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# W&R/T&P NEWSLETTER

A newsletter for educators in Canada interested in writing and reading / theory and practice. Vol. 2, no. 1. January 1983.

This newsletter is offered to all educators in Canada interested in processes and pedagogies relating to language, language use, and language acquisition. As 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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DANCING WU LI MASTERS  
AND  
WRITING AND READING TEACHERS

*"A master is someone who started before you did." (Al Chung-liang Huang, T'ai Chi Master)*

Gary Zukav, in The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics, (Bantam Books, 1979), tells of discovering that

A Master teaches essence. When the essence is perceived, he teaches what is necessary to expand the perception. The Wu Li Master does not speak of gravity until the student stands in wonder of the flower petal falling to the ground. He does not speak of laws until the student, of his own, says, "How strange! I drop two stones simultaneously, one heavy and one light, and *both* of them reach the earth at the same moment!" He does not speak of mathematics until the student says, "There must be a way to express this more simply." (Pp. 7-8.)

"In this way," Zukav says, "the Wu Li Master dances with his student. The Wu Li Master does not teach, but the student learns. The Wu Li Master always begins at the center, at the heart of the matter." (P. 8.)

Without acknowledging what is happening, Zukav himself demonstrates a few lines later the Wu Li Master's art, slipping (apparently unawares) from two-step into waltz. He suggests that "one of the greatest physicists of all, Albert Einstein, was perhaps a Wu Li Master"; and he cites as evidence the following words of that great master:

"Physical concepts are free creations of the human mind, and are not, however it may seem, uniquely determined by the external world. In our endeavor to understand reality we are somewhat like a man trying to understand the mechanism of a closed watch. He sees the face and the moving hands, even hears its ticking, but he has no way of opening the case. If he is ingenious he may form some picture of a mechanism which could be responsible for all the things he observes, but he may never be quite sure his picture is the only one which could explain his observations. He will never be able to compare his picture with the real mechanism and he cannot even imagine the possibility of the meaning of such a comparison." (P. 8.)

According to Zukav, then, masters strive to teach essences; but according to Einstein, we do not actually have access to those essences.

It seems to me that Wu Li Masters and writing and reading teachers share this central dilemma. We "know" there are es-

sences, and we strive to teach them to our students, but we can actually only guess at what those essences are. We see our students' writing (and our students writing and reading), but we have no way of seeing beyond these surfaces. Grammar, the laws of language, and rhetoric are precisely like mathematics, the laws of physics, and gravity: they are all "free creations of the human mind". They are not out there to be discovered; we "indwell them" (as Michael Polanyi says) and demonstrate them. We "know" them--but our knowing is tacit, personal, inarticulate. When all is said and done, like the Wu Li Masters our only legitimate claim to authority is that we started before our students started.

Zukav goes on to say, "Most people believe that physicists are explaining the world. Some physicists even believe that, but the Wu Li Masters know that they are only dancing with it." (P. 8.) Just so with writing and reading teachers: People may believe that we are explaining the world. Some of *us* may even believe that, but our Wu Li Masters know we are only dancing with it.

Jim Reither (STU)

#### **CHEAP PROFESSIONALISM**

Theorists and teachers of composition who are also bargain hunters may be interested in some inexpensive but excellent journals and conferences. The Writing Instructor, produced by the Department of English, University of Southern California, Los Angeles 90007, invites articles directed toward new teachers of composition, and especially encourages submissions from new teachers and graduate students. The three issues I have seen have included excellent overviews of research as well as practical applications of that research. Subscription price of \$5.00 (U.S.) is well worth it; write to Elspeth Stuckey at USC for more information.

The Rhetoric Review, ed. Theresa Enos, English Department, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, TX 75275, is another new journal that is already establishing a sound reputation. The first issue featured work by Edward P. J. Corbett, Michael Halloran, Donald Stewart, and Frank D'Angelo, as well as a fine long essay by Jim Corder called "Studying Rhetoric and Teaching School". The second issue is due out soon; a subscription is \$6.00 (U.S.).

An older journal that is still very inexpensive (\$3.00 [U.S.] per year) is Freshman English News, available from the Department of English, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth 76129. Over the past few years, this journal has produced many outstanding articles, including major issue-length essays by John Warnock and Winston Weathers. FEN is available to graduate

students for only \$2.00 (U.S.) a year, making it one of the biggest bargains on the market.

Finally, the Journal of Basic Writing, produced by the Instructional Resource Center, 535 East 80th Street, New York 10021, has published some of the most important articles on basic writing since its inception several years ago. In particular, the early issue on ERROR is a classic. Subscription price of \$5.00 (U.S.) for this journal has brought me much fine reading this past year.

Still the best buy for the money, though, is surely the NCTE Comprehensive Membership. Rather than pay separate subscription fees for College English, College Composition and Communication, Research in the Teaching of English, etc., as I used to do, I now pay only one yearly Comprehensive Fee (last year it was \$90.00 [U.S.]). This brings me *every journal* published by NCTE as well as "Councilgrams", an excellent newsletter with summaries of news items related to the teaching of English. In addition, I receive a copy of every new book published by NCTE--all for the one fee. The Comprehensive Membership has saved me money, and greatly simplified my bookkeeping. I recommend it highly.

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Many Canadian teachers are familiar with the Wyoming Conference on Freshman and Sophomore English, held every summer on the campus of the University of Wyoming in Laramie. This conference provides a week of workshops, seminar presentations, and lectures for an extremely low price, which includes accommodations on campus and even five-days' worth of meals. The Conference features three major Consultant-Speakers as well as many other presenters, and provides an excellent means of keeping up with the profession. Participants are invited to present talks, so everyone can join in the fun. Inquiries regarding the 1983 Conference, to be held from June 27 - July 1, should be addressed to Art Simpson, English Department, University of Wyoming, Laramie 82071. This conference is a convenient one for us in Western Canada to attend.

Those in the East might consider attending the new Pennsylvania State Freshman English Conference, held for the first time last year. According to reports from those present, this conference was very stimulating and worthwhile, and it, like the Laramie conference, is relatively inexpensive to attend. Next summer the conference is planned for July 5-8; inquiries should be directed to Professor Betsy Brown, English Department, Pennsylvania State University, University Park 16802/

Both the Wyoming and Pennsylvania State conferences can be attended for graduate credit, which makes them particularly valuable for graduate students or new teachers. And best of all, they offer remarkable value for the money.

Andrea Lunsford (UBC)

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**CONSULTANTS: A REPORT.** I received a letter the other day which said, in part, "Any information about your writing program would . . . be greatly appreciated. We are currently in the throes of revamping a testing process for new students, as well as a series of remedial composition classes." Earlier, last fall, Harry Hill (Concordia) had written to say that he twice travelled to Princeton, New Jersey, to consult with the Educational Testing Service on the problems of designing and grading a competency test (and nearly a year ago the Concordia English Department had brought in someone from another university to conduct a day-long workshop on the problems of teaching writing and designing writing programmes). Here at STU we have wanted to bring in an expert who could evaluate the effectiveness of our writing programme (I even talked informally to James Kinneavy and Lester Faigley--two of the team of people at the University of Texas at Austin who are conducting a massive study into the problem of evaluating writing programmes--to see if they would be willing to send someone up to help us out). This list of instances of the need for help "from the outside" could go on, but continuing to enumerate would only belabour a point that probably did not need making in the first place. No matter the extent of our own expertise, we all know the value of fresh perspectives and ideas.

It is therefore gratifying to present the following report on responses to the "CONSULTANTS FORM" which ran in the newsletter's first three issues.

That form brought tremendous response. I now have a file of thirty-six consultants--people who volunteered their own expertise or recommended the expertise of someone else. Thirty-six consultants, representing nine provinces: Alberta (4), British Columbia (13), Manitoba (1), New Brunswick (3), Nova Scotia (1), Ontario (9), Prince Edward Island (1), Quebec (2), and Saskatchewan (2).

Here, then, is a list of the areas of expertise (it's a long one, so settle in for a read):

Advanced / Intermediate Composition (2)

Bilingual Education (1)

Communication Theory (1)

Course Design--Composition (5)

Course Design--ESL (1)

Critical Apologetics (1)

Developmental / Remedial Writing and Reading (1)

Editing for Publication (2)

Elocution and Voice Production (1)

ESL--Teaching ESL Writing (5)

ESL--Testing (1)

Evaluation of Writing (4)  
 Figurative Language (1)  
 Inquiry--Teaching of (1)  
 Language Arts--Theory of (1)  
 Language Learning (1)  
 Lexicology (1)  
 Linguistics / Linguistic Theory (3)  
 Literacy and Literary Values (1)  
 Literacy "Crises"--Sociology of (1)  
 Literature--Theory of Teaching (2)  
 Northrop Frye, Literature, and Education (1)  
 One-to-One Conferences and Tutoring (6)  
 Philosophy of Education (1)  
 Polanyi (Michael) and the Teaching of Writing (1)  
 Practical Writing (1)  
 Process-Centered Pedagogy: Reading--Theory and Practice (2)  
 Process-Centered Pedagogy: Writing--Theory and Practice (6)  
 Programme (Writing) Design (1)  
 Reading--Psychology of (1)  
 Reading Process (4)  
 Reading Process--French (1)  
 Revision--Theory and Practice ((2)  
 Rhetoric--History of (1)  
 Rhetoric--Practice of (2)  
 Rhetoric / Stylistics (1)  
 Scoring--Holistic (2) and Primary Trait (1)  
 Second-Language Composition--French (1)  
 Semantics--Linguistics (1)  
 Semiotics (2)  
 Teacher Training--especially re: Teaching Writing (2)  
 Technical Writing (2)  
 Testing (2)  
 Testing--ESL (1)  
 Whole Language Theory, and Teaching Reading (1)  
 Whole Language Theory, and Writing in the Literature  
 Classroom (1)  
 Writing Development--K through Maturity (1)  
 Writing Process--Theory and Teaching (7)  
 Writing Skills--Lecturing about (5)

Not only, then, is there interest: there is an identifiable (and at least partially identified) group of people who can learn from one another and teach one another; and we are another step closer to community. What's needed now is to organize and make available the expertise we have among us. I (and others) will try to

contact members of the executive of the American Council of Writing Program Administrators, to see what we can learn about how they organize their teams of consultants. I have proposed a session for W&R/T&P at COTE Montreal--SPRINGBOARDS 83. If that session is allowed, one item we will want to discuss is ways to organize, publicize, and finance increased sharing of our experience and knowledge.

In the meantime . . . (1) I will send names and addresses of consultants to anyone who writes to request them. Just specify the area(s) of expertise required. Once you get the names it will be up to you to make your choices and do your negotiating. And (2), if you would be interested in being a "coordinator of consultants", please write. We need a small group of people who will maintain files, investigate sources of funding, and provide clearing-house services for those who would wish to benefit from the expertise of one or more of our consultants.

Jim Reither (STU)

\* \* COMMENTARY \* \*

McGill University's Faculty of Education offers a writing course called Effective Written Communication. The course, with appropriate adjustments, is taught to graduate and undergraduate management students, electrical engineering students, education students, and, in two open sections, to students from a variety of other faculties. Every Friday morning during the school year, those who teach the course meet to grapple with course management details and issues ranging from grading policy to course objectives. The following commentary concerns one of our most persistent Friday morning topics: course evaluation.

Our first commitment has been to a creative translation of contemporary writing theory into day to day classroom practice. Our course is based on a process approach to writing instruction. We teach problem-solving strategies for writing and frequently assign case studies which provide a variety of audiences and purposes for writing. Also, our students keep a journal which is submitted weekly. We believe that what we are doing improves our students' writing. However, we are feeling an increasing need to evaluate our instructional practices and the current theories on which they are based.

Aside from our own curiosity, there are two reasons for this. First, we believe that practical applications in any field should be guided by theoretical principles and that those principles should be subject to constant reassessment in practice. Theory divorced from practice becomes dogma, and practice without theory becomes mere gimmickry. Second, we sense that budget conscious administrators and justifiable calls for accountability will inevitably require us to provide proof of our effectiveness.

While we at McGill are convinced that what we do improves our students' writing, the evidence consists of intuition, hunch, and informal observation. Can we convince others with such "soft" evidence?

For instance, because we believe that the expressive mode fosters the development of writing ability, we require our students to submit weekly journal entries and we spend considerable time responding to them. Unfortunately, we have no documented evidence of the journal's usefulness. Is there a transfer from the expressive language of the journal to the transactional language of other assignments, as we believe? If so, is it a positive transfer? Similarly, our conviction that a student's written work should be treated as communication and not as flawed artifact causes us to respond extensively to each assignment. Do the students read our remarks and, if they do, what difference does it make? We are certain that the time we spend per student pays off and justifies our class size of approximately twenty-five students, but to those concerned with the so-called "bottom line", where is the proof of our cost effectiveness?

This problem of accountability is one we all face. We know there is no panacea, no fool-proof curriculum for writing. Many of us believe a process approach which stresses response to student writing is the best method for developing writing ability. We know that a product approach to writing lends itself to larger classes as well as a sequential and seemingly more structured curriculum, but we have seen the monster that that approach can create: this week the sentence, next week the paragraph, the week after that the essay. Writing is not a skill made up of discrete sub-skills which can be taught separately and out of context. Therefore, we must give proof that what we do helps our students grow as writers. Further, we must demonstrate that the practices and procedures we employ really do improve writing in the best possible way.

For confirmation of our effectiveness, English teachers have always relied on intuition and the observations and anecdotes shared with colleagues. I am not arguing that we should cease this method of self evaluation. Nor am I suggesting that writing instructors initiate complex statistical analyses of everything they do in the classroom. What I am making a case for are simply designed, simply administered tests of writing ability and the improvement in that ability fostered by our courses. For example, randomly selected pieces of student writing collected at the beginning and end of our courses and evaluated by independent readers should give us some indication of growth in our students' writing abilities. We need other methods of self assessment. This newsletter can serve as an excellent forum for discussing measures of writing improvement and course evaluation. The upcoming COTE conference in Montreal can also help us share ideas on how to monitor our effectiveness. We must provide evidence for our belief that there is life after grammar.

Anthony Paré (McGill)



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**UPDATE! THE LET'S-HAVE-AN-END-TO-UNWIELDY-TITLES CONTEST RESULTS.** Despite the fine prizes offered the winner, the LET'S-HAVE-AN-END-TO-UNWIELDY-TITLES CONTEST brought in a smaller avalanche of submissions than I expected it would. As you will momentarily see, however, the quality of the submissions speaks ever so clearly of the creativity and energy--but, still, the profound seriousness--of this newsletter's readers' minds. Because there are a number of titles here that I, had I the power, would happily have placed atop this newsletter's masthead, it is with heart-wrenching (and no doubt everlasting) disappointment that I must inform you of the decision of our impartial panel of judges: *There is no winner.* Or, rather, there is a winner, but the winner's entry is not a single title that could be placed atop the masthead; it is, instead, a veritable anthology of titles. Because renaming the newsletter would require placing *eleven* titles on the title page (a mast so burdened would arch and bend to the ground like a birch after a blizzard), the judges have deemed that, in the interest of justice, the prize *will* be awarded, but the newsletter's title will not at this time be changed. We appear to be stuck with the W&R/T&P NEWSLETTER. Here, then, is the almost official (it would be fully official, but I misplaced at least one worthy offering) list of submissions:

Nancy Carlman (UBC) submitted these:

Language Processes  
Writing and Reading  
Discourse Processing

Harry Hill (Concordia--Loyola) argued passionately for this:

WRITE

Rick Monaghan (Dawson College), more soberly, suggested these:

The Sociosemipsychological Review  
WURDS  
WoRdTriP  
The Reither Report  
Reading, Eh? ("real Canadian")  
The Unwieldily Titled Newsletter  
Writation  
AWAKE!  
PMLAC  
The Alexander Haig Letter  
Communi--

An anonymous reader from right here in River City let this one drop:

WoRdTaP ("turn it on and watch it flow")

Russ Hunt (Far-Flung Correspondent), lastly, sent this one, expressing the hope that no one else has used it (someone else has, unfortunately):

TEXT: A Canadian Journal of Writing and Reading Theory and Practice

The result is a paradox: we have a winner but we get no change in the newsletter's title. The winner? On the basis of quantity and quality both--although not necessarily for decorousness and appropriate gravity: Rick Monaghan. Congratulations, Rick. Rarely, anymore, do we see such creative, sustained, fertile fluency. And, as a special, fitting bonus, the judges have further deemed that not eight but eleven coasters--one for each title; *some of them previously used*--are to be awarded. With that judgment I am pleased to comply.

(Those of you who wish to congratulate Rick can write him C/O this newsletter. Those of you who wish to protest the decision of the judges can write the judges.)

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#### COHORT REPORT

Andrea Lunsford (UBC) will be one of the *MAJOR CONSULTANTS* at this year's Wyoming Conference on Freshman and Sophomore English. (J. Hillis Miller will be another.) This is the first time an educator from a Canadian university has been invited to serve as a major consultant at that conference. Past major consultants have included such people as Wayne Booth, William Coles, Edward P. J. Corbett, Linda Flower, Maxine Hairston, and James Kinneavy --and that puts Andrea in some mighty good company. *Congratulations, Andrea!*

