

UNDERSTANDING THE STORIES OF TWO WPA PIONEERS: EDNAH THOMAS AND JOYCE STEWARD

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The collection of materials found here have to do with two remarkable women who were in charge, one after the other, of Freshman English and then of the Writing Lab (now the Writing Center) at the University of Wisconsin from just after World War II up until 1982. Their stories are of interest to us in terms of the early history of writing program administration; this essay is meant to accompany materials on this site (the transcript and audio file of Steward's oral history, the memoir written by Thomas for her children, and the out-of-print pamphlet Thomas published to help TAs evaluate student writing) to give an overview of their professional lives and contributions.

When we discuss the history of writing program administration, it is convenient to begin with 1979—the date that marks the founding of the Council of Writing Program Administrators. It was at this point that a collective identity started to form around the title of WPA; soon the organization boasted a journal, a workshop, and a national conference, all trademarks of a field of study in its own right. But as Barbara L'Eplattenier and Lisa Mastrangelo have pointed out (*Historical Studies on Writing Program Administration*), the practices we associate with WPA work began long before that date. Amy Heckathorn states that even though they might not have called themselves WPAs, a group identity among those who carried out the work of writing program administration actually began to form just after the Second World War. She argues for the 1940s as the starting point for the formation of this professional group identity, dividing the period before the formation of the Council of Writing Program in 1979 Administrators into what she terms the early era (1940-1963), and the transitional era (1964-1979), this latter category coinciding with what Robert Connors refers to as the “era of disciplinarity” in composition studies (4). Both Charles Paine and Randall Popken argue for a biographical approach to the early

history of composition as a discipline, stating that broad ideological studies have limited usefulness; we should be looking instead at the relationship between a person's life and his or her pedagogy and professional contributions. As Paine says, such an approach "might bring us toward a history of rhetoric that has a human face" (38). In that spirit, we present here the stories of two writing program administrators, Ednah Shepard Thomas and Joyce S. Steward, whose careers roughly coincided with two of the periods Heckathorn demarks, the early and the transitional era, a period of time that has not been studied thoroughly in the scholarship. These two women, one after the other, were what we would now term writing program administrators from 1945 to 1982, providing continuity of administrative leadership for a program that underwent some radical changes in the 1960s. Our sources include the archival materials and oral history found on this site as well as published works¹; they also include materials Susan still has from her TA orientation at the University of Wisconsin in 1968, which was conducted by both Thomas and Steward. In telling their stories, we are also guided by the approach that Joan Wallach Scott has called "her-story" (20) an approach that involves not only finding historical women and telling their stories, but also teasing out the political and social issues that their stories illustrate. Much as other studies have complicated the narrative of "current traditional" pedagogy (see Gold "Remapping"), we hope their stories will help complicate the grand narrative of enlightened writing program administration having its beginning in 1979. Although the curriculum for the writing course that they led reflected its times, these two women were pioneers in developing policies and programs that anticipate what we recognize as good administrative practice today. They also occupied a particular niche within a male-dominated department that allowed them to be accepted by their male colleagues and be successful at their work, in spite of the fact that they were women

1945-1970: EDNAH SHEPARD THOMAS AND FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

Essays by Edward Corbett and Richard Lloyd-Jones give some insight into what it was like to be a WPA in the years after World War II, the period when Ednah

1 These sources are Thomas's memoir (on this site), internal documents from the University of Wisconsin English Department, the transcript of an oral history interview with Steward that Brad conducted in 1982 when Steward was 85 (on this site), materials Susan had saved from her TA orientation in 1968 (which was conducted by both Thomas and Steward), as well as the published writings of both women (including Thomas's *Evaluating Student Themes*, on this site). Those interested in the fascinating and complex history of writing courses in the English Department at the University of Wisconsin should be sure read David Fleming's comprehensive history of the program: *From Form to Meaning: Freshman Composition and the Long Sixties, 1957-1974*.

Thomas was put in charge of the Freshman writing course at the University of Wisconsin. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, known popularly as the G.I. Bill, had an enormous impact on higher education, providing subsidies for attending college. During the next seven years, more than two million veterans took advantage of the educational benefits to attend colleges and universities (Butts and Cremin). Edward Corbett and Richard Lloyd-Jones were among those veterans; Corbett described the situation:

English departments especially bore the brunt of that tidal wave of students because, in those days, virtually every college and university required all beginning students to take at least two years of English: a freshman English course and a sophomore survey course in either English or American literature. A veteran just beginning a college education became one of the twenty-five to thirty students who were packed into one of the dozens of newly created sections of freshman English. (65)

As Corbett characterizes the post-war period, it was a time of desperation in English departments; it didn't take long for departments to figure out that, with the escalating numbers of students needing Freshman English, there would need to be a director or coordinator for such a huge course. But faculty stepped up to the task. Corbett notes that it is surprising how quickly these faculty prepared themselves for the task and became resources for each other (and for their graduate TAs), given that there were no other resources at the time. Many of these people had degrees in literary studies, but in some cases they had experience with teaching English in high school and with teacher training and supervision at the secondary level. This was true of Corbett himself, as well as of Ednah Thomas, who described this period in her memoir as one "not just of expansion but of explosion."² When she started in the mid-1940s, the English Department was small and collegial enough for her to describe it in her memoir again and again as a family; at the end of her career, the department was large and deeply split, the TAs had unionized and were on strike, and riots on campus (which she could observe from her office window) were paralyzing the institution. She retired in 1970, the year of a literal explosion—the bombing of Sterling Hall in

2 According to enrollment statistics from the University of Wisconsin Office of the Registrar, in the early 1940 undergraduate enrollments hovered around 6,000 students; between 1945 and 1949 that number rose to over 15,000. By the time Thomas retired the undergraduate enrollment was close to 24,000. During the years 1944-45 there were 543 graduate students in the entire university; during 1949-50, after the institution began hiring a new entity called "teaching assistant" to handle burgeoning enrollments, the number of graduate students across campus had risen to over 3,000. By the time she retired there were over 9,000 graduate enrollments campus-wide.

an attempt to destroy the Army Math Research Center.³

As she describes in her memoir, Thomas, born in 1901, was a product of the Eastern women's college tradition; she had a B.A. from Mt. Holyoke College with a major in composition (a possible option in 1923), and an MA in literature from Bryn Mawr. From 1924-25 she taught high school in Connecticut, and from 1925-27 she taught Freshman English as a graduate teaching assistant at the University of Wisconsin. She did not complete her PhD, dropping out of graduate school to marry and raise a family. She returned to teaching in 1942 after a divorce, working in the U.S. Armed Forces Institute program (a correspondence program) based at the University. When large numbers of veterans began enrolling in the University after the War, she was hired by the English Department of the University in 1945 as a part-time teaching assistant. She moved on to teaching full time, her main assignment being to teach English 309, "Composition for English Teachers," a course for prospective high school teachers that is still in existence at the institution. In her memoir, she notes a worry that her friends in the department hired her out of pity, ("poor-brave-little-woman-in-distress-how-can-we-help-her-out"), since her husband—a former member of the department—left her with three children and little income, but they certainly also hired her because they knew she was capable. Her administrative abilities were soon recognized; she became an instructor in 1947, and as enrollments continued to rise and new a system of hiring teaching assistants to teach Freshman English was established, she became the TA trainer and supervisor as well as the faculty member assigned to observe new assistant professors and give them feedback on their teaching. Although "Director of Freshman English" was a title always held by a male faculty member in the department, at that time Ed Lacy (who handled the university and departmental committee work), Thomas did most of the work we now associate with being a WPA: scheduling, advising of freshman, and TA training and supervision. In her memoir, she describes the relationship with Lacy as extremely congenial: he tended to be authoritarian, she more "motherly"; he attended to the intramural, she to the "extramural," especially the socializing. In the fall of 1968 the Director position was taken over by William Lenehan (Fleming 52), with whom she also had a collegial partnership.

Her memoir describes an English Department that was decidedly patriarchal as well as Anglophile in the 1940s and 50s: the department was all male except for three (single) women and herself. Afternoon tea was served every day; Thomas says without irony that the system was "perfectly democratic"—either a professor's wife or the wife of one of the teaching assistants served it. Everyone read *Punch*. No one cared about the composition course. But she and Lacy

3 For a full explanation of the bombing and what led up to it, see Tom Bates's discussion in *Rads*.

cares deeply, and set about the difficult task of making the TA system work for the largest course in the university. The two of them wrote a Freshman English textbook, *Guide for Good Writing* (1951), together. She spent a great deal of time trying to understand how other universities were handling the huge increases in enrollments; in 1949 she visited the University of Iowa to see how they were handling Freshman English and to check on the writing lab, then run by Carrie Stanley. She was involved in the early days of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English, and later at the national level served as director of several Commission on English Institutes in the early 1960s, then two NDEA summer institutes for teachers. During a time when TA training in large institutions was spotty at best (see Pytlik), she set up and ran a week-long orientation program for new TAs that was then supported by a semester-long series of meetings with master TAs. In spite of the lack of a PhD, she advanced from instructor up through the tenure-line ranks until she was finally promoted to full professor in 1966-67 at the age of 65, a promotion that was based on her teaching excellence and her contributions to the training of future high school and graduate teaching assistants in the department. In the Fall of 1968 one of those TAs was Susan.

Here is how three of her colleagues described Ednah Shepard Thomas in a memorial resolution at the time of her death in 1995: “Traits of her New England upbringing remained with her throughout her life: her Eastern New England speech pattern with its tartness of delivery, a briskness of energy and sharply focused purpose in both work and leisure, a moral rectitude in her interactions with staff and students, a meticulous attention to the conduct of her duties” (Hughes, Ringler, and Scott). Susan first met Thomas during an orientation session for new TAs at the beginning of the 1968-69 academic year. The large classroom was full—the enrollment boom of the 1960s meant more TAs than ever were needed to teach first-year writing (Susan remembers that there were more than 60 brand new TAs among the department total of nearly 200). Thomas was definitely in charge, a no-nonsense individual who indeed handled things briskly. She had to be—she had one week to get novices ready to teach composition, which was in fact a week more than some of Susan’s friends at other institutions had. Further, the English graduate students’ attitude toward teaching composition was the one prevalent among their literary mentors at the time: the class was a sort of initiation rite to be endured so that you could go to the real business of teaching a literature course the following semester. The rumor among the new TAs were that Thomas would fire you at once if, while observing your class, she found your teaching less than satisfactory; the rumor was probably apocryphal, but it served to keep the TAs in line. The course Thomas helped to shape and which she supervised would be classified as current-traditional if one looked only at the course description and textbooks; the focus was

the modes of discourse; textbooks were *The Norton Reader* for model essays (“Lee and Grant” for comparison/contrast, “Once More to the Lake” for description) and Porter Perrin’s *Writer’s Guide and Index to English* for writing instruction. But in certain aspects it was in fact ahead of its time, thanks to Thomas.

Thomas was a gifted and skilled teacher, passionate about the teaching of writing and eager to pass that enthusiasm on to those she worked with. One of the stories she was fond of telling her novice teachers (also related in her memoir) was about a mistake she made as a first-year high school teacher in Danielson, Connecticut. It was a mill town, very different from her New England home; she stated that the year she spent there was one that went beyond any other in educating her. A farm boy in her class wrote that he had a horse that weighed a ton; she commented on his paper that she didn’t believe a horse could weigh that much, but found out later at an auction that the boy was right. She apologized to the boy and wrote in her diary that she learned, and never forgot, respect for the student. This respect was clearly conveyed in her approach to assessing writing. In the training sessions and in follow-up staff meetings TAs were enjoined again and again to really read what students were saying in their papers rather than zero in on surface errors. In 1955 she published *Evaluating Student Themes*, a booklet that was given to all English Department TAs as a guide for their own grading. (It was one of the all time best sellers of the University of Wisconsin Press, going through multiple printings; there was nothing else like it at the time. It may be found on this site.) Susan still has her copy, printed in 1962.

Susan’s previous experience with evaluating student writing was at an institution in the South whose English department had a composition curriculum mandated by the department chair, a linguist; the students, primarily rural African-American Texans who were what we now call basic writers, were supposed to learn to write Standard Edited English via pattern practice (they had a workbook) and readings in linguistics. Nothing in her study for an MA in literature had prepared Susan for such a situation; she consulted with experienced teachers in the department, who told her that departmental grading practice was to fail student papers that had more than three grammatical mistakes. Grading was referred to as “correcting”; it consisted of marking and counting up errors. (The failure rate, not surprisingly, was high.) *Evaluating Student Themes* presented a very different approach, one that took into account what students were trying to say in the essay as well as how correctly they said it. As Fleming notes, “its conceptual underpinnings are quite forward looking” (50). The booklet’s “Foreword to the Teacher” reflects the view of the writing process at that time (think before writing; write, revise, make a final fair copy); however, much also sounds like what we would tell TAs today. The teacher (always “he,” since the grammar books of the time declared that “he” was an inclusive pronoun) is advised to state

the purpose of the assignment in terms of pedagogical goals; instead of editing the paper, “[h]is aim is not to do the work himself but to stimulate and guide the student to assume responsibility for doing it” (*Evaluating* iv). Although Thomas assumes teachers should continue to make some marginal notes like “sp” and “pn” and ask students to correct any errors, the focus of the booklet is on the terminal comment to the student as the “teacher’s most important contribution” to the evaluation process, giving the student a sense of the work as a whole (iv). Her remarks on the importance of the terminal comment deserve to be quoted at length.

The tone of the terminal comment is as important as its content. It is the part of the teacher to recognize strength as well as weakness. (The term “evaluating” is used in the title of this pamphlet since too often “criticizing” means what it did to the practice teacher who handed back her first theme to her supervisor with the statement, “I can’t find anything wrong.”) . . . We are all semanticists enough to write, “You can strengthen that sentence” instead of, “That sentence is flabby and weak.” No student should be left without hope and no student should be left without challenge; and each should receive a specific comment which will put him in the frame of mind to write a better theme—next time. . . . If we show the student that we respect his work and are interested in it as a whole, and expect him to take the main responsibility for improving it, he is most likely to take the same attitude.” (v)

Toward the end of the Foreword of the booklet Thomas states, “It is our policy in Freshman English at the University of Wisconsin to give a grade report at stated intervals but no grade on individual themes. Experience has shown that a student looks at the grade only, and not at the comment” (vi). (This was her way of making sure that students actually read the comments.) The body of the booklet contains 14 student themes at three levels (unsatisfactory, middle quality, superior quality) with sample end comments for discussion. During the TA orientation, the importance of this end comment was emphasized as much more important than any “correcting” of student writing that TAs might want to do. TAs were enjoined not to put grades on individual papers (a theme a week was to be assigned, the first theme to be an autobiography, to get to know the students) because it was important to grade on improvement in writing; students therefore kept their papers in folders for periodic review and discussion with their TA. This is perhaps one of the earliest examples of what we now call a portfolio system. TAs were required to hold individual conferences with students to discuss

our comments and emphasize the positive aspects as well as help them understand how they might do better the next time. Because of her interest in fairness to students in the evaluation process, Thomas attended a Chicago workshop in the mid-1950s given by Paul Diederich of ETS to learn more about large-scale assessment; she then became a sort of local expert on writing assessment, designing a placement test and essay combination that would identify both superior students (for placement in the honors sections), and those who needed more help (for placement in section with more experienced TAs or instructors). This system is described at length in her memoir. She was aware of initiatives to grade student writing using computers, one of the earliest of which was Project Essay Grade, or PEG, supported by the College Board and begun in by Ellis B. Page in 1964 (Page). PEG analyzed linguistic features only, not content. Thomas brought this up in the 1968 TA orientation Susan attended, remarking on how inadequate such a system was.

Thomas believed in full class participation and gave tips on how to get everyone involved in discussions (especially important in a department where every literature class except the graduate seminars were lectures). Because she believed strongly in the importance of individual attention and encouragement, she herself had an open-door policy: TAs could drop by her office any time she was in (she arrived a little after 7 a.m. to be there before the first class of the morning at 7:45), and she arranged to teach in a room that had a back door so that they could come in at any time to observe her own teaching. TAs were encouraged to duplicate student papers (with the names taken off) for distribution in class, so that students could learn from each others' own writing as well as from the model essays. To ensure that TAs learned to give effective feedback using her guidelines, Thomas set up individual meetings with each of them to go over a set of papers they had evaluated—TAs were instructed to bring a high, medium, and low paper and be prepared to discuss why they were ranked that way. She also set up a system whereby new TAs met regularly in small groups with an experienced TA to plan and discuss what they were to teach the next week, as well as a system whereby new TAs were observed by a faculty member as well as by herself. Although some resented the supervision,⁴ Susan remembers that the focus was like the one Thomas emphasized for evaluating student writing: support and encouragement for the novice. Finally, Susan remembers that part of Thomas's ethos of respect was that she never used the term "TA," instead calling the graduate students in the program "instructors" or "teachers." Her stance was that these graduate students were no one's assistant (as in other departments),

⁴ There was not only resentment, there was outright hostility and disrespect shown to Thomas and Steward by some of the TAs during the time Susan was there (see Fleming, p. 57). They wanted more autonomy in the classroom than was allowed by the syllabus and by the directors.

and deserved to be treated as the professionals she expected them to be. She learned every TAs name on the first day of orientation.

The year after Susan attended this orientation, the English Department faculty voted to abolish Freshman Composition. Thomas, who had spent all of her professional life developing and maintaining the quality of the course, entitled this section of her memoir “Demolition.” It was the era of questioning authority, and many TAs questioned hers and the department’s: some refused to give grades (since draft boards were ready to send young men who failed to Viet Nam). Others refused to follow the syllabus. During the campus unrest, some did not meet their classes. The course had become unmanageable, and Thomas voted with the majority to abolish it. (The full story of this time is told by David Fleming and his colleagues in his award-winning history, *From Form to Meaning: Freshman Composition and the Long Sixties, 1957-1974*.) The rest of the university reacted strongly to the news that the only universally required course was now gone, and the department (partly to appease other departments, and partly to ensure that graduate program could continue with stipends for a different sort of work), laid the groundwork for a different sort of writing program. But despite the fact that the course was gone, the student-centered philosophy behind the program that Thomas had set up and run for many years continued under the leadership of her colleague, Joyce Steward.

1966-1982: JOYCE STEWARD

According to the oral history that Brad conducted with her in 2002 (available on this site), Joyce Steward was invited by the University’s English Department in 1966 to leave her high school teaching position in Madison and work with Thomas, who was getting ready to retire. (These were the days before national searches took place—hiring was via the “old boy” network.) Unlike Thomas, Steward was a Midwesterner; born in Iowa, she received a BA in English from Grinnell College and did an MA at Drake University. But there were also similarities. Like Thomas, she was divorced; she had one child. Like Thomas, she was a master teacher with a record of professional accomplishment and was active in NCTE and in the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (later she also joined CCCC). Like Thomas before she was hired, Steward was well known to the English Department faculty; besides the fact that she had taught many of their children in her high school classes, she had also taken graduate courses at the university from some of them. She had also been part of Thomas’s instructional staff for the NDEA summer institute in 1965.

Once at the university she regularly taught 309, the composition course for future secondary English teachers, as Thomas had, and became legendary for

preparing outstanding high-school teachers. Steward described Thomas as a wonderful mentor; they worked in tandem on the Freshman English program from 1966 to the time the course was abolished in 1969. (Steward was in fact the person who supervised Susan, observing her class and going over her student papers with her.) When Thomas retired, Steward took over; although there was nothing left of the composition program Thomas had helped to create, Steward planned and directed an entirely new entity, the Writing Laboratory. Steward is now best known for her pioneering work in this area, work that had a wide influence at and beyond Wisconsin. She directed the Writing Laboratory (now the Writing Center) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison from 1969 until her retirement in 1982,⁵ led a summer institute for writing center directors in 1981, and co-authored one of the first books about writing laboratories, published in 1982.

To preserve details from and to honor Steward's influential career, over the course of two days in July 2002 Brad conducted an oral history with Joyce her at her home in Ellensburg, Washington, two years before her death in 2004. (All quotations below are from that interview.) Throughout this oral history, Steward consistently downplayed the importance of her WPA work, explaining matter-of-factly, for example, that the idea to create the Writing Laboratory at Wisconsin was not hers, but rather came from William Lenehan, a faculty colleague who was associate chair of the department. "He was a man of ideas," explained Steward. Steward consistently did not want to take credit for innovations, for influencing the success of the writing lab: "Bill [Lenehan] . . . said, 'Joyce can do this'"; "I did what was asked of me." Again and again during the interview, she referred to her involvement with the Writing Lab as a "happy accident." But anyone familiar with the history of contemporary writing centers knows that Steward was undeniably one of the strongest and most influential pioneers in the development of contemporary writing centers. Steward not only established a strong writing laboratory at a major research university and trained and mentored graduate teaching assistants to work in a writing center, but she also influenced the development of writing centers across the country through her publications and consulting and through her groundbreaking work with writing in the disciplines. Her influence also extended through the Steward apostles, the many visitors to the writing lab at Wisconsin and the many Madison graduate students who subsequently did writing center work. Steward was also consistently ahead of the curve in WID, in professionalizing writing centers, and in her pedagogical approaches to writing center consultation. And for writing cen-

5 Ednah Thomas volunteered as a tutor in the Writing Lab after her retirement; she was especially interested in helping international students and continued tutoring them at the university and then at her home until a few months before her death at age 94.

ter professionals who consistently oversimplify writing center history, Steward's professional accomplishments and history complicate, in wonderful ways, some common narratives of writing center history and its administration.

Although Neal Lerner has persuasively documented the long history of writing center innovations in *The Idea of a Writing Laboratory* (2009), the belief persists that all writing labs began as exclusively remedial operations, serving only a small subset of writers—usually first-year undergraduates—in developmental or first-year writing courses. In her oral history, Steward explained that she had researched other existing labs and deliberately chose *not* to make the Madison Lab an enrollment or remedial program. Instead, from the day the door opened in September 1969, the lab was deliberately for all students, at all levels, in all disciplines. From the first, the lab served upper-classmen as well as first-year students. In Steward's words, "It worked almost magically. . . . I think it was due to the fact that we were giving help and that people needed it and wanted it." And the students who came weren't just undergraduates; it wasn't long before graduate students started asking to talk about their papers.

To share her experience developing a writing laboratory and to spread her enthusiasm for laboratory methods of teaching writing, Steward gave many conference presentations about writing labs, hosted many visitors from other colleges and universities interested in establishing writing laboratories, and authored numerous publications about writing labs. In 1975 Steward published an article in an MLA publication, the *ADE Bulletin*, "To Like to Have Written: Learning the Laboratory Way." In the early 1970s, as part of a series of discussions with Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the Wisconsin Writing Lab participated in a North-South exchange with Grambling University's Writing Lab. In 1981, together with her long-time collaborator, Mary K. Croft, the director of the writing lab at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, Steward co-led an institute for faculty interested in developing writing labs, held at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1981. Steward also persuaded her reluctant textbook publisher, Scott, Foresman, to publish one of the first (1982) books about writing labs, *The Writing Laboratory: Organization, Management, and Methods*, which Steward co-authored with Croft. In her oral history, Steward explained that The National Council of Teachers of English refused to publish it, thinking there would be little interest in a book about writing labs.

From its start in 1969, it wasn't long before the new Writing Lab at Wisconsin began to do proto-WAC and WID work with faculty from across campus. Faculty from across the University asked Steward for advice about designing writing assignments and asked the Lab to offer disciplinary-specific writing instruction within courses across campus for workshops for their students. Soon Steward and the Writing Lab staff were collaborating with faculty in, for exam-

ple, economics, geography, and pharmacy, thus supporting WID in the 1970s, before formal WAC and WID program evolved across the country. From her WID work in the 70s, Steward co-authored, with Marjorie Smelstor, one of the earliest WID textbooks, *Writing in the Social Sciences*, published in 1984.

In many cases, writing labs established in the 1970s had to fight to grow, to get the resources that they needed. Not so with the Madison Lab, according to Steward. In the Lab's first decade, Steward operated in a fairly parental and benevolent administrative world. When she needed something, she asked for it, and she recalled that she was never turned down. (Steward told Brad that the Lab's relationship with the dean was so good that when there was some other part of the department needed funds for something, they'd sometimes ask Steward to make the request.)

We've all read histories that assume that only in the 1980s and '90s did enlightened, collaborative, process-model dialogue about writing become the norm in writing labs and writing centers. But from this oral history and in print, Steward's writing center philosophy from 1969 on is in many ways enlightened and contemporary. Although there was undoubtedly plenty of the storehouse (Lunsford) and of current traditional rhetoric in the early Wisconsin writing laboratory, there was also much of the garret and the collaborative writing center as well (Lunsford). Above all, in their book Steward and Croft emphasize that tutors help students with the *process* of writing; they emphasized talk, individualizing tutorials, and collaboration between writer and tutor. Students always came first to Joyce Steward—in her oral history, she tells story after story about particular students she remembered. What she cared about most was helping individual, particular students learn and grow. Drawing on her classroom teaching, she summed up her philosophy, which was consistent with that of Thomas: Students must be graded on improvement. "What you want [the student] there to do is to learn. The student is supposed to learn what you're teaching him. Why give him a bad grade and average the six together because he didn't know when he came in? . . . I think we need to spread that word to other teachers. That's a premise that's definitely behind a good writing lab—the growth. That's what he's in a class for, as well as what [the student is] in the Writing Lab to do." From his writing center political perspective, Brad wanted Joyce Steward to say that she knew she was establishing a powerful new form of writing instruction, one carefully thought through and planned. But she didn't see the writing center as separate, distinct from her training of classroom teachers. Steward didn't see the writing center as having any special pedagogy. Instead, she saw the writing lab as embodying and practicing the same values and philosophy that informed her attitudes toward students, learning, and writing instruction throughout her career. Discovering Steward's view of this continuity, from classroom to center,

is powerful to learn. The roots of Steward's philosophy of writing instruction ran deep. When she was a master's student at Drake University, one of her most influential education professors was an expert on classroom group work—peer education. And this professor had good intellectual roots for writing centers too: he had studied with the educational philosopher John Dewey at Columbia. Although Steward's writing laboratory in the late 60s and 70s and early 80s seems not to have been influenced by Kenneth Bruffee's groundbreaking theories of collaborative learning and his development of undergraduate peer tutoring programs, it's not a reach to see Steward's writing center philosophy growing from the progressive movement in education.

In a book of her own poetry she published in 1999, 17 years after she retired, one of Steward's poems, perhaps/likely set in a writing a writing lab, captures beautifully her enduring love for literary analysis, her own humility, and her deep respect for students. This identification with students and willingness to start where they were in their knowledge permeated Steward's composition teaching, her vision of writing laboratory work, and her training of teaching assistants and future faculty:

Crossed Up

Assigned some poetry to explicate,
 young Raymond, seventeen and raw
 from the Midwestern cornfields, told
 to respond, met Tennyson, grown old.
 I watched him struggle, hesitate,
 then baffled, ask, "Something to do with the law?"

Reading a *New Yorker* verse today,
 I searched my memory for allusion,
 probed the metaphor and visualized
 strange images. When language still defied
 ability to reach conclusion,
 embarrassed quite, remembered Ray.

– Steward, *Lamps with Prisms*, 46

CONCLUSION

We believe that the stories of Thomas and Steward help to complicate the historical narrative of writing program administration as a profession. During the time in which they worked writing program administration at most institutions was, in David Schwalm's terms, a task rather than a position (9). Writing

about this time in the history of writing programs, Dwight Purdy states that much WPA work was haphazard and poorly done during this period, when most directors were amateurs.

An assistant professor took on the odious job of directing freshman English for tenure's sake. He (always he then) had some interest in teaching composition but none in constructing and managing a durable program, and the only theory he knew was Aristotle. . . . From this estranged figure came mismanagement, or none at all. The twenty, forty, or four hundred teaching assistants in his care were often selected by no rational principle. None of their course work had a thing to do with composition The director chose common texts with little or no consultation and more than likely set up a program without a coherent structure . . . He was overwhelmed. (793)

As we have seen, none of this describes the work of Thomas or Steward, who were dedicated professional women managing a program that was in many ways ahead of its time and that had a continuity that many of us would wish for today.

As Purdy notes above, most of the faculty who directed Freshman English programs at this time were men, since English departments were still decidedly male dominated. How were these women able to operate in such a decidedly patriarchal culture? If we use the lens of “herstory” we see that in fact the gender politics of the time allowed them to do their work in a way that fit tidily within the patriarchal structure. We noted that both were divorced (divorce was still unusual at that time); this is not insignificant. When Thomas was hired and for a long time thereafter, there were exactly three women on the faculty, the formidable triumvirate of Helen White, Ruth Wallerstein, and Madeleine Doran. All were nationally recognized scholars, and all were militantly single. Doran, who was still there when Susan was in graduate school, made it clear to her own female students that they should stay single if they expected to be successful scholars; she no doubt reflected the view of her colleagues when she told Susan the reasoning behind this: a married woman's first duty was always to her husband. Thus Thomas and Steward represented a middle ground in terms of their loyalties; since they were divorced with no husband at home whose needs came first, they could be depended upon to take their jobs seriously. Since neither of them had a PhD but both were mothers, they could take care of the teacher training and TA training—since that was not scholarly work but was suited to their nurturing natures. (Indeed, both women contrasted themselves with oth-

ers in the department in the memoir and the interview, stating that they were teachers, not scholars, and they expressed gratitude toward the department for accepting them as such. We should note that at the time they were faculty members, there were male faculty who also did not have the PhD but were publishing about literature, and thus were considered scholars.) Neither woman held the title of Director of Freshman English during the time the course existed—that title was always held by a male faculty member. Both were quite diffident about their own considerable accomplishments, preferring to give credit to others or to good luck. They were prime examples of the compositionist as wife, a notion lampooned by Lynn Bloom and examined more seriously by Theresa Enos. (Thomas notes several times in her memoirs that she acted in a “motherly” way towards the TAs, and even knit booties for every baby born to a faculty or TA family. She also had weekly Sunday night dinner parties for the TAs and in the early days “called” on their wives so that they didn’t feel isolated.) This wife/mother role was one that they as well as their colleagues accepted; they professed themselves to be content with, even though some TAs from the time felt that both were undervalued by their colleagues as well as by the TAs (Fleming 57).

And yet in spite of being cast in a secondary role, they were very strong and influential women, ones that deserve the term “pioneers” that we have claimed for them. They clearly had a lasting impact on the Wisconsin writing program, in part because of the longevity of their tenure and the sheer number of novice teachers and tutors they worked with over their collective 37 years of teaching and administration. They had an impact at the national level as well, through their work in NCTE and through their publications.

But mostly, we suspect, their effectiveness can be judged by the values they demonstrated in both their teaching and administration. What comes through in their written and oral histories is their deep love of their work, a love that they hoped to pass on to those novices with whom they worked, along with a sense of its importance. Their administrative approach was grounded in values they demonstrated in their teaching: respect and support for the learner, whether student or novice teacher. These values are timeless.

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PUBLICATION INFORMATION

McLeod, Susan H., and Bradley T. Hughes. "Understanding the Stories of Two WPA Pioneers: Ednah Thomas and Joyce Steward." The WAC Clearinghouse, 2017. <https://wac.colostate.edu/thomas-steward/pioneers.pdf>.

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