Resources in the Teaching of Composition

Robert L. Root, Jr.
Central Michigan University

Books

Our focus in this issue will be chiefly upon a group of anthologies which appeared in the past few years and deal with a range of issues in the teaching of composition, from theories of how people write to curriculum design, testing and measurement, and classroom practices. While all of these books contain articles which merit particular attention, the essays in one book seem to raise issues sweeping enough to demand a review of some individual pieces. The book is:

The Nature and Measurement of Competency in English. Ed.Charles R. Charles R. Cooper. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1981.

A collection of essays ranging broadly over the issues of measurement and assessment in English, including articles on competence in reading, media competency, and the politics of minimum competency as well as an overview of the issues and articles on language competence and competence in writing.

I especially want to draw attention to three articles in the book: Cooper, Charles R. "Competency Testing: Issues and Overview."

Reviews the background on the competency-testing movement and the issues it raises of influence on instruction, competency-based education, test limitation, grade-level testing, expectation levels, remediation, forms of competence, and centralization. Appendix includes NCTE Resolutions on Legislatively Mandated Competency-Based Testing and Excessive Focus on Sub-Skills.

Mellon, John. "Language Competence."

Describes language competence as a natural linguistic process and distinguishes it from language performance skills learned in school. Delineates those seven skills as: communicative skills, fluen-

cies, discourse skills, critical and appreciational skills, orthographic skills utilized in reading and writing, and self-governance skills. Discusses implications for teaching and testing and offers suggested readings for a background in language learning and testing.

Odell, Lee. "Defining and Assessing Competence in Writing."

Defines competence in writing as "the ability (1) to discover what one wishes to say and (2) to choose the appropriate language, sentence structure, organization, and information to achieve a desired purpose with a given audience," examines existing procedures for measuring writing ability, and suggests alternative ways of measuring competence.

Another book which touches on the issues discussed here from the perspective of Great Britain is:

Stibbs, Andrew. Assessing Children's Language: Guidelines For Teachers. Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1979.

Discusses the principles of assessing language and evaluates the testing and examining now being practiced in England. Offers case histories of children's language-use. The following books are remarkable for the quality of the explorations they provide of topics pertinent to the teaching of writing. The first is a research project about the writing students are asked to do and the remainder are anthologies of theory and research, all containing practical implications for the classroom.

Applebee, Arthur N. Writing in the Secondary School: English and the Content Areas. NCTE Reserch Report No. 21. Urbana, IL: NCTE 1982.

Describes a study "designed to (1) describe the writing secondary school students are asked to do in six major subject areas, (2) examine teacher's pur-

poses and techniques in making writing assignments, and (3) illustrate the extent to which the characteristics of these assignments varied with subject area, grade level, and patterns of instruction." Discovers a discouraging lack of writing opportunities for students and preponderance of poor instruction. Makes recommendations for the improvement of the teaching of writing, including a good annotated bibliography of sources which provide strategies for incorporating writing into content area instruction.

Cognitive Processes in Writing. Ed. Lee W. Gregg and Erwin R. Steinberg. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1980.

Drawing on an interdisciplinary symposium on cognitive processes in writing, this collection offers a section on theoretical approaches, including "Identifying the Organization of Writing Processes" by John R. Hayes and Linda S. Flower, explaining and illustrating protocol analysis, and "Development in Writing" by Carl Bereiter, suggesting suggesting possible stages and offering a tentative model of skills systems integration. A second section has several articles on writing research and application, including "Teaching Writing by Teaching the Process of Discovery: An Interdisciplinary Enterprise" by Lee Odell.

Exploring Speaking-Writing Relationships: Connections and Contrasts. Ed. Barry M. Kroll and Roberta J. Vann. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1981.

A collection of essays exploring the relationship between speaking and writing in a variety of ways, offering a linguistic analysis, a reading perspective, a cultural perspective, a descriptive phenomenological view, and articles from the perspectives of business, media, EFL, hemispheric function, and development.

The Language Connection: Writing and Reading Across the Curriculum. Eds. Toby Fulwiler and Art Young. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1982.

Offers twelve essays and an annotated bibliography drawing on the resources of the interdisciplinary experience at Michigan Technological University. Emphasizes writing as a means of learning and balances theory and practice directed at the use of writing and reading for learning across the curriculum.

Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition. Ed. Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle. Canadian Council of Teachers of English. Conway, Arkansas: L & S Books, 1980.

Evolving from the 1979 CCTE Conference on "Learning to Write," this collection gathers together papers by 19 participants, and the editors provide a useful overview of the issues of the volume. Articles include "The Tacit Tradition: The Inevitability of a Multi-Disciplinary Approach to Writing Research" (Emig), "Polanyi and the Contexts of Composing" (Watson), "Shaping on the Point of Utterance" (Britton), and articles by Kinneavy, Murray, Bertoff, Corbett, Winterowd, Butturf and Sommers, and others. The articles are arranged by their implied or expressed place in the rhetorical tradition, but they are not necessarily explicit investigations of rhetoric, per se, so much as explorations in the theory and pedagogy of modern composition teaching.

The range of books specifically directed at a classroom pedagogy has been broad in recent years and the books below are representative of that range, dealing with subjects as specific as basic writing, technical writing, and curriculum design, and topics as broad as dealing with the volume of student work.

Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1979-1980: How to Handle the Paper Load. Ed. Gene Stanford. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1979.

Offers good, classroom-tested practices in journal writing, teacher involvement in place of evaluation, student self-editing, responding to students, and alternative audiences, all designed to keep students writing while lowering the amount of teacher reading and evaluating.

Courses, Components, and Exercises in Technical Communication. Ed. Dwight W. Stevenson. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1981.

Addressed to technical writing teachers, this anthology details whole courses, major segments of courses, and individual exercises and relates classroom teaching to the world of business, industry, and government.

Cramer, Ronald L. Children's Writing and Language Growth. Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1978.

A textbook on the language arts for elementary-middle school teachers, offering an overview of language acquisition and learning, the relationship among the language arts, and a host of ideas for classroom teaching of the language arts.

Lindemann, Erika. A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers. NY: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Provides an overview of recent research in composition by discussing the composing process, synthesizing the essentials in rhetoric, cognition, and linguistic theory, and describing ways of teaching writing with all this background in mind; includes a section on "Teaching as Rhetoric," dealing with making and evaluating writing assignments and designing writing courses.

The Teaching of Technical Writing. Eds. Donald H. Cunningham and Herman A. Estrin. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1975.

A solid collection of articles on teaching technical writing, divided into sub-categories which define technical writing, discuss curriculum and student needs, offer a wealth of teaching ideas, and even treat technical writing as an art. One section debates the relationship of freshman composition and technical writing.

Three Language-Arts Curriculum Models: Pre-Kindergarten Through College. Ed. Barrett J. Mandel. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1980.

The book is divided into sections for each stage of schooling, elementary, middle, secondary, two-year college, and four-year college. Each section is an introductory essay and then essays by advocates of three types of curriculum: competency-based, emphasizing mastery; process-based, emphasizing discovery; and heritage-based, emphasizing culture and literary tradition.

Wiener, Harvey S. The Writing Room: A Resource Book for Teachers of English. NY: Oxford University Press, 1981.

A guide for beginning teachers of basic writing, emphasizing the practical approaches that have worked for Wiener, and including a superb annotated bibliography on basic writing prepared by Theodore Sheckels.