

On the Bulletin Board

RESOURCES IN THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION

Robert Root

Organizations

In addition to being a vital national organization, NCTE encourages affiliate groups throughout the country to reach out to language arts teachers on every level. In Michigan the affiliate is the Michigan Council of Teachers of English, whose newsletter, The Michigan English Teacher, appears eight times yearly, keeping its membership informed of publications and events both in the state and nationally. MCTE also sponsors or co-sponsors regional conferences and meetings, like the Engfest at Western Michigan University, the FLARES activities in Flint, and the articulation workshop in Mt. Pleasant. Its next annual conference will be held in East Lansing, at the Kellogg Center, MSU, May 2,3,4, 1980. Currently MCTE is encouraging the legislature and the State Board of Education to broaden the scope of the reading bill to include all communication skills, especially writing. For information, membership forms, and publications, write MCTE, P.O. Box 36664, Detroit, MI, 48236.

Publications

Many of the state affiliates of NCTE publish periodicals or other materials. MCTE, for example, has a mini-monograph series, offering "concise overviews of theory and practice in current issues and problems in the teaching of English." Two of particular interest are:

Kortwright, Judy, Teaching Correctness: An Alternative to Grammar, MCTE, 1977, 16 pp.

A junior high teacher discusses practical ways to teach correctness without grammar drills and lectures.

Yesner, Seymour, Responding to the Basics Crisis: What Do We Do Next? MCTE, 1979, 12 pp.

Yesner, Consultant in English for the Minneapolis Public Schools, responds

to the concerns of beleaguered English teachers over public political reactions to "the basics crisis."

MCTE has also initiated a yearbook, beginning with:

Maxwell, Rhoda J. & Stephen Judy, eds., Composing: The 1979 Yearbook of the Michigan Council of Teachers of English, MCTE, 1979.

It contains articles from teachers on all levels about the kinds of units, lessons, activities, and approaches they find successful in their own classrooms. Some titles: "Writing and Self-Concept," "Creating Simulated and Real-Life Audiences," "Strategies for Collaboration," "Steps Toward Self-Assessment."

Other NCTE affiliates have also produced interesting and useful publications:

Donelson, Ken, ed., Rhetoric and Composition in the English Classroom: Arizona English Bulletin, Vol. 16, No. 2, February, 1974.

The teaching of writing and its problems are discussed in a broad range of articles by classroom teachers on all levels, many offering practical classroom tips and means to solving problems. 32 articles, 210 pages.

Gallo, Donald R., ed., Confronting Writing Obstacles: Connecticut English Journal, Vol. 9, No. 1, Fall, 1977.

Elementary to college mix of theoretical and practical articles including "Writing Needs a Reason," "Talking and Writing," "Locating Real Writing Audiences," "Using Art to Teach Writing," "Visual and Verbal Exposition," "Spelyng Maydde Sympil," and others on linguistics, sentence combining, radio horror shows, correction, and "What's Expected of High School Graduates--A View from a College Department." 173 pages.

NCTE has itself published a new book on classroom practices:

Stanford, Gene, ed., Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1978-1979: Activating the Passive Student. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1978.

An elementary-college mix of classroom-tested methods to make students get involved with composing, including "Producing a Slide-Tape Presentation for a Public Audience," "Writing an Episodic Novel," "Reversing the Revision Blues," "An Exercise for the Day Papers Are Due," and articles on correspondence and speech. Other sections are on reading, poetry, and research. 151 pages. These last three publications are available through NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

The ERIC System

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is an organization sponsored by NCTE and the National Institute of Education in the administration of the Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (RCS). ERIC/RCS examines and makes available such diverse materials as conference reports, research papers, literature reviews, guides to curriculum, and program descriptions, all of which are indexed in Resources in Education (RIE) and produced in both microfiche and paper forms. Some sample titles, with their index numbers:

NAEP, Writing Mechanics, 1969-1974. ED 113 736.

NAEP, Expressive Writing. ED 130 312.

Carl J. Fisher & Catherine E. Studier, Misspellings of Children in the Middle Grades. ED 143 030.

Don Donlan, "How to Involve Other Departments in Helping You Teaching Writing." ED 145 452.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Student Guide to Writing a Journal. ED 147 829.

It is impossible to list all the available useful titles here but the ERIC system is a marvelous resource.

Some of the material accepted by ERIC finds its way into print as part of the NCTE/ERIC/RCS **Theory Into Practice** or **Theory and Research Into Practice** series. Three vital titles for teachers of writing are:

Beach, Richard, Writing About Ourselves and Others. Urbana, IL: ERIC/NCTE, 1977.

A synthesis of theory concerning autobiography, memoir, and portrait writing, theory concerning different characteristics of self, and composing process theory. The practice section has four parts: "Discussion: Introduction to AMP," "Choosing a Topic," "Researching," and "Writing a Draft." 27 pp.

Hawkins, Thom. Group Inquiry Techniques for Teaching Writing. Urbana, IL: ERIC/NCTE, 1976.

After an explanation of group inquiry techniques from personal, social, and pedagogical perspectives, detailing the advantages to student, class, and teacher, Hawkins goes on to apply theory to the teaching of writing. The practice section explains how to set up groups, how to make them work and help students to cope with them, how to help students make their own discoveries, how to create the mood to act on specific problems, and how to utilize peer criticism. Contains a set of sample cooperative and competitive tasks and an evaluation form. 41 pp.

Hillocks, George, Jr., Observing and Writing, Urbana, IL: ERIC/NCTE, 1975.

Hillocks tackles the problem of lack of specificity in student writing and discusses the need to relate the stages of observation to writing. Exercises are meant to develop students' powers as observers and recorders of sensory experience and involve them directly in observing. 15 activities follow, including: The Spy Game, the Bag Game, Blind Man's Bluff, Listening to Sounds, Observing Bodily Sensations, Listening to Dialogue. 25 pp. (cont. on p. 51)

Arlene Stover (cont. from p. 41)
in a natural language-learning process of trial-error-feedback.

The role of the teacher is vital to the success of any writing class: The writing class should not be teacher-centered; it should be student-centered. In a student-centered classroom, the teacher is a motivator, facilitator, and feedback source. Teachers must begin where the students are, not where they think students should be.

The purpose of writing is communication (to write about something, in some medium, for some purpose, and to someone). The writer knows that his obligation to the reader is to express himself in his best possible manner. Therefore, the emphasis in writing instruction must be on effectiveness of texts and not correctness of units of the texts.

Traditionally, grammatical punctilio in writing has been taught the wrong way, at the wrong time, and for the wrong reason. It should be meaningful and functional for the student. Usage and mechanics should be treated as editorial tools which can serve to make texts more generally understandable. As the student realizes the demands of the business world and the academy, he will want to know their writing conventions. Then he will learn them; not when he is told to correct ten sentences with agreement problems for homework.

The issue is not whether teaching correctness in writing is right or wrong. Rather it is one of timing and purpose. I believe Johnny can write--but only if we let him. Too often, we have imposed before the students have composed. We have filled them with rules for surface production while ignoring the deep structure of language. We have to stop frosting the cake before the batter has been mixed and baked.

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Events

February 6, 1980, **Writing Across the Continuum Conference**, MCTE Region 6 and Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant.

February 14-16, 1980 Midwest Regional Conference on English in the Two-Year College, Kalamazoo Center Hilton Inn, Kalamazoo, MI.

March 6 **Regional Conference**, Northwestern Michigan College, Traverse City.

March 13-15, 1980. **Conference on College Composition and Communication**, Washington Hilton, Washington, DC.

March 21-23, 1980. **National Conference on Language Arts in the Elementary School**, St. Anthony Hotel, San Antonio, TX.

March 26-29, 1980 Joint Meeting: **Secondary School English Conference and Conference on English Education**, Omaha Hilton, Omaha, Nebraska.

If you are aware of upcoming meetings, conferences, and other events in writing, please send information for inclusion in this feature to: Robert Root, Department of English, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant 48859.

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