
Reviewed by Rich Rice, Texas Tech University

Robert Tremmel introduces *Teaching Writing Teachers* by relating a question that English education professors often ask and that writing program administrators should consider more regularly:

> How is it [. . .] that I can be the coordinator of an English education program in an English department, working daily to prepare beginning writing teachers, yet I never walk down the hall to consult with our department’s composition director, who is also working daily to prepare beginning writing teachers whose students are often only three months older than my students’ students? (1)

The question is rooted in the intersection between secondary and post-secondary instruction, and as Tremmel and William Broz argue, the question calls for the development of a distinct discipline.

The book begins with a Foreword by Richard Gebhart that suggests reasons why both fields sometimes overlook opportunities to share ideas. The Introduction, “Striking a Balance—Seeking a Discipline,” then shares a succinct history of the research interests of both fields. Tremmel suggests here that bringing secondary and post-secondary interests must first begin with a well-developed writing pedagogy. The primary premise of the book is that we need ongoing dialogue.

In the first section Stephen Wilhoit, Jonathan Bush, and Margaret Tomlinson Rustick offer commentary on Tremmel’s Introduction and call for a united discipline. Wilhoit examines some common grounds, such as the students both fields share, the similarity in program goals, and the similarity in pedagogies. He points out that we can learn from one another in terms of assessing writing, discovering both identity and power in our institutions, and benefiting from the intellectual and social rewards of writing. We can mentor one another. His piece is called “Identifying Common Concerns.” Bush’s piece is called “Common Ground: Toward Collaboration,” and reminds readers that both English education and writing program administration serve similar roles, and that they both support students as they instill and help develop praxis. Finally, Tomlinson Rustick’s “Methods for Building Bridges” offers a professional narrative account of this history in her methods courses.

Tomlinson Rustick’s approach is similar to Chris Anson’s approach. Anson’s essay points out that writing teachers should be writers, should practice reflection, and should always work together. The chapter is entitled “Teaching Writing Creatively: A Summer Institute for Teachers.” Among other things, Anson
focuses on the reflective value of teaching portfolios, and that “where teaching portfolios may be used as a form of assessment, opportunities for collaboration and mentoring should become the governing philosophy and goal of the portfolio system” (39). If the term “mentoring” could have been worked into the title of the book it probably should have, because it is such an important teaching and learning strategy in the book. Next, for instance, in “Bridging Levels: Composition Theory and Practice,” Gail Stygall shares her account of the similarities and differences in her English education and composition teaching methods courses. She finds that just like writing is a local and social act, so too is good teaching and mentoring. Good teaching is reflective teaching.

Tom Romano then discusses the value of teaching writing instruction by writing in “Teaching Writing Through Multigenre Papers.” Specifically, Romano writes about his use of the multigenre research paper and studies how the medium (genre) impacts the message (content). David Smit also discusses the importance of genre in writing teacher education in his chapter, “Practice, Reflection, and Genre,” as well as the importance of sequencing assignments and keeping “reflection journals.” Linda Miller Cleary focuses on reflection next, pointing out that students can be asked to “deconstruct and reconstruct their beliefs about writing instruction” (75). She discusses an in-depth phenomenological interviewing research method for English education students, practicing secondary teachers, and graduate teaching assistants teaching college composition. Students are challenged to know more about themselves as writers and as teachers. Cleary’s chapter is titled “An Interviewing Project for Writing Teachers: Reflection, Research, Action.” Shirley Rose then traces the value of mentoring for college composition teaching assistants in “Mentoring for Teaching Assistants in the Introductory Writing Program at Purdue University.” The themes of this section of the book can be summarized as writing teachers should write, writing teachers should reflect, and writing teachers should use mentoring.

The next section contains seven chapters, beginning with Steven VanderStaay’s examination of his Teaching Composition and Literature in the Secondary Classroom course. In “Critiquing Process: Teaching Writing Methods as Problem Solving” VanderStaay challenges his preservice teachers to “solve the problem of how to teach writing and literature in terms that acknowledge the diversity of experiences and influence” of students (104). He immerses preservice secondary teachers in the academic writing about the process writing movement as well as literacy methods research. For Dan Royer and Roger Gilles in the next chapter, “Combining History, Theory, and Practice in the Writing Methods Course,” like VanderStaay, there is a synergy that can develop by teaching both theory and practice and, in their words, counterbalance the educational theory of James Moffett with the practical applications of Thomas Newkirk. According to Royer and Gilles, what can work on one level may indeed be appropriate for other levels of writing.

The role mentoring plays in teaching and learning is the primary focus of the next three chapters. In “Teaching Teachers and the Extracurriculum,” Doug
Hesse and Kirsti Sandy relate a system of teaching assistantship training where teachers serve as both assistants and mentors in a safe environment. The curriculum (learning how to teach) and the “extracurriculum” (learning how to mentor and support one another’s teaching) provides an authentic experience: “Being a teacher while being a student while being a mentor richly parallels the professional worlds in which most college writing teachers live” (124). Along the same lines, Melissa Whiting writes in “False Prophets and True Mentors: Transforming Instructors into Teachers” that the significance of teacher/student professional relationships are often overlooked in writing instruction courses. Whiting relates a telling case study of a student developing a topic for a paper and how the student’s learning experience could have been much stronger if the teacher would have developed a better working relationship. And Broz explores mentoring in “Personal and Distant Mentors.” Broz traces many of the assignments he uses, his beliefs in writing process pedagogy, and his philosophy of teaching. He finds it important to teach his students writing process pedagogy concepts, but he also finds it important to teach them about the people and the work that has helped developed the ideas surrounding key concepts.

Finally, Gregory Hamilton’s “Mapping a Writing/Teaching Life” and Michelle Tremmel’s “Mailing It In: Taking Writing Teacher Education on the Road” make up the final two chapters of the book. Hamilton’s piece examines the use of two assignments often included in both English education and teaching in higher education courses: a literacy narrative and a philosophy of teaching. The process of mapping the history of a writer creates opportunities “to trace the different beliefs and assumptions about writing that [students] have come to hold” (149). Students become critical of what they value, making the transparent and tacit exposed and identified. Similarly, in the final chapter of the book, Tremmel shares her experience in cross-institutional collaboration and mentoring. To teach good writing we often find authentic audiences more valuable than simply encouraging students to “imagine your audience is” some assumed reader. The same works for teaching writing instruction.

Sally Barr Ebest then begins the Afterword with “The Ripple-Effect of Mentoring: Extending the Layers Outward,” where she traces a layered approach to teaching assistant training that could be a useful strategy for other university writing programs. In the first layer, faculty mentor teaching assistants. There is a second layer of the writing program administrators mentoring their associate directors and assistants. Similarly, in a third layer, undergraduate writing students or English education majors mentor K-12 students. Some call this the ripple-effect, and others call it the “infection model” of training, where one group models a good working relationship for another group. The end result is that in layered mentoring participants are both teaching and learning on multiple levels. We all have levels of experience and inexperience, as Tomlinson Rustick concludes in the final piece in the Afterward, “Methods for Building Bridges.”
The book makes it clear that, indeed, there is a lot of potential for developing rich teaching and learning systems if we make bridges between the fields of composition and English education. At the institution I received my training in, there was a physical bridge that connected the English and the Education building. But few people traverse it, unaware of what the other side had to offer. At the institution I work at now there is a beautifully sculptured fountain of clasped hands holding the letters of the alphabet. The fountain lies in between the Department of English and the College of Education. Clasped hands are stronger than bridges, because with one we are still divided and have to cross-over, whereas with the other we are already together. The book raises this point in many ways. Open it with both hands. “Writing program administrators and English educators, first-year composition and secondary education, and universities and schools not only have much to offer each other, but together they might have much more to offer their students than they have been able to deliver so far” (16).

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