



# WLA Newsletter

. . .writing as a liberating activity. . .

ISSUE EIGHT

FINDLAY COLLEGE

## Interconnections\*

### HIGH SCHOOL PERCEPTIONS OF COLLEGE WRITING PROGRAMS

Gary Jones  
Findlay High School

This conference, I am sure, is a response to the poor publicity we in English have received lately. The indictment of English is clearly spelled out by media reports ("Why Johnny Can't Write"), by falling SAT scores, and by both parents and students. I am sure that I need not elaborate. The defense, too, has been publicized. The March 1976 English Journal contained an article titled, "The Public vs. the English Teachers: A Reply to Stephen Dunning." In that article, Arthur Stern of Teachers College, Columbia University, condenses Dunning's response to critics of English teachers this way:

1. Problems of literacy start in the home.
2. English teachers accomplish little without the support from other academic areas.
3. English teachers are not trained to teach writing and reading. They are students of literature.
4. Literacy will cost additional millions for research and additional billions for new school environments.

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### COLLEGE PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL WRITING PROGRAMS

Mary Ann Sullivan  
Bluffton College

At first when I was asked to make some comments to this group, I was reluctant--reluctant because I am so very ignorant of what really goes on in high schools today. I don't believe I have been inside in a high school except to see a few plays since I left my own. I have not been directly involved in the English education program at Bluffton College so I have only hear-say from our majors to go on. But on reflection I decided that a person like me was a good choice to speak, precisely because I think I am representative of college English teachers. We are often pretty ignorant or misinformed about what really happens in high school.

I would like to say at the outset, however, that I do not share the condescension of some college teachers toward high school teachers. I admire their efforts, for my impression is that they often work under very difficult conditions. As a college teacher I have never taught more than

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\*The "Interconnections" section of WLA explores common concerns that connect writing instruction in college, high school, middle school, and elementary school. These two articles are abbreviated versions of papers delivered at a conference on "Writing: Common Concern of High School and College Teachers," Findlay College, 3 April 1976. WLA welcomes short articles examining the approaches or materials of one level of writing instruction from the perspective of another level.

three courses at one time, and in writing courses I have never had more than twenty-five students. Yet I hear that high school teachers may have five or six preparation and that class sizes may be up to thirty students. It just doesn't seem humanly possible to me to mark adequately more than about forty papers a week; therefore, I don't see how high school English Teachers could be expected to assign a paper a week as college writing instructors typically do.

However, some of my perceptions, at least of the high school curriculum, aren't so positive or sympathetic. These impressions are based on my awareness of the kinds of verbal skills my writing students come to college with. For the past four years at Bluffton College I have served as proficiency coordinator; my responsibilities have included counselling with entering freshman about their future writing programs. During these counselling sessions of about twenty minutes, I ask students about their high school writing experiences. I have now interviewed about a thousand students and would like to summarize and comment on what I have learned from them.

First of all, it appears to me that many students graduate from high school with little or no writing experience. I believe all high school students, college prep or not, should learn to communicate in writing. It seems to me that high schools are abnegating their responsibilities--or perhaps taking the course of least resistance--when they allow students so many choices of mini-courses that they can avoid taking writing courses. I can understand that teachers might prefer to teach mini-courses in science-fiction or women in literature, and I can understand that students might prefer to take them. I do not want to eliminate these courses, but I do believe that high schools simply must teach and require the hard stuff--how to communicate in straight-forward, logical, expository prose.

Related to the problem of neglecting the responsibility of teaching writing is the problem, as I see it, of teaching creative writing as a replacement for expository writing. I think creative writing can be a valuable experience--it can help students to understand themselves, to mature, and it can help gifted writers to learn to express their emotions and experiences effectively. But as I see it, expository writing is a disciplined activity, whereas too often creative writing is taught as an undisciplined outpouring of emotion. I do not equate self-expression necessarily with communication. Real communication, it seems to me, is always concerned with the audience; it is not merely self-expression. Students too often come to college with an exaggerated notion of the values of their emotive experience; too many papers are filled with comments like, "I feel etc." They seem unwilling to argue their ideas in a rational, disciplined way. Creative writing can encourage this emphasis on feeling rather than thought, on emotions rather than reasons. And, to speak pragmatically, few college teachers--in history or psychology or whatever--will put up with mere feelings when they want reasoned analysis in term papers. Creative writing simply isn't good preparation for most college work. Although I do not want creative writing eliminated from high school curricula, I do think it is misguided to allow students to substitute it for expository writing.

When I interview students, they also tell me that they haven't had much grammar. Every year I find myself doing more and more grammar review in my classes, and for some students I suspect it isn't even review. It is very difficult to explain to a student why a "sentence" is a fragment when they can't identify subjects and verbs. It is very difficult to explain predication problems if students don't know the basics of grammar. Take a sentence like "The beliefs of the church teach. . . ." The real subject is burried in the prepositional phrase (it should read "The Church teaches. . ."), but many students can't identify prepositional phrases. Now I don't think I'm a rigid conservative--I don't want to go back to blackboards filled with diagrammed sentences--but I do believe that students ought to be able to write reasonably correct sentences and doing so demands some knowledge of the rules. And it's not merely correctness that concerns me. Many of my students write short, choppy, unconnected sentences. While I don't expect them to come to college with a sophisticated prose style, I do hope to help them learn to write more mature sentences; but this is very difficult if students don't understand the difference between a dependent and an independent clause.

Teaching Tip #6: "A Focus and Support Exercise"

Contributor: Richard Gebhardt, Findlay College

Background: Galloping generalization is one of the most persistent problems I face in writing classes. One-sentence paragraphs, strings of assertions substituted for genuine supporting material, papers made up almost completely of abstract words--such things show up frequently in writing by students of all abilities and motivations. When I have attacked generalizations with pleas for supporting details, I have been buried in bloated paragraphs with multiple unsupported topics. When I have begged for paragraphs with a single focus, I have been rewarded with choppy pages of two-line paragraphs.

Obviously, I concluded one term, I needed to attack both problems at once. But first I had to find a way to make students see--really--how lack of focus and lack of specific support can interfere with clear communication. To do this, I decided to rely on the standard technique of using examples drawn for the class itself.

Phase One: As I read a set of papers early one term, I made it a point to locate a paragraph with severe and obvious problems in focus and support. I used this student paragraph as the basis for the worksheet I took to class the next day.

#### Focus and Support Worksheet: Part I

Directions: There are many ways of looking at any topic. The specific way you "look" at your subject in a paragraph will determine the focus (or emphasis) of the paragraph. And the focus will help you select supporting material for the paragraph. To practice these principles of focus and support, do some "rapid writing" (the term I use for free writing in my classes) about these six different focuses on the same topic:

1. My room is familiar to me.
2. In my room, everything is at my fingertips.
3. Things in my room bring back memories.
4. I can go to my room to be alone.
5. I can go to my room to relax.
6. I feel at home in my room.

Take sentence one and jot down ten specific details that you could use to develop a paragraph about your room. Then write a paragraph using as many of those details as you can. Then move on to sentence two, and so on.

Phase Two: Part I of the worksheet was intended to show students how they could write paragraphs with limited focuses. It also was a deliberately misleading--a magician would call it misdirection--set-up for the lesson that multiple unsupported focuses make writing vague and ineffective. So after students had finished Part I, I gave them the "punchline" to the whole exercise.

#### Focus and Support Worksheet: Part II

Here is the punchline to the little exercise in Part I. The six sentences, as you have seen, can serve as the topic sentences of different paragraphs. (They could also work as the overall main points of several different papers.) By looking at the underlined sections, you sense different focuses; by collecting details stimulated by these different focuses, you generate the material for support in several paragraphs. But what would happen if you used all of these sentences in one paragraph--so that no focus was supported and the paragraph split the reader's attention among six different points?

This is not a hypothetical question, but a practical one. You can see the answer in the student paragraph from which I took the six sentences in Part I.

One place that I love is my dorm room. The reason for this is because it is so familiar to me. I have most of my possessions here with me and they are at my fingertips anytime I need them. The little statues and my many books on the shelves bring back nice memories. My room is a place where I can go to be alone or to relax when I'm tired. I feel at home here.

## High School Perspectives

I am sure that we would agree that these are valid observations. But I do not believe that this conference is concerned primarily with the indictment or the defense. I would rather think that as high school and college teachers of writing, we are here to see in what ways we are what the February issue of The Humanities Newsletter described as "allies", and if, indeed, we are allies, then we need to understand one another to achieve our purposes.

If anything makes allies of the high school and college writing teacher, it is a common professional concern for the quality of English instruction. I believe Stern's response to Dunning represents our common concern that English teachers respond to contemporary needs, re-examine priorities, and as professionals attack the problems that Dunning lists:

1. Admitting that problems of literacy start in the home but combating these problems in our schools
2. Admitting that English teachers accomplish little without the support from other academic areas, but as English teachers, seeking and demanding their support
3. And admitting we have established literature as the god and literacy as the tiresome chore--and then to reestablish literacy to an honorable position in the classroom.

These, I believe, are the concerns of the college writing teacher.

But rather than summarizing a journal article, let me be more specific. How do I perceive College Writing requirements? From talking with former students and by talking with my present students who have spoken with their college friends, I have come to believe that college writing will:

- be more difficult than high school
- assume a wide experience in expository writing
- demand insightful and logical content developed in detail
- require polish in terms of structure, grammar, punctuation, etc.
- require effective coherence
- demand an effective vocabulary
- insist upon intelligent responses often within limited time periods
- require a concern for ms, preparation
- not be the exclusive concern of English teachers.

I ask my students one further question: "What if these things aren't true of the school you attend?" Although some students were quite excited with that prospect, the majority felt that they would be disappointed. Some even suggested that they would transfer from institutions that did not challenge them.

Generalizing from what my students have told me about their expectations, I believe that the college writing teacher assumes that the ability to write is a major reflection of one's ability to think. But my observations are not clinical. They are based on casual ideas of college students and their friends in high school. They are feelings based on what is probably a lack of communication.

Finally, I believe that high school can (as opposed to does) prepare students for these demands, if they are the right demands. I believe that any repeat performances of high school teaching responsibilities should be considered remedial or tutorial, and taken by students without college credit. And college teachers should expect, at the very least, that high school students come to them as competent writers.

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### WRITING FEATURED IN CHANGE

Change: The Magazine of Higher Education probably is not on most English teachers' must-read list. But the November 1976 issue should be. There is a 20 page section on "The Decline of Literacy," containing articles on back-to-basics, black English, the impact of media on communications and thought, and on writing instruction. The historical context and warning against moving back to discredited materials and methods provided by Donald Stewart's article, "A Cautionary Tale: The Unteachable Subject," should be especially valuable to writing teachers today.

EDITORS' NOTE: Toledo, Ohio, the "Glass Capital of the World," is an industrial city of 400,000. It also is such a typical midwestern city that it is used as the much-longed-for home town of Corporal Klinger on M.A.S.H. So the confusing and contradictory state of grammar instruction outlined in the following article probably suggests conditions in many other cities. Between the lines of James Apsey's report, confusion and frustration reveal themselves. Students moving from parochial to public school, from junior to senior high school, and even from one elementary grade to another may have to learn new grammars--with their idiosyncrasies and special terminologies. And teachers must take time from writing and reading in order to retrain these students. Unlearning and relearning grammar are not likely to promote effective writing, enjoyment of literature, or healthy attitudes toward language arts classes. They are more likely to generate the feelings that Sloan Wilson describes in "Why Jessie Hates English." "'All we get, Daddy, is grammar,'" complains Wilson's twelve-year-old daughter. "'That's all we're supposed to study, right through high school'" (Saturday Review, 18 September 1976, p. 11).

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#### TEXTS USED FOR TEACHING GRAMMAR IN TOLEDO AREA SCHOOLS: A SURVEY

James Apsey  
University of Toledo

During the Summer of 1976, the following Toledo-area schools were contacted, either by personal visit or by letter: Anthony Wayne, Devilbiss High School, Toledo Board of Jewish Education, Lake Local Schools, Maumee City Schools, Maumee Valley Country Day School, Oregon Schools, Sylvania Board of Education, Toledo Diocesan Schools, Central Catholic High School, Toledo Public School Board of Education, and Wauseon High School. Four County Vocational School, in Archbold, Ohio, was surveyed by telephone. All the schools represented in this survey are teaching English grammar. The Toledo Public Schools have returned to grammar pedagogy in all its ninth and tenth grades for the first time since about 1968. The Toledo Diocesan School system has taught grammar without interruption. One of the reasons given by several English teachers for this renewed interest in teaching English grammar is that public awareness of the sharp decline in writing skills was aroused by the 1975 Newsweek cover story, "Why Johnny Can't Write." Consequently grammar is back in full force in Toledo-area curricula.

Traditional Latinate grammar has, so far, retained its position of primacy over the newer forms of linguistics at the elementary and secondary levels of education. Nevertheless, every text examined in this survey has included at least a reference to the insights gained by linguistic scholars during the past fifty odd years.

For example, the text used in Toledo Public High Schools, Maumee Valley Country Day School, and Wauseon High School--English Grammar and Composition, Third Course, by John E. Warriner, Mary E. Whitten, and Francis Griffith (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973)--is unmistakably a traditional grammar. Arrangement of its material is in seven parts plus a supplement. Part One contains five chapters on the parts of speech, the parts of a sentence, the phrase, and the clause. Part Two covers English usage including subject-verb agreement, pronoun antecedent agreement, the correct use of verbs, pronouns and modifiers. Part Three teaches aspects of sentence structure. Part four covers composition, and part five, aids to good English: the library, the dictionary, and vocabulary. Part six covers speaking and listening; Part seven the mechanics of writing. The supplement discusses onomatopoeia, beauty in words and other features of the lexicon intended to stimulate the student's interest in his language. Although Warriner's book is a traditional grammar, the authors acknowledge in the preface that linguistic research shows "Latin-based traditional grammar does not provide the most accurate possible description of our language." Yet, they add, a linguistic grammar of English, suitable for general use in the schools, does not exist.

It is not too soon, Warriner believes, for interested class room teachers to begin experiments in linguistic concepts in the classroom. Toward this end a series of twelve lesson plans on structural grammar are included in the Teacher's Manual.

Similarly traditional in its approach to English grammar is Plain English Handbook: A Complete Guide to Good English, by J. Martyn Walsh and Anna Kathleen Walsh (Cincinnati: McCormack-Mathers Publishing Company, Inc. 1972), the text used at Central Catholic High School. The book is organized as indicated by these chapter headings: Sentence Completeness, The Parts of Speech, The Sentence, Mechanics of Composition, The Paragraph, The Whole Composition, Choice of Words, and Structural and Transformational Generative Grammars. This last chapter is included for the benefit of the "more advanced student" who may wish to investigate "recent developments in language study."

Unlike their high school elders who study from the above two textbooks, fourth graders in Toledo's parochial schools will learn transformational-generative grammar if their teachers select Patterns of Language, by H. Thompson Fillmer, Ann Lefcourt, Nell C. Thompson, George E. Coon, and Barbara B. Gramer (New York: American Book Company, 1974). Unit titles illustrate the difference: Word Order in Sentences, The Two Parts of a Sentence, Words in the Noun Phrase, Words in the Verb Phrase, More about Words in the VP, Other Words in the VP, Basic Sentence Patterns and Joining Sentences, Joining Sentences and Changing Sentences [transformations], and Putting Sentences together. Students will become familiar with such terms as NP + VP, plain form, -s form, past form, negation (not-form), and other terms so much a part of the transformational lexicon.

While the fourth graders are learning their NPs and VPs, sixth grade Catholic school pupils will be studying from a text that is organized in a way that encompasses a study of traditional grammar within the framework of a general English course. Their text will be Language For Daily Use by M. Ardwell Elwell and Eric W. Johnson (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973). Missing from the pages, however, is the traditional form of sentence diagramming. Instead, the authors use a set of symbols with which they identify the parts of speech. For example: N=noun, V=verb, V<sup>be</sup>=verbs of being, V<sup>h</sup>=helping verb. Thus the sentence, "Frank could have been president," is described, symbolically, by the string: N V<sup>h</sup> V<sup>h</sup> V<sup>be</sup> N. Language For Daily Use is organized around the following format: Listening and Speaking, Writing Good Sentences, Good Study Habits, Learning About Nouns, Gathering and Organizing Information, Learning About Verbs, Written and Oral Reports, Learning About Pronouns, Writing Letters, Using Adjectives and Adverbs, Writing for Fun, Prepositions and Conjunctions, Sharing Stories, and Enjoying Poetry. This is followed by a Review Handbook which is a review of the grammar.

Meanwhile, eighth graders in the Catholic schools who learn their grammar from Power in English: Experiences in Language, 2d ed., by John S. Hand, Wayne Marsh, James W. Ney, and Bernard Folta (Palo Alto: Laidlaw, 1975) will have a good basic understanding of transformational-generative grammar. Additionally, these same students will have acquired a knowledge of the history of the English Language as well as an understanding of its dialects. Sentence diagrams are the tree-branch type. The book is organized in such a way that Transformational grammar is embedded into the other aspects of English study. Chapter One, under the heading "The Nature of English," discusses changes that take place in living languages such as English in terms of structure, inflection, word order, gender, meaning and phonology. Chapter Two covers composition in terms of report writing. Chapter Three turns to the sounds of English, the sounds of words, consonants, and vowels; in short, the phonemes of English. Chapter Four looks into the problems of persuasion in composition. Chapter Five investigates the way in which words are formed. Here the parts of speech, morphemes, word bases, affixations, synonyms, and antonyms are discussed. Chapter Six returns to the problems of composition, this time narration and the uses of fantasy are covered. Chapter Seven resumes the discussion of grammar in terms of the elements of basic sentence structure. Chapter Eight is the concluding chapter on composition with a look at the features of drama. Chapter Nine discusses sentence structure again, this time in terms of transformation, deep and surface structure, compounding, embedding, and the use of relative clauses. The book concludes with a look at the conventions of writing:

NEW TOPICS FOR COMPOSITION  
PSYCHING YOUR STUDENTS:

Albert C. Yoder  
Southside Virginia Community College  
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Have your students write from their own experience. How many times have you heard that? A good many, I would imagine; and you may have approved of the idea almost as often as you heard it. Although it is not my intention to contribute to the theory supporting this injunction, it usually runs something as follows. We write best about what we know best and we know best what we have lived and experienced. Thus writing should begin with self-expression. Beyond that, the point is usually made that all writing is personal, that we never escape self-expression no matter what writing we do. Writing, then, is an extension of personal discovery and growth.

One very practical problem with this theory is that it is difficult to teach self-expression. Even so, it becomes one of the teacher's functions to stimulate and provide opportunities for self-expression. And this is where many of the rhetoric texts need supplementing. The problem is not the persuasiveness of the theory, but the details of the practice. And as a practicing teacher I am interested in translating the idea of writing from experience into specific writing assignments. Admittedly, some of the rhetoric texts and articles advocating this kind of composition do suggest assignments, but often only a few and those may be very broad (eg. description, narration). It has been my experience (teachers, too, can write from experience) that students want and probably need more, and more specific, topics than those included in the rhetoric texts. What I would like to suggest, then, is a source for such topics.

When you ask students to write from their experience, you are inevitably asking them to reveal something personal about themselves, about what they think and feel. This is also what psychologists and counselors are interested in, and a tool they rely on is the "personal inventory". These are professionally prepared instruments requiring individuals to make personal responses.<sup>1</sup> Although they ask for only simple responses, the statements in the inventory may also be written about at some length. These inventories are designed by psychologists for specifically what many teachers are interested in: getting students to express themselves. And I doubt that English teachers could design a better stimulus for accomplishing this purpose.

I have collected a number of these inventories, many containing hundreds of statements, and to give you some idea of what their statements are like I will reproduce a few.

- I am afraid to be myself.
- I do what others expect of me.
- It is necessary that others approve of what I do.
- My feelings of self-worth depend on how much I accomplish.
- I believe in saying what I feel in dealing with others.
- I believe that man is essentially good and can be trusted.
- I believe that knowledge of what is right makes people act right.

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<sup>1</sup>Standard personality inventories include:

- Allen Edwards, Edwards Personality Inventory, and Edwards Personality Preference Schedule (Science Research Associates).
- Leonard Gordon, Survey of Personal Values (Science Research Associates).
- Harrison Gough and A. B. Heilbrun, Adjective Checklist (Consulting Psychologists Press Inc.).
- Harrison Gough, California Psychological Inventory (Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc.).
- Paul Heist, Omnibus Personality Inventory (Psychological Corp.).
- Starke Hathaway, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (Psychological Corp.).
- Louis Thorpe and Willis Clark, California Test of Personality (California Test Bureau).

- Appearances are all-important.
- I like only masculine men and feminine women.
- Two people will get along best if each concentrates on pleasing the other.
- Living for the future is as important as living for the moment.
- What I have been in the past dictates the kind of person I will be.
- A person can completely change his essential nature.
- People have an instinct for evil.
- Honesty is always the best policy.
- I doubt whether I would make a good leader.
- I believe we are made better by the trials and hardships of life.
- I like to be the center of attention.
- It is all right to get around the law if you don't actually break it.
- Only a fool would try to change our American way of life.

Your school counselors or psychologists undoubtedly have a number of personal inventories they would be willing to share with you. However, I want to make it clear that the function of the inventories, as I am recommending them, is to provide topics for self-expressive writing; I am not recommending them as a means of psychoanalyzing or otherwise evaluating the psychological health of your students.

Let me add finally that some of the statements might be responded to in a paragraph, some in an essay, but the best way to use them may be as a means of triggering reflections in a journal. I recommend using personal inventory statements in journals, because journal entries are commonly shorter, more informal, unstructured, and personal than essays. After a student has used the journal to explore his ideas and feelings about a number of inventory statements, he might then be encouraged to choose one of them as the subject of a formal essay. In my classes, for instance, I give my students a statement or question each day and have them respond in their journals--sometimes in class, sometimes outside of class. Finally I encourage them to pick one of the journal responses and develop it into an essay.

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### Grammar Text Survey

punctuation, capitalization, and form. Ample attention to review and testing is given at the end of almost every chapter. And, in the Teacher's Edition, there is a 114 page supplement filled with ideas, alternative teaching strategies, helps for the chapters, and a professional bibliography.

For those eighth grade teachers in Toledo's parochial school system, who feel less comfortable with transformational grammar, and who, therefore, given the option, prefer not to use the Laidlaw text, there are two other English texts from which to choose. One is Patterns of Communicating by Allan A. Glatthorn and Jane Christensen (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath and Co., 1975); the other is Modern English in Action by Henry I. Christ and Jerome Carlin (Lexington, Mass: D.C. Heath and Co., 1966). Both of these books take the traditional approach to the pedagogy of grammar. Problems of composition, rhetoric, and syntax are treated extensively within traditional grammatical concepts. Except for the grammar, the D.C. Heath textbooks are organized along the lines of the Laidlaw edition.

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### ABOUT THE WLA NEWSLETTER

WLA is edited by Richard Gebhardt of Findlay College and Barbara Genelle Smith of Northern Kentucky University.

WLA began in a workshop on "Writing as a Liberating Activity" at the 1973 NCTE College Section meeting. Its editorial policy continues the concerns of the workshop:

- The role of writing classes in freeing student imagination and creativity.
  - Ways that writing teachers can expand the range of student outlook and opinion.
  - Ways that teachers can expand the range of instructional options open to them.
- An excerpt from WLA's original "position statement" of editorial policy is on p. 10.



## College Perspectives

In my discussions with students I have learned, too, that some of them take mini-courses in the writing of term papers. I have mixed feelings about the teaching of this course. It certainly cannot hurt students to learn to use the library (hopefully more than The Reader's Guide) and to develop techniques of research. At its best, writing a term paper should teach students to organize ideas, another valuable skill for college work. But it does students a disservice when the term paper is taught in such a way that students don't sense the differences between the cut-and-paste approach and a real synthesis of ideas, and that they never learn the definition of plagiarism.

These, then are my main impressions of what high schools are and aren't doing. In conclusion, I'd like to make a plea that we all learn to help each other. Attending workshops like this is a good beginning. Talking often with our colleagues--not griping about students, but talking about our objectives and methods--is also helpful. Since we all involved in teaching communication, we should all be doing just that--communicating.

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 A STUDENT RESPONSE TO MARY ANN SULLIVAN

Paula Deardorff

Mary Ann Sullivan said that "colleges have a three-fold perception of high school writing programs": that many students graduate from high school with little or no writing experience, that high schools ignore the responsibility of teaching students to write by offering a variety of electives, and that creative writing too often replaces expository writing in high school composition classes.

I believe the perception that students graduate with little writing experience is a valid one. The high school I attended only offered a one-semester writing course, and it was open only to seniors planning to attend college. Students in general or vocational tracks completed four years of high school without one writing course. I wonder how the school officials expected vocational students to become secretaries, or general students to write job applications when they could not construct a proper sentence.

The belief that high schools ignore the responsibility of teaching students to write by offering other electives is also correct. The English electives offered in the high school I attended included everything from dramatics to speech to poetry--with only one writing course included in the list of electives. I enrolled in the writing course and during one semester we wrote three papers. The rest of the semester was spent reading four books. I do not see how anyone could be expected to learn to write by writing only three papers.

The third idea Dr. Sullivan suggested was that when high school students do write, they do so in a creative style, not in an expository style. The few papers I wrote in high school were done in a creative style. We were never taught to organize and explain and develop main ideas. Writing what we felt was what was considered important.

When I think back to the one high school writing class I attended, I realize that at the end of the semester only two students had really accomplished the art of writing. The rest of the class was still writing at a very low level ability. If all writing programs are as poor as the one I attended I wonder how any freshman college student can write.

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 ARTICLES WANTED

WLA invites you to submit brief articles, reports, reading lists, reviews. "Teaching Tips" similar to the one on p. 3 are especially welcome. Submissions should grow out of a teacher's experiences in high school, college, or middle school writing classes, and they should relate to one of the elements of editorial policy stated on p. 8. Submissions must be concise; even then the WLA format may require shortening before publication. Footnotes should be avoided whenever possible.

(Excerpts from WLA Newsletter,  
Issue Two, March 1974)

". . . writing is a process that ends in an artifact, in a product that conveys something to others, and so usage, structure, clarity, and the like are important. But these things must be seen in the perspective of the whole process in which individuals work with language to understand their ideas and themselves and to express their insights in ways that reflect their own personalities."

"Writing is a creative act which by its very nature explores relationships between disparate materials and uses language to give new forms to the relationships."

"Writing is a liberating, liberalizing, humanizing activity which should be made to connect with the student's development as a human being and with the whole process of education, rather than identified with the all-too-often artificial atmosphere of the writing class."

"Writing is a means for one human being to communicate achieved insights to other human beings, and so a writer must be aware of the clarity of his/her writing for others, recognizing that choices in language, structure, and usage will have a direct influence on the effectiveness of his/her writing."

". . . the writing class should keep the individual student at its center by focusing . . . on writing as a creative process of self-awareness and self-expression. . . . And it should handle the necessary aspects of usage, organization, and language from such a perspective and in such ways that they do not in any way prevent writing from being what it rightfully is--a creative, liberating, humanizing activity."

I just finished reading the March issue. I was especially interested in your attempt to get input from all levels instead of just the usual: sermons from the mount called academia. If there's anything really wrong with students' writing by the time we see that writing, it's wrong because the "system" is wrong in elementary, junior high, and senior high schools. Too many teachers at those levels don't have the proper training to teach written communication, and most of them don't have the time (thanks to thoughtful planning by school boards). Input from those who do have the training and/or time could well be inspiration to all concerned where inspiration is most needed.

Ron Smith, Utah State Univ.

I have appreciated over the last months receiving WLA. The newsletter is one of the bright spots in my day; I have voraciously read virtually everything in the several copies I have received. One of the most interesting things about the newsletter is that for one of the few times in my professional career I am able to witness people coming nose-to-nose with the most essential activity we engage in: expressing the self.

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