

W&R/T&P NEWSLETTER

A NEWSLETTER for educators in Canada interested in writing and reading / theory and practice. Issue #2. November 1982.

This newsletter is offered to all educators in Canada interested in the processes and pedagogies of writing and reading. As a forum whose primary objective is to intensify the relationship between theory and practice, it will serve both informative and polemical functions.

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(Chris and Terry will keep in touch with what's going on in their provinces and inform the rest of us through this newsletter. We need Correspondents from the other provinces, so if you'd like to contribute, drop me a line.)

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COMMENTARY: Not long ago it was fashionable to dismiss the labours of writing teachers on the grounds that they really didn't "belong to a discipline". What writing teachers did had no base in creditable research, theory, methodology, or scholarship. This criticism was valid as long as what was called "teaching writing" consisted for the most part of analyzing professional essays, prescribing forms and modes, assigning themes, and writing such things as "frag", "punc", and "dict" in the margins of student essays. Now, however, one does not have to look far to find evidence to put the lie to that tired old charge. It is possible, for example, to rattle off the titles of half-a-dozen genuinely useful--"reputable"--journals; we can easily name several important books and a dozen excellent articles; and we can provide the names of fifteen or twenty widely-published, highly-respected scholars, researchers, and theorists. There is, we can say, a discipline out there.

But I want to point something out. The flyer advertising the Montreal "SPRINGBOARDS 83", COTE's sixteenth annual conference, features four keynote speakers--John Dixon (formerly of Bretton Hall), Alan Purves (University of Illinois), Harold Rosen (University of London), and Andrew Wilkinson (University of East Anglia)--plus six invited papers, by Anthony Adams (Cambridge University), Diana Davis (Monash University), I. V. Hansen (University of Melbourne), Gordon Wells (University of Bristol), Robert E. Shafer (Arizona State University), and Donald Graves (University of New Hampshire). That's a pretty impressive list of names--ample evidence, surely, of the good health of our discipline. Unfortunately, however, not a single one of those names is that of an educator in a Canadian college or university. Not a single one. A look at previous COTE conference rosters shows pretty much the same sad state of affairs.

We cannot blame COTE conference organizers for this. They must, if they are to continue mounting an annual conference, feature headliners who are leaders in the field. How else are they going to draw the large numbers of conferees it takes to make a conference succeed? Their problem can be stated simply: Only a tiny number of the major scholars, researchers, and theorists in this discipline teach in Canadian institutions.

Furthermore, the problem is more profound than what has so far been suggested here. We can more accurately sound its depths if we look through our lists of journals, books, and articles, of scholars, researchers, and theorists, or if we look through the last few issues of the journals most consistently useful to us. The amount of "Canadian content" we will find there ought to make us wonder whether the small number of important articles published by writing teachers in Canadian institutions argues that perhaps too few of us are "at the cutting edge"--and too many of us merely "at the edges"--of the discipline.

There is a discipline out there. There is an identifiable community of scholars studying language, language processes, and language-acquisition processes. Their research and scholarship are clearly enriching the pedagogies of those of us who teach writing. The question is, are those of us who teach writing in Canadian institutions doing more than teaching writing? Are we members of that community? Do we share its aims, problems, methodologies? Can we number ourselves among the scholars, researchers, and theorists in this discipline?

Jim Reither (S.T.U.)

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[Newsletters belong as much to their readers as to their editors. I invite you to submit your own essays (limited to 500-600 words, please), similarly addressed to issues relating to "the state of the profession", for publication as COMMENTARY.]

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Although the first issue of this newsletter has been delivered to over one hundred educators in Canada, a great number of the present and potential members of this community have yet to be reached. I urge you to mention the newsletter to your colleagues; copy and pass it on to others. Just as important, ask those you contact to notify me so their names can be added to our mailing list.

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"We are dealing with the uses of literacy, and my own concern is with the way language and experiences and life of our schools is being fragmented in so many ways. Our curriculum ought to be involved with writing, speaking, and talking as holistic activities. To have a proper sense of how to write, you need a sense of the relationship between audience and writer. To talk well most of us, certainly to start with, need a kind of social context."

Jay Featherstone, at a conference at the Reading Laboratory, Harvard Graduate School of Education, in Visible Language, Vol. XVI, no. 2 (Spring 1982), 112.

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A USEFUL BOOK: Erika Lindemann, A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, 297 pp., \$16.95.

In Canada at present, beginning writing teachers are more likely than not to have had very little training in either the theory or the practice of teaching writing. Lindemann's book attempts to provide such teachers not with a ready-made approach, but with materials which may set them on the road towards discovering their own approaches towards this area of teaching. To this end, it presents brief overviews of theories of the composing process and of the fields of rhetoric, cognition and linguistics; then follows a nuts-and-bolts discussion of teaching words, sentences and paragraphs, devising writing assignments and designing writing courses.

A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers is not going to excite the teacher experienced in this field; it presents no new paradigms, and, indeed, offers few syntheses of existing paradigms. But its theoretical overviews are up-to-date, and its practical advice takes full account of the writing-as-process and holistic procedures in designing and evaluating assignments. For beginning writing teachers who can't find an advisor to introduce them to this field, or whose colleagues seem devoted to nothing but 'correct usage', this book is a must.

Chris Bullock (Alberta)

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CONSULTANTS: Only a few people filled out and sent in the "CONSULTANTS" form that appeared in Issue #1. The range of expertise is encouraging--from the writing and reading processes to socio-semiotics, from peer tutors to course design, from medieval rhetorical theory to holistic and primary trait scoring--but the small number is not. I know there are many more among you who either have sufficient expertise to serve as consultants to the rest of us or who can recommend the names of others who have that expertise. I am running the "CONSULTANTS" form again this issue (you'll find it at the end of the newsletter). Please take the time to fill it out and send it in.

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LET'S-HAVE-AN-END-TO-UNWIELDY-TITLES CONTEST: Two people sent in submissions for the contest, offering some five or six possibilities. I'll choose among those, if I must, but I'd rather wait to get more submissions. I remind you: I'll send a set of eight coasters (advertising an assortment of genuine German beers and stolen from genuine Gästhausen all over West Germany) PLUS a brand new disposable BIC razor to the person who suggests the best title for this newsletter. Are you really willing to settle for "W&R/T&P NEWSLETTER"?

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COHORT REPORTS: Nancy Carlman (Department of Language Education, U.B.C., Vancouver V6T 1W5) wonders, "Would anyone . . . be interested in the Canadian Teacher Ed. newsletter I edit (quarterly) for teacher-educators in reading, language arts, & h.s. English? If so, just . . . send his or her address to me and join COTE."

Chris Bullock (Alberta) sends

A Note on COTE in Montreal

I'm interested in contributing to a "post-secondary stream" at Montreal next May. What I had in mind was a presentation entitled "Theories of Composition, Theories of Man" which would try to sharpen our sense of the differing ideologies informing some of the composition texts we tend to use most often in our writing courses. It would also ask the question: are there some ideological approaches which are more appropriate to the Canadian situation than others?

But before I submit this proposal I'd be interested to know what other contributors in this area have in mind, so as to know whether we have a coherent "post-secondary stream" which can raise questions important for us not just next year, but in the years to come.

[What do other contributors have in mind? Let's use this newsletter as a clearinghouse for your proposals.]

Mary H. Maguire (COTE 1983, Montreal, Co-Chair; Faculty of Education, McGill H3A 1Y2) informs us that the COTE program committee are trying to set aside blocks of time each day of the conference for matters relevant to post-secondary issues and problems. [We should not, obviously, let such an opportunity pass us by.]

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Pauline MacKenzie (Co-Chair CCTE 1984, Fredericton; 365 Prospect Street, Fredericton E3B 3B9) will in the next week or so be writing to invite the featured speakers--the daily "keynoters"--for CCTE 1983. It's probably not too late, however, for you to submit names of people you think would make good headliners, since the odds are that one or more of those she invites will be unable to accept. Sometime within the next month or so she will also be sending out invitations for other major speakers --the "invited papers". So far as I know, the preliminary list of potential invitees has not yet been completed. I urge you to write to her, or to me, to offer your suggestions. I know that the program committee for CCTE 1984 would be pleased to hear your ideas and suggestions.

Jim Reither (S.T.U.)

Finally, Richard M. Collier (Mount Royal College, Calgary) wrote to suggest "a small and generally unknown journal concerned with writing and the teaching of writing: Eforum is published two or three times a year out of The Writing Centre at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor. The editor's name is Patricia Stock. The articles are short, often condensations of longer pieces in more visible journals, but are usually quite valuable in that they range from the very theoretical to the solidly pedagogical. Most issues contain lengthy annotated bibliographies of books and articles dealing with composition."

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"Ideas are not essential forms, they occur in the process of achieving goals--as our goals change so do the contents of our thought. Writing, because it involves goals over and above those of reflective thought, necessarily transforms our ideas."

David Galbraith, "The Effect of Conflicting Goals on Writing: A Case Study," Visible Language, Vol. XVI, no. 4 (1980), 364.

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"We owe young people the open doors and expanded possibilities that only literacy can provide. Teaching for literacy conceives of learning not as behavior but as action--of process, of restlessness of quest. To encounter the arts and other subjects in a mood of discovery and mindfulness and rational passion is to have experiences that exclude inertness. Literacy empowers people; it is a beginning, a becoming--not an end in itself."

Maxine Greene, "Literacy for What?", Visible Language, Vol. XVI, no. 1 (Winter 1982), 78.

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CONSULTANTS: As an initial project for this Newsletter, I am compiling a list of educators in Canada who are sufficiently expert in matters of theory or practice that they can offer their services as consultants. If you have that kind of expertise, please send me your name, address, and a list of topics (the more precisely defined, the better) on which you are sufficiently expert to act as a consultant. Alternatively, recommend someone else, providing me with the same information.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

AREAS OF EXPERTISE (e.g., evaluation, course design, the writing or reading process, etc.)

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