. For example, a rotating basic writing instructor offers an advanced business writing course each spring. Finally, the atmosphere initially established by the rotating faculty concept has allowed an extensive writing across the curriculum project to develop, ensuring reinforcement of writing skills throughout the college.

Our experience with rotating faculty has generally been positive. But as exciting and rewarding as teaching writing is, so is it challenging. Good teachers of basic writing make their students grow, sometimes after great resistance. Even under the best conditions, with optimal preparation and training, there is the potential for failure. Thus, not all faculty may be appropriate for the task. But careful recruiting can minimize failure. Nothing could be worse than dealing with an instructor who has thrown in the towel half way through a course, especially since the failure may be blamed on inadequacies in the program. Should the disgruntled instructor criticize the program, recruiting becomes more difficult.

Several aspects of the recruiting program maintain quality control. Since the professional skills faculty are ultimately accountable for the success of the program, we are concerned with the quality of our recruits. The professional skills faculty act as primary recruiters, and recruiting begins only after an instructor's reputation has been checked. Nevertheless, some faculty will volunteer themselves--or be volunteered. These volunteers deserve special attention. Stressing the commitment necessary to take full advantage of the training program and explaining in detail all the elements of the program often eliminate those volunteering for purely extrinsic reasons -- for a tenure commitment or similar internal political reason. Advising volunteers that there is a common pre/posttest writing sample used both for advisory grading and program evaluation also steers the less-than-committed elsewhere. The demands of heart and soul made of rotating faculty require their commitment to be genuine.

## TRAINING FACULTY

Three training activities prepare rotating faculty for their task. The first involves a set of reading materials delivered toward the end of the spring semester. Generally, rotating faculty teach in the fall semester, giving them time during the summer to prepare their courses. The readings discuss the nature and function of writing, the relations between writing and learning, and various writing pedagogies.<sup>4</sup> Core faculty select and reproduce articles and excerpts from books, adding marginal notations to draw volunteers' attention to particularly relevant points in the reading. A short annotated bibliography lists specialized articles and texts available in a teachers' library in the Skills Center. The texts in the teachers' library are selected for their accessibility to non-specialists and for their practicality.

Two important considerations govern the selection of assigned readings. First, they must be reasonably brief. Our volunteers, since they contribute extra time to our program, have already assumed quite a burden. Second, the readings must help them solve the immediate problem of preparing to teach a basic writing class and reflect the philosophy of the program. Thus, many readings emphasize the importance of paper feedback when composing or identify invention as a skill at least as important as editing and proofreading. The readings illustrate the importance of developing an authentic voice in writing, further stressing that basic writing teaches much more than correct writing. Their purpose is to introduce rotating faculty to writing as a holistic skill, not a collection of independent manipulated discrete skills.

In addition to representing the philosophy of the program, the readings also introduce rotating faculty to the variety of ways of teaching writing. Thus, they learn there is room for their individual styles. They have general skills for teaching writing; the readings show them how to apply these skills in the classroom. They can pick and choose among the readings, incorporating specific strategies that reflect their individual styles as teachers. The readings also serve to get them thinking about the task. Their minds are set to "cooking," as Peter Elbow would say.

The second stage of the training program is a one-day workshop just after spring semester. Volunteers receive \$50 for their participation in

---

<sup>4</sup> Representative readings include James Britton, *The Development of Writing Abilities 11-18* (London: Macmillan Education, 1976); Kenneth Bruffee, *A Short Course in Writing, 2nd ed.* (Cambridge, Mass.: Winthrop, 1980); Peter Elbow, *Writing Without Teachers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Janet Emig, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1971) and "Writing as a Mode of Learning," *College Composition and Communication*, 28:2 (May 1977); Roger Garrison, "One to One: Tutorial Instruction in Freshman Composition" in "Implementing Innovative Instruction," *New Directions for the Community College*, 2:1 (Spring, 1974); Thom Hawkins, *Group Inquiry Techniques for Teaching Writing* (Urbana, Ill.: ERIC/NCTE, 1976); Ken Macrorie, *Telling Writing*, revised 2nd ed. (Rochelle Park, N.J.: Hayden Books, 1976) and *Writing to be Read*, revised 2nd ed., (Rochelle Park, N.J.: Hayden Books, 1976); Donald Murray, *A Writer Teaches Writing* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1968).

workshops. The sum is a modest but tangible institutional reward for their contribution. The money is provided through faculty development funding since the skills and attitudes volunteers acquire in writing workshops generalize themselves to all their teaching. The chemist teaching basic writing for a semester begins to emphasize writing skills in chemistry courses. As a result of the program's writing-as-learning philosophy, rotating faculty are likely to use writing more effectively in their content courses, making them better teachers.

The one-day end-of-semester workshop indoctrinates volunteers to the purpose of the basic writing course. We aim to help needy students acquire basic writing skills, and also to guard the integrity of the curriculum at large through the competency requirement. We devote the morning to a discussion of values in writing and the formulation of course objectives. To help volunteers understand the difference between competent and incompetent writing at the freshman basic skills level, we spend time reading and discussing samples of student writing. We begin with holistic scoring, reading for a general impression, and ranking by overall quality of the writing. As discussion continues, we assign values to the various elements of writing including content, structure, and mechanics. As we discuss these elements, rotating faculty develop a working vocabulary. They begin to understand coherence, for example, not as an abstraction, but as a set of linking operations in writing. As they understand the linking--how it works in competent writing and is absent in incompetent writing--they begin to develop strategies for helping students write coherently. Developing a vocabulary is an important function of the discussion.

Our discussion of the samples is purposefully non-directive. That is to say, values are not imposed. Volunteers are encouraged to vent pet-peeves. This instructor's hostility to the comma fault merges with that instructor's horror at poor spelling and with another's absolute intolerance of vacuous writing. In the process, instructors become aware of the incredible variety of values. Then the important work of the day begins. First, we make the point that not any single fault characterizes incompetent writing. Second, we begin to develop a view of good writing. Competent writing is writing in which skills are integrated. The key point is integration. The discrete manipulation of a skill is not in itself sufficient to create good writing. We consciously move instructors away from a workbook, grammar drill mentality. Finally, we generate a list of characteristics of competent writing and form these into objectives for the course. Typically these objectives include writing grammatically correct sentences, using a variety of sentence structures, structuring and developing paragraphs and writing short papers. These are broad enough for all to agree upon while vague enough to leave room for all to maintain their idiosyncrasies. And they are specific enough to describe an outcome, competent writing, which is distinguished by these features.

During five years of workshops, the objectives have not changed much. Still there is value in devoting the whole morning of a workshop to forging objectives. Providing volunteers with a working vocabulary and a holistic sense of writing is crucial to their success in the program. Lately, however,

we have added to the objectives a set of goals. Unlike our objectives which can be quantified and measured, the goals are qualities. The goals further emphasize the philosophy of the program, especially the relation between writing and learning and the importance of peer interaction. They also include "soft objectives" like wanting students to feel comfortable and confident when writing and making students understand that writing has a variety of functions.

The purpose of the morning workshop is to encourage rotating faculty to take an active part in program and course design. Imposing objectives would take less time and be less demanding, but would neither enhance teachers' understanding and commitment to the task nor increase their potential for success. Rotating faculty involved in the morning workshop stand a greater chance for success than non-participants, as we have learned by comparing rotating faculty performance with that of adjuncts hired late and without the experience of the training workshops. Though adjuncts may have more appropriate credentials and more experience in teaching writing per se, they are generally not as effective as rotating faculty. Measures of effectiveness include student evaluation of teaching and analysis of pre- and posttest writing samples.

We devote the afternoon of the first workshop day to beginning the process of realizing the goals we established in the morning. First we distribute a set of syllabi previously devised by core and rotating faculty. The syllabi include not only the schedule for the semester, but also the mechanics of the course including policies on attendance, late papers, supplemental skills lab requirements, and so forth. All instructional concerns are represented. Each syllabus shows the style of an instructor fitting itself to the philosophy of the program and the objectives for the course. Distributing and discussing existing syllabi illustrates that teaching writing on any level is largely related to individual style. During the discussion we emphasize that there are diverse ways of accomplishing the same goal--that there is no one magical way to teach writing. Instructors use different strategies according to their own teaching and writing styles. Instructors are encouraged to personalize their syllabi to take advantage of their own strengths and weaknesses -- but always in service to established program goals and objectives. The discussion of syllabi not only helps new rotating faculty begin to shape their own syllabi, but it also almost always results in changing existing syllabi. My syllabus has gone through three radical revisions as a result of these syllabus-sharing sessions. The syllabus sharing is not a service to new faculty alone.

Syllabus sharing takes the greater part of the afternoon. Near the end, however, faculty begin discussing texts. Again reflecting our basic philosophy that each instructor is best capable of determining how common objectives will be met, we do not use a standard text. Texts reflect the style of the instructor and the shape of the course. Here core faculty exert some influence. We discuss the texts we use and why we use them. After the range of possible texts and purposes of the texts are discussed, we move to the teachers' library where about seventy-five texts ranging from workbooks and handbooks to readers and rhetorics are available for inspection.

Core faculty supply these texts to the library by contributing examination copies. In addition, whenever publishers' representatives visit, I show them the library, explain our text policy, and encourage them to send two of whatever seems appropriate to me. These become library copies. Their cooperation has helped us establish a library representing the state of the art in composition/writing texts. Such a system benefits both core and rotating faculty. It can be developed anywhere as long as space exists to store and display texts. Rotating faculty leave this session with a few texts to work through before they make a final choice. They also leave knowing that the teachers' library is a source of supplemental ideas and exercises for teaching particular skills.

The final workshop day ends with two charges to participants. First, they are directed to choose their texts and to order them by mid-summer. Second, they are charged with drafting a syllabus. These syllabi become the first agenda item in the follow-up workshops scheduled for the week before school begins in the fall.

The third stage of training occurs the week before school begins. Intensive is the only word that can describe the fall workshop day. Volunteers are excited about the programs they have planned during the summer, but they are also anxious as they approach the threshold. The workshop concentrates on five specific activities, all save one of a purely practical nature. The time for philosophical rumination is passed. The computer is printing out class lists.

The first activity of the day seems not to be a practical one, but it is crucial. Faculty are forced to write under pressure, in an area for which they have not been academically prepared, in a less than comfortable place, for a purpose whose value they cannot absolutely determine. Finally, they must share that writing with strangers. The aim is to have faculty experience what their students experience. These exercises have included twenty-minute descriptions of the way individual faculty actually write papers and articles contrasted to how they were taught to write, impromptu considerations of the purposes of writing and the reasons faculty volunteer to teach writing, and descriptions of familiar places. One particularly effective exercise is having faculty write the placement sample required of students.

Since faculty, especially those volunteering to teach basic writing, are experienced writers, the approximation is inexact. However, the point is made. Most faculty experience anxiety. In the discussion that follows the exercise they become aware that anxiety may be the only thing most writers have in common. They are reminded of the gist of their readings. Composing is a complex and idiosyncratic act. There may be a single task, but there are myriad strategies for accomplishing the task. Most basic writers are without these strategies. In the discussion, providing a variety of writing strategies to students becomes the major theme. The volunteers have planned their syllabi and have structured their courses. The writing exercise reminds them that the course cannot be so rigid that individual writers are excluded.

Once we have all written, have shared our writing, and have been reminded of the complexity of composing, we turn to practical matters that often mean the difference between success and failure. First we review and critique the provisional syllabi designed during the summer. Since it has been some time since the syllabi were devised, the discussion often begins with someone explaining revisions already planned. Since the core faculty and repeating volunteers have taught the course already, they are particularly aware of potential hazards and can suggest solutions. Special attention is paid to chronology--what skills are generally best handled when. The debate over working with paragraphs before whole papers continues to rage among core faculty. However, we stress the folly of teaching sentence skills without the context of a longer unit of discourse. This debate often results in a revision in a volunteer's syllabus. Our goal is to fine-tune our syllabi. We emphasize the importance of having a sound structure as the foundation of the course.

After critiquing syllabi, we describe the support services attached to the program. While the training program represents the best preparation we can devise for rotating faculty, we know it is not sufficient.<sup>5</sup> Thus, we offer rotating faculty several on-going support systems to help them through the semester. These include formal and informal group problem-solving sessions during the semester, a mentor system, and Skills Center testing/tutorial assistance. Recently, I surveyed the rotating faculty to determine which elements of the on-going support were most helpful. Meetings were noted as least helpful, mainly because schedules prevented regular attendance. Rotating faculty found the mentor system quite helpful. The mentor system allows rotating faculty to formally designate one of the core faculty as chief consultant during the semester. Core faculty take the mentor system seriously, making a point to maintain personal contact to check how the course is going and if there are any problems. Since the core faculty are widely experienced writing teachers, it is rare when rotating faculty encounter new problems. The mentor system is a formal problem-solving network. Rotating faculty find having one core faculty person to trust with problems, insights, or complaints very helpful.

What rotating faculty find most helpful as on-going support, however, is the Skills Center. Rotating faculty are informed of the Skills Center services and instructed in how to get students working the peer tutoring lab. All rotating faculty responding to the survey listed the Skills Center support as the most important support service.

The Skills Center functions as our testing center. We use a variety of pre/posttests in program evaluation. More important, we use the pretests as diagnostic tests. Performance on the Nelson-Denny Reading Test may suggest a student will have difficulty, so we will recommend supplemental

---

<sup>5</sup> A helpful article describing a semester-long training course for full-time basic writing instructors appears in Constance J. Gefvert, "Training Teachers of Basic Writing" in *Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, Administrators*, eds. Lawrence N. Kasden and Daniel R. Hoerber (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1980).

lab tutoring. If performance on the pretest writing sample, a process rather than impromptu test, suggests misplacement, we can sometimes move the student to a more appropriate section. These are testing services the Skills Center offers basic writing faculty.

The most important services rotating faculty see the Skills Center providing, however, is extensive one-on-one tutoring. Especially weak students can be mandated to work with a tutor on a particular task or through the entire semester. The work in the Skills Center becomes a requirement of the course. Tutors submit bi-weekly reports on a client's attendance, attitude, and performance to sending faculty. Sometimes extra peer support alone can help a weak student tremendously. Peer tutors understand certain problems students have that even the most informed and sensitive instructor cannot understand. Peer tutors can help untrained students with schedule-organizing and study skills which may be extrinsic to writing instruction but crucial for the basic writing student's survival. Sometimes the availability of help, even if not needed, enables the basic writer to succeed. Sometimes the praise and support a peer tutor offers is crucial to a student who hates the impersonality of school. Peer tutoring provides all these services to basic writers.<sup>6</sup>

The Skills Center functions as an important supplement to classroom instruction. Rotating faculty appreciate the support and value the service highly. However, they also understand the inherent limitations of a peer tutoring system. The Skills Center can only supplement the instruction in the course; it cannot supplant it. In addition, the Skills Center is effective only to the degree that it is systematic. Rotating faculty must understand the system well to take advantage of it. Several rotating faculty report that supplemental Skills Center assistance is crucial to the success of their weakest students. We allow time in the morning for discussion of the Skills Center and its role in a basic writing course.

At the end of this long morning, participants leave for lunch with two tasks. First, since lunch is an opportunity for some private social exchange, rotating faculty are encouraged to establish the mentor relationship then. Second, all instructors are requested to return prepared to share one particularly successful classroom strategy with the group.

We borrowed our first afternoon activity from the Bay Area Writing Project. Faculty share something they do that works. Core writing faculty generally describe particular strategies they use to introduce students to important writing concepts. Often these are games that extend the composing process, introduce categorizing as a means of establishing coherence, or use brainstorming to generate ideas and data to support ideas. We also discuss strategies for evaluating papers, including conference sessions and styles of marginal notation. Rotating faculty need to see a variety of styles

---

<sup>6</sup> Most helpful on the topic of peer tutoring is Kenneth Bruffee, "Staffing and Operating Peer-Tutoring Writing Centers," *Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, Administrators*. The notes to Bruffee's article generate a comprehensive bibliography on the topic.

of paper grading. They must understand that paper grading has instructional implications.

Just as important, presenters discuss problems with the exercises and offer extended discussions to anyone contemplating their use. This, of course, results in identifying another resource rotating faculty have available to aid them. Over the years, one or two paragraph precis of the exercises have been collected in a file kept in the Skills Center. The file is available to all. So much of all the training is a process of making rotating faculty aware of resources and how to take advantage of them. On the same survey mentioned earlier, rotating faculty ranked sharing successful classroom exercises as the second most helpful workshop activity. The most helpful activity was the syllabus review and critique.

The final activity of the afternoon is often limited by the fatigue growing from such a long and intense day. Each veteran participant reports one success and one failure while teaching the course. The failures often involve pacing. At mid-semester half of a class disappears with illness or frustration resulting from trying to meet the level of expectation of the instructor. Around the table participants discuss strategies for dealing with such problems. The purpose is to bring us back to earth, to the reality of the classroom after the heights reached when we shared the successful lessons. We want all participants to leave with a balance of enthusiasm and realism.

#### SOME FINAL SUPPORT

From the beginning our goal is to give rotating faculty a realistic sense of their task and the preparation to allow them success. Earlier mentioned were ongoing support through Skills Center testing and tutorial assistance, the mentor system, and occasional group meetings. However, we devote quite a bit of energy to giving volunteer faculty guidance in their final evaluation of students, since a failing grade might result in dismissal from college. To aid them with this crucial decision, we offer one more service, a pre/posttest writing sample evaluation designed to give them information on student progress through the semester and a measure of their level of competence.

During the first week of class all instructors administer the pretest. The pretest is not an impromptu sample. Research indicated that one of the absurdities of evaluation in composition programs was the impromptu sample. Sanders and Littlefield theorized that the reason pre/posttest writing samples showed little or negative growth in student writing was the nature of the impromptu sample. Instruction in writing that emphasizes the composing process generally prepares a student for failure on an impromptu sample. The skills needed for success on the impromptu sample are the opposite of those taught in a good composition course. A twenty-minute sample requires an easy and superficial response, exactly what composition courses view as bad writing. Sanders and Littlefield suggested abandoning the impromptu sample for a sample allowing writers to use what they've learned in the course.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> S. Sanders and J. Littlefield, "Perhaps Test Essays Can Reflect Significant Improvement in Freshman Composition," *Research in the Teaching of English*, 9 (1975) 145-53.

We use such a test despite its inadequacies from a tests and measurements point of view. We distribute the topic to the class before the sample is to be written, instructing students to prepare to write a paper on the topic during the next class. They can write for one hour. They can bring notes, dictionaries and whatever writing aids they use when writing papers. They must, however, write the final version on paper we provide. The special paper allows us some control of the testing situation and aids in blind scoring the samples later. Once completed, the samples are collected, coded and stored in the Skills Center.

At the end of the semester the same sample topic is given following the same procedures. These posttests are collected, coded, and randomly mixed with the pretests. They are holistically scored by trained readers, some teaching in the program and some drawn from the college at large. The reading is run with rigor. Each paper is scored twice on a 1-6 scale. Readers are instructed that a score in the top half of the scale represents competent writing, while lower half scores represent incompetent writing. Readers know the pre- and posttests have been scrambled, but they cannot distinguish one from the other.

The results of the reading are reported to each instructor by roster showing pretest score, posttest score and change. Instructors are advised to use these scores in an advisory fashion. They know what score signals competence, but they also know the inherent limitations of any one holistically scored writing sample. If the performance on the sample contradicts a student's performance throughout the semester, faculty are instructed to trust their own judgment. The pre/posttest system serves to foster confidence in evaluation or to provide a second professional opinion in cases of genuine doubt. Instructors, especially the rotating faculty, appreciate this second opinion and rank it as one of our most important support services.

In addition to the rigorous training and support outlined above, a successful volunteer basic writing program depends on several intangibles. First of all, it depends on extraordinary talent and commitment of core faculty. Not only must they teach their courses, they must also help train and support the rotating faculty. The program depends as well on the good will of the rotating faculty who volunteer to teach in the program. It depends on rotating faculty who have enough success in their first course to volunteer again. Effectiveness increases geometrically as rotating faculty repeat courses. Finally, the program depends on institutional commitment. Basic writing is valued enough that the best teachers in the college are allowed, even encouraged, to teach it. The administration supports the program and the volunteers who make it work.

But their support is repaid tenfold. Students receive high quality instruction in an area of clear need. Their increased competence protects and enriches the entire curriculum. Continuous reinforcement of the skill promotes writing proficiency. In addition, faculty are invigorated by their participation in a grassroots effort to improve the quality of the institution. Their participation makes them better teachers, thereby improving quality in upper levels of the curriculum. Finally, increased collegiality opens the

door for the other formal programs to increase student learning quality like writing across the curriculum.<sup>8</sup> Rare are instances where so little is risked while so much is gained.

---

<sup>8</sup> Those interested in a helpful discussion of both the problems and potential of establishing formal writing across the curriculum projects should read Elaine P. Maimon, "Cinderella to Hercules: Demythologizing Writing Across the Curriculum," *Journal of Basic Writing*, 2:4 (Spring/Summer, 1980) 3-11. In fact, the entire issue is devoted to writing across the curriculum theory and practice.

## THE SOCIALIZATION OF WRITING TEACHERS

"I never start my paper at the beginning; an outline would be out of the question. I write parts of the paper first, often on whatever I have with me when inspiration strikes--a paper towel, the back of my grocery list. But I wouldn't tell my students that."

And she would not tell her students this secret simply because she was trapped by the conventional wisdom of our profession. She felt she was bound to uphold the conventions of writing instruction which many textbooks pronounce: that writing proceeds in an orderly linear fashion, from formal outline to topic sentence to the summary paragraph. She finds herself divided; her individual process of writing conflicts with the way she thinks she should teach others to write. And she is not alone.

Her statement was like many made the first night of our class--a practicum in the teaching of writing, a one-semester course required of all graduate students who are simultaneously teaching for the first time in New York University's Expository Writing Program. We had asked the class to jot down a specific ritual they follow when a paper is assigned to them. They wrote without hesitation, often laughing as they recalled their own behaviors as writers, those idiosyncracies like needing a yellow legal pad or a glass of wine to see them through.

Our next question, however, stumped them: "How can you transfer your behavior into a writing strategy for your students?" We doubt it was the question itself that puzzled them. The students selected for the program are all quite intelligent individuals, usually with teaching experience in a field other than writing instruction--English and American literature, music and media ecology, near Eastern studies and economics. Rather, their confusion stemmed from the idea that their processes as writers could in any way be meaningful to someone else. Their model for teaching came from the courses they were taking, courses where there is a body of material or content to be studied and learned: the teacher lectures or leads a discussion. The idea of looking at their own processes--the way in which they go about writing--was completely new. And so our task began, one of helping teachers redefine themselves as writing teachers on the basis of who they are as writers.

---

*Lil Brannon is Assistant Professor of English Education, Director of the Writing Center, and Assistant Director of the Expository Writing Program at New York University.*

*Gordon Pradl is Associate Professor and Program Director of English Education at New York University.*

Too often this need for a radical shift in perspective is overlooked in teacher training as mechanical solutions and procedures for teaching writing are magically unveiled. Such an approach, however, would hardly have been appropriate in our case, working as we do in the context of the NYU Expository Writing Program, a two semester sequence in writing for all undergraduates, staffed almost entirely by graduate teaching assistants. Each semester the students complete eight compositions, including several that require outside research. Each paper must go through at least three drafts, the first of which is submitted for peer group review and commentary. The program has no required texts or syllabi, but instructors are encouraged to share with each other successful assignment sequences and classroom lessons as they are developed. This interaction is facilitated by both the one-semester practicum and the ongoing supervision the instructors receive from the full-time English Education faculty who work with the Expository Writing Program.

The major theoretical underpinning of the program is that writing is a recursive process: writers discover their meanings in the act of writing; ideas take shape in the ongoing dialectic between the intentions of the writer and the demands of a reader. At the heart of such a recursive process is the notion of revision. Thus, a series of drafts or reformulations are needed to decrease the discrepancies between what the writer wants to express and what the reader perceives in the text. Therefore, helping students find ways of revising a piece of writing becomes central to instruction. All assignments go through multiple drafts where revision can be based on teachers and students responding as readers to texts. In such a setting, it is important that writing teachers also remember their own experiences as writers, understand their own anxieties about writing, their desire for perfection, the false starts, the awkward sentences--processes and feelings we all share as writers as we fulfill our need to communicate.

Based on this philosophy of writing, a typical NYU writing workshop class begins with some stimulus to write--a problem derived from issues that students face: a current campus problem, conflicting interpretations of a text, a personal ethical dilemma. The students write, read what they have written to their writing groups, receive reader response to what they have written, revise, receive teacher response, revise again. This process is repeated throughout the semester. All the work is collected in a portfolio and evaluated at the end of the semester. In sum, the writing program tries to instill the natural process of writing: that writers' first drafts are seldom their final ones and that writing must meet the expectations of readers.

Because the writing program treats writing as an organic process, the teachers are not compelled to give students structural models to emulate, such as the traditional forms of classification or comparison/contrast. Rather than having students write five paragraph themes and slot information into boxes, teachers encourage students to grapple with ideas, allowing content to dictate form. The study of arrangement, the need to elaborate or to reorder, springs from the students' own struggle with questioning readers and the need to communicate their ideas to their peers and

the academic community.

We cannot, however, assume that these assumptions are shared if the teachers have not come to them independently. Because most teachers have experienced traditional schooling--that one must learn grammar first, then sentences, and finally paragraphs and essays; that one lectures about form; that every two weeks an essay is required, one structured around a given form--new teachers are often bewildered by NYU's Expository Writing Program. We have stripped away every assumption they have about how writing is to be taught. They do not know what to do in the classroom, and they often do not feel comfortable doing it our way. That is precisely the reason we begin as we do, by first discussing how we as writers write and what this can mean for our students.

We follow up this initial in-class writing and discussion by having our teachers do a more detailed analysis of their behaviors as writers. This assignment is deliberately made as wide-ranging as possible in order to tap the talents and personalities that make up the class. In giving this assignment, we begin by clarifying the distinction between retrospective macroanalysis and immediate microanalysis. In the former case we encourage our teachers to think back on how they developed as writers. What are their earliest memories as writers? Did any teacher or other person have any strong positive or negative influence on their writing. Did they ever keep a journal? What kind of school sponsored and/or creative writing have they done in the past? What are their attitudes toward writing? Is their image of themselves as writers positive or negative? In some instances, this line of questioning sends our teachers back to their early writing or journals, some perhaps having been buried in family attics for years, only to discover earlier triumphs, fears, and disappointments. This retrospective macroanalysis also refers to the larger patterns they might go through in completing a longer piece of writing for themselves, for school, or for the real world, keeping track of everything from their first glimmerings of an idea to the handing in of a final product. Here they might record a number of items: their plan for generating ideas, their research strategies, their revising procedures, or even their quirks like typing standing up or using longhand on lined yellow legal pads.

The micro level, on the other hand, refers directly to an audio-taped monitoring of some time span when the writer is actually setting words to paper. This research technique, known as protocol analysis, comes from the "composing aloud" approach being utilized in much current writing research. While writers compose, they speak their so called stream of consciousness into the tape recorder. Admittedly, this act of talking-writing is not possible for all--for some severely interferes with their ability to write. For those who can relax with this technique, it is possible to answer a number of interesting questions about their fluency in writing. Are phrases or clauses continually reconsidered or is there a smooth flow through all of the sentences making up a paragraph? Is the writer easily distracted? How does the writer discover new meaning connections as sentences are being composed? Does having to get a sentence "just right" ever hamper the over-all flow? For how long a period can the writer write

effectively? Although we indicate the detail with which such microanalysis can be carried out (see, for instance, Sondra Perl's coding scheme in *Research in the Teaching of English*, 13, No. 4 [December 1979], 317-336), our purpose here is merely to expose as many of the class as possible to this procedure so that they might at the appropriate moment use it as a diagnostic tool for themselves or for their own students.

After the papers are written (the suggested length is seven to ten pages, but many students make this assignment their own and report back with more than twenty pages), we share our discoveries with each other. Making the process self-conscious and finding out that other writers share the same anxieties and doubts is illuminating to beginning teachers. Not one writer's paper sprang fully edited from the pen. Not one writer followed a formal outline to fruition. All had struggled; all had been frustrated at various points; all had discovered something that they did not know they were going to write until they had actually begun. They procrastinated, desired perfection, needed an audience, had quirks. The teachers found that they and their students shared the same difficulties: writing is not easy for anyone; it is deliberate; it is idiosyncratic; yet when the right connections are made, it can be deeply rewarding.

In order to nurture this new sense of a shared community of writers, all of whom have similar needs, we ask the teachers to form writing groups with other members of the class. Groups of no more than five teachers meet weekly for one hour to read their work to each other, work written for this class or any other that they might be taking. The group provides an audience, one that can reflect back to the writer what it perceives the piece of writing to be saying, what the attitude of the writer is, and what expectations the writer has built up in the reader. The group's interactions form the foundation for demonstrating appropriate responses to their own students so that they, in turn, can profit from their peer writing groups. The teachers discover where in the composing process writers need support for their efforts and how to withhold evaluation until the appropriate moment. In other words, what is most useful to a writer is not a deductive summary judgment. Rather, writers must inductively reach their own conclusions regarding whether or not a piece of writing is working on the basis of the descriptive paraphrases generated by their peers. For example, if the peers say that the paper makes a point that the writer did not intend, then the writer must sort through this "dissonance" while reworking the original draft.

Responding carefully as a reader in a group parallels responding carefully to students when writing comments on their texts. Traditional evaluative modes of commentary, which often send contradictory messages, do not serve the purpose of stimulating rewriting and rethinking. Teachers must understand that students will revise based on what the instructor points out as the key areas worth further attention. If, for example, a teacher writes after a particular sentence "comma splice" and "wrong word" and then next to the entire paragraph comments, "This paragraph does not fit in with your entire piece," the student will be confused, not knowing where the revision should begin. Does the writer "fix" the sentence-level

problems in hope that this will clear up the noted misplacement of the paragraph or does the student omit the entire paragraph and disregard the teacher's other comment? New teachers readily grasp this point and they quickly learn to order their responses according to a hierarchy of concerns. It is harder but nonetheless crucial to help teachers find alternative ways of articulating responses so that they will not be directives ("Move this paragraph nearer to the beginning and order your paper the following way...") or vacuous ("Think more about what you are thinking").

To accomplish this end, we do several commenting exercises. First, teachers write an in-class paper. Papers are then exchanged so that no one knows whose paper they are commenting on. The teachers comment on the papers and return them. The teachers then explain how they feel as writers when they receive the kind of commentary that they have. Most often they feel that the comments have not respected the integrity of the writer, have missed the point of the paper, or have pointed out extraneous things. The few comments which are appropriate, those comments which tend to address the lapses of logic within the text and thus stimulate the writer to rethink an issue, become the starting point for our next exercise.

In this exercise we bring in three student papers, all having been commented on by three different teachers. The individual comments, however, are placed on separate cards and are not written on the text. The teachers in the class must decide what comments were written by which teacher and for which text. Traditional modes of commenting like "be specific" or "wrong word" or "Is this what you mean" or "Needs more development" can be placed on all the writing because they are not text specific. On the other hand, comments made in direct response to the logical entailments in the piece of discourse are readily matched with the appropriate composition. Such comments, by necessity, change from piece to piece because the teacher/reader is addressing the specific issues and referents within each piece. Rather than saying "be specific" to the sentence "All colleges are alike," the teacher would register her confusion to what the writer had said: "In what ways are colleges alike? size? student body? course offerings?"

Having teachers look carefully at new strategies for responding shows them alternatives are possible. Our third exercise, then, is an on-going one in which we explore alternative commenting strategies. For example, for several weeks we begin each class with a short piece of writing that the class reads. We ask them to find the key problem in the text which, if revised, would improve the piece of writing. They then formulate a comment which may stimulate revision. The comments are critiqued by the class and on occasion by the student who wrote the essay. This procedure not only helps the teachers find alternate strategies but also provides them with a way of seeing just how their comments affect the hearer.

One commenting procedure that we found invaluable derives from a model of teaching writing developed by Ann Berthoff and Dixie Goswami which emphasizes the notion of dialogue in the composing process. Since the purpose of any commentary is first to dramatize the presence of teachers as concerned readers and second to instill in writers that they too must

be active readers of their own texts, we designed a strategy for commenting which has the students make explicit their intentions as they reread their initial drafts. In a wide column to the right of the essay, students set up dialogues with their texts, stating what it is they are trying to say, what language they are using that enforces their messages, and what they expect the reader to be thinking at strategic moments in the discourse. The teacher then has an inroad into the thinking processes of the student. The teacher can see what the student was intending and point directly to the disparity between the student's stated purpose and the reader's interpretation or understanding of the text.

The success of teacher-written dialogue with students is directly related to the success of the ongoing classroom dialogue. The language that teachers use with the class sets the tone for the acceptance of instruction. Since our pedagogy demands that the teacher is no longer the center of the classroom, often new teachers again need new models. So that the teachers can actually observe their dialogue with their classes, we ask our teachers to tape-record a portion of their class and transcribe and critique themselves. This act, simply of hearing, ironically, for "the first time," their interaction with students, provides the teachers with a way of distancing themselves from the dialogue in which they were initially engaged. They become observers rather than participants. The transcribing process provides yet more distance. Writing down their statements allows them to see just how much or how little they have dominated the classroom exchange. The critique demands further reflection. Here they not only interpret for themselves what was actually taking place, but they also have the opportunity to make new discoveries: to see where communication may have broken down, to see where connections were made with students, to see communication in action. By listening to themselves--to those junctures where they thought that they had understood a question at the time but on reflection may have missed the point, where they did not give the students enough time but went ahead and answered the question--they discover new approaches to both opening up and directing the ongoing classroom dialogue.

Once our teachers have analyzed their tapes, we visit their classes. Our observations are nonevaluative. We seek to give the instructors support and open the way for them to question their teaching methods. We try to observe an entire writing instructional unit, from its inception to the completion of a writing assignment. We meet individually with the instructors before actually going into the class to find out the goals of the assignment, the method the teachers are going to use to meet the goals, and the context in which the teachers want us to observe what it is they are doing. During the actual classroom observations, we take copious descriptive notes of what it is we see, what questions the teaching strategy raises, and what we see as the student response to the teaching method. After completion of the observation, we share our written critiques of the unit with the teachers and discuss with them what we have observed. Since the critiques are nonevaluative, we trust that these observations initiate a collegial dialogue. We enter this relationship as supporters, keeping the door

open for questions not only from us concerning what we have seen but also from the teachers concerning our interpretations of the events happening in the class. The teachers have indicated that this dialogue provides them with a means of explaining and thus clarifying for themselves what it is they are doing. The process of transforming an exercise into a way of learning, a discussion into a meaningful writing assignment, a question into an exploration of a concept is what they want to have happen. From our vantage point as observers, we can see things happen that they may have missed because their attention was directed on another matter. Yet from their previous interactions with their students, they have an intuitive, if not conscious, awareness of strategies which will or will not work. The exchange, then, that we have in our discussions with teachers allows both of us to explore teaching in action.

The casting of assignments is yet another critical area we consider with our teachers. Again we begin inductively by asking our teachers to bring in for analysis the most recent assignment they gave their own students. After the members of the class have exchanged their assignments we have everyone write briefly on three questions related to the assignment they now have before them: 1) What audience and purpose have been set up by the assignment? 2) What is it you have to know or do in order to complete the assignment? 3) How committed would you be to writing this assignment?

In the class discussion that follows, we begin to see the range of problems which occur in framing adequate assignments. Generally in their assignments our teachers have assumed an "omniscient teacher" as reader, and the students' purpose in writing is merely to impress this teacher with their writing. The teacher, in formulating the assignment, did not have in mind some specific communicative or aesthetic goal. These shortcomings are highlighted when we ask the teachers to reflect on their own school-initiated writing experiences, contrasting those papers they had written to have a specific influence on a specific reader and those papers done perfunctorily to complete the assignment. We then ask them to attempt to reformulate their assignments, keeping precise purposes and audiences in mind.

Further discussion in this area leads to a consideration of the scope of assignments ("To complete this assignment properly, I would have to know how to interview people, and I have never done this before"), the arbitrary and fragmented nature of assignments ("Describe in detail everything that you see before you on your desk"), and the lack of involvement the student feels toward many assignments ("I don't really want to write on abortion anymore"). Throughout all this discussion we realize there are no easy solutions, that what might work in one instance may be a dismal failure in the next. Yet in the midst of this relativism, we get the teachers to see the importance of continually doing their own assignments alongside their students and of continually assessing their assignments, trying to ascertain how they are being perceived by their students. This means that during the course of a semester, a student needs to encounter a number of writing tasks, each of which will be successful to the extent to which it

engages the students' intentions and commitments.

To pursue our exploration of the relationship between assignments and committed student writing, our teachers read *Uptaught* by Ken Macrorie, *The Plural I* by Bill Coles, and *Writing Without Teachers* by Peter Elbow. Each book in its own way addresses the issue of genuine student writing as opposed to "English" or "Theme Talk," besides considering what role the teacher might take towards students in class. It must be emphasized that these texts were selected not to give our students a "method" to follow; rather, our point is to foster an inquiring, exploratory approach toward teaching. In this respect, all three authors are powerful advocates of educational positions that in turn force our own teachers to define themselves as writing teachers. While many of our teachers applaud the authors' attack on the vacuous mechanical nature of most school writing just as many are alarmed at the apparent laissez-faire attitudes of Macrorie and Elbow and at Coles' supposed glee in "beating up on" students. In working through these contradictions, we force students to return to the texts and resolve for themselves the way teaching style influences the developing student writer.

The series of thirty assignments that Coles presents in *The Plural I* offers our teachers a model for constructing assignments that are integrated and sequenced around specific definitional issues their classes are being asked to address. The kinds of texts and questions Coles presents to his students force them to reexamine pat assumptions about the nature of their personal and social experiences and the conventions (especially linguistic) that appear to govern them. In this set of assignments, Coles seeks to explore how the term "professional" is contrasted with the term "amateur" and what ethical stance is taken toward experience when one chooses to talk the way one does. Coles' questions appear to have answers (Assignment 3: "What are your aspirations so far as professionalism and amateurism are concerned? Are there senses in which you would like to be a professional? an amateur? Are there senses in which you would not like to be a professional? an amateur? Professional what? Amateur what?"), but there are no formulas, as his students quickly discover. Only those responses that create some rich linguistic texture connecting and mediating the self and the world are adequate. Writing in Coles' sense moves beyond mere "correct" communication; it is literally an earned act of self-definition. And it is the interconnectedness of the assignments, all of which pose paradoxical problems that impresses on Coles' students the need to take responsibility for their own learning and the quality of their own prose. His students make these connections during the term because a community of concern has been established: all the students are using writing to engage a common theme, one which is never completed in the sense that most fragmented assignments are. An insight reached in one paper, then, can be tied to another in a later paper. Writing in this sense is not a skill; it's an education.

We next ask our teachers to produce their own series of five to ten Coles-type assignments. This forces them to consider for the first time how one piece of writing might lead to a second piece of writing; that

writing is not just organizing information; that it is infusing organized information with some personal significance. To get this point across, we distinguish between assignments that are "topics" (Write on anything that interests you such as baseball or the fashion industry) and assignments that turn these topics into "issues" with all the resulting tension, conflict, and contradiction which reflect our real attraction to things (Why should Dave Winfield get more money than Reggie Jackson? or Who should dictate what you wear?). The point is not simply to get students to take a simple-minded advocacy stand; rather, it is to get them to wonder at the complexities of relationships once the world of decision-making is opened up as a possibility.

A second major concern growing out of constructing Coles-type assignments is the reciprocity between reading and writing. Writing, we stress, cannot really be taught in isolation from the critical reading of some outside texts, for the ability to judge one's own attempts at creating sentences grows only as one works in the transactive presence of the sentences of others. As our teachers try to frame appropriate questions for the passages they have chosen to relate to a particular extended issue, they come to appreciate once again the problematic nature of texts and how all writing courses must in turn be reading courses.

*Uptaught* and *Writing Without Teachers* serve the important function of tying together a number of the practical and philosophical issues we have been dealing with in the teaching of writing. First is the notion that writing is discovery, that writers seldom set out to say already formed ideas, slotting concepts into rhetorical boxes. Instead, writers find ideas by writing. The technique of free-writing (writing spontaneously, never allowing the pen to leave the paper) eliminates the artificial pressures of highly structured writing tasks, pressures which often cause undue anxiety in writers.

Most of our teachers, practiced as academic writers, had never used this technique themselves. Therefore, when we had them practice free-writing at the beginning of class one evening, many wrote what might be classified as an "exam question," a highly structured well-ordered paragraph. It took the teachers several three-minute writing sequences to free themselves of the constraints of learned writing behavior. In other words, they had to learn to relax, to let their minds wander from one idea to the next. The benefit they gained from this exercise was the freedom to explore, to find writing as a way of learning.

Finally, our teachers perceive that a writing classroom is, indeed, a "teacherless" classroom. Writing is a communicative enterprise; only in the transactions between writer and text and reader and text is meaning conveyed. Teachers do not have knowledge to impart, nor do they hold the answers to how the writing can be improved. Only the writers can discover new ways of clarifying their meanings, and this discovery can be quickened and enhanced by hearing the questioning reader. Teachers, then, are collaborators, readers among a group of readers, persons who reflect back to the writer what they have heard, what they expect to hear, what they wish to know more about. They are not authoritarians, guardians of standard written English, correctors of essays but participants in a community of

writers, taking a stance which reinforces both teacher's and students' writing groups.

To bring together the various strands of the semester, we ask our students to write a concluding five page paper addressing the issue: "What is it you are doing finally when you are teaching someone how to write?" Their statements end up reflecting both our philosophical and practical concerns for the semester. In most instances, this is the first opportunity for them to consider their *raison d'être* for teaching. Our best teachers begin to move beyond the cliches of all those well-intentioned methods texts on writing which view the student writer in static terms and the writing process as linear and mechanical. All the complexities of the dynamic student and the recursive writing process are revealed in the honest ambiguities of our teacher's own prose, and these papers become important testimonies to their commitment to a new stage of socialization.

## WRITING AS LEARNING FOR BASIC WRITING TEACHERS AND THEIR STUDENTS

Our seminar-practicum for teachers of basic writing began as one hour of optional credit in a course on the teaching of composition in the two-year college. The requirement: spend two hours a week for six weeks observing the way teachers work with underprepared students in the Writing Lab. The innovation was supposed to make no difference in my schedule. But, by the end of the first week, the observers had become participants. They wanted to know more about what they were seeing and hearing. They wanted to discuss our instructional goals and the basic assumptions we were making about the nature of writing and the teaching of writing. They wanted to understand the dynamics of the learner-teacher conference. And they wanted to work with at least one of the struggling writers enrolled in the lab.

For some of these prospective teachers, the optional hour of credit became a major effort. A year later, after earning a semester of credit by teaching two classes at a two-year college, the ones who had worked the hardest for their hour of "observation" returned to the lab to learn more about teaching basic writing. At the end of that semester, they recommended that the one-hour requirement become a separate course. And now our seminar-practicum attracts people from other programs, especially candidates for the M.A. in Writing (expository), the M.F.A. (fiction or poetry), and doctoral candidates with a major emphasis in Rhetoric and Composition or English Education.

Because our Writing Lab predates the latest back-to-basics movement by about 50 years, our seminar-practicum has never been limited to the development of "functional" literacy or to the mastery of the "basic skills" needed for the elimination of errors in spelling, punctuation, usage, and syntax. Instead, basic writing, like writing at all levels of development, is presented as the humanistic discipline that is basic to all humanistic study. The putting together of words to express (to make) meaning, the thinking involved in the composing (the discovery) of meaning, the sharing of that meaning (the writer's perception of experience) with listening readers--these are the basics in the concept of writing we want our teachers to understand and practice, in their own personal and professional lives and as they engage students in writing that *is* learning.

---

*Lou Kelly is Associate Professor of Rhetoric and Director of the Writing Lab at the University of Iowa.*

The two-hour weekly SEMINAR, which is, of course, closely integrated throughout the semester with the requirements of the practicum, follows a general sequence of informal explanations, required readings, and class discussions. To prepare my students for their work in the lab, we focus first on the individualized instruction we offer underprepared writers. But merely telling a class what to do is not enough. To become the kind of writing teachers we need, they must understand the theory that informs our practice and accept the intellectual assumptions of this approach to the development of writing abilities. So our weekly meetings are usually structured as responses to the questions, misconceptions, and anxieties I hear while reading the journals in which they have recorded their own perceptions of the course as well as their responses to specific questions I've asked them to address.

To begin the PRACTICUM, students come to the lab four hours a week to watch and listen as director and experienced teaching assistants get our beginning writers started on the opening series of writings. After reading some of these papers, the new teachers share with me their initial reactions. And, as our seminar discussions and their reading and writing continue, their increasing knowledge, self-confidence and poise tell me if they're ready to begin working with lab students during the third week of the semester. At first, each is assigned only one person at each of two pairs of regularly scheduled hours (MW or TTh), but most of them soon have four for each pair of hours, eight in all.

In the COURSE JOURNALS my students keep, their participation in the seminar and their work as lab teachers are fully merged. They're not only writing progress reports for the lab director; they're also engaging me in learner-teacher dialogues. I listen, of course, to what they're telling me and respond to the needs they express or imply, clarifying the procedures and concepts they do not understand and talking with them about their work with lab students. And, as their journal writing becomes self-involving, it becomes a dialogue with self--about the theories each person is learning and the teaching he or she is doing. It becomes the generative force that leads to new insights about the nature of writing and about self as writing teacher. Engaged in that kind of writing, my students are creating their own model of the writing-as-learning which we want all our lab students to experience.

Without the practicum, the seminar would be a course about theories of discourse and the methodologies and assignments that seem to be logical extensions of those theories. Without the seminar, the practicum could not move very far beyond simplistic, reductionist methods or how-to guidelines. Without the course journal that is a dialogue with teacher and self, the students in this course would have no credibility as teachers in the basic writing course offered in our Writing Lab.

### **Seminar and Basic Writing Course--A Symbiotic Relationship**

Like the instructional program we have developed for underprepared writers, this seminar for writing teachers begins in dialogue--both oral and written. Before our first meeting, as students come by to inquire about the

practicum hours that must be arranged, our conversations move quickly from the official to the casual, and then to the first writing for their course journals. It's not homework--just spontaneous responses to two sets of questions that are directly related to the enterprise that will soon engage us: 1) How do you see yourself as a teacher, specifically as a teacher of writing? What do you consider a writing teacher's main function? How do you feel as you approach this new learning/teaching experience? 2) What expectations do you have about the students you'll be working with in the practicum? What kinds of writers, what kinds of learners, do you think you'll encounter in the Writing Lab? Like generations of English teachers who have gone on to their rewards and many who are still with us, some folks in every class are eager to join the national guardians of proper English and correct spelling. Others hope to be spared the red-pencil obsession of a Miss Fidditch.<sup>1</sup> But all of them have heard about the stereotypes that inhabit the world of remediation--deprived and disadvantaged urban minorities, ignorant country kids, and dumb jocks.<sup>2</sup>

To enable my seminar students to assess their basic linguistic knowledge and to examine their attitudes toward the language diversity they'll soon encounter, I ask them to complete a questionnaire at our first class meeting. Deciding where they stand on thirty semantic differential scales requires thoughtful deliberation about linguistic, social, and pedagogical issues that we return to in many seminar sessions. And they get a mini-course in "bonehead" linguistics by reading an explication of the questionnaire.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, knowing how language works does not necessarily change people's attitudes toward low prestige dialects. I tell all my students about the reactions of one sociolinguistics class to the kind of writing they'll soon be working with. It was a typical group of undergraduate and graduate English majors, some with teaching experience. Near the end of the term, after hearing the linguistic facts and discussing the major

---

<sup>1</sup> Martin Joos, *The Five Clocks* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961). In the introduction, Albert Marckwardt identifies Miss Fidditch: "...a character originally named by Henry Lee Smith, Jr., in one of his more devastating moments but described by H.L. Mencken two decades earlier as one of the old-maid schoolteachers who would rather parse than eat" (xiv). Joos' book, "designed to overcome...the English usage guilt feelings of the normal American" (xii), is the story of Miss Fidditch's metamorphosis through "the power of looking at language and seeing it whole....[through] thinking and learning about language, not only as a human instrument but as an instrument of humanity....Here is the message and the hope for those of us who are professionally dedicated to the study of language" (xv, xvi).

<sup>2</sup> To correct any stereotypical thinking about underprepared students, I recommend the following: *Iowa English Bulletin*, ed. Lou Kelly, *Theme: Integrating Our Minorities*, 29, No. 1 (Iowa City: University of Iowa, November, 1977); William Labov, *The Study of Nonstandard English* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1974); Mina Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977); Geneva Smitherman, *Talking and Testifying: The Language of Black America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

<sup>3</sup> Lou Kelly, *Basic Linguistics for Teachers of Writing* (monograph in progress).

research, after feeling liberated from uptight traditional attitudes toward language and joking about their newfound reverse elitism, they were asked to read a piece of "illiterate" writing.<sup>4</sup> The collective response was the old conditioned reflex: clean up the grammar and the Black dialect, teach the kid what a sentence is, drill him on punctuation rules, give him a fourth grade spelling book, advise him to drop out of college. Obviously, these students were not *reading* this young man's paper; they were not hearing what he was saying. They were only seeing the errors.

### Reading Lessons for Writing Teachers

To help underprepared writers avoid demeaning putdowns in a culture that values "correct" writing, we must help them learn the conventions of written English. But that is not our first task. Our first task as teachers of basic writing is to learn to *read* and *hear* our writers. It's not easy, of course. Their handwriting is often painfully juvenile, sometimes illegible. On almost every line, they've misspelled some words and omitted others. Most of them find commas very confusing and some of them use no punctuation at all. If their syntax is not painfully simplistic, it's so disjunctive that getting the meaning requires close analysis. And these beginning writers are certainly not using "correct" English. But in spite of the errors and the muddled meaning, we can hear the promise of mature thought in our students' work--if we screen out the interference.

To help my practicum students learn to do that, some of our early seminars are reading lessons. For they must learn to listen instead of seeing errors as they read. They must learn to *attend* to the text--of student writers. Carefully and thoughtfully considering what they are hearing, they must ask what each writer is trying to tell us. Do the facts and opinions expressed say anything about the *person* we're listening to? What personal traits and attitudes are revealed in text or subtext? Is there anything here that parallels our own experience, anything that helps us relate to and understand this person? Anything that would help us engage this person in conversation?

When I share the work of beginning writers in our seminar, I ask everybody to tell me, first in writing, what they hear as they read. And as they write, the reading lesson continues. They are not only answering my question; they are learning how to become more perceptive readers of writing that is full of distractions. For homework, I ask them to read several more papers--screening out the errors, listening to the human voices, attending to the meaning of what these voices are trying to say. And then they write about that reading experience, saying what they are learning about these writers and about themselves as readers.

As our reading lessons continue, we talk about the way we read literature: immersing the reading self in the world the writer is creating, hearing

---

<sup>4</sup> Jay L. Robinson, "The Wall of Babel; or, Up Against the Language Barrier," *Varieties of Present-Day English*, ed. Richard W. Bailey and Jay L. Robinson (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 441.

the resonances of text and subtext, taking on the consciousness of the person who is addressing the reader's consciousness through a work of art. Then we ask ourselves if we can give as much to our students' work: attending to text and subtext; immersing the teaching self in what the writer is trying to say, easing into the consciousness that pervades the undeveloped, unpolished prose. It's not easy, of course. But necessary. Responding to student writing is indeed the teacher's major responsibility in our basic writing course.

### **Learner-Teacher Dialogues and the Basic Writing Course**

When students arrive for their first lab hour, we talk with them, first in person and then from the pages of a text (*From Dialogue to Discourse*).<sup>5</sup> It's a *talking* book, we say, and their first reading (13-16) is a continuation of our conversation, a brief monologue, like the ones that frequently interrupt, and momentarily delay, the give and take of our daily exchanges with other people. Their first writing is a direct response to that reading--a monologue directed to the person who's been "talking on paper" with them. That's the basic procedure during their first three weeks in the lab: they read one of a carefully crafted series of "invitations-to-write" and then they talk to us--on paper. By direct assertion and implication, we are assuring them that we need to know their answers to the questions posed in each invitation, that we want to know more about them and their ideas. With rare exception, they write as if they believe we mean what we're saying.

After completing the first required readings and studying the opening series of invitations-to-write, everybody in the practicum-seminar knows the initial intent of our basic writing course: to help students think of writing as authentic discourse instead of an academic requirement or an exercise to develop "basic skills;" to help them bring to all their writings the spoken language they have already mastered, permitting, releasing, the grammatical and rhetorical competence they have gained from a lifetime of talking; to engage each writer in a learner-teacher dialogue that is the context for writing that *is* learning.

But how can a worried teacher inspire confidence? We spend a lot of seminar time anticipating the first one-on-one conference, that existential encounter when the dialogue begins between writer and writing teacher. Within the supportive seminar circle, it's easy to hear the possibilities for sympathetic and provocative responses to the student work we're reading together. At first, we need only acknowledge a moment of experience a writer has shared, or affirm an attitude or opinion that comes through with unmistakable clarity in either text or subtext. It's the kind of response everybody welcomes in everyday conversations, the kind that would assure any of us that our ideas are worth writing about and that our reader is willing to look at the world from our point of view.

---

<sup>5</sup> Lou Kelly, *From Dialogue to Discourse: An Open Approach to Competence and Creativity* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1972).

Because most basic writing students are not fluent enough to fill even one page, teachers must make a second insistent message clear: I want to hear more. Of course, it's essential to make that assertion specific to the piece of writing we're responding to. So we consider the possibilities as we give more seminar time to student writing. At first our tell-me-more questions are direct and simple, for anything that generates more writing and keeps the learner-teacher dialogue going also generates more self-confidence, for writer and new teacher. And writing more, day after day throughout the semester, is the only way that the underprepared can develop the syntactic fluency they need. But we must never allow them to think that we only want longer papers. Our responses to their writing must assure them that we are perceptive interested readers. We must also make their responsibility clear: you cannot learn what we're trying to teach unless you give us thoughtful written responses to our questions, responses that satisfy the need to know which your earlier writing has evoked in us.

By the fourth week of the semester, most of our writers are ready for a third kind of response from their teacher: *Tell me a story* about the experience(s) remembered in this piece of writing. Let me *see* you and the people you were involved with at that particular time in your life. Show me what happened. Help me feel what you felt and hear what you were thinking, long ago or only yesterday. Tell me what you now think about this experience. Help me understand the experience from your point of view.

New teachers soon learn not to expect anybody to achieve all that in their next writing. They also learn why we're not merely asking for more details. As our story tellers move beyond their usual superficial perceptions of experience to write longer and more graphic stories, we want these stories to become reflective and self-involving. For only then can they discover that writing can be a means of interpreting and understanding their own lives.

### **Practicum Student Becomes Writing Lab Teacher**

The passage from practicum student to Writing Lab teacher occurs during the third week of the semester. Though some folks may still feel reluctant and uneasy, they are, with rare exception, ready to assume their initial responsibilities. Through seminar and required readings, including lots of student writing, and by observing experienced teachers working with lab students, they certainly have an extensive overview of our basic writing course. And while reading their writings about these experiences, I've found the intensive self-involvement that one-on-one teaching requires. So I introduce teacher to student and the official relationship begins in casual conversation. Before their next meeting, the teacher will carefully study the six to eight short pieces the student has already written--trying to hear everything this writer is saying, in text and subtext; learning the writer and the person who's revealed in the undeveloped, unpolished prose; anticipating the first one-on-one conference and hoping to get a congenial but productive learner-teacher dialogue started by affirming the worth of each person's experience and by asking the tell-me-more

question that seems most appropriate for this particular writer. (By the end of the fourth week each teacher usually has eight students who attend twice a week.)

For the rest of the semester, our seminar-practicum is a community of learners, with each teacher working with their own students but all working together to achieve the goals of the basic writing course. In seminar and throughout the week, there's lots of talk about students and their writings. Delightful or troubling stories are retold and one-to-one conferences are re-lived as teachers share their experiences. Everybody knows they're supposed to ask for help, from lab director or other teachers, whenever they need help with a particular writer. Our seminar discussions of theory and practice are now enlivened with supporting evidence and challenging questions based on the way students are responding or not responding to new invitations-to-write and to the teacher's tell-me-more questions. But week by week, the seminar must also prepare teachers for the ongoing instructional sequence of the basic writing course.

### **Hearing the Syntactic Disjunctions that Obscure Meaning**

As fluency and confidence replace the lab students' fear of the empty page and they can fill at least one page in one hour, when they know their teacher's listening to their ideas, it's time for a seminar discussion about the procedures recommended for working with the ones who write sentences that don't say what they mean. Whether it's a simple omission, one confusing word, or a serious syntactic derailment that blurs or disrupts the intended meaning, we do not cite grammar rules for them to memorize. Instead, writer and teacher read the sentence together--aloud. Is anything left out? Does it say what you mean? How would you say it in a conversation? As we suggest possibilities for clarifying and rephrasing, we again read the sentence aloud, so the writer can hear the version that sounds right for her or him. But that is only the beginning of a slow, painstaking process. Whenever a sentence is revised, the writer must read the original and the revision, aloud, many times--*listening* to the difference each change makes, *hearing/feeling* the rhythm and sound of the syntactic patterns that make the difference, *consciously* trying to internalize the new patterns so they'll eventually become habitual unconscious patterns. As our students begin to trust our editing abilities, we offer written suggestions to be used not only as they rewrite their sentences, but also for the oral practice that will help them develop a critical ear for the syntactic disjunctions that may again diminish the clarity of their ideas. But, as Mina Shaughnessy recommends, we are always

[...] wary of substituting our stylistic preferences for those of our students, riding (and writing) roughshod over the student's meaning in the interest of grace or economy, or ferreting out errors without commenting upon or even noticing what the writer is getting at, as if thought were merely the means for eliciting grammatical forms (84).

## Developing and Shaping Ideas

Over many years, many seminar students have pointed out that their work in the practicum would be a lot easier if we began our basic writing course by teaching paragraphs as units of thought that are developed from topic sentences. After explaining why we abandoned that tradition,<sup>6</sup> I ask them to read Arthur Stern's "When Is a Paragraph?"<sup>7</sup> This short critical review of the history of paragraph definition begins with Alexander Bain, a nineteenth century Scottish logician, then moves through the Unity-Coherence-Emphasis triad, Christensen's rhetoric of the paragraph, Becker's TRI and PS paragraph patterns, and finally, to Richard Braddock's empirical study of topic sentences. Using an exemplary research design and meticulous procedures, Braddock showed, quite conclusively, that the published essayists he studied did not rely on topic sentences, indeed, did not write the kinds of paragraphs prescribed in composition textbooks. Stern argues that the "new" rhetoricians are also making false claims about paragraph development. To conclude our seminar discussion of this pedagogical issue, we look at some writings which illustrate the stylistic and substantive differences students can achieve when they're trying to say something that's important to them instead of struggling against the constraints imposed by somebody's limited definition of paragraph or theme.

Our basic writing course begins with talking on paper because this naturalistic expressive mode accommodates whatever level of writing and thinking a student is capable of. Like the spontaneous responses we shape as we utter them in a conversation, the responses to our invitations-to-write are relatively unstructured, but coherent enough for any sympathetic reader to understand. While talking to us on paper, our beginning writers are recording general impressions and opinions, or stringing together loosely connected descriptive and narrative details, or momentarily reflecting on whatever they're saying. They frequently ramble and backtrack, of course, as most oral story tellers do. And they usually seem unaware of the need to analyze the experiences or ideas they're sharing with us. But my seminar students/lab teachers are not learning how to evaluate organization as they study their students' work. They're searching for questions that will engage the mind of each writer they're working with.

Responding to a well-focused tell-me-more question requires more cognitive effort than does the spontaneous response invited in our opening series of writings, because the writer is being asked to extend and elaborate a brief and superficial narrative, or to clarify and elaborate a vague and general statement. As he or she attempts to do that, the writing becomes what I.A. Richards has called a "*completion*" of experience, "the occasion and the means of growth which is the mind's endless endeavor to

---

<sup>6</sup> Lou Kelly, "One-on-One Iowa City Style," *Iowa English Bulletin* I, No.1 (Fall/Winter, 1980), 4-19.

<sup>7</sup> Arthur A. Stern, "When Is a Paragraph?" *College Composition and Communication*, 27 (1976), 253-7.

order itself."<sup>8</sup>

Asking why--frequently and insistently--may be the most productive response a teacher can offer when attempting to challenge the shallow perfunctory thinking that impedes or prevents the development of our students' minds. Indeed, whenever they're trying to explain why, they're moving, slowly but steadily, toward the higher-level goals of analysis and synthesis. Again, the teacher's question must be specific to something the writer has already written, but the possibilities seem unlimited: 1) Why is the experience shared in this writing important to you? Did it shape your attitude about anything which you still value? If so, what implications could it have for your future? 2) Why do you make this statement? What does it mean in relation to a specific time or particular incidents in your life? Has anybody ever disagreed with you on this matter? Have you ever questioned your point of view? Why do different people have different opinions on the same subject?

Our beginning writers, and their teachers, soon realize that responding to an explain-why question is not as easy as talking on paper. So we call it thinking on paper and attempt to clarify the difference by discussing the relationship between thought and language as it is envisioned by L.S. Vygotsky in his studies of the development of language in children.<sup>9</sup> To talk on paper, writers need only transform what Vygotsky calls the outer plane of thought which is available for immediate utterance because it is already "connected with" and "embodied in words." But thinking on paper involves them with their "inner speech," that "dynamic, shifting, unstable thing, fluttering between word and [non-verbal] thought" (149). Transforming this undefined "thing" into coherent syntactic structures is rarely spontaneous for writers at any level. Instead, we grope for clarity in the verbal, non-verbal confusion that fills our heads as we struggle with difficult concepts and disturbing situations, trying to sort through our perceptions and analyze the implications of what we have perceived, trying to make the connections that lead to understanding.

To engage our students in that kind of mental activity, we tell them to continue using their own expressive language as they respond to our explain-why questions. And they're not to worry if their initial thinking on paper is disorganized and full of fragmented ideas. The learner-teacher dialogue will again provide the guidance they need as they try to make the connections that will help them clarify and structure their own "dynamic, shifting, unstable" inner speech.

In our discussion of the kinds of questions that enable our writers to move from talking on paper to thinking on paper, we look for parallels in James Moffett's study of the relationship between the development of writing abilities and abstraction.<sup>10</sup> As Moffett says, "Abstracting, like

---

<sup>8</sup> I.A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 130-131.

<sup>9</sup> L.S. Vygotsky, *Thought and Language*, ed. and trans., Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1962), pp. 33-51.

<sup>10</sup> James Moffett, "Kinds and Orders of Discourse," *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), pp. 14-59.

breathing, goes on all the time" (27). From our earliest perceptions of reality and our first attempts to learn the language with which we represent our perceptions, "we grow slowly through the whole abstractive range during our period of maturation" (25). But we do not discard one level of abstraction as we go on to the next one: "at any time of life we are constantly processing new experience up through the cycle of sensations, memories, generalizations and theories" (25).

Such a range of abstractive ability is apparent in our students' early writings: bits of highly personal interior monologue that tell us what's happening now; episodic glimpses of what happened back home in high school; general expectations about what always happens; speculations about what's likely or sure to happen in the future (35). But we find little evidence of the abstractive abilities needed to elaborate or analyze an incident or an idea or to bring related incidents and ideas together in a unified piece of writing. Even as our writers try to respond to specific tell-me-more and explain-why questions, many of them do not seem capable of sustaining a narrative or a concept beyond a brief summary which suggests or asserts what they know. But, as Edward Sapir pointed out a long time ago, language is heuristic.<sup>11</sup> So we keep them talking/thinking on paper, because each writer's expressive speech is the language of discovery and learning for that person; it is the language which enables everybody to respond to their own thought processes and to use all their abstractive abilities while they're writing. And when that begins to occur, they're edging a little closer to higher levels of thinking. Within the context of our learner-teacher dialogues, their writing is becoming a means of looking at their own experience more analytically and seeing the relationships that will help them impose order and create meaning as they structure their personal knowledge of the world. Moffett would say they are moving--freely and naturally--up and down the "abstraction ladder" (35).

There's no way to show my seminar students how this happens. But we give them examples of student work that grew increasingly reflective and analytical as the teacher asked well-focused questions and the writer responded. We also point to the kinds of questions the underprepared cannot address successfully because they have not yet developed the intellectual maturity such questions require. Of course, a student's writings do not provide a precise measure of cognitive development, but their early work provides the signals we need as we try to adapt the instruction we offer to the capabilities of each writer.

Every semester I'm again amazed that yet another seminar-practicum class is willing to give the effort it takes to sustain productive learner-teacher dialogues with our beginning writers. I always tell them to let me know if they ever discover that the same results can be achieved by teaching topic sentences or other means of "simply" focusing and organizing a paper before they start writing. But our hopes for any simple way to teach

---

<sup>11</sup> Edward Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality*, ed. David Mandelbaum (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1956), p. 7.

writing diminish when we consider how language is inextricably bound to all that we experience and to all our thinking about experience. Our own native dialect enabled us to order and understand the world even as we were learning that dialect. And so, we assume, that same expressive language enables our beginning writers to order and develop a coherent and unified narrative or explanation as they talk/think on paper in response to their teachers' well-focused questions. For the learner-teacher dialogue not only provides a starting point for the thinking that sustains their composing processes; that dynamic context also reveals the relationships and connections that shape their ideas.

But even when we clearly define the question, for ourselves or for our students, composing ideas can be a messy process, and the ideas we have composed may need to be slightly or extensively altered and rearranged. In our basic writing course, we do not address this problem until the writer can extend a narrative or sustain an idea beyond the usual one-page effort. Again, asking questions is recommended. First, we ask questions that will enable the beginning writer to see the relationships which determined the ordering of ideas in a coherent piece of his or her own writing. Then we ask some questions that point to the sentences that are not clearly related to the idea(s) the writer is trying to develop. More specific questions point to sentences that are juxtaposed but not joined in semantic relationship. Other well-focused questions reveal the sentences or blocks of sentences that need to be deleted because they are irrelevant, or rearranged so that related ideas will be clearly connected. We never ask all those questions during one conference, of course. But the dialogue about the coherent ordering of ideas almost always includes a question or two about the need for further development. Again, the illustrative materials for our seminar discussion are successive drafts of papers that have been rearranged and expanded as writers responded to their teachers' questions.

Throughout the semester, asking the right question at the right time is the teacher's greatest challenge. As that challenge is met, our students' brief expressive responses to our invitations-to-write grow longer and clearer, less simplistic, more thoughtful and more engaging. But one semester is never enough time for them to internalize the model of writing-as-learning which they have been given. Within the context of our learner-teacher dialogues, however, while responding to their teacher's reassuring comments and challenging questions, they begin the long process of becoming perceptive critical readers of their own writing. Achieving that goal without the continuing guidance of caring teachers is, of course, impossible. But our writers do learn how to move in that direction--looking for the relationships and making the connections that enable them to compose coherent ideas, anticipating the reader's need for clarification and elaboration, hearing the syntactic patterns that need to be revised and the ideas that need to be rearranged or deleted.

### **Copyreading**

Throughout the instructional sequence described here, the interactive processes of writing and thinking are certainly more important than a

completed product that's been corrected and polished for the sharp eyes of a Ms. or Mr. Fidditch. But when you value *what* your writers say while they are engaged in the processes of composing, when you know they value the ideas they have tried to express, you also value the written statements of those ideas: the products that have evolved from the processes. Though incomplete, incorrect and unclear, the product is a presentation of the self--the writer, who, like all the rest of us, needs the sense of worth that comes when other folks seem to be attending to what we are saying. To make graphic the pleasure we take in our students' writings, and to present some of their work as products to be enjoyed by readers beyond the teacher, we publish a dittoed handout, *Voices from the Writing Lab*, three or four times a semester. It's a joy to see their eyes light up when they find their own words in print. In fact, it seems to be the evidence needed to confirm what we've been telling them: you are a writer.

While they're still feeling good about this early success, their teachers have a new question for them: do you see the differences I see between your original copy and the published statement? Very few of them can point out those differences, even though the editor of *Voices* has attended to the omissions, misspellings, and punctuation that would distract most readers. She has also made other changes, like the verb forms that most people on campus would consider illiterate. But almost all of the underprepared are aware of the value our culture places on "correct" writing; most of them have already told us about their own "bad" grammar and spelling. So their teacher takes this opportunity to tell them about a special kind of reading they'll be learning how to do before the end of the semester. We call it copyreading. It's not a part of the composing process, but a time for writers to consider what they have already written; a time to ask if we have followed all the conventions that make it easier for readers to hear what we are saying; a time to *consciously* attend to punctuation, spelling, and usage. Copyreading puts error where it belongs--at the bottom of the writer's list of concerns. And it frees the underprepared from the paralyzing worry of not getting every word "right" while they're trying to say what they think.

Lab teachers know why they're not supposed to begin marking and correcting errors after this first learner-teacher dialogue about copyreading. Developing syntactic fluency and learning to elaborate ideas takes time--more time than a few weeks can provide; for most of our students, more time than a full semester. For most of them it would no doubt be best to postpone any attempt to work on surface errors until the next semester. But learning what to look for, then learning to *see* the mistakes in all their writings is a long and tedious process. So we usually begin copyreading around midterm. But we never let it take on more importance than content. And we always insist that they never let their concern about errors interfere with their composing processes.

It's not easy, of course, for teachers to find and maintain the balance between a continuing disregard for error while listening to the ideas composed and the careful attention to error demanded as they help their students learn to copyread. But it is possible--if they're willing to learn yet

another way of reading student writing. So I ask them to study the body of work they have from each of their writers, identifying and classifying the most frequent errors in punctuation, spelling and usage. Such an analysis reveals the patterns of error that make possible a systematic approach to learning how to find and correct specific kinds of error--periods *or* misspelled words *or* third person singular verbs, for example. Until students have learned to copyread systematically, we do not ask them to look for more than one kind of error. To help them recognize the same kinds of mistakes in later writings, each of them keeps a record of their mistakes--corrected, of course. This Copyreading Guide develops in three parts: a correct list of all the words they have misspelled; examples (that is, corrected sentences from their own work) of their punctuation mistakes and omissions; examples (again their own sentences) of their usage mistakes. Before copyreading a new piece of writing, students are urged to review the examples recorded in their personal guides, and then to *consciously* look for the specific errors and the kinds of errors they've identified and corrected in their previous writings. Since they look for only one kind of error at a time, most of them need to copyread every page several times.

Becoming a competent copyreader is indeed a long and painstaking process, even when spelling and punctuation are the main problems. It takes even longer, and it's far more frustrating, when writers are expected to find and change linguistic patterns they've been hearing and using all their lives. So very few of our basic writing students are able to correct all the mistakes in the last writing they do for us. But they do know *how* to copyread. And this systematic approach to error enables them to compose first drafts in their own everyday language, without worrying about their "bad" grammar.

### **The Functions of the Course Journal**

Our discussions of theory and practice, of general principles and specific writers, are never limited to the seminar, but carry on through assigned and unassigned hours in the lab--in one-on-one conversations and in small groups, from the opening days of the semester throughout the next fourteen weeks. But our learner-teacher dialogues find their most compelling form in the course journals. Though the response varies from class to class, most seminar students/lab teachers enjoy the freedom of expression and the time for personal reflection that journal writing permits.

From the perspective of a lab director, the rationale for asking them to write seems obvious: from the beginning, I need to know how they are hearing what I am asking them to do. What attitudes and values have shaped their perception of writing and the teaching of basic writing? What concept of self determines the level of confidence they feel about the responsibilities I'm asking them to take on? When will each of them be ready to engage their students in the kind of learner-teacher dialogues I'm trying to engage them in? In their journals, I find implicit if not explicit answers to these questions, and I respond by letting them know that I understand both the joys and frustrations they are feeling and by trying to

clarify anything I have not made clear and anything they have misconstrued. Though daily entries are not required, the habit is encouraged, "...for taking note of one's *experience*, of *witnessing* one's life..." as my colleague Sherman Paul says about the journal he requires in literature classes.

I think I want for my students what I want for myself: a form (mode) of writing that brings us closer to experience, is, in fact, of the experience, hews to it. Isn't one of the rites of participation the right to participate in one's own experience? To have that as source, and as endless resource: to know that because of such engagement one will always have something (relevant) to say, that one will never be at an end of words.<sup>12</sup>

The questions I ask students to address at the beginning of the seminar place them at the center of their own learning, enabling them to center their writing within their total experience as life-long users of language and engaging them in writing that brings them closer to what they are experiencing as seminar student and basic writing teacher. I want their journals to be a vital inexplicable part of their learning and their teaching. But some people feel uneasy when asked to express their own ideas--with their own voices--in the open form of a journal to be shared with teacher and classmates.

Last night I dreamed I was standing on the steps of Old Capitol completely naked. And trying to hide my nakedness. I was still looking for my clothes when I woke up. That's how I feel whenever I write anything for anyone else to read.

That confession from a former seminar student may explain why a hackneyed response that involves no risk or a rehash of somebody else's ideas is a more popular form of academic writing than the journal that "*hews to*" experience and engages both mind and emotion. A few people actually seem incapable of writing open-form expressive prose, at least in a course journal. It's as if learning to write the depersonalized prose of academic papers has robbed them of the expressive language of everyday speech. Some students, like some of their teachers, regard such writing as the radical or romantic notion of an anti-intellectual. That stance can be shaken, of course, with a few compelling excerpts from the journals of their classmates or from the journals that are part of our literary heritage. And the questions that evoke the early entries get most folks writing, quite enthusiastically, before they have time to succumb to their anxieties.

When seminar students become lab teachers, they no longer need generative questions from me, for their students are now the focus and the stimulus for their journal entries. Shaping their ideas at the "point of

---

<sup>12</sup> Sherman Paul, "Journals," *Iowa English Bulletin*, 29, No. 2 (Spring, 1981), 5-6.

utterance," as James Britton would say,<sup>13</sup> they write with the easy flow of friendly talk, for they know they are writing for a sympathetic reader within an "accumulating shared context," about our "shared interest and expertise."<sup>14</sup>

The relationship is both personal and professional; the writing and my response to it, a learner-teacher dialogue. In the language of Britton's audience categories, I am not "teacher as examiner;" I am not grading their writing or the teaching they're writing about. Instead, I'm listening to and learning what only they can tell me about their work with the lab students whose writings I read during the opening weeks. For the rest of the semester, I follow the students' progress by reading their teachers' journals. And when anybody asks for help, explicitly or implicitly, in person or in their writing, I respond, with written comments or in conversation. If specific and detailed suggestions seem to be needed, I review the lab student's work and sometimes join in the learner-teacher dialogue about a particular piece of writing or a particular problem. I'm not a stranger, of course, because I've been talking with everybody all semester--from the pages of the text we use and from dittoed invitations-to-write which supplement the text.

So the course journal has several important functions. It is, first of all, a report, the means whereby the lab director is given the information she needs. It's also a record of the writer's experience as a lab teacher, is "in fact, of [that] experience" because it is a continuation of the dialogue that does not end when the conference with the student ends. Britton would say my teachers' journals combine two basic functions of expressive speech.<sup>15</sup> They are not only "spectating about experience" with a sympathetic listener, but also generating "speech for oneself." As they write, they're looking back on their students' writing and the conversations they've had about that writing, so they can tell me what they think and how they feel. Their writing is not only a representation, but also an interpretation of their verbal and nonverbal dialogues with their writers. They're trying to make sense of this learning/teaching experience, shaping and giving it meaning. As they talk on paper to the teacher who has engaged them in a dialogue about teaching, they're also talking to self. In the language of their own expressive speech, these fledgling scholars and teachers are trying to say what they are learning--before they have learned. They're grappling with perplexing teaching experiences and intricate theories of discourse--before they clearly see what they're trying to explain. They're tentatively exploring new concepts, uttering half-formed thoughts and attitudes--because their teacher has promised to respond even though their ideas are not clearly expressed or fully developed. Their writing is an enactment of what Britton calls the "particularly direct

---

<sup>13</sup> James Britton, ed., *Talking and Writing* (London: Methuen and Co., 1967) xiii.

<sup>14</sup> James Britton et al., *The Development of Writing Abilities* (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1978), pp. 65-73.

<sup>15</sup> James Britton, *Language and Learning* (New York: Penguin, 1980), pp. 50-74.

relationship" between expressive language and thinking, a relationship which suggests the importance of the expressive as a "mode of learning at any stage." So, each teacher's journal is a developing model of the concept of writing that is essential to our basic writing course. For lab students and the person who is responsible for the quality of instruction they get, that is the most compelling function of the course journal.

Given the demands of that kind of writing, I'm not surprised if somebody in the seminar seems to be merely keeping a record of their conferences with students or relying on superficial and vague generalities to fill the pages of their journal. I respond by filling the margins with questions to be addressed in the next entry. And if I find no references to the articles and books we've discussed in seminar, I urge them to establish a dialogue with those texts: attend to the concept of writing they present, compare the suggestions from other writers with the ones I've offered, see the connections between all the theories and the actual writing experiences of your students, and then--tell me what you think as you continue talking with me in your course journal.

Jerome Bruner has proposed that "interior intellectual work is almost always a continuation of dialogue."<sup>16</sup> As Vygotsky and other psycholinguists have explained, the development of thought in the young child depends on talking--verbal interactions with caring adults. So we and all our students need what Bruner calls "the dialectical, almost dramaturgic quality of dialogue as a model for pursuing our own thoughts in the privacy of our own consciousness."

I hope my teachers' journals and my responses to them are enabling dialogues--not only in their efforts to work successfully with the beginning writers assigned to them, but also as they try to make the connections between their own writing, their students' writing, and the theories of discourse we have discussed. I hope all their writing will become the origin of insight and understanding, the "source" of personal knowledge and the "endless resource" for their own "interior intellectual work."

A couple of weeks after midterm, I ask everybody to read what they have written so far: take a second look at the experiences they have already described and the conclusions they seem to be moving toward, listen for recurring themes and issues, analyze the implications of what they've been saying. This reading marks the beginning of their "final" papers, the self-evaluations of their learning and teaching which I ask for near the end of the semester. Every year I have to explain, always more than once, that I'm not asking for a research paper that attempts to summarize, explicate, or compare various theories of discourse or pedagogy. Instead, I want to know how they now see themselves as teachers of basic writing, and what they now think about the underprepared writers they have been working with. When I read these papers, I want to hear the

---

<sup>16</sup> Jerome S. Bruner, "Introduction to the Expanded Edition," *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand*, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), vii.

voices I've been listening to in their journals. Don't lose the lively and engaging qualities of the expressive, I urge; don't consciously shift into a more formal style or choose a more learned vocabulary. Instead, I hope the complexity of their syntax and their diction will be shaped by the complexity of the ideas they're trying to express.

Though my teachers' "final" papers are more focused, the form less open, their ideas more fully developed and supported by ideas gleaned from reading and discussion, they are still talking about their own experience -- still participating in that experience, still engaged in a search for understanding through writing. The merging and interrelated aims of the journal may give way in this discourse to a single dominant aim, but their audience has not changed. Even if they visualize a general audience of basic writing teachers, they only need to make our shared context of seminar and basic writing courses more explicit. Their perception of experience is still the center of their writing; they are still trying to make their own voices heard, even though the paper may sound less personal as it becomes more scholarly. Of course, keeping a journal for one semester and discovering in that journal the substance, form, and style of one analytical paper cannot ensure the mastery of a new composing process. But if their move from expressive talking on paper to academic writing has been sustained by an enabling learner-teacher dialogue

...the "self" is not lost on the way...[instead] "the self," though hidden, is still there. It is the self that provides the unseen point from which all is viewed: there can be no other way of writing quite impersonally and yet with coherence and vitality (*Language and Learning*, 179).

## SENSITIZING BEGINNING TEACHERS OF WRITING

The teaching assistants in the composition program at Idaho State University where I taught are probably very similar to teaching assistants at many other schools. They are graduate students in English who enter the program with little experience in the classroom. They often do not have strong backgrounds in composition theory, teaching methodology, or language studies in general although most of them have done reasonably well in their own writing courses and can write coherent papers, free from major errors. Based on their own experiences as students, they tend to believe in the efficacy of rules and "grammar." Although they have never had serious problems composing sentences and none of them has profited much from sentence drills and repetitions, they tend to like handbooks and accept unquestioningly the workbook tradition. They also tend to accept the notion that practice makes perfect, believing that all students can learn if they work diligently and apply themselves with purpose. Finally, almost all of them view the teaching assistant experience as a financial necessity rather than an intellectual challenge. They expect to find their intellectual work in their study of literature: good books and deep minds. For many, plowing through student papers would hardly qualify as an intellectual experience.

Because our teaching assistants come to the teaching of writing with a set of tacit, deeply held attitudes and assumptions, it is simply not possible to reorient them to the teaching of composition in a one-day program or even a series of workshops given at the beginning of a semester. Instead, our composition staff has begun to recognize the need for a long-term sensitization program that chips away at preconceptions while supplying alternatives to them, a program that introduces the intellectual challenge of teaching composition but does not overwhelm too quickly with theory. As part of this program, we have begun to introduce our beginning teaching assistants to a number of writing problems that appear on the surface to be relatively simple, yet can, with analysis, yield a surprising number of insights into the difficulties both teachers and students encounter in the writing classroom. In what follows, I will concentrate on one of these problems, the *comma splice*, in order to sketch out an approach to sensitization that can be adapted to a variety of teacher training programs.

---

*Irvin Y. Hashimoto was Director of the Writing Center at Idaho State University (Pocatello) for five years. He is now Assistant Professor of English and Director of the Writing Center at Whitman College.*

Background for our discussion of the comma splice is Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*. We introduce the book not as a text with answers or, indeed, as a text that should be read and absorbed all at once, but as a text with an idea--that there are "styles to being wrong":

[...]the teacher must try to decipher the individual student's code, examining samples of his writing as a scientist might, searching for patterns or explanations, listening to what the student says about punctuation, and creating situations in the classroom that encourage students to talk openly about what they don't understand.<sup>1</sup>

The notion that we can recognize "styles of being wrong" is important. It offers to beginning teachers an alternative to drills and improbable, often dull, workbook exercises. Instead, they can use their students' own writing as a source for instructional materials. Rather than dwelling on general, often unessential "grammar" study, they can focus on the specific errors students actually make. Such a notion also suggests an alternative model for understanding student behavior. Instead of seeing students as passive responders, beginning teachers can see them as active participants who come to writing with strategies and intentions that affect how they view writing as well as how they write. Recognizing students as active learners is especially important for teachers working with adult learners because it requires teachers to take into account students' previous language experiences, to accept student errors as a necessary part of the learning process, and to focus on techniques that students can use to analyze their own writing.

What makes the notion of "styles of being wrong" particularly appealing for the initial orientation of teaching assistants is that beginning teaching assistants generally understand the approach. To recognize a style of being wrong, teachers must scan student errors, looking for patterns or clusters of errors that might indicate the underlying assumptions that may have contributed to a student's method of approaching writing tasks. This is precisely the procedure students use to study literature: analysis of texts to discover patterns of language, methods of organization, clues to authorial intention, insights into meaning.

Having given our beginning teachers a general background on and orientation toward error, we can proceed to individual problems such as the comma splice in an attempt to provide realistic practice and give credence to Shaughnessy's remark that "...the issue of error is much more complex and troubling than it seems in theory."<sup>2</sup>

On the simplest level, we can introduce examples of student comma splices as recognition exercises:

---

<sup>1</sup> Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Shaughnessy, p.9.

a. My attitude toward grammar was never positive, and probably never really stressed. It seemed to me that the teachers left it up to the students to learn the grammar themselves. I think the only thing that the teachers stressed in my whole exposure to English was spelling, they had the notion that if a student could spell well, then the student automatically knew everything there was to know about grammar, I never really understood the phrases and catches that went along with writing. Even today I have to think of what a noun or a verb is, or when and how it is used. Again I can remember getting back papers in English that I had written and all that was on the paper was spelling error marks. The teachers weren't concerned if you used a noun or a verb correctly, they only cared about the spelling.

b. I saw a sight that made me feel like my stomach was in my throat. The side of the old oak was covered with blood and hair where James' head had struck it at over 100 mph. I turned around and climbed in my car. As I slowly drove towards my house I realized that what people had tried to tell me was true, maybe I had been a fool for racing.

Such passages are not too difficult, but difficult enough to start with. In the first example, we can clump the student's comma splices--perhaps even make some judgments about why the student made them. The errors tend to cluster around ideas which the student seems to be relating closely together. In the second example, a student makes one comma splice at the end of the passage. This comma splice seems to signal a stronger relationship between the sentences than a simple period might. Changing the comma to a semi-colon also doesn't work well because the relationship of the ideas in the two sentences is not a coordinate one. Indeed, unless a student has been introduced to the uses of colons or dashes to introduce explanatory information, the closest device to do such work might be the comma.

More important than simply recognizing comma splices in controlled examples and suggesting one or two logical reasons why particular students might use such comma splices is the problem of recognizing a *wide range* of equally logical reasons for comma splices. William Herman, for instance, suggests the comma splice is an error in *punctuation*.<sup>3</sup> Virginia Underwood and Mariellyn Kett suggest it might be a problem in "sentence logic."<sup>4</sup> Jack Romine suggests the comma splice is an error that results from "haste or carelessness."<sup>5</sup> John Langan suggests that comma splices

---

<sup>3</sup> William Herman, *The Portable English Handbook* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), p.211.

<sup>4</sup> Virginia Underwood and Mariellyn Kett, *Writing Skills, 2nd ed.* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1977), p.400.

<sup>5</sup> Jack Romine, *Writing Sentences: A Self-teaching Guide to Grammar, Structure, and Sentence Combining, 2nd ed.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), p.47.

occur when writers become "so involved" in the act of writing down their thoughts that they forget to make the breaks between their thoughts.<sup>6</sup> And Mina Shaughnessy suggests that some comma splices might occur because of a beginning writer's "aversion to closure."<sup>7</sup>

Beginning teachers often do not understand that they have such options in analysis. Furthermore, they often do not recognize that each choice they make concerning the cause of particular comma splices directs them toward certain teaching strategies. Teachers who see the comma splice as an error in "punctuation" are apt to concentrate their instruction on the conventions of standard written English. Those who see the error as "sentence logic" are apt to emphasize coherence devices or various methods of subordination. Those who see the error as "haste or carelessness" might turn to exercises that train students to be more careful--perhaps some form of controlled composition.

To underscore the difficulty teachers have deciding on the causes of comma splices, we can also introduce a few student examples for discussion:

- a. Brutus is a good, honorable man, he has a deep love for his wife and treats her with gentleness as he does his servants.
- b. Bilbo wants what most people desire, he desires friendship, to be of service to someone and to feel needed.
- c. There's so much as well as many things to see in life, Its great to see life as it happen's and as it is and its greatness and just how small we are in it.
- d. If we begin with the origin in the Early Colonial period, we have the conquerer, we see an indigenous indian population incorporated into the economy brought and developed by the conquerer, and his decedents, meaning the coastal "Creole Culture" which now stands as the Elite, Mestizo power of the country, in the cities like Lima and others.

Are the problems in *a* and *b* problems of haste? carelessness? sentence logic? Or are they both problems in parallel constructions and, hence, not comma splice problems at all? Is the problem in *c* a problem of punctuation or a problem in redundancy? Or simply a problem of having nothing to say? What exactly is the problem in *d*?

So far, we have only introduced causes of comma splices that are somehow student problems: students are too hasty; they have no sentence logic; they are too involved; and so on. We can make the issue much more complex by introducing teaching related errors as possible causes of

<sup>6</sup> John Langan, *English Skills* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1977), p. 294.

<sup>7</sup> Shaughnessy, p. 20.

student errors. Consider, for example, some of the problems students have with textbooks. Because our beginning teaching assistants have faith in textbooks, they tend to be unaware that such books present great difficulties to students who genuinely do not understand problems such as comma splices. The example we use is the *Harbrace Handbook*, currently favored by a number of faculty members in the department. As we pace our teaching assistants through the "comma splice" in the text, we point out the extent of grammatical knowledge students must already have in order to use the explanations in the book. In order to learn what a "comma splice" is, for instance, students must learn what "main clauses" are. The need to discover that "main" clauses can be distinguished from "subordinate" ones by recognizing first that "clause is often defined as a group of related words that contains both a subject and predicate" (p.18). They also have to learn the "main clause can stand alone as a sentence, a grammatically independent unit of expression, although it may require other sentences to complete its meaning" (p.22). Even though they may not be able to discover what it means to be "a grammatically independent unit of expression" or what it means "to complete...meaning," students might still go on to learn that a "complete predicate consists of a main verb along with its auxiliaries (the *simple predicate*) and any complements and modifiers" (p.441). And if they are still interested, they might further investigate "predicates," "auxiliaries" (which regularly indicate tense but "also indicate voice, mood, person, number") (p.425), and complements (objects, subject complements, and object complements), and modifiers (adjectives, adverbs, restrictive modifiers, and nonrestrictive modifiers).

Teaching-related errors, of course, are not limited to textbooks that don't provide sufficient help, and we need to introduce other sources of teaching-related errors. One such source is oversimplicity. For example, teachers often teach comma splices by using simple examples and exercises composed of sentences such as these:

- a. John ate a cow, he got sick.
- b. Angelo got a sore throat, he stayed home from school.

But students are constantly exposed to much more complex sentences--sentences that stretch their analytical capacities to their limits:

- a. It is curious, I think, that with all the current interest in "basic writing," little attention has been paid to the most basic question: What is it?<sup>8</sup>
- b. What is "basic writing," that is, if the term is to refer to a phenomenon, an activity, something a writer does or has done, rather than to a course of instruction?<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> David Bartholomae, "The Study of Error," *CCC*, 31 (1980), 253.

<sup>9</sup> Bartholomae, p. 253.

c. Any given student, for example, may be able to speak "classroom English," and at another time speak the near inarticulate language shared with one or two close friends (often single words or short phrases, where the friendship supplies the rest of the meaning), then at another time speak sports lingo and understand fully what "pick one out" or "hitting the seams" means, at still another time speak the cool, near-wit of the "Tonight Show," then at another time speak gently to a grandmother.<sup>10</sup>

By using such sentences, we can underscore the difficulties students have if their only strategies are simple ones like "look for main clauses that have subjects and contain complete thoughts" or "look for that part of a sentence that can stand alone." In the first sentence, for instance, if we ask, "What is the main clause?" our beginning teaching assistants will have no trouble recognizing it. But their students, working from simplified notions, might have considerable trouble choosing between "It is curious..." or "I think ..." or "...little attention has been paid...." Here, in fact, the third choice might seem to contain more of a "complete" thought than the other two, even though it is not the main clause.

We can further emphasize the difficulties beginning writers have with simple strategies that come from simple explanations by presenting examples of sentences such as these:

- a. The car began to appear lopsided, one wheel raised slightly off the pavement.
- b. You like warm weather, don't you?
- c. Experiment, you know what that's all about.
- d. The thought of the car's destruction made him so weak he was unable to move, his eyes watered, his stomach ached.
- e. Pro-gun lobbyists are a powerful force in Washington. Their stand is a simple one, let people own guns, as granted in the Bill of Rights, to defend themselves and to use for recreation without violating anyone's civil liberties.

Because our teaching assistants tend to have few problems understanding such sentences themselves and recognizing the ambiguities in some of them, they often tend to underestimate their students' misunderstandings. They often do not see the kinds of pitfalls these sentences can cause writers with limited or simplistic strategies for sentence analysis. For beginning writers, each sentence except for *c* could appear to contain at least two sets

---

<sup>10</sup> Jim W. Corder, *Contemporary Writing: Process and Practice* (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman, 1979), p. 169.

of subjects and verbs that are separated only by commas.

Finally, we point out that teaching related errors can be caused not only by oversimplicity, but also by overcomplexity. We might, for instance, ask our beginning teaching assistants to suggest ways to explain how comma splices can be used correctly for stylistic reasons. Our discussion might begin a couple of ways. We might begin with examples of comma splices by authors such as Wallace Stegner, Norman Mailer, or D.H. Lawrence. Or we might begin with an analysis of a rule such as Irene Brosnahan's:

Rule: The comma alone is used to separate independent clauses, without any accompanying conjunction under the following conditions:

1. *Syntax*--the clauses are short and usually parallel in structure though they can be in any combination of affirmative and negative clauses.
2. *Semantics*--the sentence cannot be potentially ambiguous, and the semantic relationship between the clauses is paraphrase, repetition, amplification, addition or summary.
3. *Style*--the usage level is General English or Informal English.
4. *Rhetorical*--the effect is rapidity of movement and/or emphasis.<sup>11</sup>

In either case, whether we begin with detailed descriptions of established practice or with rules for good comma splice usage, the difficulties describing such usage to students become immediately apparent. Using Brosnahan's rule, for instance, teachers would need to describe "parallel structure," "affirmative and negative clauses," "potential ambiguity," "paraphrase," "repetition," "amplification," "General English," "Informal English," and the notion of "rapidity of movement and/or emphasis."

Having introduced the issue of overcomplexity, we can introduce, then, questions of practicality. Is it possible to make complex issues such as the correct use of comma splices simple enough to teach to beginning writers? If so, how long will such explanations take? In a sixteen week session, will it be worth the time? At what point does complexity add unnecessarily to the burdens we impose on beginning writers?

By concentrating on a specific writing problem such as the comma splice, we can, through a series of increasingly complex encounters with that problem, explore the difficulties teachers often face if they choose to analyze student error with any kind of sensitivity. In addition to comma splices, we can introduce other topics throughout the semester, such as sentence fragments, notions of "restrictive" and "non-restrictive" elements,

---

<sup>11</sup> Irene Brosnahan, "A Few Good Words for the CS," *CE*, 38 (1977), 185.

and parallelism. Even the apostrophe has its problems. Beginning teachers often do not recognize that the notion of "possession" is not a simple one for beginning writers to recognize in constructions such as "John's winning first place in the beauty contest startled Marsha" or in constructions like "The battle of the books" (where students want to write *books*) or "The book was hers" (where students want to write *her's*). Problems with definite and indefinite articles, prepositions, and spelling can further complicate simplicity.

It is important, however, to keep in mind that the approach to sentence-level errors that I have outlined here is just one part of a total program in sensitizing beginning teachers to the range of writing problems they face in the classroom. The process of sensitizing beginning teaching assistants is a gradual one--one that allows teaching assistants to try things out, to make mistakes, to continue to ask questions. It is through their trials and growing understandings that, over a period of time, they can, in their own ways, learn a great deal about how to sharpen their perceptions, recognize options, and cope with the complexity of teaching composition.

Betsy E. Brown  
John T. Harwood

## TRAINING AND EVALUATING TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL INSTRUCTORS OF COMPOSITION

Finding qualified teachers to staff a large, diverse writing program is always difficult. Most public universities are too large and their budgets too small to hire trained and experienced Ph.D.'s or even M.A.'s in English to staff the many sections of composition they teach. Like Penn State, many universities rely on graduate teaching assistants to cover most of the freshman composition sections, but with declining enrollments in English graduate programs and increasing enrollments in upper-division courses such as business and technical writing, the pool of graduate assistants may not be adequate to cover all the sections not staffed by regular faculty members. Schools in urban areas may be able to hire trained part-time teachers from the community, but in an isolated community such as State College, Pennsylvania, where the main campus of Penn State is located, the pool of available teachers may be shallow. Thus, many composition programs must choose between leaving sections unstaffed or hiring and training inexperienced, "non-traditional" composition teachers, teachers who lack formal training in English.

The Composition Program at Penn State hires a number of such non-traditional teachers each year. The training program we describe below serves these and other, more traditional instructors who are teaching composition for the first time. Our evaluation of the effectiveness of these new teachers suggests that, with thorough training and supervision, they can be assimilated successfully into a traditional writing program and that, in fact, such non-traditional teachers may be valuable additions to a composition staff. Our research may be of particular interest to other programs faced with hiring instructors from other fields or implementing writing-across-the-curriculum programs where writing courses are staffed by faculty members from other disciplines.

### THE STUDENTS AND THE COURSES

Admission figures suggest that the entering students at Penn State's main campus form a somewhat homogeneous group, with aptitude somewhat above the national average. Of approximately 3,500 freshmen who enroll at University Park annually, roughly 2.5% bypass the regular freshman courses and move into Honors Composition. About 14.5% receive

---

*Betsy E. Brown is Assistant Professor of English at The Pennsylvania State University. Formerly, she was the Assistant Director and Acting Director of the Penn State Composition Programs and Director of the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition.*

*John T. Harwood is Associate Professor of English and Director of Composition Programs at The Pennsylvania State University.*

some developmental instruction before they enter the first freshman course or while they are enrolled in it. The great majority of students, however, move directly into the regular two-course freshman sequence.

The first course in the sequence, English 10, asks students to write primarily from their personal experience in papers developed by the traditional patterns of exposition. Students concentrate on developing their skills at all levels of composition, beginning with planning the whole essay, then refining the parts: paragraphs, sentences, words. Most classes work with sentence combining, expanding students' stylistic options and developing their sense of rhetorical choices. Students are introduced to the rhetorical concepts of invention, arrangement, and style; their writing, which is for the most part informative, is usually addressed to their classmates or other student audiences.

The second course, English 20, deals with argumentation and persuasion. Subjects extend beyond the students' immediate personal experience, requiring research and documentation. Students are encouraged to write for audiences less familiar and less receptive than their fellow students in argumentative forms such as evaluation, causal analysis, refutation, and proposal. By the end of the course, students are expected to write fully documented and accommodated arguments for specific audiences.

Both English 10 and 20 are rhetorically based courses with a clearly defined sequence of objectives. Instructors use a common syllabus for each course, and while teaching methods, textbooks, and individual paper assignments may vary, the course requirements, grading criteria, and general objectives are consistent across all the sections. Assuring some degree of uniformity among sections is necessary because a large number of sections are taught each term and because the program is a two-course sequence, with the second assuming a number of skills learned in the first. The common syllabi for the courses make supervising new instructors less difficult than it might be in a program with more variety among sections.

## THE STAFF

Only 11% of the two regular freshman courses are taught by faculty members. (The proportion of courses staffed by faculty is higher in honors and advanced writing.) That means that approximately 350 sections of English 10 and 20 (and the developmental course and tutorials) must be staffed each year by instructors who may have little formal preparation or teaching experience. While the majority of courses are taught by teaching assistants from the English Department, others are taught by teaching assistants from other fields. The rest of the staff is made up of non-student lecturers, with M.A.'s or higher degrees in English and related fields. These T.P.L.'s ("Temporary Part-time Lecturers," their title apparently intended by the University to describe unequivocally their tenuous status) are typically either Penn State Ph.D.'s who have not yet found permanent jobs, local residents who cannot find or do not want to find full-time teaching positions, or A.B.D.'s from English or other departments who need support while completing their degrees. While there is a fairly regular turnover among the first and third of these groups of

T.P.L.'s and among T.A.'s, the local residents form the core of the continuing writing faculty and are sometimes involved in training or assisting their less experienced colleagues.

### THE TRAINING PROGRAM

In the fall of 1980, 42 new instructors joined the composition staff, a number unusually high (the number for 1979 had been 28) because of faculty sabbaticals, completed Ph.D.'s, and the transfer of a number of experienced teachers to other courses, notably business and technical writing. This group of instructors represented a range of fields: 28 teaching assistants from English and Comparative Literature; one teaching assistant each from Speech Communication, History, and Psychology; and eleven T.P.L.'s, including two A.B.D.'s from Philosophy, one from History, and eight non-student lecturers with degrees in English, Music, French, Philosophy, or Sociology. All of the T.P.L.'s had had some teaching experience as had some of the T.A.'s, but only three new T.A.'s had more than one year's experience teaching composition, and none had taught writing at Penn State.

Ranging in age from 21 to 42 and having vastly different experiences and interests, this large group of new instructors required a training program that would introduce them to the discipline of rhetoric and composition, teach them practical skills for use in the writing classroom, and give them confidence and a sense of professionalism as they entered a new field. Despite their numbers, each received training that required approximately sixty hours of staff time from faculty members and experienced T.A.'s and T.P.L.'s. Their training continued through the instructors' full first year of teaching and included a two-day orientation, a thirty-week course in the teaching of writing, and close supervision and counseling by the Teaching Coordinator, a faculty member who visited the classes of all new teachers and consulted with them about grading, student problems, and other concerns.

### ORIENTATION

The training program for composition began in the summer, when all new teachers received the texts for the first of the two freshman courses and material explaining the courses and the Composition Program. In 1980-81, all new instructors of English 10 used the same rhetoric text, *The Writer's Work*, by Dean Memering and Frank O'Hare (Prentice-Hall, 1980) and *Penn Statements*, a collection of essays from the previous year's English 10 students that is published by the Composition Program and required in all sections. In addition to the texts, the new instructors received a resource book for English 10, written by the composition faculty and containing discussions of special topics in teaching writing as well as information about procedures and policies in the Composition Program. Topics covered in the resource book include "Teaching Writing as a Process," "Teaching Sentence Style," "Teaching Invention," each section designed to give practical teaching advice and, more important, to put teaching methods informally but firmly in the context of recent research

and theory in the teaching of writing. Teachers were asked to read the material before they came to campus; bibliographies in the resource book identified other readings of potential value.

When instructors arrived for fall orientation, held for two days during the week before classes began, they knew a little about their courses and their students. The orientation introduced them to the staff of the Composition Program, explained the training program, and prepared them for the first few weeks of their teaching. While some new instructors may have had years of teaching experience in other disciplines and others may have come only recently from freshman English themselves, we assumed that all of them needed a thorough introduction to the ways students are likely to improve their writing and the techniques which teachers can use to aid their students' improvement. Experienced teachers explained the sequence of assignments in English 10 and the writing skills their students could be expected to develop. Workshops involved the new teachers immediately in considering the composing process through a brief writing assignment and a discussion of their own difficulties in responding to it, demonstrating the importance of audience and purpose to successful student writing. Other workshops covered formulating writing assignments, using instructional time, and evaluating student writing--commenting and grading. The presentations and workshops were supplemented by information on additional resources for teachers.

#### THE TRAINING COURSE

Orientation ended by introducing new instructors to the other components of the training program: a three-term course in the teaching of writing and individual consultation with the Teaching Coordinator. The training course, English 602, met for 75 minutes a week for thirty weeks; graduate students took the course for one hour of credit per term, while T.P.L.'s audited it. There were three sections of the course, each with 10-15 students, taught by faculty members involved in the composition program. The sections were rotated each term, so that each new instructor had three different teachers and studied three slightly different approaches to teaching writing.

In the fall term, sessions of the course were devoted primarily to "what to do next week"--discussions of theme assignments, class activities, exercises for developing paragraph, sentence, and word-level skills, and special problems with each assignment. These activities were supplemented by discussions of evaluation, analysis of student or professional essays, and discussions of pedagogical or theoretical articles on composition. The new teachers often brought to 602 questions about teaching problems or troublesome students and new approaches or activities they had developed on their own.

In the winter term when the new teachers taught English 10 for a second time and 602 sections were freed from the week-to-week preparation of classes, the instructors introduced more thorough discussions of evaluation, of the writing process, and of the value of various classroom activities. In addition, new teachers read and discussed William F.

Irmscher's *Teaching Expository Writing* (Holt, Rinehart, 1980). The last few weeks of winter term introduced English 20, a course in argumentation that is difficult for both students and teachers; the class discussed the aims of the course, studied the techniques of argumentation and persuasion, and devised methods for continuing to develop the skills students had learned in English 10. They also received a resource book of supplementary materials for English 20 and the texts for the course (a handbook and the *Penn State Reader*, a collection of argumentative essays developed especially for use in English 20). In the spring term, 602 focused once again on week-to-week activities in English 20 with particular emphasis on finding resources for class in newspapers and magazines and on rhetorical analysis of argumentative essays.

## SUPERVISION

While Orientation and the teacher training courses dealt with groups of instructors, each new teacher worked individually with the Teaching Coordinator, who was available for consultation with all instructors but spent most time with those in the first year. Because of the large number of new instructors, the Coordinator was assisted by five experienced full-time lecturers, who were compensated for the time they spent working with inexperienced teachers. The Coordinator primarily helped instructors solve individual problems outside the day-to-day curricular activities handled in 602. With other experienced lecturers, the Coordinator also served as a kind of supervising teacher. In addition to observing the new instructors' classes, the Teaching Coordinator examined teaching files from their courses (containing assignments, exercises, class notes, and other material from their courses) and a selection of student papers (usually a range of A-F papers and a complete set of papers from one student). These materials were discussed in a conference at the end of the term.

In summary, the new teachers, whether traditional or non-traditional in background, received extensive training and supervision during their first year in the program. But we were unsure how effective the program was until we examined the differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers, especially those without formal backgrounds in the teaching of writing.

## EVALUATION

To evaluate the training program and determine the effectiveness of our non-traditional instructors, we compared the teaching effectiveness of three groups of new composition teachers at the end of their first term of teaching. Each group of eight new teachers, a stratified random sample of our teaching staff, represented different backgrounds for teaching composition: group 1 consisted of experienced teachers of college-level composition (some faculty, a few lecturers, and T.A.'s with several years of experience); group 2 consisted of T.A.'s and lecturers without graduate training in English and without experience in teaching composition (the non-traditional teachers); group 3 consisted of new T.A.'s in our graduate program, with B.A.'s or M.A.'s in English (a more traditional group of new

composition teachers).

In our evaluation, we examined five kinds of data:

- students' writing;
- students' evaluations of their teachers;
- teachers' grade distributions;
- students' attitudes toward various aspects of composition;
- students' writing apprehension.

Our findings disclose some interesting differences and similarities among the three groups.

### STUDENTS' WRITING

At the end of the term, we randomly selected five papers from each teacher's final set of essays. After we trained raters in holistic evaluation and achieved a satisfactory degree of reliability, two raters evaluated each essay on a four-point scale. Based on these holistic evaluations, we found no statistically significant differences in the quality of student writing among the three groups. We were surprised by this finding since the teachers in group 1 averaged slightly more than three years of full-time teaching and four years of part-time teaching; teachers in group 2 and group 3 were very inexperienced. We had expected that teachers' experience would be associated with students' improvement in writing, but our data do not support this common-sense assumption (see appendix for supporting data).

### STUDENTS' EVALUATIONS

Analyzing students' evaluations of their instructors on a standardized teaching evaluation instrument used in the composition program, we found that students regarded experienced teachers (group 1) as significantly more effective ( $p < 0.048$ ) than beginning teachers. We hypothesized that freshmen might prefer teachers who were somewhat older, even if not more experienced, than beginning T.A.'s, but even when we controlled for the effects of age, experienced teachers (group 1) were still rated significantly higher than teachers in the other groups. Whatever these evaluations measure--teachers' confidence or competence or congeniality--seems to be related to instructors' teaching experience. Students of experienced teachers may not write better than students in the other two groups, but they are more satisfied with their teachers.

### GRADE DISTRIBUTIONS

We wondered whether differences in student evaluations could be explained by grading practices, but we found non-significant differences in the mean final grades for the three groups. The non-traditional teachers (group 2) tended to be more demanding graders than teachers in the other groups, but the difference was not significant ( $p < 0.12$ ).

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD COMPOSITION

We asked students to characterize their attitudes toward various aspects of rhetoric and composition, using a survey instrument developed for this purpose. (A copy of this instrument is available upon request.) For example, we asked whether "knowing your audience makes writing easier," whether "any student can learn to write," whether "the composing process never varies," whether "content is more important than expression," and so on. We found no significant differences among the groups except on one item: "grades are just a matter of opinion." Students of teachers in group 1 (experienced teachers) disagreed most strongly and in group 2 (non-traditional teachers) disagreed least strongly. To put it more simply, beginning teachers (and especially non-traditional teachers) were less effective at communicating the basis for evaluating their students' writing. As we noted above, non-traditional teachers gave slightly lower grades than the others, but since the difference was very slight, grades alone probably do not account for the differences in students' attitudes. How students perceive grades may be affected by how teachers explain assignments, provide feedback about writing, or discuss student and professional writing, so we are unable to explain completely the difference in students' attitudes toward grading.

## WRITING APPREHENSION

We used the writing anxiety instrument developed by John Daly and Michael D. Miller to measure students' writing apprehension and found statistically significant differences among the two groups of beginning teachers ( $p < 0.011$ ). On five questions we found significant differences that may indicate significantly different pedagogical practices and consequences. On one of the questions,

#2 I have no fear of my writing being evaluated

students of new T.A.'s (group 3) disagreed more strongly than those of experienced teachers or of non-traditional teachers. That is, students of new T.A.'s expressed greater concern about being evaluated. But the students of non-traditional teachers agreed more strongly than their counterparts on these four statements:

#8 Expressing ideas through writing seems to be a waste of time;

#21 I have a terrible time organizing ideas in a composition course;

#22 When I hand in a composition I know I'm going to do poorly;

#26 I'm good at writing.

These differences suggest that non-traditional teachers were less successful at allaying their students' anxieties about writing than the traditional

teachers or perhaps may have raised their students' anxieties. While higher anxiety might be related to the slightly lower grade distributions for non-traditional teachers, such slight differences in grades probably do not explain all the differences in attitudes that the writing apprehension scale uncovered.

#### SUMMARY

We believe that with adequate training and supervision, faculty or lecturers from disciplines besides English can provide effective instruction in composition. Student evaluations for new teachers--both traditional and non-traditional--are positive, though students prefer experienced teachers over beginning teachers. Students' writing does not seem to suffer--or benefit--because of their teachers' backgrounds and experience, and students of non-traditional teachers tend to perform slightly better than students of beginning T.A.'s. The major difference, we conclude, is in students' attitudes toward grades and anxiety about writing. Since the differences are very slight, we are uncertain about their practical consequences, but the differences do suggest that thorough discussions of such matters ought to be included in the training of all new teachers of writing, particularly those from other disciplines.

There are, of course, professional considerations that are relevant to hiring non-traditional teachers: more and more English Ph.D.'s may go unemployed if we turn to other kinds of instructors in significant numbers. And assimilating professors from other disciplines who are transferred to writing courses because of declining enrollments in their own departments (a possibility that seems more and more likely at some institutions) will have its own difficulties. In general, however, based on teachers' performance and the staff's morale, we believe our own experience with non-traditional instructors has been successful.

## APPENDIX

Table 1

### Evaluation of Student Writing

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
24.750 (8)	24.250 (8)	21.875 (8)	23.625 (24)	1.139	0.339

Table 2

### Student Evaluation of Teacher Effectiveness

N = 24 teachers

Group 1 = experienced teachers of composition

Group 2 = "non-traditional" lecturers

Group 3 = beginning T.A.'s

### Cell Means

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
5.62 (8)	4.32 (8)	4.58 (8)	4.84 (24)	10.273	0.001

Table 3

### Grade Distributions

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
2.768 (8)	2.671 (8)	2.93 (8)	2.790 (24)	2.313	0.1236

Table 4

Attitudes Toward Writing and Writing Classes  
 "Grades are just a matter of opinion"  
 (1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree)

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
2.59 (194)	2.33 (201)	2.39 (188)	2.44 (583)	3.057	0.048

Table 5

Writing Anxiety  
 (1 = strongly agree; 5 = strongly disagree)

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
86.49 (194)	84.58 (201)	89.51 (188)	86.80 (583)	4.526	0.011

Question 2, "I have no fear of my writing being evaluated"

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
2.96 (194)	2.90 (201)	2.64 (188)	2.83 (583)	4.191	0.016

Question 8, "Expressing ideas through writing  
 seems to be a waste of time"

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
4.22 (194)	3.95 (201)	4.13 (188)	4.10 (583)	3.423	0.333

**Question 21, "I have a terrible time organizing  
my ideas in a composition course"**

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
3.31 (194)	3.18 (201)	3.51 (188)	3.33 (583)	4.116	0.017

**Question 22, "When I hand in a composition, I know I'm  
going to do poorly"**

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
3.71 (194)	3.55 (201)	3.95 (188)	3.73 (583)	7.536	0.001

**Question 26, "I'm no good at writing"**

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Grand Mean	F	Sig. Level
3.74 (194)	3.65 (201)	3.93 (188)	3.77 (583)	3.427	0.033

## CHOOSING YOUR DOCTORAL PROGRAM

Teachers considering doctoral training in English should evaluate their interests, goals, and career opportunities honestly and realistically. If your primary interest is in literature, but you expect to teach composition as well, you may want to look for a program which will provide training in composition and rhetoric as well as in English and American literature. Ideally, such training would not be a single course or two, but a regular subfield, one that would bring you into contact with several faculty members, expose you to cross-disciplinary research, and offer you a practicum in teaching.

Indeed, many candidates will want to consider a doctoral program emphasizing composition and rhetoric. There are now a number of such programs, and candidates may wish to examine them with questions like the following in mind:

- Will the program expose me to developing interdisciplinary work in the human sciences broadly concerned with the transmission of literacy--work in areas such as linguistics, cognitive psychology, reading theory, cross-cultural studies?
- Will the program expose me to a number of different theories of composition, as opposed to one oriented solely toward a single theory?
- Will the program give me the research skills I need to test my ideas in the classroom, the writing lab, and in naturalistic settings?
- Is the program flexible enough in its requirements? (Can I transfer credits for courses in other departments or at other institutions? Can I substitute a computer language or a research design course for a foreign language requirement? Are residency requirements flexible enough to allow me to continue full-time teaching?)

If the answer to any any of these questions is "no," I'd recommend that you look into the possibility of designing an individualized program (many large universities allow such interdisciplinary programs), or that you look elsewhere for a graduate program that better fits your needs.

---

*Patrick Hartwell is a Professor of English at Indiana University of Pennsylvania where he teaches in the doctoral program in rhetoric and linguistics. He is the author, with Robert H. Bentley, of *Open to Language* (Oxford), a freshman rhetoric.*

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: RESEARCH ON GRAMMAR  
INSTRUCTION

We are eager to hear from those who can acquaint us with unpublished reports or findings about the effect of grammar instruction at the basic writing level, or who can refer us to published work on this subject that may have escaped our attention. Please write to Carolyn Kirkpatrick or Mary Epes, Department of English, York College/CUNY, Jamaica, N.Y. 11451.

## CALL FOR ARTICLES

Articles should be no more than 6,000 words (about 20 pages). Please follow the MLA Style Sheet, second edition, for matters of form. Include all footnotes at the end of the article. Enclose two copies of the article and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Manuscripts and correspondence should be addressed to: The Editors, Journal of Basic Writing, Instructional Resource Center, City University of New York, 535 E. 80th Street, New York, New York 10021.

### *ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC WRITING*

The editors invite articles which describe the kinds of writing done in various academic disciplines and "real world" non-academic settings. Authors might consider such qualities as the characteristic stances toward audience and subject, typical formats and structures of exposition, levels of diction, and variations in usage. The objective is to provide readers with a better idea of the different kinds of writing students will need to do to function well in college and on the job.

# The Painless Solution



## To Your Department's Report Writing Problems

**Fidelity of Report Revised.**  
*a New, Modular, Multi-Media*  
Training Program —  
now available for only \$695  
Tools and techniques to teach  
report writing skills easily  
and inexpensively.

**Effective, Cost-Saving,  
Time-Saving, Fun, Complete.  
Free, No-Risk, 7-Day Trial.**

Write or call for free brochure:  
"Fidelity of Report Revised,  
Taking the Mystery out of  
Report Writing"



**Charles S. MacCrone Productions, Inc.**  
8055 Valencia Street, Aptos, CA 95003  
(408) 688-1040



Journal of Basic Writing  
The City University of New York  
Instructional Resource Center  
535 East 80th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10021

NON-PROFIT ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
NEW YORK, N.Y.  
PERMIT No. 5704