

INTRODUCTION

The articles in this issue reflect the diversity of philosophies and approaches current in training teachers of basic writers. The first three articles describe doctoral programs, hypothetical or actual, which intend to provide the kinds of instruction believed to be most useful to basic writing teachers. The differences in these programs point to fundamental differences in perception about what basic writing teachers really need. Harvey Wiener argues that larger amounts of writing and peer evaluation are needed in graduate literature courses. He goes on to say that it is a combination of more writing and traditional belletristic literary training which best develops those finely honed skills of analysis and synthesis needed to read basic writers perceptively and which imparts the intimate working knowledge of the writing process necessary to teach writing effectively. While a few courses in non-literary subjects would provide useful insights, Wiener maintains, the best teachers of writing have usually been people interested in language as literary art who have established themselves professionally by their own writing, usually on subjects other than the teaching of composition.

In direct contrast, Joseph Comprone makes a case for diversified training in such non-literary subjects as cognitive psychology, descriptive linguistics, non-literary research methods, reading theory, and writing protocol analysis. While a few courses in traditional literary areas such as rhetorical theory and narrative literature are useful to the basic writing teacher, in-depth historical and generic surveys and literary analysis of the customary sort are, he believes, better suited to experts in a specialized variety of cultural criticism than to the specialists who will teach the skills of basic writing. Given the fact that so much must be learned or tested out first hand, he argues for academic credit for supervised teaching and administrative experience. It follows from his premises that doctoral dissertations of writing specialists should have a pedagogical orientation.

The course of study described by John Brereton strikes a balance between these two programs. It provides a double major for students able to undertake rigorous literary and non-literary studies in equal measure.

Because of the numerous required courses and required electives, the program leaves no room for academic credit for supervised teaching and administration, requires a dissertation in a traditional literary subject, and aims to train prospective teachers of basic writing so that they will comfortably fit in English departments.

To some degree, the differences in programs endorsed by these authors reflect the different institutional settings in which the teaching of basic writing has gone forward and the accidents of our collective personal histories as writing teachers. While there are important similarities in the programs, we do not yet appear, as a profession, to have reached a consensus about that balance and synthesis of writing, critical reading, teaching writing, and hard information about various subjects which will best prepare the beginning teacher of basic writing. Nor do we seem agreed on the kinds of experience and information useful—and perhaps rather readily accessible—to teachers of writing in general and other kinds of experience and information in addition that may be necessary for those who will teach at the college level across barriers of dialect, language, and almost complete inexperience with writing.

The last three articles describe programs aimed not only at meeting immediate institutional needs but at training the next generation of high school and, sometimes, elementary school teachers. These programs attempt to reform the way English teachers are trained so that they will actually teach writing, so that entering college students will have already learned more of the fundamentals of writing.

Richard Gebhardt describes programs developed to meet the needs of a small liberal arts college and its graduates. He outlines the informal techniques used successfully in staff meetings with undergraduate writing center tutors and his English Department. He details, too, the more formal instruction provided in an undergraduate course for prospective elementary and secondary school teachers and writing center tutors and in a series of workshops for faculty from other disciplines.

James Moran spells out the principles and methods he and his colleagues have found most effective in training teachers to teach writing, whether the format is a single two-hour workshop or series of workshops, an undergraduate or graduate course, or an eighteen month institute. More important, they have discovered, than any particular format or design or assignment is what the teacher believes to be true about writing, for that will inform whatever he does.

Finally, Donald McQuade and Marie Ponsot describe the substance of a program for training in-service secondary school teachers and—a bold stroke—undergraduates who go into high schools and actually team

teach, as opposed to tutor, writing. The program addresses directly the competencies needed by basic writers, building proficiency in skills of observation, inference, and analysis and bridging between oral traditions, classical literary forms, and expository prose.

We have asked two of our authors, Gebhardt and Comprone, to furnish lists of the readings they consider most important in training teachers at the undergraduate and doctoral levels respectively. Such lists fall slightly out of date almost before they reach print. Yet they provide useful reference points for those of us beginning programs of teacher training and those of us who wish to read in some depth in a new area.

The editors wish to thank Edward P. J. Corbett, Frank D'Angelo, Janet Emig, E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Lee Odell, Edward M. White, and Joseph M. Williams, who have agreed to serve on our National Advisory Board. We also wish to express our affection and appreciation to Sally Heaphy, who has served as business manager for many years and now leaves to begin full time teaching, and Marilyn Maiz, who, from our inception, has been our most helpful critic. Both now join the CUNY Advisory Board.