

# W&R/T&P NEWSLETTER

A Canadian newsletter devoted to writing and reading theory and practice. Vol. 2, no. 2. March 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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## NEWS FROM THE PROVINCES

British Columbia: The Development of Writing Curricula

Several seminal writing curriculum projects, notably Writing 44 (North Vancouver) and SWEEP (Surrey), have developed in the B.C. schools. Inspired in part by the Huntington Beach Project, these exciting projects are significant both for the curricula they are producing and for the process by which they produce it.

The starting point is the juxtaposition of outside expertise (university affiliated and thus validated) with the experience of classroom teachers. The "expert" provides a theoretical framework as well as knowledge of current research and trends. In interaction with this expertise, the teachers write/revise the curriculum. Although the new curricular products are far superior to those they replace, the most significant result of the project is the transformation of the teachers, who grow more confident and competent, increasing their knowledge while developing new perspectives on teaching writing--and becoming more critical and self-reliant in the process.

Writing 44 and SWEEP have each produced several impressive looseleaf-bound volumes of curricular materials. Perhaps the "experts" could have produced "better" materials; the achievements of such projects, however, are measured by changes effected in classrooms, not by the contents of curriculum guides and resource books. Teacher involvement in the process is one key to effective implementation, in part because teachers are changed by the process, in part because their involvement constrains the new curriculum to what teachers are willing to do.

Through workshops run by North Vancouver teachers, Writing 44 materials have been implemented in other districts. The SWEEP senior secondary materials, after some editing in the Ministry of Education, became the curriculum for the province's new Composition 11 course.

Writing 44, coordinated by Howard Cross (North Vancouver School District) and guided significantly by Andrea Lunsford (U.B.C.) started earlier and has been better funded. I will focus on SWEEP, however, because its level of funding is closer to what might be possible in most school districts, because I know it better, and because one of its products is readily available (send \$2 to the Publications Services Branch of the B.C. Ministry of Education, Victoria, BC V8V 1X4 for *Composition 11: Curriculum Guide and Resource Book for Teachers, 1982*). A similar project, at the elementary level, has been started in Coquitlam by Donna Greenstreet.

SWEEP began ordinarily enough as a series of in-service workshops, including one by W. Ross Winterowd (who guided the Huntington Beach Project). Then David Bristow, who initiated and

coordinated the project, convinced the Surrey School Board to pay the equivalent of summer school salaries to 18 teachers while letting them work on three interrelated projects: a writing lab, and revised composition curricula for both senior and junior secondary. At this point, in the spring of 1981, Bristow brought me in as the outside "expert", and I presented an overview workshop on "The Process Approach to Teaching Composition," which was attended also by Robert Overgaard of the Ministry of Education (who was then overseeing the creation of a new composition course for Grade 11).

In this workshop, I presented writing as a set of interrelated processes--creative process, communicative process, and underlying cognitive, affective, and linguistic processes--and argued for the efficacy of thinking about teaching writing as a set of interventions in these processes. Talking to school-teachers, of course, I supported my argument with practical "what-do-I-do-on-Monday-morning" exemplars while summarizing recent research findings, offering two models of the creative composing process (one elegant, the other more lineal and adaptable to teaching "stages"), and emphasizing that their classroom experience would be at least as important as my expertise in developing an effective curriculum. Later, I presented the same workshop to all the English teachers in the district as a first step toward implementing the new materials. (Interestingly, several of the 18 teachers working on the project told me that they "really understood" the workshop after sitting through it the second time).

During the summer, I met with Bristow and the 18 teachers weekly, as well as making myself available for queries. In the process, I reduced the material presented at my workshop to a teacher's heuristic for writing composition lesson plans. Bristow maintained liaison with the School Board and Ministry as well as acquiring equipment, and supervising and coordinating the project, using my "authority" as he thought necessary.

Bristow also concentrated on overseeing the development of the writing lab. In principle, the lab deals with students' more mechanical writing problems. Either on the basis of a pretest or (better) while reading students' writings, the teacher makes a problem-diagnosis and prescription; each student then goes to the prescribed file, which contains information, instructions, exercises, and mastery tests. The lab allows the teacher to individualize instruction in mechanics and frees regular class time for more important aspects of composition. Its effectiveness depends on the quality of teacher prescriptions and on the quality and specificity of the files. The SWEEP lab is stored in a small computer and distributed (and revised) through the word-processing function.

The problem with the lab is the same problem that occurs with grammar workbooks and sentence-combining exercises: some teachers use it to replace writing instruction, not to free time for the more important aspects of composition. North Vancouver

has, therefore, decided to do away with the lab. In Surrey, where the diagnostic process and prescriptions are much more detailed, the lab has been retained.

The Composition 11 curriculum, although less than perfect, represents a significant improvement over previous patterns of instruction. One of my regrets is that I was in Shanghai (teaching Chinese English teachers) during the important revision phase of the project. But the flaws in the curriculum (e.g., what I consider a misinterpretation of Burke's Pentad) are secondary. What matters is not the curriculum guide and resource book, but rather how teachers perceive composition and what they do in their classrooms. Not surprisingly, Composition 11 is variously implemented in various schools around the province. In B.C., as elsewhere, most English teachers have not in the past been very well prepared at university for teaching composition; often they have never had a composition methods course or even an advanced composition course. The Composition 11 curriculum is a written product, the result of creative processes of certain teachers; it must be judged as a communicative process, by the quantity and quality of change it helps induce in the teaching of writing in the schools of B.C.

Richard M. Coe  
Simon Fraser University

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A REMINDER: Aviva Freedman (Linguistics, Carleton) is chairing a Canadian Caucus meeting at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Detroit. It's session C3-SIG: Thursday, 17 March, 4:30-5:45pm. All readers of this newsletter are invited to attend.

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A REQUEST: Are you "presenting" at CCTE SPRINGBOARDS 1983, Montreal, in May? If so, send me the details--name, title of presentation (and perhaps a brief description); type of presentation (workshop, paper, demonstration); title of session; day, date, and time (if you know them); and so on. I'll publish whatever information you send me, so other readers of this newsletter will be aware of and can support your efforts. From what I'm able to gather, there will be a strong post-secondary stream of sessions--perhaps the strongest ever at a CCTE Annual Meeting.

*Litmanship Through the Ages:  
Stephen Potter as Literary Historian*

Until inexcusably recently, I -- like, I think, most of my colleagues -- thought that somehow there had always been English departments, or at least that the kind of curricula that I had endured as a student and administered as a teacher for a quarter of a century had somehow come into existence miraculously, perhaps sprung full-blown from the head of Matthew Arnold. What makes this ignorance least excusable is that a considerable number of good, readable histories of our profession exist. To name just three: Arthur Applebee's *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English* (NCTE, 1974), David Shayer's *The Teaching of English in Schools 1900-1970* (London, 1972), and William Riley Parker's remarkable article called "Where do English Departments Come From?" (*CE* 28:5 [February 1967], 339-51). All three are excellent (and even revolutionary) reading for most of us in the profession. (It must be said, though, that none deals at any great length or with much seriousness with their social and intellectual context. Freud, the Soemæ, Einstein, Black Friday, Dewey, James, Auschwitz, Levi-Strauss, Sputnik or Piaget do not loom large in their views of the evolution of our discipline, and perhaps this tells us something about the traditional insularity of English studies.)

But the most surprising history of our field I know is surprising mainly because of its authorship. It was written by Stephen Potter, the author of those *Litmanship* books which conditioned the attitudes of so many of us toward English humour in the fifties and sixties, when the underground traffic in copies of *The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship; or the Art of Winning without Actually Cheating or One-Upmanship; Being some Account of the Activities and Teaching of the Lifemanship College of One-Upness and Gameslifemanship* rivalled the later dealing in copies of Heinlein or Tolkien. Those of us who fell in love with those books then were often surprised to learn that Potter had been a genuine literary scholar, the author of books on D. H. Lawrence and Coleridge.

The book in question is entitled *The Muse in Chains: A Study in Education* (London, 1937), and it represents perhaps the most delightful revolutionary tract I know. Potter's attitude toward English studies is irreverent to the point of paganism, and yet his own literary credentials are not even slightly peccable. His view of the rise of what he terms *Lit. Ang.* -- to remind us of its roots in the old English grammar school tradition of instruction in classical languages

and literature -- is mordant in a way achievable, perhaps, only by someone writing from the very inside of that tradition, and, even more, by someone who still believes that, as the dedication says, "English Literature is the best of all subjects for education."

It is difficult to describe the peculiar tone that makes Potter's writing so bracing. Quotation is not easy, because so much depends on modulations of tone -- from extended, fairly straightforward exposition into moments of excruciating irony, for instance -- that it is very difficult to select passages that will be effective out of context. A sentence like this, for instance, sounds far more cynical here than it does in the midst of Potter's explanations of how immersed he himself is in the world of *Lit. Ang.*:

When I say "Lit" I am comprehensively conscious of worn-out old stumps of sentences mixed with names I seem never not to have known -- like "Skeat . . . Elia . . . Massinger . . . Dove Cottage." "Willing suspension of disbelief . . . killed in a tavern brawl . . . strong mystical vein . . . later period" mixed up with "Folio . . . 'Tis Pity . . . without o'erflowing, full . . . sic," etc.

One is never sure, even, whether to take the very organization of Potter's book entirely seriously. An example of this difficulty is his division of the category "Lit-men" into three types.

Type I, the literary historian, he terms "the categorist, the simplifier, the coverer-of-ground-for-the-sake-of-covering-the-ground." Presented with the richness of the nineteenth century, Potter's archetypal historian "does not hesitate an instant. 'The subject of nineteenth-century poetry,' he begins, 'is pretty equally divided between nature and man.' For the moment," Potter says, deadpan, "we will remember this phrase as motto for the *Litlit* histories."

"Type II," he says, "call Laminatory, or Elia-type . . . the idler with the pipe." This is the one North Americans tend to think of as the British amateur. " . . . he rather ignores the discussion of writing, and goes in tremendously for the human side, which he understands perfectly because he is so tremendously human himself. . . . there is always the implication that the real writing, the real good, is the Laby kind of writing, his own kind of writing, in which quibbles, contemplation, and humour dashed with sadness and a touch of Ah-the-Past is the thing."

Type III may be called the note-man or surface

creeper,' the creator of Variora and schools editions of classics. Penetratingly, Potter observes, describing an adult re-encounter with a schools' edition of Milton (prepared, perhaps, by one "A. W. Verity, M. A."), that "indeed, because the notes in this book were adapted for boys, and *Paradise Lost* itself was written for men made calm and dignified by long experience, the notes are the more concrete masonry of the two."

It would probably be silly to object that Potter's three types don't represent a very complete view of the profession (I, for instance, would insist that a Type IV, Critic, is -- and perhaps was in 1937 -- at least as important). It becomes even sillier as you become acclimatised to the Potterian atmosphere, so redolent of parody that even the act of classifying seems mildly sardonic. On the other hand, much of the power of the book resides in its fundamental historical accuracy. Potter is not attacking a straw man or a dead horse.

This becomes clearer the more you work at keeping parodic exaggeration and truth separate. Potter's apparent parody regularly dissolves into literal and sobering truth. "A. W. Verity, M. A." ought to be an allegorical figure, for example, but in fact he is not. "The strange Lit. Ang. questions" on examinations are often not invented:

Give as many thoughts as you can from writers who flourished in the century ending with 1688 -- the thoughts to be remarkable for beauty, force, or shrewdness . . .

Most of us Lit. Ang. types who read Potter's *Shakespeare* books will remember the parody footnote he offered, in "A Note on Litmanship," Chapter 6 of *One-Upmanship*. It was a note on the first line of *Henry IV*, part 2. The line is "Who keeps the gate here, ho!" and the note, which appeared to have been written by following Dr. Johnson's instructions for writers of notes, was offered as an example of the "versed in the language of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries" ploy.

Who . . . here, ho! 'Who' is here, I think, the indefinite (i.e. 'He who'), and not the interrogative pronoun, as is implied, for instance, by the punctuation, 'Who keeps the gate here? Ho!' (*Oxford Shakespeare*), and 'Who keeps the gate here, ho?' (*Cambridge Shakespeare*). 'Who keeps the gate' is a periphrasis (i.e. 'Porter') of a kind usual in calling to servants or others, in attendance but out of sight. Cf. *2 Henry VI*, I, iv, 82: 'York . . . Who's within there, ho! Enter a Serving Man' (*Oxford Shakespeare*); *Henry VIII*, V, ii, 2, 3: 'Crab . . . Ho! Who waits there!' ('there?' *Oxford Shakespeare*). 'Enter Keeper' Massinger, *The Roman Actor*, III. ii: 'Iphis . . . I must

not . . . knock . . . Within there, ho! Something divine come forth . . . [Enter Latinus as a Porter]; Jonson, *Every Man in His Humour*, IV, viii; R. Steele, *The Funeral* (1701), II, iii: 'fardingale. No -- who waits there -- pray bring my lute out of the next room. Enter Servant, with a lute.'

"And," as Potter notes, "so on for another inch." The point is that readers of *One-Upmanship* took this as parody, when, as a reading of *The Muse Unchained* makes clear, it is sober fact, a quotation from the old Arden Shakespeare (in which, in Potter's words, "the editor, out of sheer appetite for his task, seems to be resolving to break all records for moneyworth in the way of explanation of the utterly clear").

As is already becoming apparent, the great temptation with this book is to quote great long swatches of it -- to read aloud, for instance, the three-page epitome of the standard literary biography on pages 81-83 ("Without gusto, [the biographer] prepares himself for the purple passage of praise. Soon over.") Or Potter on the subject of examinations: you may be able to teach taste, he says, "but whether you can examine in taste -- that is another matter altogether. . . . Broadly speaking, the only examinable facts of literature are dates, personal characteristics of writers, and dicta on the subject of How it Works." Or passages of black, savage irony -- Potter on those examinations' "cool supposition that unbearded boys can reasonably be asked to pass judgment on the souls of mature Shakespeares."

Granted, much of the book is preoccupied with anecdotes of the discipline's development in Great Britain; and there is rather a lot of Oxbridge academic political gossip. And granted, Potter's views of what ought to happen -- more "creative" writing, for example -- are somewhat dated; nonetheless, his account of what has happened is devastating, and only one who is determined to see in satire's glass every face but his own will miss the general applicability of much of the story Potter tells. No one who has ever read any kind of examination in English, surely, could fail to find his description of a "good student" other than excruciatingly accurate (remember that this is 1937, before it was obligatory to avoid comments that might be read as sexist):

. . . whose fountain pen skates exhibitionistically over the page. Off glides sentence after easy sentence. She lit is often a 'she' enjoys herself. She is rising to the occasion, she feels; she paralyses her neighbour by calls for extra sheets of paper, and as often as not she is doing what is required, answering the questions in the expected way, with the right

knack, grammatically, a student whom the examiner may feel himself compelled to mark highly, even though in almost every sentence there is a phrase of sickening triteness. (p. 223)

Whatever our judgment of particular opinions or passages, however, Potter's prose has the effect of a

cold bitters and tonic on a hot, lazy afternoon; you may pucker, but you're refreshed. Forty-six years after its publication, *The Muse in Chains* retains an amazing amount of its original power; perhaps this is an indication that we haven't yet found a way to loosen, much less remove, the Muse's educational shackles.

Russell A. Hunt  
Far-Flung Correspondent

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COHORT REPORTS. Carolyn Gardner (Writing Workshop, York University) would like us to know that she plans "to hold an informal session at the May COTE Montreal meeting for interested post-secondary people to comment on [her] research proposal (funded by SSHRC, to begin 83-84) - the study of the interaction between the instructor and the student in the individual tutoring situation during the task of revision. Notice in the Newsletter [Carolyn suggests] would bring the session to the attention of people who might be interested in commenting during or after the session." She invites readers of the newsletter to write to her for a description of the proposal before the Conference.

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Victor Y. Haines (Dawson College, Montreal) has sent along copies of the "Haines Cranton English Literacy Test (Post Secondary Level)" and its Manual, inviting a qualified person to review the test. If you would like to look at and review this test, please write and I will send it along to you. Professor Haines' address is Dawson College, LaFontaine Campus, 1001 Sherbrooke Street, Montreal, PQ H2L 1L3.

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Ian Lindsay (Concordia University--Loyola, Montreal) would be interested to meet or write to anyone who sees connections between Transformational Grammar theory and composition theory and teaching. He'd prefer that "they're not stuck in the theory of the 60's (eg Lakoff, etc.)."

THIS IS AN ESSAY:  
"On the Nature and Role of W&R/IT&P"

My desk dictionary--it's the *Funk and Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary*--lists "a short composition dealing with a single topic" as the first (and primary) meaning of the noun *essay*. These two meanings follow: "An attempt to get something done; endeavor"; and "A tentative trying out or testing of something; trial". I expect that for most of us this set of meanings is pretty much the same as the one we carry around in our heads. We most often use the term to refer to the kinds of articles we encounter in *Harpers* or *Atlantic Monthly* or in one of our professional journals or in much of the writing we ask our students to produce for us. The second and third meanings--endeavor; trial (the ones that feel almost as much like verbs as nouns)--we use less frequently.

I would not be surprised to learn, however, although I don't know how we'd test it, that those of us who study and teach writing and reading are subtly adjusting the ways we habitually organize this set of meanings: there is a gentle but significant nudging-out of noun coupled with an urging-in of verb. More and more often, I would guess, the term *essay* is used in contexts that allow greater resonance of something-going-on, slightly less palpability as thing-already-done. More and more often, *essay* is again being used to suggest "endeavoring" or "testing".

An obvious impetus for this change (if, indeed, such a change is occurring: I'm really less concerned with whether or not it *is* than I am that it *should be*) is the attention being given to writing and reading as processes. When, now, we think about writing and reading, and when we teach them, we strive to think and teach not only *knowing that* but *knowing how*; we try to think in terms not only of "pieces of writing" and "interpretations of reading", but also of "acts of writing" and "acts of reading". When teaching writing, e.g., we not only deliver maxims about appropriate content, organization, outlines, and the like; we also find ways to help students through the processes of generating information and ideas, organizing, planning, drafting, and revising--through, i.e., the processes involved in discovering and working out semantic and rhetorical intentions.

This division of writing and reading into product and process, while dangerous if reduced to an artificial dichotomy, has given us an extraordinarily powerful new way of seeing. When used unreductively, *product* and *process* are more than mere buzz words: they are probes that allow us to see more deeply into what we do, what we study, and what we teach. We see more deeply in part because we see doubly: this newsletter, for example, is not only a thing you hold in your hands and read; it is also an event in which you are participating--which you are *making*--as you read. We are aware of it as both thing and event, and this double awareness necessarily conditions how we view, how we respond to, and how we evaluate it.



Two other sets of terms, one widely known and used, the other not, give us language that will help us clarify these matters. Because they attempt to categorize uses of discourse, they illuminate the nature and functions, actual and potential, of a newsletter such as this.

The more widely known of these sets of terms is the Britton-Burgess-Martin-McLeod-Rosen distinction among expressive, transactional, and poetic discourse. As set out in chapter 6 of *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)* (London: Macmillan Education, 1975), expressive discourse "is language close to the self", language that reveals the speaker, "verbalizing his consciousness, and displaying his close relation with a listener or reader". Expressive language is "thinking aloud on paper"--diary entries, e.g., that "record and explore the writer's feelings, mood, opinions, preoccupations"; "personal letters written to friends or relations for the purpose of maintaining contact with them"; or "writing addressed to a limited public audience assumed to share much of the writer's context and many of his values and opinions and interests". Transactional discourse is "language to get things done"; it is used "to record facts, exchange opinions, explain and explore ideas, construct theories; to transact business, conduct campaigns, change public opinion". Poetic discourse, finally, "uses language as an art medium".

Douglas Barnes's distinction between exploratory and presentational functions of language is less well known, but equally valuable. Exploratory language, according to Barnes, "is usually relatively undogmatic; it allows for tentativeness and false starts. One doesn't have to pay too high a price for vagueness and mistakes." (What he is "talking about is, of course, the use of talk and writing as heuristic devices".) Such language can be contrasted with presentational or "final draft" language, "which is appropriate for occasions such as a lecture when the audience can reasonably expect a high level of explicitness, clarity, and organization". ("Language Across the Curriculum: The Teacher as Reflective Professional," *The English Quarterly*, III:3 [Fall 1980], 13. Elsewhere, talking more specifically about language used by children in school, Barnes distinguishes between "language to explore" and "language for performance": *From Communication to Curriculum* [Penguin Books, 1976], p. 61.)

The point, finally, is that a newsletter such as W&R/T&P ought to imitate a professional meeting as much as it does a professional journal. It is a *forum*--a place where professional dialogue can occur. It is a place that allows and encourages public *expressive discourse*--thinking aloud on paper. It is a place animated by language that is *exploratory*--undogmatic, tentative. It is a public conversation, not a public lecture.

This is not to say, of course, that transactional and presentational language have no place here. They clearly do (and so does the poetic). But we academics are over-committed to what

Britton, et al., call "transactional discourse": we tend to belittle language that looks like it is a record of thinking aloud on paper. We are over-committed to what Barnes calls "final draft language" or "language for performance": we dread the possibility that our thinking might get caught dressed in language that is inexplicit, unclear, or disorganized. Our consciousness and fear that our thinking might be judged makes us unwilling to expose it "in-process".

But expressive and exploratory discourse are, it seems to me, exactly appropriate to the kind of forum this newsletter is intended to be. And if we can make it that kind of forum, it will occupy a special and powerful place in our professional lives. To make it that, however, we've got to take part in the event as if it were a professional meeting and not as if it were a professional journal. A newsletter such as H&R/T&P is not something one *submits* one's work to; it's a place to which one has free access. Or, almost free: the price of admission is the shedding of passivity and anonymity. We must expose ourselves to the possibility (surely not the likelihood, given our shared contexts, values, opinions, and interests) of disapprobation. But we gain more than we give up, for through contributing to the dialogue taking place in this forum we earn our franchise and gain control over our worlds.

James A. Reither  
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*It is possible to speak a language so commonized by generality or jargon or slang that one's own mind and life virtually disappear into it. And it is possible to speak a language made so personal by contrivance, affectation, or slovenliness that one makes no sense.*

Wendell Berry, "Poetry and Marriage: The Use of Old Forms," *The CoEvolution Quarterly* (Winter 1982), 49.

