many adherents. For my part, I am persuaded by the hermeneutic Burke; the appropriation richest in implication is that which would pull Burke within the intellectual orbit of people like Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas, Ricoeur, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, and Blumenberg. If this line of interpretation prevails, most of the writers represented in *Legacy* will find it congenial, for the hermeneutic Burke and the Burke of the rhetorical turn are the same. At bottom, both come together in the principle of insufficient reason, acceptance of human being as *Mangelwesen*, a creature of deficiencies, whose endless task it is to speak for the speechless and to reflect upon both what has been made articulate and what makes any speaking possible. Beyond this, there is a certain listening for the as-yet-not-said. That should be enough, quite sufficient in its own way.


Reviewed by Reed Way Dasenbrock, New Mexico State University

Chris Anson’s collection of essays, *Writing and Response: Theory, Practice, and Research*, is both a good and an encouraging book. Throughout the past fifteen years, as composition research has consolidated its status as an autonomous discipline, a fruitful tension has existed between attempts to draw and attempts to cross disciplinary boundaries in the field. The contributors to this collection present a sensibly balanced perspective on this issue; they have a solid professional identity as writing researchers, but they don’t ignore the possibility that the study of response to student writing might profitably draw on other disciplines. For example, reader response criticism is an important resource in these essays. David Bleich himself contributes the lead essay, and the work of Rosenblatt, Fish, and Iser is drawn on in a number of other essays. In addition, since response to writing isn’t utterly different from other kinds of response, a number of essays draw on relevant insights from psychology. Dene Thomas and Gordon Thomas’ “The Use of Rogerian Reflection in Small Group Writing Conferences,” in particular, usefully establishes analogies between the therapeutic techniques of Carl Rogers and the teaching of writing. So the essays Anson has gathered achieve a good combination of disciplinary centeredness and interdisciplinary borrowing to focus on an important problem.

The central notion of *Writing and Response* is that when professors grade papers and comment on writing in conferences and in class, and when students work with other students in class or in a writing center, they are all engaged in the same activity: responding to writing. However, certain kinds of response contribute to writing improvement, whereas others don’t. Thus,
we all should be aware of the instructional pay-offs (and costs) of different kinds of response.

The essays in *Writing and Response* explore many kinds of response. Paper grading, writing conferences, peer groups and tutors are each the subject of several essays, but other kinds of response are also discussed, from computer programs to Jeffrey Sommers' intriguing technique of having students respond to their own writing in memos. Any writing teacher could benefit from reading about this wide repertoire of response modes, both in learning new techniques and in reflecting on whether one's own technique of response is productive. A theme in a number of the essays is that there is often a disparity between our theory and practice of response. As Anson argues in the closing essay, "Response Styles and Ways of Knowing," professors tend to think that their responses to student writing are far more supportive and encouraging than they actually are. An attractive feature of *Writing and Response* is that it urges a constant reflection on the relation between theory and practice, between the study and the teaching of writing.

There is at least one important respect in which the contributors to *Writing and Response* are themselves insufficiently reflective and in which there is an enormous and troubling gap between their theory and practice. With the exception of an excellent essay by Susan V. Wall and Glynda A. Hull, "The Semantics of Error," essay after essay cautions that the old "current traditional" concern with correctness and the consequent practice of marking all grammatical errors in student writing is destructive; such emphasis makes students think that form alone is important and that only teachers know all the answers. Teach the process of writing, ignore errors, and respond to the substance of the writing, not to its formal correctness—this is the prescription that comes across in virtually every essay. My problem with this is that these prescriptions are always expressed in essays written in perfectly correct (which means, as we all know, endlessly corrected) standard written English. Several essays cite student writing with palpable grammatical errors and urge us not to yield to our dualistic urges to focus on these errors. Yet, until the passages making those recommendations are as full of grammatical errors as the passages they are quoting, I think this advice will seem a little hypocritical.

What is never made clear anywhere in *Writing and Response* is the point at which it is appropriate for instructors to respond to errors in student writing. The message is always, "not now, later"; but since this advice is repeated at every level of the writing curriculum, practically speaking "later" means "never." The proper response to student writing seems always to be to ignore "surface level errors" and to focus on the content of the essays, not to correct the discourse of the novice writer but to encourage him or her to continue to grow and improve. But this advice conflicts with the fact that what the rest of the world primarily demands of our students is not inner growth, not even a desire to write, but simply and coldly the ability to produce competent,
perhaps dull, but definitely error-free prose. Study after study has shown this, as does the competent, often dull, but always error-free writing produced by all writing researchers.

The question that needs to be posed is this: why shouldn’t we focus on errors? What rationale can we articulate that might satisfy those outside English departments (students, parents, faculty in other disciplines, people in the business community) who feel just the opposite? The metaphor of “surface error” suggests one answer, which is that we shouldn’t focus on errors because they aren’t important; what is important about writing is its content, and what is important about writers is not their level of grammatical skill but their inner development. But this is an answer implicitly contradicted by the correct prose of advocates of this view and explicitly at odds with the demands of the world for which we are educating our students.

The answer advanced by at least one contributor to Writing and Response (and implicitly shared by other contributors) is considerably more substantial than this. Russell A. Hunt’s answer is that if we encourage writers’ fluency, focus on their development, and get them to write a lot, then the errors will take care of themselves, in just the way babies self-correct their articulation and gradually approximate the norms of adult speech: “We don’t learn language by having our errors pointed out and corrected; we learn as a by-product of using language in order to do things we care about doing” (83). But does this analogy hold? Does the acquisition of writing skills indeed work like the acquisition of speech? The baby learning to speak does so in an acoustically-rich environment; if it is not in such an environment, it doesn’t learn as well or as quickly. Are all our students in writing-rich environments, in learning environments where they will indeed do enough things with the written word to learn by doing? Or does this egalitarian-sounding proposition paper over and perpetuate differences among our students that reflect differences in their backgrounds? And does there come a time when we should assume that self-correction is not going to take place (in, for instance, an advanced writing class, as probably the last formal instruction in writing a student is likely to receive) and explicit instruction needs to take its place?

The axiom that the errors will take care of themselves is more a matter of faith than a tested proposition. If there is any support for this idea, then we ought to make it an explicit rationale for our decision not to focus on errors in student writing; but if there isn’t such support, if the errors won’t take care of themselves, then we have a problem. I have focused on this problem because though Anson rightly congratulates his contributors in his introduction for their willingness to ask questions and proceed with reflective uncertainty, they nonetheless rest content at a deeper level with current axioms in the field, particularly those about focusing on “deep” growth as opposed to “surface” errors. A metaphor may be holding us captive here. Is “surface” in writing anything we can ever get beneath, as the metaphor implies? As in painting, depth may be an illusion; surface may be all we have.
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I am not urging a return to the old focus on correctness at the expense of everything else, but surely only a dualist would insist that we have only two choices.

If it can be shown that correctness can take care of itself, then well and good. But if it cannot, then we need to find a new balance between the traditional concern for surface and the new concern for depth. I think the language of part and whole may serve us better here than surface and depth. To balance Aristotle's concern for genre, for well-made wholes, for the mastery of the available means of persuasion, we need some of Longinus' concern for the well-made sentence or phrase. Correctness is not a particularly thrilling war cry, but perhaps style could take its place in ways that could mediate between the external world's demand for error-free prose and our own concern with other aspects of good writing.


Reviewed by William E. Smith, Virginia Commonwealth University

Writing program administration has long been characterized by poor planning, crisis management, borrowed program design, and slavish adherence to tradition. And not infrequently, writing programs flourish within an institution because a charismatic writing program administrator makes a program succeed through common sense and force of personality. Edward White's *Developing Successful College Writing Programs* carefully examines the theoretical and practical issues necessary for organizational decision making and decreases the profession's reliance on chance and crisis.

*Developing Successful College Writing Programs* departs from the scant literature of objective program descriptions, such as Haring-Smith's *A Guide to Writing Programs*, Hartzog's *Composition and the Academy*, and Connolly and Vilardi's *New Methods in College Writing Programs*. White's contribution is a candid, personal, and often witty appraisal of current theory and administrative practice.

White divides his book into three parts, each increasing in complexity. The first section, "Examining the Current Status of Writing Instruction," emphasizes the importance of research knowledge and its necessity for long-range planning and growth. He analyzes six major research studies of college composition programs: the Kitzhaber study (1963), the Wilcox study (1973), the Austin Research Project (1983), the California Project (1983), and the two MLA studies by Hartzog and Connolly and Vilardi (1986). He also analyzes in depth two studies of instructional patterns in the writing classroom, the California study and the Hillocks study. The thrust of this section—indeed,