Contemporary Composition Studies:
Steps Beyond
The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning

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The Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (AEPL), an official assembly of the National Council of Teachers of English, is open to all those interested in extending the frontiers of teaching and learning beyond traditional disciplines and methodologies.

The purposes of AEPL, therefore, are to provide a common ground for theorists, researchers, and practitioners to explore ideas on the subject; to participate in programs and projects on it; to integrate these efforts with others in related disciplines; to keep abreast of activities along these lines of inquiry; and to promote scholarship and publication of these activities.

The *Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, JAEPL*, meets this need. It provides a forum to encourage research, theory, and classroom practices involving expanded concepts of language. It contributes to a sense of community in which scholars and educators from pre-school through the university exchange points of view and cutting-edge approaches to teaching and learning. *JAEPL* is especially interested in helping those teachers who experiment with new strategies for learning to share their practices and confirm their validity through publication in professional journals.

Topics of interest include but are not limited to: intuition, inspiration, insight, imagery, meditation, silence, archetypes, emotion, attitudes, values, spirituality, motivation, body wisdom and felt sense, and healing. Articles may be practical, research-oriented, theoretical, bibliographic, professional, and/or exploratory/personal. Each issue has a theme. The theme of the 1996–1997 issue is Writing, Thinking, and Teaching in the Borderland.

Membership in the AEPL is $12. Contact Nat Teich, Department of English, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon, 97403–1286 for membership information. Membership includes that year’s issue of the *JAEPL*.

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The Editor's Message

The prospect of bringing off a new journal is character building, I have come to believe—particularly when it is published only once a year and by a fledgling organization. The Journal of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning (JAEPL) had to be good, very good, especially the inaugural issue. That this was the first issue also meant, I hoped, that readers would tolerate mistakes. Surely, mistakes could be corrected with the next issue. But on second thought, that was a long year away.

Nonetheless, I celebrate the occasion of the inaugural issue of JAEPL. The logo is derived from the Egyptian hieroglyph, akhet. The sign represents the horizon from which the sun emerges and behind which the sun disappears daily. The logo depicts mountain peaks with the sun appearing between them on the horizon. The design was chosen because the image graphically embodies both the quieting and broadening vision of language that this journal indeed speaks to.

The theme of this first issue is Contemporary Composition Studies: Steps Beyond. What it does not mean is abandoning the solid armature of knowledge and skills. What it does mean is that we reflect our history but we question it. We resist its safety. Let me rephrase that. It means that we hold tradition up for scrutiny at the same time that we push boundaries back, follow intuitions, test and record them. What this also means is that JAEPL is different from other publications in the field. Unlike establishment journals, an occasional expressive essay, for example, will not merely seep into JAEPL, valorized by a special few who, only after playing by the rules, are allowed to break them. The forms of the articles, as readers will see, are not only empirical, theoretical, and practical, but also exploratory/personal and imaginative. This journal is for all thinking-feeling instructors who learn and teach, so to speak, to the beat of a different drummer.

JAEPL serves as an alternative forum for teachers and writers with establishment professional affiliations but whose professional beliefs may straddle several perspectives. For this issue articles are contributed by professionals using unorthodox methods in mainstream language teaching—play, drama, kinesthetics. Readers will also hear the voice of educators working in related fields or those who feel marginalized because they serve marginal populations: the disabled, the neurologically impaired, the underrepresented; and do so in alternative locations (By this, I mean not only physical settings but also bodily locations.). Individuals who do not know which professional forum to trust will find the door open here. But if I were asked to characterize the authors of those articles, more than anything else, I would say that they believe in things they cannot see.

A few statistics about the inaugural issue of JAEPL: Inquiries about submitting articles numbered 33. Actual submissions numbered 29. Of the contributions received, readers requested only minor revision on three manuscripts. Five manuscripts were returned with recommendations for major revision. Eight manuscripts were rejected, five by both readers and three by me.
because their subjects and the journal were clearly a mismatch. Seven came back with recommendations that were split between major and minor revision. And six submissions were returned with a split between major revision and rejection. Twelve pieces are published in this issue, producing an acceptance rate of 41%. The inconsistencies in ratings were not surprising, given our amoebic-like subspeciality. Pairing manuscripts and readers was not easy. A few manuscripts were returned when reviewers said they recognized the author. Resending those submissions added three to four weeks to the review process. Readers willing to speak with potential contributors also lengthened reviewing time but usually made for stronger pieces.

With personal experience submitting and publishing scholarly articles, I devised the JAEPL manuscript review to work like this: A manuscript arrives and is logged in. Two readers are identified and the submission is sent out with Reader’s Guidelines and a Reader’s Form. Reviewers have about three weeks to read the manuscript and return their comments and the manuscript. If they feel unqualified to evaluate a particular submission or believe anonymity has somehow been compromised, they return the article unreviewed.

Just as authors, readers need to be accountable for their comments. I ask reviewers to sign their name at the bottom of the Reader’s Form and to indicate if it may be made known to the author. When permission is granted, the ensuing dialogue, written or oral, often turns into an opportunity for substantial clarification. As does collaborative learning, the peer review process has obvious virtues. Potential contributors reported that they were generally enriched by pre-publication conversations.

After reviewers’ comments are returned, I read the articles carefully, leaning heavily on reviewers’ judgments. I send reviewers’ comments to the author with a letter of my own and any emendations written on the manuscript. When major revisions are requested, I often send the revised manuscript to the original readers, though in the end, it is I who makes the final decision. The procedure generally takes between two and three months.

The first time readers are sent contributions, I send along guidelines, asking readers to:

1. Observe some version of the golden rule. Respond as if you were writing to a friend whom you want to keep as a friend. Use a natural and respectful tone.

2. Feel free to point out significant, related publications that the author may have overlooked.

3. In a rejection give earnest, concrete, supportive advice. It might even be helpful to suggest another outlet for the piece.

4. If an otherwise acceptable article exceeds the page limit, mark parts for deletion. However, emphasize what should be saved in a manuscript, not only what should be changed or edited out.

When a contribution has been accepted, I start copy editing. If I don’t
already have the submission on disk, I ask for one plus a short abstract and biography. At this point I usually call the contributor to set up a time when we can go over the piece. I try to do the line editing by phone, even though it may take an hour or two. After considerable experience with this method, I find it exquisitely effective. We all know how illuminating it is to get our words into our muscles, into our vocal chords, as we try to be clear for someone who is truly trying to understand. It is the dialogue of negotiating meaning, jockeying for clarity and understanding.

Most reader responses were gentle and specific, generous and sympathetic. A few reviews produced several cursory comments but only one yielded a harsh, off-putting reaction. Unlike in the review processes of establishment journals, I did not come across any bad mouthing because a contribution infringed on a reader's own research program. On the contrary, reviewers seemed only too happy to see work out there, getting read, getting published.

There was no right kind of essay. Essays were downgraded or rejected if they were conceptually shallow or chaotic, or inaccurate and out-dated. Readers in general wanted nothing heavy or pretentious. They resented jargon. Corn-ball sentimentality, syrupy or purple prose also jarred them. Readers took a dim view of stylistic awkwardness or redundancy, or an egregious number of typos and spelling errors.

Accepted were generally pieces that added something substantial to our body of knowledge or provided insight into the complexity of that knowledge. Or the contribution posed a new issue, bringing it to bear on some question in language teaching or learning. As other editors have stated, contributions should be enlightened and fresh. Authors should have a sense of what is happening in the disciplinary debate. They should try to engage practicing professionals at the same time that they say something important to them. Critical rigor, imaginative speculations, and a graceful, felicitous writing style also worked in authors' favor.

Why did I choose APA style over MLA? An interesting question. The virtues of the MLA style are that it is most familiar to the greatest number of contributors and readers. It calls for a Works Cited list that conforms to standard punctuation and capitalization conventions. For example, full first names in a Works Cited list means more information, so that citations for, say, writing specialists Charles Cooper and Marilyn Cooper could not possibly be confused.

In contrast, APA style requires a number of curious conventions. In the References full first names are replaced by initials, which I find unnecessarily telegraphic. Unlike the third edition of the APA Publication Manual, the first line of each entry in the references is now indented while the lines following are flush left. Because the entry names are now buried on the page, I find locating citations visually more difficult. For books, only proper nouns and first words of titles and subtitles are capitalized; the rest are lower case. But not titles of journals. They are virtually the only document capitalized as in MLA style—the logic of which escapes me. Titles of essays, book chapters, and articles in periodicals are capitalized like book titles. But unlike MLA style, quotations marks are virtually extinct on APA's Reference list.

However, the big ticket item for me was the in-text documentation. I like to
know when things were done, said, written, or published. What stuck most in my craw was the fact that the MLA style does not require dates in intratextual citations. So unless authors insert dates into their text, readers may be left without chronological grounding. MLA adds abbreviated titles to authors’ names for intratextual citations to distinguish among several works by the same author—which to my mind are irredeemably intrusive. This is precisely where APA style carries the day. Although I think readers could do without the abbreviations, p. or pp. that precede page numbers, APA style calls for the publication year as part of every intratextual citation.

For this volume I drew reviewers from within the ranks of AEPL because I did not know enough about the professional pursuits or publishing record of our larger special interest constituency. We continue to need book reviewers and manuscript readers. Among the ways to participate in the JAEPL process are to attend AEPL sessions at the annual meetings of the CCC or the NCTE, participate in the AEPL summer retreats, write and publish, and become a self-studied specialist on some aspect of the domain beyond the cognitive. Drop a letter to me or to Assistant to the Editor Mary Deming. Identify your areas of interest and describe what professional experiences (presentations, publications, workshops) you have had in these areas. Feel free to recommend individuals whose interests intersect with ours but who may not be affiliated with the Assembly.

And of course, same time, next year. The theme of our next issue is Writing, Teaching, and Thinking in the Borderland. By this I mean stories of personal and professional discovery or renewal, administrative or community cooperation, and theoretical epiphanies, so that advances in language education are being realized in enabling and constructive ways.

We have already made some adjustments for the next volume. We have increased the maximum number of pages to fifteen. We will start a Letters to the Editor section provided we receive some. Although I read all material, determine the reviewers and its ultimate publishability, submissions are now sent first to Mary Deming for logging in and manuscript management.

Submissions continue to come in. If they were too late for this inaugural issue, I am holding them for consideration for the next issue. Potential contributors should refer to page 110 for submission guidelines. The deadline is February 29, 1996.

I hope with this journal that we are keeping some old friends and making some new. Of the old friends, let me thank the SUNY at Brockport Educational Opportunity Center for being my weigh station during my sabbatical year. Both Georgia State University and the English department at SUNY at Brockport helped with every form of communication available to them: e-mail, fax, postal service, phone, and duplicating. What else is there? Gracious thanks to the Lifebridge Foundation for funds for this inaugural issue of JAEPL. I also thank Martha Goff Stoner, Mary Deming, and her staff member, graduate student David Olliff.

JAEPL promotes self-definition, emotional wisdom, and an openness to experience. Please consider this Editor’s Message your invitation to join AEPL, to write, to listen, to understand.

Alice G. Brand
SUNY at Brockport