Richard C. Gebhardt

TRAINING BASIC WRITING TEACHERS AT A LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGE

BACKGROUND

In *Teaching Basic Skills in College,* Barbara Quint Gray and Virginia B. Slaughter note that "the phrase 'basic writing skills' designates a spectrum of ability that can be divided into three broad categories," ranging from "the semicoherent, misspelled, syntactically fractured first attempts of marginally literate high school educated adults," to writing that is "grammatical most of the time although it may retain some lapses" and that "exhibits the writer's ability to establish a topic and stick to it, to create sensible paragraph divisions, and to produce an orderly essay."[1] Generally, basic writing students at Findlay College fall in the middle of Gray and Slaughter's spectrum of ability:

> Writing at this level may retain some grammatical errors, but they should not be as pervasive or as disorienting as those at the first level. Sentence structure problems are likely to consist of fragments and run-on sentences rather than the nonsyntactic structures that appear in the work of less skilled writers....
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> Development of thought in Level 2 writing may be quite disjointed at the outset. Writers may start off with a sentence that looks as if it intends to establish a topic but is too vaguely expressed to establish the topic with much certainty. And they may abandon that topic altogther.... Such writers also evince little understanding of the convention of paragraphing and remain unfamiliar with the traditional rhetorical modes, continuing to present highly egocentric writing which evolves by a private logic of associations....However, their impromptu passages may continue, albeit

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[1] "Writing," in Alice Stewart Trillin and associates, *Teaching Basic Skills in College* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), pp. 16 and 19. Gray and Slaughter provide more detail and examples for each of these ends of the spectrum.

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> repetitively, for several hundred words, suggesting the Level 2 writers' conviction that they have something to say and that they can say it in writing. (p. 18)

Our students have a wide range of writing abilities. By and large, though, basic writing papers at Findlay College do not look like the most extreme examples in Mina P. Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* or like the paper with forty errors in two hundred words that David Bartholomae discusses in "The Study of Error."[2] To put it in Shaughnessy's terms, even though some of the students lack the command of language they need to "bring off the consolidations that are called for in writing," the most typical problems of Findlay's basic writers are lack of writing experience, lack of confidence in academic situations, and lack of positive motivation to learn.[3]

Much of this lack of academic confidence and motivation stems from reading problems and inadequate study strategies,[4] from unproductive academic habits and expectations fostered by former schooling,[5] and from the outright uncertainty many of Findlay's basic writers feel about attending college at all. But problems of attitude and motivation also reflect, as Andrea Lunsford has pointed out, the connection "between poorly developed writing skills and poor self-image, lack of confidence, and lower levels of cognitive development."[6] Cognitive limitations, for instance, combined with limited writing experience, can interfere with student ability to revise papers[7] and to write for other people. And so difficulty moving beyond "writer-based" drafts[8] is a significant problem for Findlay College's basic writers.

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[2]David Bartholomae, "The Study of Error," *College Composition and Communication*, 31 (October 1980): 259-260.

[3]Mina Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford, 1977), pp. 73, 79, 85, and 124-125.

[4]In "Reading," Margaret M. Waters suggests the influence deficiencies in reading ability and study habits can have on student attitude and performance. *Teaching Basic Skills in College*, ed. Trillin, especially pp. 91-95, and 134-137.

[5]See Richard Meeth and Robert Pitcher, *Overcoming Underachievement in College* (Arlington, Va: Studies in Higher Education, 1980), pp. 30-33.

[6]Andrea Lunsford, "The Content of Basic Writers' Essays," *College Composition and Communication*, 31 (October 1980): 284. Also see Lunsford's "Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer," *College English*, 41 (September 1979): 38-46.

[7]See Shaughnessy, p. 80.

[8]See Linda Flower, "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing," *College English*, 41 (September 1979): 19-37.

Cognitive ability also bears on student performance in academic assignments requiring abstraction and generalization from written materials. When Findlay's basic writers have to summarize material, respond to main points in articles, or compare pieces of nonfiction, they exhibit special problems. To use Thomas J. Farrell's words, they "read with cognitive tunnel-vision." That is, students judge details to be important because of the new information they contain, and so "they do not effectively differentiate between main ideas and supporting details."[9] As a result, summaries and related assignments often overlook or underemphasize key ideas, treat minor or supporting points as if they were theses, or completely miss important similarities or differences between articles.

Findlay College's basic writers, then, are most prominently marked by their lack of experience with the writing process and with the need to use the process to communicate to others, by their lack of academic confidence and motivation, and by difficulties abstracting and generalizing from written materials. Thus, Findlay's basic writing program tends to follow the second option Lawrence Kasden outlines in "An Introduction to Basic Writing": "While the types of writing problems that warrant the concern of the basic writing teacher at one school may primarily... be surface ones—syntax, grammar, standard dialect—at another school the basic writing teacher may start a course with more rhetorical concerns, such as organization, development, coherence, audience...."[10]

The college administers a placement test (brief samples of narrative and summary writing, the College Board's Test of Logical Relationships, and the Nelson-Denny Reading Test) in order to determine which students need English 100 before they take the required English 102, College Writing I. English 100, Writing and Reading Review (and English 101, a second-semester continuation for some students) is a four semester-hour course stressing writing process, the need to communicate to audiences, and the fact that writing and reading are reciprocal parts of written communication. The course is organized into units based on a number of the "basic thought patterns" Mina Shaughnessy recommended: this happened, this is the look of something, this is like or unlike this, this caused this, and this is what someone said (pp. 257-269). Sentence

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[9]Thomas J. Farrell, "Developing Literacy," *Journal of Basic Writing*, 2 (Fall/Winter 1978): 42.

[10]Lawrence Kasden, Introduction in *Basic Writing: Essays for Teachers, Researchers, and Administrators*, ed. Lawrence Kasden and Daniel Hoeber (Urbana, Ill.: NCTE, 1980): p. 7.

combining and other sentence-level work fit within this organizational structure, much of it taking place in lab sessions in the writing center. The culminating three-week unit on writing summaries probably is English 100's most direct attack on the common student need to build powers of generalization and abstraction. But throughout the semester, students also work with the reading teacher to locate main ideas, find organizing relationships, identify author assumptions, and draw inferences using nonfiction materials that serve as examples and models in the writing instruction.

Writing and Reading Review is the backbone of Findlay College's basic writing program. It has been designed as direct preparation for College Writing I, a course in which about two-thirds of the grade hinges on understanding, summarizing, analyzing, comparing, and drawing supporting evidence from nonfiction prose. Both courses are supported by a writing center staffed by undergraduate assistants who work with students in group lab sessions and individual conferences. The writing center also provides referral services for students who come for help with assigned papers in many courses or who are sent by teachers who stress writing in their courses.

In order to meet the needs of these formal and informal programs, Findlay College's efforts to train teachers of basic writers are aimed at several different groups:

—English faculty members teaching Writing Skills Review and College Writing I.

—Faculty members who stress writing in courses throughout the college.

—Undergraduate assistants who work in the writing center.

And these efforts range from a course in the teaching of writing and a less rigorous tutor training course, to faculty development workshops and informal staff discussion of useful articles on composition and the teaching of writing.

TRAINING WRITING ASSISTANTS

Teaching of Writing Course

Most undergraduate writing assistants take English 345, Teaching of Writing, an advanced composition course for students interested in teaching—elementary education majors, prospective high school teachers in English and other areas that stress writing, and students preparing to work as assistants in the writing center. This course evolves a bit from

what I laid out in "Balancing Theory with Practice" each time I teach it.[1] But several consistent threads have run through it: the need for frequent writing in composition classes, the importance of audience and the usefulness of having students write for their peers, the fact that writing is a dynamic process of discovery as well as communication, the importance of positive instruction by teachers who themselves are writers, and the value of helping students become their own teachers. Consistent, too, has been the assumption that such ideas should not be presented as abstract subjects removed from the act of writing. And so, as I wrote several years ago, readings, class discussions, and guest presentations "cannot be allowed to become ends in themselves."

> They are grist for the writers' mills; they are substance for papers. To guarantee that students think of their readings as a prelude to writing, I ask them to maintain a looseleaf notebook with sections for "Writing Tips," "Teaching Tips," and "Reactions." I also ask students to write papers... that require them to develop their own perspectives on ideas contained in the readings. (p.140)

At present, Teaching of Writing requires students to keep a notebook of information and responses, and to write a series of five hundred word summary-reaction papers on important readings. Students also write a reaction report on their observations during a practicum experience in the writing center. Throughout the course, students meet in small writing groups to discuss their own writing. And they prepare three 1500 word papers developing limited topics within these general areas:

> What writing teachers should know about the writing process
> What teachers should know about rhetoric
> A productive climate for writing instruction
> Using writing process or rhetoric in the kind of classes I will teach
> The basic writer
> Sentence combining.

Those requirements weave into a curriculum that highlights nine subjects. During each of these units, students read between three and five

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[1] For a description of the underlying philosophy and original structure of this course, see Richard C. Gebhardt, "Balancing Theory with Practice in the Training of Writing Teachers," *College Composition and Communication*, 28 (May 1977): 134-140.

articles from a longer list of library resources, including the sample of articles mentioned here.

Writing Processes (Two Weeks)

Emig, Janet. "Writing as a Mode of Learning." *College Composition and Communication,* May 1977.

_____ . "Hand, Eye, and Brain." In *Research on Composing.* Ed. Charles Cooper and Lee Odell. NCTE 1978.

Flower, Linda, and John Hayes. "Problem Solving Strategies and the Writing Process." *College English,* Dec. 1977.

Murray, Donald. "Internal Revision." In Cooper and Odell.

_____ "Write before Writing," *College Composition and Communication,* Dec. 1978.

Petrosky, Anthony, and James Brozick. "A Model for Teaching Writing Based upon Current Knowledge of the Composing Process." *English Journal,* Jan. 1979.

Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers." *English Language Arts Bulletin,* Winter/Spring 1980.

Winterowd, W. Ross. "Pre-Writing." In *The Contemporary Writer.* Harcourt, 1975.

Rhetorical Forces of Audience and Purpose (Two Weeks)

Ede, Lisa. "On Audience in Composition." *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1979.

Flower, Linda. "Writer-Based Prose." *College English,* Sept. 1979.

_____ , and John Hayes. "The Cognition of Discovery." *College Composition and Communication,* Feb. 1980.

Knoblauch, C. H. "Intentionality in the Writing Process." *College Composition and Communication,* May, 1980.

Tibbetts, A. M. "Rhetorical Stance Revisited." *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1975.

Ulanov, Barry. "The Relevance of Rhetoric." *English Journal.* April, 1966.

Walshe, R. D. "A Model of the Writing Situation." *College Composition and Communication,* Dec. 1977.

Writing Processes, Rhetoric, and Young Writers (One Week)

Clay, Maria. "Exploring with a Pencil." *Theory into Practice,* Dec. 1977.

Douglas, Wallace. "On Value in Children's Writing." In *English for the Junior High Years.* Ed. Stephen Dunning. NCTE, 1969.

Fichteneau, Robert. "Teaching Rhetorical Concepts." *Elementary*

English, March 1972.
Graves, Donald. "Let's Get Rid of the Welfare Mess in the Teaching of Writing." *Language Arts,* Winter 1975.
Larson, Richard. "Rhetorical Writing in the Elementary School." *Elementary English,* Dec. 1971.
Petty, Walter. "The Writing of Young Children." In Cooper and Odell.
Smith, Frank. "The Language Arts and the Learner's Mind." *Language Arts,* Feb. 1979.

Productive Climates for Writing Instruction (Two Weeks)

Arbur, Rosemarie. "The Student-Teacher Conference." *College Composition and Communication,* Dec. 1977.
Gebhardt, Richard. "Teamwork and Feedback." *College English,* Sept., 1980.
Gray, Barbara and Virginia Slaughter. "Methodology," a section in "Writing." In *Teaching Basic Skills in College.* Ed. Alice Trillin. Jossey-Bass, 1980.
Koch, Carl, and James Brazil. "The Comfort Zone." In *Strategies For Teaching the Composition Process. NCTE, 1978.*
Moffett, James. "Learning to Write by Writing." In *Teaching the Universe of Discourse.* Houghton Mifflin, 1968.
Murray, Donald. *A Writer Teaches Writing.* Houghton Mifflin, 1968. Especially sections 22, 23, 27, 33, 34.
Welch, Jack. "On the Importance of Cohesiveness in Writing Classes." *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1973.

Grammar and the Sentence (One Week +)

Calderonello, Alice, and Thomas Klein. "Grammar on the Firing Line: Its Relationship to Composition." *English Education,* Dec. 1979.
Collins, James. "Dialect Variation and Writing." *English Journal,* Nov. 1979.
Cooper, Charles. "An Outline for Writing Sentence Combining Exercises." *English Journal,* Jan. 1973.
D'Eloia, Sarah. "The Uses—and Limits—of Grammar." *Journal of Basic Writing,* Spring/Summer 1977.
Gorrell, Robert. "Usage as Rhetoric." *College Composition and Communication,* Feb. 1977.
"Students' Right to Their Own Language." A Special issue of *College Composition and Communication,* Fall, 1974.

The Basic College Writer (One Week +)

Bartholomae, David. "The Study of Error." *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1980.

Carkeet, David. "Understanding Syntactic Errors in Remedial Writing." *College English,* March 1977.

Halsted, Isabella. "Putting Error in Its Place." *Journal of Basic Writing.* Spring, 1975.

Linn, Bill. "Psychological Variants of Success." *College English,* April 1978.

Lunsford, Andrea. "Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer." *College English,* Sept. 1979.

_____. "The Content of Basic Writers' Essays." *College Composition,* Oct. 1980.

Shaughnessy, Mina. "Diving In." *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1976.

_____. "Basic Writing." In *Teaching Composition: Ten Bibliographic Essays.* Ed. Gary Tate. Texas Christian, 1976.

Reading and Writing (One Week)

Emig, Janet. The articles listed under Writing Processes.

Ginn, Dorothy. "Composing an Abstract." *College Composition and Communication,* Dec. 1976.

Sternglass, Marilyn, "Composition Teacher as Reading Teacher." *College Composition and Communication,* Dec. 1976.

_____. "Sentence Combining and the Reading of Sentences." *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1980.

Waters, Margaret. "Reading." In Trillin.

Wresch, William. "What Reading Research Tells Us about Writing." *English Language Arts Bulletin,* Winter/Spring 1980.

The Paragraph and Coherence (One Week)

Cohan, Carol. "Writing Effective Paragraphs." *College Composition and Communication,* Dec. 1976.

Irmscher, William. "Teaching Structure." In *Teaching Expository Writing.* Holt, 1979.

Stalter, William. "A Sense of Structure." *College Composition and Communication,* Dec. 1978.

Stern, Arthur. "When Is a Paragraph?" *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1976.

Winterowd, W. Ross. "The Grammar of Coherence." *College English,* May, 1970.

Making, Responding to, and Grading Assignments (Two Weeks)

Coleman, Mary. "Individualizing Instruction through Written Comments." *Language Arts,* March 1980.

Cooper, Charles. "Measuring Growth in Writing." *English Journal,* March 1975.

Hoffman, Eleanor, and John Shifsky. "Designing Writing Assignments." *English Journal,* Dec. 1977.

Judy, Stephen. "Writing for the Here and Now." *English Journal,* Jan. 1973.

Kelley, Lou. "Is Competent Copyreading a Violation of the Students' Right to Their Own Language?" *College Composition and Communication,* Oct. 1974.

Larson, Richard. "Teaching Before We Judge." *The Leaflet,* 1967.

This curriculum does not look like a program exclusively for basic writing teachers—certainly not like the graduate course Constance J. Gefvert outlines in "Training Teachers of Basic Writing."[12] But Teaching of Writing does address the needs of Findlay's basic writers for instruction that emphasizes the process of writing for other people about academic subjects. It also reflects the fact that Findlay College is a small, undergraduate institution which can support, at best, an annual teaching-of-writing course for writing assistants and prospective teachers of the language arts. For instance, unit three, "Writing Processes, Rhetoric, and Young Writers," is important in a course in which up to half of a given class may be elementary education majors. But there are connections between writing difficulties of basic writers and their experiences in earlier language learning. So this unit is in no way inappropriate for students who later will teach high school or college writing. Similarly, unit nine, "Making, Responding to, and Grading Assignments," fits into the preprofessional training of future school teachers. It also helps writing assistants work with students who have difficulty understanding their assignments, and it helps them understand the kinds of comments teachers make when they refer student work to the Writing Center.

Typically, each unit of the course opens with an overview presentation in which I suggest the emphasis of the unit and orient class members to the items on that unit's reading list. After that, students read assigned articles, recording key ideas and responses in their notebooks, and they prepare summary-reaction pieces. Frequently, students exchange these summary pieces for "practice marking"—each student adding comments

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[12] *Basic Writing,* ed. Kasden and Hoeber, pp. 119-140.

along lines dictated by the grading guidelines of College Writing I.[13] And periodically, papers are duplicated for class discussion. Students also work on longer, more wide-ranging papers that integrate their personal perspectives, their experiences in the writing center, and information from several articles. A great deal of class time is spent discussing student writing, though there also is some discussion of key readings—their ideas and their effectiveness as pieces of writing.

To a large extent, Teaching of Writing illustrates the form-follows-function principle. Since college and high school writers need experience with the writing process, the course demands much writing and re-writing. And since a major problem that basic writing teachers will face is student difficulty reading, understanding, and writing about nonfiction prose, the course requires close reading and the writing of summaries. Similarly, the course employs classroom techniques (such as the questioning strategy outlined in the next section) that help students understand assigned articles and, at the same time, give students ways to help their future clients read more effectively. Finally, since writing instructors, whether assistants in the writing center or future high school teachers, must have a real feel of what it is like to write for a genuine audience, Teaching of Writing emphasizes small, collaborative groups in which students

> ...practice the concepts of feedback, diagnosis, and prescription about what they are reading. In these groups, students learn about audience definition and audience response, and about how it feels to have a key point missed by readers interested in little but well-placed commas. In these groups, students come to understand the importance of cooperation, the power of peer pressure, the difficulty of opening up to a critic, the bitterness of a writer under attack. And all of these things reinforce what the students are reading and writing about and thereby help students prepare to be effective writing teachers. (p. 140)

Less Formal Training of Writing Assistants

Even though Findlay College offers a formal course in the teaching of writing, some writing assistants cannot take the course, or they cannot

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[13]In the future, I plan to handle practice marking so as to follow Kenneth Bruffee's idea of a "progressive process of peer criticism" through which students learn to "distinguish three types of analytical readings: objective, rhetorically descriptive analysis; evaluative or judgmental response; and reaction to the issues and point of view developed in a paper." "Staffing and Operating Peer-Tutoring Writing Centers," *Basic Writing*, ed. Kasden and Hoeber, p. 148.

take it before they begin work in the writing center. Such students usually are majors in English, communications, elementary education, or bilingual studies; they have done well in College Writing I and then have taken additional work in College Writing II, Advanced Composition, or English Language. They begin working in the writing center in controlled situations in which they can observe writing teachers and more experienced assistants, provide general reader-feedback on drafts, and begin to develop experience working with students.

In the semester before they start to work, these students spend some time in the writing center and read a pamphlet that explains the operation of the center and anticipates questions new assistants are likely to have. They also read the sound, non-technical advice Donald M. Murray offers about "The Writing Teacher's Seven Skills" and "The Techniques of Teaching Writing" in *A Writer Teaches Writing* (Houghton Mifflin, 1968). Then the new assistants turn to a selected group of articles which they read and discuss in staff meetings while they work in the writing center.

Feedback and the Climate of Conferences:
Moffett, James. "Learning to Write by Writing."
Arbur, Rosemarie. "The Student-Teacher Conference."
Kelly, Lou. "Is Competent Copyreading a Violation of the Students' Right to Their Own Language."
Linn, Bill. "Psychological Variants of Success."

Problems in Student Writing Processes:
Flower, Linda and John Hayes. "The Cognition of Discovery."
Sommers, Nancy. "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers."

Grammar and Error:
Gorrell, Robert. "Usage as Rhetoric."
Calderonello, Alice and Thomas Klein. "Grammar on the Firing Line."
Bartholomae, David. "The Study of Error."

Paragraph and Structure:
Cohan, Carol. "Writing Effective Paragraphs."
Irmscher, William. "Teaching Structure."

In order to help new assistants understand such readings and learn an effective teaching strategy they can use with clients who have poor reading comprehension, I have students reread carefully a critical few

paragraphs in an article, instead of asking for a general discussion. Then I have the students ask *me* questions about the passage—an exercise that stimulates their critical thinking about the article and gives me a chance to reveal my own thinking about ideas in the article and to talk about related ideas and resources. Finally, I have the assistants put aside their copies of the article while I ask questions that require the assistants to probe their memories, form generalizations, apply the reading to experiences they are having in the writing center, and relate the selected passage to other parts of the article and to other things they have been reading.[14]

Staff meetings also focus on what assistants have observed from their work in the writing center. Here, the effort is to let people talk through their experiences, sharing insights and approaches and profiting from the broader background of writing teachers and more experienced assistants. Other parts of staff meetings are given to role playing and discussion about how various assistants and teachers would approach specific writing problems and selected student papers.

TRAINING FACULTY MEMBERS

English Faculty Members

Professional discussions about the training or re-training of English faculty members to teach writing frequently focus on the kind of teachers Robert Lyons has described: "senior members of the department who have not taught writing for a number of years. These faculty members are now teaching composition because shrinking budgets and low enrollments have reduced both the staff and the number of electives in the English department...."[15] In a department like this—a department in which, to use the words of Thomas Bonner, Jr., "suddenly everyone has to teach composition"—faculty training is quite a problem. For training efforts must begin with rock-bottom issues of attitude and motivation. As Bonner puts it: "teaching composition must be established as a common objective of the whole department," faculty members "must be convinced that a comprehensive approach to teaching composition will help both themselves and the department," and "the department must identify

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[14]This approach is a modification of the "reciprocal questioning" strategy developed by Anthony Manzo and John Sherk and recommended as a way to increase reading comprehension and cognitive ability in Deanna Martin and others, *The Learning Center: A Comprehensive Model for Colleges and Universities* (Kansas City: University of Missouri, 1977; ERIC: ED 162 294).

[15]Robert Lyons, "Faculty Development through Professional Collaboration," *Writing Program Administration*, 4 (Winter 1980): 13.

specific skills for each level of undergraduate instruction so that the nature of the job becomes clearly defined."[16]

Happily, professional development work in writing at Findlay College does not need to begin at this level. The six full-time faculty members (a professor and three associate professors of English, all tenured, an English instructor, and an assistant professor of reading) all teach developmental courses and recognize the importance of this teaching to the college, to their own careers, and, most importantly, to their students. Beyond this, the English faculty has a tradition of working together on the first-year writing program, of jointly reading placement tests and final examinations, of sharing teaching problems and successful teaching strategies, and of working to improve English 100 and English 102. In short, the English faculty is actively and cooperatively engaged in teaching writing.

This commitment to writing and to the common experience of teaching writing means that English staff "training" to teach basic writing can be a much more informal enterprise than it may need to be elsewhere. A few years ago, for instance, the department bought paperback copies of *Errors and Expectations* for the staff, and all of us got together to discuss the book, one chapter at a time. On other occasions, the staff has convened to discuss a specific teaching strategy one person has found useful, or to consider the applicability to our courses of an article one staff member has reading in the *Journal of Basic Writing, College Composition and Communication,* or another journal.

Many of these discussions take place while the staff is trying to evaluate and improve Findlay College's first-year writing courses. In such curriculum development sessions, the writing director does exercise formal leadership—announcing a series of meetings, setting agenda, organizing materials for discussion and drafts of changes that grow out of discussions. In 1979-1980, for example, the staff worked together to rethink the basic English 100 course as part of a federal Title III SDIP grant. Together, the English faculty examined the writing and reading needs of our incoming students. And we studied materials such as Mina Shaughnessy's chapter on "Basic Writing" in Gary Tate's *Teaching Composition* (Texas Christian, 1976); Andrea Lunsford's "What We Know—and Don't Know—about Remedial Writing" (*CCC,* Feb. 1978) and "Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer" (*CE,* Sept. 1979); and

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[16] Thomas Bonner, Jr., "Six Steps toward Departmental Engagement in Composition," *Writing Program Administration,* 4 (Winter 1980): 20.

Thomas Farrell's "Developing Literacy," (*JBW,* Fall/Winter 1978). We also reviewed a half dozen basic writing texts and a similar number of reading texts, in the process of developing the integrated writing and reading course sketched in the background section above. Through all of this, it is clear, we were helping "train" each other to teach composition better. And yet, this training was fairly unobtrusive, since the real motive behind our work was to improve Findlay College's basic writing program.

Similarly, an unobtrusive sort of "training" continued after the program was developed and the writing and reading teachers began working with the general course outline, the texts, and the grading methods the whole English faculty had developed. When the basic writing and reading program first was taught, Findlay had a new person on the staff. The course outline, and a number of memos summarizing thinking that had gone on during the development of the course gave this teacher an immediate point of reference and an agenda for discussions with the writing director and other English faculty members. And staff meetings of the English 100 teachers inevitably turned to what was working and what was not. These discussions generally returned to the theories and the practices the staff had tried to incorporate from earlier reading, and more often than not, they led one or more of the teachers to modify strategies they were using.

I do not mean to suggest by this optimistic view of staff training that Findlay College's English faculty does not need to work continually to keep up with developments in the profession. But the staff has at its disposal many excellent sources of information: library or departmental subscriptions to the *Journal of Basic Writing, College Composition and Communication, Freshman English News, Research in the Teaching of English, Writing Lab Newsletter, Journal of Remedial and Developmental Education,* and other periodicals; good library holdings in the teaching of writing and a library acquisitions policy that encourages staff members to order new titles; a departmental budget that lets teachers photocopy and circulate interesting articles. Moreover, Findlay College is interested in writing and in faculty development—right up to its Academic Vice President and its President—and it fairly frequently sponsors workshops for all faculty members. Clearly, though, the English faculty's greatest strength is that, by and large, its members are interested in trying to use ideas from articles and workshops to improve their teaching of writing.

General Faculty Members

The interest that the English staff feels in teaching writing well is not

matched by the faculty at large. The faculty is not hostile to efforts to promote writing in a wide range of courses, and a fair number of individuals in education, science, business, humanities, and social sciences do realize that, no matter how effective a first-year writing program is, students must receive reinforcing writing demands later, in their major courses. But, in general, the situation at Findlay College resembles one Toby Fulwiler has described:

> Biology, music, and chemistry teachers know, experientially and intuitively, that revision, for example, is necessary for good writing; at the same time these teachers seldom make multiple draft writing assignments... which reflect that tacit knowledge. Their understanding of writing has not been translated into classroom pedagogy. While a few teachers continue to insist that writing is strictly the business of English teachers, most teachers simply have not thought about teaching writing nor felt confident enough to teach it.[17]

These last two attitudes—not thinking about teaching writing and lack of confidence in one's ability to teach it—have been the special targets of Findlay College's efforts to help general faculty members work more effectively with writing. Over the past few years, there have been several formal workshops and follow-up sessions, all of which have tried to raise faculty awareness that they *can* do things in their classes that will help students write better.

The first of these seminars, "Writing as a Way to Learn," was attended by about half of the college's faculty and by a sprinkling of administrators, including the Academic Dean, Dean of Students, and Business Manager. In planning this workshop, I tried to appeal to the vested interests of teachers committed to helping students learn accounting, chemistry, history, and other subjects. So, instead of slanting the session so that it might seem to be asking teachers in other disciplines to *help teach writing,* I organized a seminar to demonstrate that writing is an activity through which students can *learn whatever subjects* they are taking.

I paid twenty-five dollar honoraria to five volunteers who agreed to read an article, write an abstract of it, and bring ideas from the reading into the workshop. When the workshop began, I was able to list these

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[17] Toby Fulwiler, "Interdisciplinary Writing Workshops," *CEA Critic,* 43 (January 1981): 27-28.

resource people on the program: an education teacher prepared to talk about Janet Emig's "Writing as a Mode of Learning," a sociologist ready to report on Myrna Smith's "Bruner on Writing" (*CCC*, May 1977), a philosopher able to comment on Sondra Perl and Arthur Egendorf's "The Process of Creative Discovery" (*Linguistics, Stylistics, and the Teaching of Composition*, ed. Donald McQuade, (L&S Books, 1979), an historian who had studied Ann Berthoff's "Tolstoy, Vygotsky, and the Making of Meaning" (*CCC*, Oct. 1978), and a business professor able to talk about Linda Flower and John Hayes' "Problem-Solving Strategies and the Writing Process." And since I had sent out reading materials to teachers who registered in advance, the workshop began with a fair number of people who had already familiarized themselves with William Irmscher's "Writing as a Way of Learning and Developing" (*CCC*, Oct. 1979), Lisa Ede's "On Audience and Composition," Andrea Lunsford's "Cognitive Development and the Basic Writer," and a collection of *WLA Newsletter* articles on ways to teach writing in various disciplines.

This workshop barely scratched the surface of its subject, and yet it did introduce teachers to some genuinely important ideas:

- That "writing" is a complex activity that varies from person to person
- That writing pulls the resources of brain, hand, and eye together so that it creates as well as communicates ideas
- That writing about complex, abstract subjects generally takes more time than most academic writing assignments allow
- That teachers can combat this time problem by helping students use discovery strategies and by insisting on revision of early drafts before grading papers.

Faculty found the ideas interesting, partly because I tried to keep the session theoretical—focused on learning generally—rather than too explicitly aimed at how to teach writing. And as the session drew to a close, a chemist asked whether I could lead a second workshop, one stressing techniques of teaching writing.

"Writing as a Way to Teach," the follow-up workshop I offered some time later, was attended, again, by nearly half the faculty. Because several new teachers had joined the faculty since the previous seminar, I began with some review. But, in keeping with faculty interest, this workshop had a more strongly "practical" flavor than the first one. Using demonstration and discussion, I introduced the following materials:

Hoffman, Eleanor and John Schifsky. "Designing Writing Assignments."
Flower, Linda and John Hayes. "Problem-Solving Strategies and the Writing Process."
Flower, Linda. "Writer Based Prose."
Larson, Richard. "Discovery through Questioning" (*CE,* Nov. 1968).
An assortment of collaborative writing guides, grading guidelines, and peer-evaluation worksheets used by teachers in first-year writing courses.

And the workshop offered information, and a bit of practice, on these five practical suggestions for using writing as a way to teach in any discipline:

- Develop writing assignments likely to help students learn, rather than assignments that exist only as evaluation tools.
- Structure early assignments and/or classroom activities to help students generate ideas and find focuses for the papers they will write eventually.
- Handle assignments and class activities so that students cannot pretend that they are writing for their own clones.
- Set expectations and structure assignments so that students must look critically at the logic, clarity, and evidence of first drafts before they can complete their papers.
- Encourage students to go to the writing center when they are starting on papers and after they have finished their first drafts.

Such suggestions did not fall into limbo as soon as the workshop was over. Because Findlay College had begun a new supporting skills system, including a writing center among its other services, interested faculty members were able to refer students for work on papers in their courses. They also could arrange for special class presentations on topics like "Brainstorming," "Narrowing a Topic," and "What Is 'Revision'?" Then, too, the Supporting Skills System gave me the time and resources to develop materials, host informal faculty sessions about writing, and buy coffee for teachers who seemed interested in talking about how they might modify their writing assignments to help students learn more effectively.

Clearly, Findlay has a continuing need for writing programs aimed at general faculty members. Still, I am heartened to know that over a third of the faculty refers students for work in the writing center, and that at least some teachers have changed the ways they handle writing assignments so that they are helping students to learn and to write more

effectively. And, if I need more encouragement, I can always pull out my correspondence file and read this kind of unsolicited letter from one teacher in a team-taught biology and ethics course:

> In my Freshman Seminar last semester, my partner and I assigned a term paper. As you know, we had you come into class and lead the students in exercises designed to help them to choose a topic. These seemed to be helpful to many students.
>
> In addition to that, we had each student bring to us a rough draft of the term paper. We found that the most common and glaring errors were those of clarity of purpose and organization and development. In other words, the students could not state clearly what they wanted to say, nor could they organize the material in a systematic way....
>
> We sent them to the writing center where assistants worked with them on these particular weaknesses. When the students re-wrote their papers, the improvement was marked indeed. A much higher degree of clarity and organization was quite apparent.