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Writing Teacher Education: Past and Present

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In *The Literature Workshop*, Sheridan Blau (2003) points out one of the more significant ironies of discipline formation “in the broader field of English studies”:

a kind of schizophrenic split between the teaching of writing and the teaching of literature at every level of instruction. As a profession, we have for the past twenty or twenty-five years tended to teach composition in ways that are process-oriented, learning-centered, and collaborative while we have continued . . . to teach literature in a way that has been product-oriented, . . . text-centered, . . . and both competitive and top-down. . . . (p. 3).

Although Blau may be overly pessimistic about the state of literary instruction and overly optimistic about that of writing instruction, the kind of split he identifies is not limited to the teaching of literature and composition but extends also to the teaching of teachers of literature and writing. Preparing English teachers to teach literature has a long-standing tradition informed by a large body of research and pedagogy. Approaches to educating English teachers as teachers of writing (one aspect of what has become known as writing teacher education) has, on the other hand, emerged much more recently; indeed, it has been only in the last ten years or so that a critical mass of English teacher educators has begun viewing writing teacher education as a practice rising to the level of a discipline.

One particularly important aspect of this disciplinary development is that the ideas and structures that have led to its formation have come not just from research and pedagogy in the English language arts and English teacher education but also from research in rhetoric and composition and the teaching of first-year composition, dating back to the 1960s or before (Tremmel, 2002). Thus, when we speak of writing teacher education in terms of a discipline, we are really talking about an interdiscipline, developed over time in a process of intellectual and pedagogical cross-fertilization in an environment that supports teaching writing teachers of both high school English and first-year composition.

Jonathan Bush and Erinn Bentley’s new journal *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education* is an idea in this discipline-formation process whose time has come, and Bush and Bentley are the right people to move it forward with this new journal.

We first met Jonathan Bush at the 2002 Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in Denver. Bob had just presented a paper on some research we had been doing related to the education of writing teachers, and Jonathan came up to the front table where Bob was packing up his book bag and, in a semi-mysterious way, basically ordered both of us to attend the next session, where Jonathan was scheduled to speak. When we got to that session, we immediately understood why we were there. Jonathan had been working on many of the same questions we had and had gotten to the same point we had: that of understanding writing teacher education as an emerging interdiscipline that had been developing for many years below the radar in English teacher education and composition studies (Bush, 2002).



Those who know Jonathan will understand immediately that when he learned there were more of us interested in this interdiscipline than anyone knew, he went right to work. Over the next few years, with the help of other writing teacher educators, compositionists, and writing program administrators Elizabeth Brockman, Janet Alsup, Heidi Estrem, and many others, Jonathan established a CCCC Special Interest Group devoted to writing teacher education and a commission on writing teacher education within the structure of the Conference on English Education (CEE). He also helped bring about numerous projects, panels, meetings, and texts that have had significant influence on how we all currently understand the interdiscipline of writing teacher education within the larger context of English Studies and NCTE.

If scholars like Richard Larson, Richard Gebhardt, Richard Lloyd-Jones, and Carl Klaus (Tremmel, 2002) represent an early generation of writing teacher education, Erinn Bentley represents the future. Erinn was Jonathan’s doctoral student at Western Michigan University. Her work there combined English teacher education with rhetoric and composition, and her dissertation applied elementary and secondary teacher development strategies to a college composition program. As an emerging scholar, Erinn is perfectly positioned for the work this new journal will do.

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In 2011 at the CEE Commission meetings during the 100th anniversary of the NCTE Convention in Chicago’s Palmer House Hotel, the largest group in the room was the current membership of the Commission on Writing Teacher Education. At this meeting (and at the CEE social later in the afternoon) we were excited to hear about Jonathan and Erinn’s initial plans for *Teaching/Writing: The Journal of Writing Teacher Education*.

Again, we believe that this is the right journal coming online at the right time. In it, the diverse array of scholars and practitioners in writing teacher education—compositionists, writing program administrators, English teacher educators, National Writing Project fellows, and anyone else interested in the education and continuing development of pre-service and in-service writing teachers—will have, for the first time in what is beginning to be a long history, a journal dedicated to research and pedagogy that is increasingly of compelling interest to them. And even though this may not be part of Jonathan and Erinn’s current business plan, we see another important potential role for this journal. We hope that as *T/W* provides a new and broadly conceived venue for researchers and scholars to publish their work and continue to shape and develop this increasingly dynamic interdiscipline, it will also contribute to changes in the way writing is taught in classrooms everywhere, call into question the view of writing instruction as testing and correction, and find ways to uproot the stubborn persistence of current-traditional approaches that for at least 90 years have worked against the growth of writers (Davis, 1922) at all levels.

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