

# PROLOGUE

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For those not reading in *College English*, 46 (1984) 348-65, Robert J. Connors' review of composition journals, I reprint his analysis of the *Journal of Teaching Writing*.

The *Journal of Teaching Writing*, which appeared for the first time in spring of 1982, is probably the most expensively-bound journal covered by this essay: large, beautifully printed, and carefully designed, with an inviting format that makes it easy to read. More importantly, *JTW* has published a number of fine articles by well-known scholars and by lesser-known but promising authors as well. It covers both theory and practice, includes useful book reviews, is very capably edited, and would seem to have a bright future. And yet, the *Journal of Teaching Writing* evidences a strongly divided personality. Published twice yearly by the Indiana Teachers of Writing, *JTW* exists in a state between two worlds of academic publication — the regional and the national. Like *The Writing Instructor*, it has the advantages of being in a state with a great deal of activity in composition, but unlike the California journal, *JTW* still depends for most of its readership on the state where it is located. Not all *JTW* subscribers are Hoosiers, but the majority are members of Indiana Teachers of Writing who receive the journal as part of their membership, and thus *JTW* has only begun to attract the national readership it obviously is interested in.

Its affiliation with Indiana Teachers of Writing presents the journal with another crux, since the organization exists to serve teachers at all levels, from elementary through college. Thus a large number of *JTW*'s readers are elementary and secondary teachers, people who are interested in pragmatic classroom techniques and applications of ideas in their own schools. Most of the submissions to the journal, however, come from college-level authors who wish to address the problems of college writers and who are speaking to an audience of their peers. Ron Strahl, the editor of *JTW*, is thus forced to decide whether to try to serve his whole constituency by soliciting more elementary- and secondary-level articles or to publish the good college-level material that

comes his way most frequently. Along with the question of regional-national emergence, this question of the level to which *JTW* is addressed needs to be answered before the journal can define itself clearly (362-63).

Virtually all of my most respected and trusted colleagues from across the country, in ITW, and at ICPUI read the review as upbeat. Certainly the ITW, only four years old, and the *JTW*, only two and a half, the comment went, have made incredible strides in a short amount of time. Both the organization and the journal, the comment continued, have helped place Indiana on the national composition map. And, of course, I cannot help but feel gratification from many of Connors' words: "expensively-produced journal"; "large, beautifully printed, and carefully designed"; *JTW* having published "a number of fine articles by well-known scholars and by lesser-known but promising authors as well"; it "being located in a state with a great deal of activity in composition," like California.

To be sure, Connors is insightful as he always is when he writes. Nevertheless, I doubt if the *JTW* has truly "a divided personality" in the negative sense. It may seem that way to those outside of Indiana, but since the founding of ITW, the premise of both the organization and journal has been to break down barriers which segment and isolate teachers of writing at various levels. I don't think this goal is any different from what the *Chronicle of Higher Education* had in mind when it called for more partnerships between universities and school corporations; or what the Bay Area Writing Project envisaged before it evolved into the National Writing Project; or what the NCTE conference every November symbolizes; or what the Lilly Endowment hoped for when it committed \$200,000 to further involvement and cooperation in the form of linkages between Indiana schools and universities. As I recall at the first ITW conference in October, 1981, each of the twenty presentations was delivered jointly by an elementary or middle school teacher, a secondary teacher, and a college faculty member, thus setting immediately a precedent for future ITW activities, including the publication of a journal.

And yet Connors is absolutely correct when he sees not only the regional and national but mixed curricular audiences to which the *JTW* is aimed as presenting challenges for the *JTW*. Certainly I cannot deny that five of the six prologues written so far for the journal have been attempts to clarify what the *JTW* is all about. But these prologues have been pub-

lished not in the wake of criticism but of enthusiasm born out of pedagogical commitment and risk-taking. What makes it seem as if the *JTW* has a “divided personality” is exactly what sets it apart from the other six general college composition journals — *Journal of Basic Writing*, *College Composition and Communication*, *Freshman English News*, *The Rhetoric Review*, *Writing Instructor*, and *Written Communication*. What seem to be cruxes for the *JTW* may indeed be only its appeal. Yes, elementary and secondary teachers “are interested in pragmatic classroom techniques and in applications of ideas in their own schools.” Yes, “some college-level writers wish to address the problems of college writers and . . . speak to an audience of their peers.” Why, however, are these desires mutually exclusive? Perhaps Connors here is subtly referring to the traditional split between praxis and theory as most often represented by the stereotypes of the school teacher knee-deep in papers wondering what she’ll do Monday morning and the college theorist and researcher who never seems to teach. Maybe, but I doubt it.

I think what Connors is concerned with is the viability of the journal, the long term consequences of “risking” and maybe not surviving. In concluding his review, Connors motivates and cautions:

Composition studies is a genuine discipline, no longer merely a hobby, or avocation, or punishment, and through our scholarly contributions to journals we can direct this fledgling discipline in a number of directions . . . . It would seem a shame to exchange the amiable credibility of our discipline’s youth only for the Passchen-daele criticality of ‘mature’ humanities fields like literary theory. Before all else, if we are to be true to our best heritage as rhetoricians, we must strive to maintain communication with each other: never to dismiss, never to despair of, never to despise any other serious practitioner must be the goals embodied by our scholarship. We are the oldest and the newest of the humanities, and it is up to us to use the lessons of our past to vision forth for the future the best that scholarship can be (364-65).

Bob Connors is concerned for the *JTW*, not critical of it. As I prepare to send this issue to press, it might seem that maybe he is coldly right in assessing the annoying problems encountered by the *JTW*: for the first time in six issues no article in the journal has been authored by an elementary,

middle, or secondary teacher. If, however, our readers at the school level can get beyond the bylines and those at the college level beyond titles, all — I am convinced — will agree that this issue best exemplifies so far the mission and quality of the *JTW*.

The lead essay by Anne Schultz quite simply sets the tone for the entire issue. Without scholarly references, notes, or jargon, it dramatizes the internal struggles including the inevitable contradictions we all have when we sit down at our writing tables whether we are elementary or college faculty or, for that matter, non-faculty. The essay resists curricular pigeonholing and is about you and me and most of the students we have taught.

From there, Sandra Stotsky's essay about teaching imaginative writing in the content areas at middle school simply reverberates with potential applications at all levels, even within college-based across the curriculum programs. Stotsky herself epitomizes the philosophy of the *JTW*: She has published both in *Language Arts* and *College Composition and Communication*.

That "student writers find composition classrooms uncomfortable places to be in" and that some teachers and instructors are "able to overcome this 'other wordliness'" form the universal scope of Robert Tremmel's "Hospitality in the Classroom." The essay implicitly negates curricular boundaries. The McKensie and Tompkins essay, "Evaluating Students' Writing: A Process Approach" mandates an opening up to all audiences. In fact, when I stupidly asked them to "get middle school into their title," they politely refused, citing the much larger purpose, audience, and intent of the piece. They were right, the editor wrong. The article by Carolyn Boiarsky comes very close to one of the major assumptions behind the *JTW*: Teachers at the school levels value access to the most recent information about teaching writing. Her survey is unabashedly a translation of theory to practice at each of the four levels.

In addition, what possibly could have more catholic appeal right now than an essay on integrating the computer and writing instruction? Jack Jobst shows how the PC can aid both student and instructor: The student learns and the teacher evaluates more efficiently. The fact that the students whom he discusses are college freshmen makes absolutely no difference. Even the curricular purists would have to give us that one. Then Peter A. Lyons is quick to point out that the

name of his method for teaching and writing about literature is ostentatious: the cumulative inferential paradigm, or CIP for short. But it works. Since I received the article, I have used CIP in the college *and* elementary classroom. My five year old daughter and I played around with it and *Danny and the Dinosaur*, admittedly not *Beowulf* or *King Lear*, but the process — practicing fact-finding and making inferences — worked the same.

The connections of Marilyn Sternglass' article to faculty beyond college doors are obvious; it is almost a blueprint for enduring partnerships between the secondary and university level. She says it best when she states: "From the university's perspective a great deal was gained. . . . We have come to know English teachers. . . . They have made us understand the complex and often trying environment in which they work. They have earned our respect and admiration for their commitment to their students and their discipline." And from the end of the article comes optimism that echoes the *JTW*'s hopes: "Perhaps it is possible for everyone to win."

The final two essays — one describing a unique writing program, the other recalling the composing processes behind and within an eventually published poem — and the two reviews may well be a bit more specialized than the other articles but no less appealing for all teachers of writing who respect and love their profession.

This sixth issue of the *JTW* marks the third anniversary of the journal. I can report that for the first time out-of-state subscriptions have inched ahead of Indiana ones, perhaps setting aside for awhile the Hoosier perplexity to which Connors calls attention. Institutional subscriptions from university libraries are only slightly more than institutional subscriptions from school corporations, and individual subscriptions are fairly evenly balanced among the curricular levels. Since school started, I have received about fifty manuscripts, most having been written by university faculty. We can live with that phenomenon *if* the manuscripts speak to us all. I think some will.

So this longest prologue of the three years attempts to say quite simply that the *JTW* is "clearly defined" and there will be no redefinition in the near future. The only way the *JTW* can fail is if our audience admits it has nothing in common with each other. And we all know we have our students, our singular profession, our love of the craft we teach, our

respect for each other, our desire to learn more from research,  
and on and on. "Perhaps it is possible for everyone to win."

Ron Strahl