

# NWP: 25 Years of Excellent Readings

## BAWP Then ...

by JAMES GRAY and MARY K. HEALY

*This year, as the National Writing Project celebrates its 25th anniversary, we wondered how the concerns of writing teachers have changed over this quarter century. We decided that one way to focus this question would be to take a look at what Fellows of the Invitational Summer Institutes were reading 25 years ago, and compare and contrast these titles with what they are reading now. We asked Jim Gray and Mary-K. Healy to recall important readings from the early years of the Bay Area Writing Project, and current BAWP director Carol Tateishi to comment on what BAWP Fellows are reading today. Then Don Gallehr, whose tenure at the Northern Virginia Writing Project began in the 1970s and extends to the present, reflects on readings then and now.*



When the Bay Area Writing Project opened its doors in the mid-1970s, a number of books and articles on writing and the teaching of writing were already in print. It was not the flood we have today, but many of these works were brilliant and remain so to this day. Here is a sampling of the material Fellows at our early institutes read in whole or in part:

Sylvia Ashton-Warner: *Teacher* (1963). This is a classic book by an instinctive teacher who taught Maori children in a country school in New Zealand for 24 years.

Douglass Barnes, James Britton, Harold Rosen: *Language, the Learner and the School* (1969). This examination of teacher and pupils' classroom language offers valuable insights into the crucial role of language in learning.

Also by Douglass Barnes, *From Communication to Curriculum* (1975). Barnes' studies of pupils' talk and small-group interaction in British classrooms provided the foundation for the development of writing response groups.

James Britton: *Language and learning* (1970). *The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18)* (1975). Britton was the leading light of several major British teachers and scholars who had an early and major impact on our understanding of writing.

Francis Christensen: *Notes toward a new rhetoric: 6 essays for teachers* (1967) These essays describe basic patterns of sentence modification and paragraphs common to 20th century writers, but not touched on in any of the current—and past—grammar and composition textbooks. This is the one piece of research above all others that had a major impact on Jim's teaching of writing.

Paul Diederich: "Measuring Growth in English" (1974). This work taught us about holistic evaluation, an approach Diederich developed to save ETS when they took on the task of a national assessment of writing and found themselves totally befuddled when the readers, doing the only thing they knew how to do, tried to score all those papers one at a time.

Janet Emig: "The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders" (1971). This is the first non-quantitative research study involving case studies of real students in and out of the classroom. The 12th-grade students who were the subjects for Emig's case studies did not learn to write in school but at home where they wrote what they wanted to write.

W. Haggitt: *Working with language* (1967). A highly creative teacher's experiments in teaching a very average group of junior high school students in a Council School in Birmingham, England.

David Holbrook: *English for the Rejected*. Published in the 1960s, this fine book was written by another of that strong group of British scholars interested in children's writing. This is the first book about writing we had seen that reproduced children's writing exactly as written.

William Labov: *The Study of Nonstandard English* (1970). This award-winning book based on Labov's research in the slums and ghettos of New York is a classic in the field.

Ken Macrorie: *Uptaught* (1970). The most lively, engaging, and readable book on writing we have ever read, the book that describes how Ken Macrorie, after 16 years of teaching writing, discovered how to get his students to write 'fresh' rather than 'dead.' The first of an unending stream of great books on writing, *Telling Writing, I-Search*, etc. written by Macrorie.

Nancy Martin et al: *Writing and Learning across the Curriculum* (1976). Based on research in classrooms

across England, this book demonstrates how writing can be a powerful tool for learning all school subjects.

James Moffett: James Moffett's unpublished "Writing Assignments" later expanded as *Active Voice*. Twenty-nine writing assignments on a developmental schema that progressed from the most personal, "A Spontaneous Stream of Thoughts" to the most abstract, "Combining of Generalizations into a Theory," a work that sharpened teacher awareness to have students explore a wide range of writing experiences.

Mina Shaughnessy: *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*. This book is still an inspiring guide for teachers who work with 'basic' writers, written by a woman out the Dakotas who took on the task of teaching the 'basic' writers who appeared in CUNY classes after the university's change in entrance requirements from selective admission to open admission. This important book identifies the errors basic writers make, discusses the reason for the errors, and offers informed strategies for dealing with them. Includes many before and after samplings of writing.

During BAWP's first summer institute we reproduced and handed out so many items that Dick Shoemaker reported that we had given everybody 11 inches and 8 pounds of paper.

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## ... and Now

by CAROL TATEISHI



For what might seem a surprising reason, we no longer require BAWP summer institute fellows to read the seminal works on Jim Gray's Institute reading list of twenty-five years ago. The reason is the teachers we invite to our summer institute have already absorbed and demonstrated in their practice the principles advocated in these works. While they may not have read, for example, James Britton or Nancy Sommers, they are familiar with the ideas of these writers and have implemented many of their ideas.

However, we *do* think it is important that our summer Fellows know where their best practices have come from, so we include among our common readings two articles by Marcia Renee Goodman: "Teaching writing and thinking," found in the Spring 1989 volume of *Visions and Revisions: Research for Writing Teachers*, published by the Regents of the University of California; and "Inside the writing process classrooms of Elbow, Murray, and Berthoff," found in the Fall 1988 volume of *Visions and Revisions*. Goodman does an excellent job of summarizing the contributions of the major figures in writing research.

Anyone who wishes to read the original sources may find these works in our resource center.

In developing our current list, we ask, "What are the issues and concerns that our summer Fellows bring to the institute? What works can we introduce that will promote productive talk and thinking among Fellows around their shared interests?" We have developed a list of over thirty citations which answer the needs of our summer Fellows.

There are some common readings we use regularly. Many summer Fellows teach in urban settings, and almost all have classrooms that are linguistically diverse. While these teachers bring to their work a familiarity with process writing and "best practice," they are noticing that the mere implementation of these strategies is not a guarantee that their students' writing will improve. Many Fellows come to the institute willing to question their assumptions and the assumptions of the writing establishment about the most effective way to teach writing.

Two works that express the often unspoken doubts that summer Fellows bring with them are Lisa Delpit's articles, "Skills and Other Dilemmas of a Progressive Black Educator" (Harvard Educational Review, November, 1986) and "The Silenced Dialogue: Power and Pedagogy in Educating Other People's Children" (Harvard Educational Review, August, 1988.) Though these works are over a decade old, the provocative questions Delpit asks about the practice of teaching writing as it relates to culture—particularly the culture of African Americans—always generate important and useful discussion.

Then we add to the mix an article by Maria de la Luz Reyes, "Challenging Venerable Assumptions: Literacy Instruction for Linguistically Different Students" (Harvard Educational Review, Winter 1992.) In this article, de la Luz Reyes puts Delpit's questions into the context of second language learners. She sets out and critiques the assumptions of the writing process approach, suggesting departures and revisions that will help process writing work with "linguistically different" learners.

Another concern of many of our Fellows stems from the pressure they feel to teach the expository essay. To

some, that means "We can't do personal writing anymore." Others ask, "How can students meet the demands of the essay form without giving up their claim to the personal voice that individualizes and energizes their writing?" To help Fellows work out an answer to this question, we ask them to read two essays by James Moffett, "On Essaying," (Coming on Center, 1981) and "Bridges: From Personal Writing to the Formal Essay" (Center for the Study of Writing Technical Report, March 1989). In these pieces Moffett argues that personal writing and exposition need not be mutually exclusive categories, that much writing that meets the goal of exposition—to explain and convince—relies on the personal. Moffett's essays are particularly powerful because they mix the personal and the formal in a way that illustrates the point he is making.

Readers may note that none of the works I have referred to here is particularly recent. We look for strong ideas where we can find them, but we also try to stay current. For instance, this past summer we made use of Jabari Mahiri's "Street Scripts: African American Youth Writing About Crime and Violence" (Social Justice, Volume 224, No 4). Mahiri builds on the work of Janet Emig who established that many students who demonstrate little competence with school writing are in fact very competent real world writers. He looks at the voluntary writing of African American students, examining its structures and genres. Jabari's work urges teachers to look beyond school assignment writing to better assess the true competencies of their African American students as writers.

Looking over Jim Gray's reading list of twenty-five years ago, I would conclude that we now find it necessary to provide readings that look more carefully at the communities from which our students come. This means that we consider some works that are not limited to or even focused on the teaching of writing. But Jim's common readings and ours do share a goal: to generate among our summer Fellows informed discussion that may lead them to examine and sometimes alter their practice.