

DEFINING OUR MISSION: NEW DIRECTIONS FOR JTW

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During a panel discussion at the 1987 Conference on College Composition and Communication, Nancy Sommers complained that "all composition journals seem to be doing the same thing over and over." Recently selected as the next editor of the *Journal of Teaching Writing*, I perked up my ears. At another panel session I had just heard editors Rick Gebhardt of *College Composition and Communication*, Theresa Enos of *Rhetoric Review*, and Jim Raymond of *College English* speak of clear distinctions among their journals. If called on to define the special purpose of *JTW*, how would I explain its practices and policies? I decided that during my editorship the *Journal of Teaching Writing* will have at least three distinctive features: service to teachers of writing at all academic levels, emphasis on practice-as-inquiry, and commitment to scrutiny of theory.

First, to continue an original goal, the *JTW* will serve an audience of teachers of writing at all levels from elementary through college. This breadth of audience sets it apart from other journals: its appeal as well as its challenge is to serve a readership teaching and researching at so many academic levels. In a *College English* review of composition journals Robert Connors asked, "Would elementary and secondary teachers committed to classroom application and university instructors busy with both pedagogical and theoretical concerns read the same journal?" Based on growth in circulation and acceleration of manuscript submissions from all academic levels, the answer to that question has been yes.

The next question might be, "What kind of articles appeal to these diverse readers?" The second distinctive feature of *JTW* helps to answer that question: although *JTW* will publish work by many

authors, it will emphasize work by teacher/researchers. To persuade school teachers who in the past have not written about their teaching and to assure university professors that classroom-based research is solid and valued, I will use Stephen North's term Practitioners to describe these authors. Teachers typically derive from their teaching ideas and practices which become part of the lore of the teaching of writing. Every teacher knows how much practical knowledge is exchanged in the teachers' lounge or faculty lunchroom. On a more formal level, instructors report on successful practice at conferences and conventions. In written form teachers contribute to "My Favorite Assignment" and "Classroom Exchange" columns. Each of these constitutes an important place for exchange of information. Sometimes lore derived from practice, however, can seem "undiscriminatory, illegal, and sloppy," but, as North points out, it is "clearly a very rich and powerful body of knowledge" (27).

Four constraints that North notes problemize the publication of this knowledge, however. First, because this mode of inquiry is primarily reflexive, that is figuring something out helps the inquirer, the practice can perpetuate itself without community sanction. For that reason teachers are sometimes unmotivated to share their findings. Second, much lore is passed on only orally. Third, practitioner discussion is often conducted by beginners. Fourth, when practice-as-inquiry does meet the standard of being fresh knowledge, its author may find nowhere to publish her findings (29-32).

Although researchers from each segment of North's taxonomy—Philosophers, Critics, Experimentalists, Clinicians, Formalists, and Ethnographers—will be published in *JTW*, the work of Practitioners will predominate. Practice-as-inquiry, however, has distinctive features which set it apart from practice alone. Practice becomes inquiry in three instances: when an unfamiliar situation demands adaptation of familiar strategies; when although the situation is familiar, unsatisfactory standard approaches necessitate creation of new approaches; or when both situation and approach are nonstandard (33). In other words, inquiry responds to genuine problems. Formerly solved problems or previously discovered solutions do not interest readers. Using Kenneth Burke's definition of history as a power conversation, Jim Raymond noted at CCCCs that ours is a "conversation with consequences." He advised writers not to "barge into the conversation without knowing what is going on or what has passed or with too much recapitulation." Reviewing submissions as assistant editor for the past several years, I have sug-

gested against publication for articles which only repeated the discoveries of previous writers. Practitioners need to be true to their own methodology and aware of their particular contributions to the field of composition.

The first two constraints of reflexivity and oral transmission merge into the difficulty of convincing teachers of writing to share their practice-as-inquiry. North notes a contrast in allegiances between Practitioners and other knowledge-making communities in composition. Instead of the dominant ripple from inquiry community to colleagues and classrooms, practitioners hold allegiance to classrooms, colleagues, and then the profession. The teacher/researcher movement may well be changing that pattern, however. For instance, Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle: Writing, Reading and Learning with Adolescents*, an excellent example of published sharing by a teacher/researcher, will be reviewed in our next issue. As classroom practitioners are given their due respect, they may well be more motivated to publish. Community sanction may be unnecessary for survival but vital for flourishing.

To prosper, we also must examine and reexamine the theories evinced by our practices. The third feature of *JTW* will be a commitment to articulation and reexamination of theoretical positions. Practices are not neutral: some ideology, in the best sense of that word, is represented by our practices, both in pedagogy and in research. As Cary Nelson asserts, "Theoretical writing now typically assumes that meaning is not automatically given, that it must be consciously produced by a critical writing practice, that methodological, epistemological, and political choices and determinations are continually at issue in critical analysis" (1). To accept any theoretical position with its goals and methodology without reevaluating its position in current social and political structures may doom composition studies to the fate of some past literary studies. If a curriculum does not reflect the students that it serves and the discourse of a profession does not include the discourse of the classroom, a discipline suffers. In his inaugural speech as NCTE president Richard Lloyd-Jones warned, "We become so defensive of our own fragment of the academic world that we forget the inclusiveness of language. The dialects within our own profession seem to mark how we value instead extreme competence developed by small and isolated groups" (7). The interplay and even conflict between theoretical positions is fruitful if they keep us aware of our own theory but also open to change. Nelson puts it well:

Only a theorized discipline can be an effective site for a general social critique—that is, a discipline actively engaged in self-criticism, a discipline that is a locus for struggle, a discipline that renews and revises its awareness of its history, a discipline that inquires into its differential relations with other academic fields, and a discipline that examines its place in the social formation and is willing to adopt its writing practices to suit different social functions. (2)

The *Journal of Teaching Writing*, therefore, will be committed to teachers of writing at every academic level, to practice-as-inquiry, and to discussions of theories whose goals and methodologies are consciously and constantly refined and redefined. Four new editors will guide the journal toward these goals.

Assistant Editor Jan Guffin chairs and coordinates the Department of English at North Central High School in Indianapolis, Indiana. He also has contributed to shaping the proficiencies in English established by the State Department of Education. On the national scene he chaired the College Board Committee which produced the Orange Book, a statement of college preparatory competencies in English. Active since its inception in the Indiana Teachers of Writing, a 500-member organization, Jan has read manuscripts as a member of the *JTW* Editorial Board for the past five years. Jan will be involved in screening and final selection of manuscripts.

Managing Editor is Kim Lovejoy, who will work with subscriptions and circulation and will contribute to editorial considerations. An assistant professor at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, Kim has taught previously at William Woods College and at the University of Missouri at Columbia. With his degree in English language and linguistics, his research centers on application of theories of cohesion and information management to developing a model for analyzing writing in different disciplines. He is especially interested in issues pertaining to writing across the curriculum.

Our Review Editor is John Trimbur, who heads the Writing Program at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts. He has taught at day care centers, community colleges, and other universities, including Boston University. He serves on the Executive Board of the National Council of Writing Program Administrators, for whom he is a consultant-evaluator, and has read manuscripts as an Editorial Board member of *Writing Program Ad-*

ministration. John consults with high school English departments and has taught teachers of kindergarten through college at the Martha's Vineyard Summer Institute in Writing. He publishes on literacy issues and on collaborative learning. In most issues of *JTW* we will select at least two books for review, one of general interest and one with emphasis on a special area of composition. In this issue we introduce John through his review essay centered on E. D. Hirsch's provocative book *Cultural Literacy*. Although John will designate reviewers, he is open to suggestions of books and of readers.

Editor of *JTW*, I will apply my experience from the past five years as Assistant Editor. My work as Executive Director of The Indiana Teachers of Writing, co-director of a Lilly Linkage grant with the Indianapolis Public Schools, instructor in IUPUI's Young Scholars program, and teacher in junior and senior high schools in Indiana and Ohio supports my understanding of and concern for language instruction in public schools. As Assistant Professor of English at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, I am Coordinator of Advanced Writing and The University Writing Center. My current research interests are the influence of gender on writing, advanced composition, and self-sponsored writing outside academia. In addition, I serve on the CCCC's Commission on the Status of Women in the Profession and as a consultant-evaluator for the National Council of Writing Program Administrators.

Our Editorial Board represents all levels of instruction and all areas of the country. Each university instructor on the board has taught in public schools, been involved in a National Writing Project site, or had other direct experience with writing instruction in elementary, junior high, or senior high. Each elementary, junior high, or senior high teacher has demonstrated commitment beyond his or her own school through participation in national organizations or publication in professional journals. Board members are chosen because of their dedication to students, commitment to colleagues, and knowledge of the needs of *JTW* readers.

Lastly, and most importantly, are the readers. Our list of nearly 1000 subscribers includes individuals and institutions in Hong Kong, Holland, Australia, India, Canada, and every state of the United States. We want to know reader reaction to our publication, including single articles or entire issues. Please respond to published material, suggest subjects not yet included, or, best of all, contribute an article which expresses your most recent discovery concerning the

teaching of writing. During my years as editor I hope that our list of readers and of contributors will continue to grow as the *Journal of Teaching Writing* makes its distinctive contribution to the profession.

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