

W&R/T&P NEWSLETTER

~~~~~  
A Canadian newsletter devoted to writing and reading theory and practice. Vol. 2, no. 4. May 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.

~~~~~

EDITOR: James A. Reither
Director, Writing Programme
St. Thomas University
Fredericton, New Brunswick E3B 5G3

FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENT: Russell A. Hunt
English Department
Indiana University
Bloomington, IN 47405

~~~~~  
PROVINCIAL CORRESPONDENTS

ALTA: Chris Bullock  
English Department  
University of Alberta  
Edmonton T6J 2E5

B.C.: Richard M. Coe  
English Department  
Simon Fraser University  
Burnaby V5A 1S6

MAN: Murray J. Evans  
English Department  
University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg R3B 2E9

NFLD: Jean Chadwick  
English Department  
Memorial University  
St. John's A1C 5S7

ONT: Michael Moore  
English Department  
Wilfrid Laurier University  
Waterloo N2L 3C5

P.E.I.: Prof. Terry Pratt  
English Department  
U.P.E.I.  
Charlottetown C1A 4P3

P.Q.: Anthony Paré  
4356 Earnscliffe Avenue  
Montreal H7A 3E8

CCTE SPRINGBOARDS 1983, MONTREAL:  
IMPRESSIONS, REFLECTIONS, SUGGESTIONS

*CCTE 1983: One Subjective Impression--a freewriting (Montreal, May 13)*

Amidst the multiplicity, a paradigm emerges, defined by the dichotomy "creativity"/"correctness". Of course, there aren't many here who would speak up for traditional "correctness", and the definition of "creativity" is not simplistic. But the weight here lies on the side of "creativity", expressive writing, writing as exploration, to understand oneself and one's experiences. Look at the "headline" speakers, the ones who filled the big rooms: John Dixon, Andrew Wilkinson, Harold Rosen, et al. from England; Donald Graves and Don Murray from the U.S. (There are exceptions: CCTE paid Steve Witte's airfare, but he packed no ballrooms.)

I got a sense that many people here struggle against the traditional "correctness" paradigm at home, that they come here to be reconfirmed, to renew their beliefs--and, of course, to pick up new particulars and teaching techniques--but not to have the paradigm challenged or changed in significant ways.

I don't want to denigrate the accomplishments of those who returned "creativity" to language arts and English composition classes, but I myself see their paradigm as a useful antithesis to the traditional paradigm, as a paradigm to . . . what is that German word which means simultaneously "conserve" and "transcend"? . . . at least beyond elementary school.

So, I'm not complaining about what's here at CCTE, but I'm looking to see something added. I'm looking for more basic controversies, involving perspectives that come out of--and are challenges to--the research, theories, paradigms that have emerged since "the sixties" (i.e., since 1974-75), even those that use numbers. And I'd like to see those dealt with other than on the periphery of the conference. I guess I should do something about that.

Ah, yes, thank you, Chris: *aufhebung*.

Rick Coe  
Simon Fraser University

*Impressions of CCTE, 1983*

What did most of the people who came to the CCTE Conference in Montreal this year come to hear? As I looked out over the faces of the audience attending the panel I was doing with Rick Coe, I wasn't sure at all whether our modest effort at broader perspectives on composition was going down well or not.

Certainly people had come to hear Harold Rosen defending narrative against the demands of the prissy, academic essay. Certainly they had come to hear John Dixon reading stories in his broad yet delicate Wakefield accent; this time it was "The Dog's Got Me Bum," by twelve year old Tony. Certainly they had come to hear the inimitable Donald Murray, who provided a cornucopia of readings from his day book.

Besides the perennial COTE celebration of narrative and creativity, was there anything new? Was it my imagination, or was it hunger for a swift answer to the problem of a better-organized writing course this year? Certainly there seemed a fair scattering of titles like: the five stages of the writing process--how to use them for greatest effect; or: the successful writing program--a new model; or: success in grammar--how to achieve it.

What does this show? It seems to show that mainly inspirational addresses on the value of creativity need to be complemented by quick fixes. What I would like to see, however, is more substantial discussion of theories of composition and the practices they might lead to--more papers like Jim Reither's on a model of composing, or John Warnock's "Development and Liberation Motives for Revision."

But whether an exclusive focus on creativity has a symbiotic relationship with a quick route to 'correct writing' is for others to judge. And whether any COTE members are looking for alternatives is equally open to question. As I said at the outset, those faces in the audience looked very enigmatic.

Chris Bullock  
University of Alberta

*Some reflections on the COTE conference in Montreal*

EVALUATION. The pre-conference sessions on Monday (by invitation only) and Tuesday were concerned with evaluation. Differences of opinion produced some lively and controversial discussion. Too many issues and insufficient time (and space) make a detailed report impossible. However, a few thoughts come to mind.

(1) The Monday session generated considerable heat which was carried over to Tuesday. Unfortunately, those not present Monday had some difficulty identifying the origin and nature of the controversy which became immediately apparent at the first session Tuesday morning.

Although a whole range of issues and views was presented, there did seem to be two distinct positions. One was represented by people either actively engaged in or considering large scale



worse, its concerns consistently *mattered*. My lasting impression is that serious teaching and learning about language emerged as too important to neglect and too complex to trust entirely to faculties of education.

But "seriousness" does not accurately describe our boisterous conduct in Montreal. The best times were many informal brain storming carouses with W&R/T&P people and other like-minded delegates. Invariably associated with too much good food and drink, these *ad hoc* seminars resulted in enthusiastic argument, much hilarity and public embarrassment, grandiloquent plans to save the world, dozens of exciting ideas, new personal and collegial friendships, and the Myklebustian Committee for Post-Futurist Phorism (the staid need not apply). Even at its giddiest, however, this spirit generally distinguished the conference's small phalanx of *inquirers* from the passively receptive crowd preoccupied with pedagogical and evaluative packages. (Now there's a sentence needlessly full of the spluttering *p*'s of self-righteous indignation.)

For me, the formal program highlights were Donald Murray's vigorous talk on the craft of surprise and our own Chris Bullock's stimulating analysis of the new rhetoric's limiting liberal ideology. What these two otherwise dissimilar papers shared was genial rigour. Chris showed the necessity of examining the theoretical and social implications of popular writing course pedagogy. Don Murray spoke of gingerly nurturing student writers' capacity for searching and discovering but insisted too that there must eventually be a time for "cruel harvest". A few other speakers were also well worth hearing, and tentative plans for Fredericton next year seem to promise continued broadening and deepening. This may be aided by the efforts of the unnameable. Yes, the Newsletter workshop created something that could become, approximately, a Canadian association for the advanced study of writing and reading [CAASWAR]. Through newly-elected COTE post-secondary director Jim Reither, the new group will help to develop more fully an "advanced" (not to say exclusively post-secondary) component for the Fredericton program.

Finally, things to do. The prospect of COTE's offering a more congenial home for post-secondary writing teachers and discourse theorists should be made known at universities and colleges. In particular, all the right gang should be encouraged to go to Fredericton in 1984. The first big question is who (and how many) are we? So, you newsletter folks, start spreading the word. As Ontario correspondent I will write soon to the coordinators of all post-secondary writing programs in my province. If it looks possible, I will also try to arrange a gathering of the most interested Ontario people--or at least of those who could conveniently come to Waterloo or to Toronto.

Mike Moore  
Wilfrid Laurier University.



- d) Russ Hunt, on research on reading [and the relationship of that research to what we might be doing to teach our students how to be better readers of literature];
- e) Jim Reither reviewing the year's important research on writing;
- f) Nan Johnson (University of British Columbia) on links between classical and current theories of rhetoric;
- g) Mike Moore and others who direct post-secondary level writing programs;
- h) a panel on writing in the community colleges;
- i) a session on "What Do We Want to Teach Students about Writing and Reading?", emphasizing positive benefits and objectives, not merely elimination of errors;
- j) teaching, at advanced levels, students with physical, learning, and cultural disabilities; and
- k) possibilities for helping ESL students in regular writing classes.

7. *Newsletter*

- a) address all of the above concerns;
- b) list/review publications by "CAASWAR" people and others of interest; and
- c) preview conference offerings to identify presenters we should not miss.

Kay Stewart  
Grant MacEwan Community College

~~~~~

NEWS FROM THE PROVINCES

Addendum to Report on Research and Writing Courses at the University of Calgary.

Faculty Research: *Christine J. Gordon and Carl Braun*

"Metacognitive Processes: Reading and Writing Narrative Discourse". Instruction in story organisation allowed the fifth grade students in the experimental sample to write better summaries of stories read, to give better answers to questions on story organisation, and to write better narratives themselves.

Carl Braun and Christine Gordon

"Writing Instruction as a Metatextual Aid to Story Schema Applications". A study (in progress) to determine the effects of writing instruction in narrative schema on both reading and writing.

Chris Bullock
University of Alberta

A NOTE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Our graduate program in English language studies is now well established, with a number of students having completed MA's and five students in the throes of Ph.D. work. The degree in English language includes study in three major areas, one of which a student chooses as the area of specialization: History and Theory of Rhetoric (including composition studies); History of the English Language (philological studies); and Structures of Modern English (syntactic and semantic studies). While our course offerings vary from year to year, the list of graduate courses offered during this last year will give some indication of the nature of our program: Speech and Writing as Linguistic and Literary Media; Rhetoric, Composition, and Literary Theory in the Scottish Enlightenment; Tense and Aspect in the History of English; Modern Modes of Language Analysis; Studies in Modern Rhetoric and Composition; The Art of Beowulf. Anyone interested in learning more about the UBC M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in English language studies may write to Andrea Lunsford or Nan Johnson, Department of English, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5.

Some current student and faculty research that may be of interest to W&R/T&P readers: Nancy Carlman, "The Effects of Topic and Mode and of Two Scoring Methods on the Writing Scores of Grade 12 Students," Ph.D. dissertation; Dan Foster, "English Teachers' Perceptions of Coherence," M.A. thesis, January 1983; Amanda King, "Informal Argumentation: Toward a Unified Purpose and Foundation for Teaching Composition," M.A. thesis in progress; Anne Greenwood, "First-Year University Students Writing About Poetry," article currently submitted for publication; Susan Stevenson, "Ethos and Expectations: Another Look at Mina Shaughnessy's Philosophy of Teaching," paper to be delivered at the Wyoming Conference on Freshman and Sophomore English; Cheryl Draper, research investigating the intersection of reading, writing, and thinking processes; Andrea Lunsford, preliminary research toward a history of rhetoric in Canadian colleges and universities. For further information on any of these studies, contact individual researchers C/O the Department of English, UBC.

Andrea Lunsford
University of British Columbia

The revitalization of composition has had its darker implications, however, for those of us who were first attracted to English, and remain committed to it, because we were convinced that something which we can call the "higher literacy" is a good thing considered by itself, regardless of anybody's imputations of social or economic utility. We believe that engagement with *A Modest Proposal* or *Macbeth* or *The Sound and the Fury* or *Fifth Business* is not only good for an individual, but good for the tenor and richness of the culture we all share. And those of us who believe that sort of thing can hardly help but be disheartened (however pleased we may be at composition's new position of respectability) to see the way in which the focus of our departments' efforts is turning toward the teaching of writing, particularly when that writing is regularly--and perhaps necessarily and unavoidably--distanced from those fundamental concerns which were so instrumental in persuading us to spend our careers reading, and talking about, and writing about, literature.

And there is little doubt that English departments are turning in that direction. A recent study by the ADE, reported on by Art Young at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in March, dramatizes statistically--by number of sections, by number of students taught, and by the kinds of courses which are being dropped from calendars and the kinds added--that English departments are teaching less and less literature and more and more composition.

I would argue, however, that this is not a consequence of the increased demand for composition; it is a consequence of the fact that literature teaching is in the same sort of doldrums that composition teaching was in twenty years ago. The last explosion of real interest in the teaching of literature occurred more than a quarter century ago, concurrently with the rise of the New Criticism (historically the first critical paradigm to rise out of classroom experience and find its most important venue in that classroom). Since then we haven't, as a profession, thought much or seriously about the teaching of literature. Literary criticism has moved further and further away from the sort of reading experience familiar to nonprofessionals, and become more and more irrelevant to any classrooms other than the graduate seminar. Our other professional activities seem not to affect very substantially--except in the relatively unimportant area of our selection of works to teach--what happens in undergraduate and introductory classes.

The unexamined assumptions which govern literature teaching now, it seems to me, though different in substance, are similar in effect to the sorts of thing we assumed in composition courses twenty years ago. We assume that there are people who can read and people who can't, and that our job is to separate the two, encouraging those who can to go on in the discipline and those who can't to go take something else--sociology, perhaps, or education. We seem to hold the essentialist assumption that there is a literary heritage which can be delivered or adminis-

tered to those capable of receiving it (we phrase this by saying things like "every educated person should have some familiarity with Shakespeare") and we assume that our fundamental method is exhortation or persuasion.

Whether literature teaching is ripe for the sort of Copernican revolution which, in the past couple of decades, has overwhelmed and transformed the discipline of composition is a question I would rather not address here. Still, the same (or broader) extradisciplinary resources exist today. The study of reading and learning to read; the interest in natural language processing in artificial intelligence; the growth of cognitive psychology and the development of ever more sophisticated models of cognition, comprehension, and language development; the growing understanding of sociolinguistics (pragmatics, semiotics, sociology of language)--all those kinds of intellectual endeavors which revolutionized our understanding of the composing process, and more--are out there for our appropriation.

We who have experienced what happened to composition under the pressure of new understanding from other disciplines ought, I believe, to be trying to apply those ideas to what happens in literature classrooms, to what we know about the reading of literature and the process of learning to read literature. We should be finding ways to change a situation in which most students, having "done" literature, will spend their lives never again reading another classic or serious work of verbal art. And we should be trying to change a situation in which dominant cultural attitudes about literature make the very attempt to distinguish between "classic or serious works of verbal art" and other stuff feel just slightly ridiculous.

Reading is the medium in which our profession exists. We cannot afford to continue ignoring it. Fish don't study water--but they just stay fish, too.

Russell A. Hunt
Indiana University
[St. Thomas University]

~~~~~

**A User's Review:**

Linda Flower, *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing*

The Faculty of Education's cross-disciplinary writing programs at McGill rely heavily on the work of Linda Flower and John Hayes of Carnegie-Mellon University. Their research on the writing process (a short bibliography follows) serves as the primary theoretical basis for the work done in our conferencing and courses, and Flower's *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981) is the text we use in our undergraduate writing program. In fact, Flower and Hayes' 1977





COHORT REPORTS

Bill Prentice is a doctoral candidate at the University of Alberta, investigating "the relationship between learning styles and the written products and composing processes of grade twelve students." He would like to hear from others who have some expertise in these areas or are working on similar research. His address:

W. K. Prentice, Program Consultant  
Swift Current School Division No. 94  
Elmwood Education Centre  
600 Chaplin Street E.  
Swift Current, Sask S9H 1J3

Ian Pringle (Carleton University) has written to pass on an announcement of interest to W&R/T&P readers: Steve Witte and John Daly, both of the University of Texas at Austin, "are going to be editing a new refereed journal *Written Communication: A Quarterly Journal of Research, Theory and Application*. They are currently soliciting submissions for their first number, scheduled for April 1984."

NOTICE

This is the last issue of the *W&R/T&P Newsletter* for this academic year. Publication will resume in the fall, of course-- look for the next issue to come out in late September or early October. Which means: You've got the whole summer to get a piece written for us. We need precisely the kinds of things suggested by Kay Stewart, above, and a great deal else as well. I already have, in hand, an excellent analysis of one moral dilemma faced by those who design and administer writing centres. I'd like to see: more "user's reviews" of textbooks; think-pieces that address the issues and problems of our profession; descriptions of writing and advanced reading courses and programs; notices of important articles and books; notes about personal research and work in progress; and so on.

My address for the summer (through mid-August):

C/O General Delivery  
Aitkin, MN U.S.A. 56431

I also have an "electronic address": The Source, STJ697.

Jim Reither



*This newsletter has enjoyed (and owes its existence to) the most generous support--financial and moral--of St. Thomas University.*