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The Future of Writing Teacher Education

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Our Vision for *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*

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In introducing the June 2011 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, Kathleen Yancey characterizes the collection of articles as sharing a common aim to confront readers' assumptions. Yancey contends that confrontation may be viewed as a mechanism, not for antagonistic exchanges, but for "situating our perceptions, practices, and beliefs into a wider set of contexts" (581). As English educators, teachers of writing, and administrators, we also see value in opportunities to encounter writing and the teaching of writing in new and different contexts. Many of us who teach teachers of writing share multiple roles in a variety of programs: writing, linguistics, teacher preparation, and graduate faculty. We teach, advise, mentor, supervise, and administer, and sometimes it feels as though we're doing these all at once. Rarely, however, do we have opportunities to reflect on how our perceptions, practices and beliefs shape and are shaped by these contexts. Seeing the same colleagues at summer CEE workshops, NCTE and CCCC conventions, WPA summer institutes, and RSA conferences, helps assure us that it's possible to build a vital professional life around our shared history and commitment. Scholars like Richard Gebhardt, Stephen Wilhoit, and Robert Tremmel, to name a few, have also sought ways to understand the overlapping nature of writing teacher education, but for the most part, institutional and disciplinary boundaries have stifled an integrated understanding of our field. While many individuals have worked to make connections between fields, Robert Tremmel's 2001 call for us to "start acting as if writing teacher education itself deserved some kind of disciplinary status" still seems an unrealized goal (25).

In "Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century," Richard Fulkerson argues that in the new millennium, Composition Studies has become more fragmented as a discipline, noting that we "differ about what our courses are supposed to achieve, about how effective writing is best produced, about what an effective classroom looks like, and about what it means to make knowledge (2005, 681-2). We think that similarly, professionals in English Education have also approached writing instruction from a variety of (conflicting) perspectives. A scholarly journal such as *The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* will offer educators the opportunity to confront important issues in our profession as we share strategies and pedagogies, theorize practice, discuss research and grant opportunities, and propose opportunities for joint efforts in scholarship, teaching, inquiry, and professional development.

As the spaces, surfaces, and interfaces in which and through which literacy practices are shaped and rhetoric happens continue to expand, we as writing teacher educators must grapple with the transformations that occur in and through these spaces. In large part our students are still producing academic texts that are traditional in the most narrow sense: white paper, black ink, one inch margins all around, with linear development culminating in claims and conclusions. Certainly, the current emphasis on traditional linear forms of writing reflects what we think our students will be expected to teach in the first year writing class or the secondary classroom, but the values that shape what writing is and what writing does are shifting, at least in the spaces in which many our students compose and deliver their texts. Often, however, our complex institutional contexts make finding ways to address these realities difficult. The English educator, often laboring alone and isolated within an English department, needs the professional support of other writing teacher educators. While the

WPA or rhetoric and composition faculty member may not suffer the same degree of isolation in the English department, the familiar complaints about first year writing courses that don't "fix" students' writing sufficiently also focuses critical attention on the education of graduate student instructors.

The shifting expectations of writers, educators, and policy makers are nothing new, but what has changed over the last twenty-five years is our ability to respond to charge. In the nineteenth-century Harvard instituted its first written entrance exam to measure the writing abilities of incoming students after concerns had been raised about their poor preparation. By 1975 a *Newsweek* article ("Why Johnny Can't Write") proclaimed that America had a writing crisis, only this time the blame was placed on public schools for neglecting "the basics." While this was not a new controversy, the way educators and policymakers were defining literacy altered the expectations for writing teachers. The National Writing Project and other groups of committed educators responded to the crisis by creating a professional development model that extended the use of writing in all disciplines, across all levels, by identifying and enhancing the role of successful teachers. The paradigm for reform has also shifted, however, and recently, the same "sky is falling" theme has served politicians and the testing industry as they both construct a narrative of poor performing teachers and students and offer the SAT, CLA or other products as solutions, promising reliable standards and measures of students' reading, writing, and thinking abilities. Those engaged in writing teacher education are left to "consult" with representatives from the government and the testing business, complain on blogs, or become "occupiers." In one way or another we've probably all been asked, "What's the problem of teaching to a test if the test is a good one?" Plenty. And we hope *The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* can confront (to use Kathi Yancey's term) the myopic ways writing and the teaching of writing has been studied and represented by politically interested groups with no commitment to writing or the teaching of teachers. The ironic confluence of two forces - the expansion of writing in the general culture and the uniting of political and business interests to control how writing is taught and assessed - presents our field with a unique, kaironic moment. To better prepare future teachers of writing and address together the realities of standardization, we must unite. With the rich proliferation of writing in our culture, we need to find ways to prepare writing teachers to connect the processes and products of their writing in the real world with the classroom context. We need to offer practical solutions and models for administrators and policymakers involved in planning, implementing, and assessing writing programs. More specifically, we'd like to see articles in *The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* that address the following key areas for our profession:

- *Investigations of K-12 teacher education in English, specifically examinations of how we prepare teachers to create robust and rigorous lessons in creative writing, informative writing, argumentative writing, and research writing.*
- *Examinations of college teacher education in English, particularly looking at how future college instructors are prepared to teach first-year writing, advanced composition, technical/report writing, writing in the disciplines and across the curriculum.*

- *Research in writing program administration at the elementary, secondary, and university levels, with discussions of changes in standards and assessment, approaches to mentoring and evaluation of teachers, curriculum mapping, selection of courses, syllabi construction.*
- *Inquiry into the how we prepare writing teachers to reach out beyond school walls, specifically studies of writing instruction that includes engagement with academic service learning, community writing, learning centers, extracurricular writing projects, writing competitions or programs, and publishing of student writing.*

Our expectation for *The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* is that publication will offer teachers of writing at all levels a space in which to explore commonalities, to compare strategies, and to evaluate existing policies and common practices - - in effect, making connections across institutional and departmental divides. Though obstacles may exist, we believe that the construction of an academic space such as this one will provide necessary opportunities for shares interests, efforts, and hopes.

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Promising Connections: Uniting Writing Teachers

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Two thousand eleven was a banner year for the Composition Studies-English Education Connections SIG, a special interest group that meets annually at CCCC. First of all, the SIG marked its ten-year anniversary. From 2001-11, the SIG showcased more than one hundred presentations by an impressive range of new and veteran teachers-scholars who, despite differing roles and affiliations, all share a professional interest in mentoring new writing teachers in the broadest sense of that responsibility. Second, former and current SIG co-chairs published "Seeking Connections, Articulating Commonalities: English Education, Composition Studies, and Writing Teacher Education" (Alsup, Brockman, Bush, and Letcher) in *College Composition and Communication*. The article, which chronicles the SIG's ten-year history, appears in a two-issue symposium celebrating the tremendous value in significant NCTE-CCCC bridges. As if these two overlapping events—the ten-year anniversary and subsequent recognition from the CCC article—weren't enough, SIG leadership also learned in 2011 that Jonathan Bush, a founding SIG co-chair, had proposed and received approval to create a new journal, *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* to be published by Scholarworks/Eerkeley Electronic Press. Though not formally affiliated with the Composition Studies-English Education SIG, the journal's roots are intricately connected to it and, further, SIG members are likely to be targeted as readers and contributors—more good news.

As current and future SIG co-chairs, we naturally see value in *Teaching/Writing*, so we immediately invited the co-editors to the 2012 SIG meeting in St. Louis, where they will introduce the journal, distribute PDFs of the preliminary issue, and discuss the Call for Manuscripts for the inaugural issue, along with general submission guidelines, publication schedules, and the like. In turn, we readily accepted the co-editors' invitation to explain in this preliminary issue of *Teaching/Writing* why the field needs the journal and what we hope it might provide to its readers and the field, at large.

Take Inspiration from the SIG

As previously indicated, *Teaching/Writing* is not currently affiliated with the SIG (or any other professional association, for that matter), but the SIG nevertheless does help to demonstrate the tremendous audience the journal will immediately address.

Identifying and Reaching the Interests of a Broad and Far-Reaching Audience

Most obviously, SIG members, whose ranks number in the dozens, are representative of a far larger group of writing/rhetoric professionals who easily number in the thousands: writing program administrators (directors of composition and basic writing coordinators, as well as NWP site, WAC/WID program, and writing center directors); English education faculty (writing and/or literature methods professors, field instructors, and student teaching supervisors); and secondary-level English teachers (NWP teacher-consultants, host teachers, literacy coaches, and classroom teachers). These three major groups, as well as their corresponding subgroups, represent an incredibly broad range whose pedagogical influence is made even stronger by virtue of varied geographic location and institutional affiliation. They teach, for example, in rural, small town, urban, and suburban locations across the entire country and in virtually every educational setting imaginable (flagship institutions,