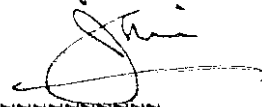


W&R/T&P
NEWSLETTER

Doug:
Here she be. Thanks. Hope
you get some response.



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A Canadian newsletter devoted to writing and reading theory and practice.  
Vol. 2, no. 5. September 1983.

This newsletter is offered to all educators in Canada interested in processes and pedagogies relating to language, language acquisition, and language use. A forum whose primary objective is to intensify the relationship between theory and practice, it serves both informative and polemical functions.

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One Year of W&R/T&P

I put the first issue of the *W&R/T&P Newsletter* in the mails on the 1st of October last year. I sent it to just over eighty people. This issue -- the first of the academic year 1983-1984 -- will be sent to 254 subscribers. I don't really know, of course, what that growth in the subscription list means (the newsletter is, after all, free to subscribers; and many of the people on that list did not actually write to request the newsletter: I got their names from others who thought maybe they would like to receive it). We can at least believe, however, that having W&R/T&P has helped us to know better who we are and what we might have in common. To the extent that that's true, *W&R/T&P* has made some modest progress toward achieving one of its objectives -- helping to build a sense of community among those of us working in a Canadian academic environment who are interested in writing and reading theory and practice.

But we accomplished more than that, too. *W&R/T&P* published some nice little articles, notices, and reviews. Some examples: Russ Hunt's "Two 'Energizing Articles'" and "Litman'ship Through the Ages: Stephen Potter as Literary Historian"; Chris Bullock's, Rick Coe's, and Murray Evans' "News from the Provinces" reports; Andrea Lunsford's review of several inexpensive journals and two bargain conferences; Anthony Paré's commentary on the need for accountability in the writing courses we teach, and his review of Linda Flower's *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing*; and a batch of valuable Cohort Reports. In addition, we've put together a file of over thirty "consultants" -- people who admit to knowing something they might teach the rest of us. We arranged a session at CCTE 1983, at which an organization called the Canadian Association for the Advanced Study of Writing and Reading was proposed -- and perhaps even formed. We helped to publicize -- who can say if we helped to improve? -- CCTE 1983; and we published a series of "reviews" of that conference.

Perhaps the greatest accomplishment of all: I actually had, in hand, more material than I could publish in the final issue of last academic year. I ended the year holding Doug Brent's piece for publication in this issue.

In short, *W&R/T&P* has accomplished some things. What interests me, however, are some important things we have *not* accomplished. For one thing, I still believe we have failed to identify people who, if they knew about us, would join us: they teach writing and reading (literature) at post-secondary levels, or they teach others to teach writing and reading, or they conduct research into writing and reading, or they are responsible for curriculum design relating to writing and reading. All those people -- and others "interested in processes and pedagogies relating to language, language acquisition, and language use" -- are potential subscribers to *W&R/T&P* but are not on the list. For another, although I've the names of over thirty consultants, all I've been able to do with that list is send it to a couple of readers who have requested it. Someone should be organizing something. For another, *W&R/T&P* does not have Provincial Correspondents in three provinces -- New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan. For another, the Newsletter is still burdened with an unpronounceable title. And so on. We've things to do.

Doing those things will require your help. Will somebody out there take over the consultants file and do something with it? Will you all continue to tell people about *W&R/T&P*, and pass copies of your issues on to others? How about volunteers from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan to serve as Provincial Correspondents? Will you write reviews -- particularly of the kind that tell your actual experience with a text, relating the book's assumptions and aims and telling us what works and what doesn't)? Will you write Commentaries addressing problems and issues relevant to writing and reading at post-secondary levels? Will you write brief articles for us, discussing some theory, reporting some research, or suggesting a theory- or research-based pedagogy? Will you send us news about yourself and others (Cohort Reports), and about political events that might affect us? Will you, in a word, *join* those of us who are participating in this community?

James A. Reither
St. Thomas University

Draft Editing in the Writing Centre

The rapidly proliferating institution of the writing centre can pose questions for writing centre administrators that go beyond the obvious logistic and pedagogical ones. The choice of teaching strategy, for instance, can attain the dimensions of a moral dilemma.

Most modern research on composition teaching seems to recommend a strong emphasis on criticism of actual writing samples rather than on correcting workbook exercises. The most obvious way for the writing centre instructor to implement this recommendation is to review drafts of assignments that students are preparing for content-area courses. After all, students have already invested a great deal of time and effort in these assignments, and are already motivated to try to make them succeed. Why make students undertake yet more writing for our exclusive benefit--writing that is bound to lack even the artificial source of motivation provided by a grade? A glance through the *Writing Lab News-letter* shows that this logic has been accepted by many universities throughout North America; it has certainly been accepted by the students who keep turning up at the University of Calgary's Writing Centre with drafts for us to help them with.

The moral dilemma is this. Helping students with drafts can provide the material we need for instruction, but it can also undermine the principle on which writing instruction itself is founded. Composition is worth teaching, we say, because writing skill is important in any discipline, not just English. To make this point clear to students emotionally as well as intellectually, we desperately need reinforcement from content-area

instructors who comment on writing skills and take them into account when grading. If we help a student clean up his draft, we mask his skill or lack of it and short-circuit the reinforcement process. Only English instructors, we seem to be saying, need worry about writing; problems of composition are basically trivial matters that can be swept away, first by us, and later, perhaps, by the omniscient 'secretary' that some students seem to think will edit their work when they leave university.

Theoretically, of course, a skilled and self-disciplined instructor would be able to consult on a draft rather than editing it, opening the student's eyes to new possibilities and leaving him not just with a cleaner draft but with a real increase in skill and understanding. But how many harried instructors can achieve that ideal very often in practice, especially when many students are not really interested in anything but a quick fix? Here on earth, consulting on drafts is almost bound to degenerate into sanctioned plagiarism.

Even consulting on assignments that have been graded and returned has its dangers. If we believe that form and content, writing and thinking, are inextricably bound up, how can we presume to second-guess an instructor who is far more expert than we in the content of the paper? Why put ourselves in the position of trying to explain what someone else did and didn't like about a paper? The only areas on which we can honestly comment are relatively superficial ones such as grammar, syntax, and gross structural errors. Confining our comments to these areas can only further reinforce the myth that mechanical errors are the only legitimate domain of writing instruction.

At the University of Calgary we simply refuse to look at drafts of credit assignments. We will review completed and graded assignments only briefly to gain a general overview of the student's writing skill; we do not presume to tell the student what his instructor would probably have wanted. To provide us with material, we ask students to work through a series of assignments that call upon them to generate brief essays of various kinds.

We pay a price, of course. Some students, unwilling to do more writing on top of their credit assignments, disappear from the centre. More seriously, we lose the chance to work with varied assignments that have a certain amount of ready-made engagement and that call obviously and specifically on the skills that students need in content areas. But at least we can coax revisions out of students without belying the connection between writing skill and grades, and, more important, between form and content.

Douglas Brent
University of Calgary

ANNOUNCING: A NEW JOURNAL

Although the first issue of *Written Communication: A Quarterly Journal of Research, Theory, and Application* is not scheduled to appear until April 1984, waiting to see a few issues before subscribing would probably be a mistake. For one thing, the two people editing this new journal, Stephen P. Witte and John A. Daly, of the University of Texas at Austin, are both excellently qualified.

For another, Witte and Daly have put together an Editorial Board representing some of the best minds from a number of the disciplines currently contributing to our understanding of what written communication is and how it works. That Board's members include Robert de Beaugrande, Hunter Breland, Robert Calfee, Veda Charrow, Charles Cooper, Lester Faigley, Linda Flower, Lawrence Frase, Carl Frederikson, Sarah Freedman, Joseph Grimes, John Hayes, Shirley Brice Heath, James Kinneavy, Richard Larson, Erika Lindemann, Andrea Lunsford, Michael Miller, Ellen Nold, Lee Odell, Alan Purves, Marlene Scardamalia, Rob Tierney, and Richard Venezky.

If that's not enough, let me quote from an information sheet distributed at CCTE Montreal last May:

Written Communication is a quarterly journal devoted to the advancement of knowledge of writing through theoretical, historical, and empirical research. *Written Communication* is a cross-disciplinary journal, and the editors encourage manuscripts addressing substantive issues in writing from the perspectives of such disciplines as English, psychology, linguistics, journalism, reading, communication, anthropology, and education. Among the topics of current interest are the following: Assessment and evaluation of writing; Writing and the professions; Impact of technology on writing; Social consequences of writing literacy; Development of writing ability; Rhetorical history and theory; Function /uses of writing; Composing processes; Attitudes toward writing and written texts; Connections among writing, reading, speaking, and listening; Structure of written texts; and document design.

The editorial address for this publication is

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An Advertisement: *Rhetoric Review*

Rhetoric Review, now in its second year of publication, is being recognized as an excellent resource for researchers and teachers of rhetoric and composition. The editors encourage Canadian teachers both to subscribe and to submit entries to this journal, not only a source of pedagogical assistance for new and experienced teachers but also a platform for a lively exchange of opinion within the discipline. Published in September and January, *Rhetoric Review* subscription rates are \$6.00 (U.S.) in Canada. All correspondence should be addressed to

Theresa Enos, Editor
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CCTE 1984: FREDERICTON

The Seventeenth Annual Conference of the Canadian Council of Teachers of English is scheduled for August 19-24 here in Fredericton. The keynote speakers are David Doake, Acadia University; James Kinneavy, University of Texas at Austin; Andrea Lunsford, University of British Columbia; William Lutz, Rutgers University, and I. V. Hanson, University of Melbourne.

You found a brochure advertising this conference in the envelop with this newsletter. I hope you'll come; I also hope you'll use the proposal form on page 3 of that brochure. The conference organizers are hoping for a strong postsecondary presence at CCTE 1984, even stronger than there was in Montreal. So, come along to Fredericton next August. Give a paper, conduct a workshop, present a demonstration. But get your proposal in before the deadline -- 31 October.

'CAASWAR'

At *W&R/T&P*'s session at the Montreal CCTE last May, Mike Moore (Wilfrid Laurier University) proposed an informal organization calling itself the "Canadian Association for the Advanced Study of Writing and Reading. (You might have seen an announcement to that effect in the most recent ACUTE Newsletter.) Since then, those of us whose names appear on the masthead of *W&R/T&P* have discussed, through the mails, the possibility of mounting a small conference that would give *W&R/T&P* subscribers an opportunity to discuss issues of common interest. It is now time to ask all readers of *W&R/T&P* to join that discussion.

Russ Hunt and I have agreed to go ahead and try to organize something. Because many postsecondary people will already be coming to Fredericton for CCTE 1984, and because perhaps even more might come for that conference if there is the added incentive of a gathering concentrating on matters postsecondary, we are going to try to put something together for the two days preceding CCTE 1984 -- i.e., for 17-19 August 1984.

Our theme: 'Composition and Literature: The Troubled Connection'.

Our very tentative plans look like this:

Friday evening, 17 August: a 'keynote' and a social gathering of some sort, concluding with a midnight homemade clam chowder.

Saturday, 18 August: four seventy-five minute sessions, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, followed by a dinner with a second 'keynote' and a second social gathering.

Sunday morning, 19 August: one seventy-five minute session and a shorter closing session -- finishing at or before noon.

The issue of the relationship between composition and literature is a rich and timely one, generating questions and problems in many areas. Here are some Russ and I came up with in a few minutes of brainstorming; there are undoubtedly many, many others. We would be happy to have any of them addressed under the general rubric 'Composition and Literature: The Troubled Connection'.

Institutional.

Structural: What is the relationship between teachers of composition and teachers of literature in postsecondary contexts? To what extent are they the same people? To what extent should they be the same people? Are the perquisites attaching to each function different?

Historical: How has that relationship developed, and what direction is it taking now? Is there a specifically Canadian history of that relationship,

distinguishable from the American (or British) experience?

Pedagogical: What is the relationship between the teaching of composition and the teaching of literature in postsecondary contexts? In curricular terms, do they compete for students, do they complement each other, should their relationship be modified?

Pedagogical.

Literature as independent variable: What, if any, impact does the teaching of literature have on the learning of composition? To what extent is writing about literature relevant practice for writing about other things?

Composition as independent variable: What, if any, impact does the teaching of composition have on the learning of literature?

Theoretical: To what extent does what we know about the teaching of literature have potential to illuminate and perhaps change our teaching of composition?

Theoretical: To what extent does what we know about the teaching of composition have potential to illuminate and perhaps change our teaching of literature?

Scholarship and Research.

Literature as independent variable -- structural: In what ways can the methods and theory of literary scholarship -- whether of traditional literary scholarship or literary criticism (particularly, perhaps, such newer methods as deconstruction, semiotic criticism, and reader-response criticism; but including New-Critical style "close reading" -- illuminate or change the assumptions, methods, and findings of composition research?

Literature as independent variable -- historical: In what ways have the methods and theories of traditional literary scholarship influenced the development of composition theory and research?

Composition as independent variable -- structural: In what ways can the methods of composition research illuminate or contribute to the endeavours of the traditional literary scholar or literary critic?

Composition as independent variable -- historical: In what ways, if any, have the methods and theories of composition research as it has developed in the past few decades influenced the course and practice of traditional literary scholarship? Of literary criticism?

These are, I say again, suggestions, probes. We invite you to think about the issue in

any way that seems to you significant. We envision five seventy-five minute sessions, each with either one or two presenters, and we urge you to propose whole sessions -- topic, participants, and titles -- or to propose a talk, workshop, or demonstration you would like to present.

The issue is timely, complicated, urgent. If possible, we would like to see the proceedings of our gathering published.

Again, then, a call for help. We need, first of all, your interest and participation. We also need suggestions about and help obtaining funding for such a conference (neither Russ nor I are widely experienced in that area). We need suggestions for "keynoters" who could address our central issue in a vital, provocative, thoughtful way. Please send us your suggestions, your proposals, your comments, your offers of assistance.

One thing: We realize asking you to come two days early -- to what some administrators will consider a 'non-conference' -- is asking a great deal. We remind you, however, that your coming for the weekend (that is, over a Saturday night) makes you eligible for a cheaper excursion fare. We won't say you'll *save* money by coming to our meeting, but we do suggest that coming a couple of days early won't cost a whole lot more.

I'll let you know in the next issue of *W&R/T&P* how much interest there is in our idea.