Other institutions with significant textbook holdings include the American Antiquarian Society, Antioch College, Columbia's Milbank Library at Teachers College, Illinois State University, Northern Illinois University, Stanford University, Trinity College, University of Kansas, University of Michigan, University of South Florida, University of Southern Mississippi, and the public libraries of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia.

Textbooks are also available on microforms, especially through the American Primer Collection (see Richard L. Venezky's introduction and the *Guide to the Microfiche Collection*, Bethesda, MD: University Publications of America, 1989) and the Early American Imprints collection. The "Nineteenth-Century American Schoolbooks" Digital Collection at the University of Pittsburgh currently offers online 130 full-text versions of schoolbooks. Other digital collections include the African Colonial Schoolbooks collection (available through Aequatoria Archives Research Project). Textbooks are reproduced in facsimile versions by Southern Illinois University Press (Landmarks in Rhetoric and Public Address), Teachers College Press (Classics in Education), and Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints. There are facsimiles of popular readers, issued by commercial presses (Dover, Applewood), and in growing numbers, of grammars and spellers (addressed to the home schooling audience). The McGuffey series remains in print.

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From Freedom to Manners: African American Literacy Instruction in the 19th Century*

TOM FOX

ANNE RUGGLES GERE's 1993 CCCC Presidential Address, "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition," called attention to the growing trend to imagine the history of composition, the history of learning to write, as larger than the institutional histories that have so usefully informed composition studies in the last decade. She argues that by concentrating on institutional contexts for constructing composition's history, we have neglected other powerful contexts for learning to write. And although the term "extracurriculum" first referred to the clubs and societies that attached themselves to academic institutions, Gere extends the definition (and thus the social groups under study):

> my version of the extracurriculum includes the present as well as the past; it extends beyond the academy to encompass the multiple contexts in which persons seek to improve their own writing; it includes more diversity in gender, race, and class among writers. . . . (80)

By exploring the contexts and practices of literacy learning by African Americans in the 19th century, I hope to contribute to a more expansive history of writing instruction. For students and teachers of composition in today's universities and colleges, a broader history of the extracurriculum in composition could provide promising models of teaching and learning and new arguments for transforming the historically fundamental definition of composition as remedial in purpose. The history of the literacy practices of African Americans in 19th-century America offers both hopeful stories and cautionary tales as we construct pedagogies, curricula, and writing programs in the late 20th century.

As Susan Miller argues in *Textual Carnivals,* "actual writing" is "undiscoursed" (34), that in fact institutionalized composition originated in the

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"I wrote 'From Freedom to Manners' when I was researching issues of standardization for my book *Defending Access* (1999). Discovering textbooks for Freedman's Bureau schools sent me on a research jag to understand curricula that was designed to provide new citizens with educational access and to understand why it failed. These questions felt immediately relevant to doubts about access for students in my own teaching of first-year composition."

—TF

repudiation of writing in everyday, public ways. This historiographical exclusion of everyday writing functions politically to legitimate a particular view of writing and writing instruction, a particular social and political agenda that helped form and reproduce these institutionalized practices (34–35). The specificity of the historical conditions of African American literacy in slavery argues for a "composition" that defines learning to write in terms of specific political goals that originate in resistance rather than the reproductive goals inherited by institutional histories.

WRITING, FREEDOM, AND REPRESSION

An obvious feature of African American literacy in the pre-Civil War South was that it was more transparently political than literacy for whites. Yet despite threats of dismemberment (cutting off the index finger was a common punishment for slaves who were caught writing), whipping, and even death, African Americans learned to read and write in remarkable numbers. From five to ten percent of slaves could read and write. Based on her extensive examination of a variety of sources, Janet Duitsman Cornelius, in her important book, *When I Can Read My Title Clear*, has argued that the ten percent figure is more likely accurate.

That any significant population of slaves learned to read and write testifies to the strength and ingenuity of slave resistance, considering the violent opposition to slave literacy. In the 1830s, following various publicized slave rebellions, fearful white Southerners believed that literacy contributed centrally to rebellion, and enacted legislation that made teaching and learning literacy illegal. South Carolina, which historically had banned slave literacy in 1740 and in 1800, had one of the most restrictive of laws. The discussion that preceded its enactment in 1834 continually referred to the role that literacy played in Denmark Vesey's elaborately organized scheme for rebellion in Charleston eight years before. Whitemarsh Seabrook, whom Cornelius calls "fussy and somewhat pedantic," unrelentingly led the movement to ban literacy teaching to slaves. His tactics were to argue that literacy and religion were the two main threats to slaveowners' power and were "most dangerous when combined" (40). During the years 1829 through 1834, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Virginia, Alabama, and South Carolina all passed these laws. Most laws included prohibitions to assemble as well.

While the legal suppression of literacy learning was difficult to enforce, anti-literacy laws were symbolic gestures that signified the collective fear that slaveowners had of slave literacy and legitimated the violent means used to punish slaves for learning to read and write. These laws were perhaps aimed at Northern abolitionists who wished to teach slaves to read and write as they were slaves. Brutal slaveowners, however, never needed laws to enforce their wishes. Cornelius cites several stories of slaves who told of the punishments—from whipping, to amputating fingers to prevent writing, to hanging—for getting caught reading and writing (66). It was clear to any slave in the early 19th century that reading and writing were risks.

Apparently, slaveowners had a reason to fear literacy. They cited the fact that rebellious leadership among slaves, from Nat Turner to Denmark Vesey in Charleston, saw printed texts—abolitionist texts, biblical texts, newspaper

reports of slave rebellions—as "an inspiration for revolt" (30). They cited David Walker's *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World*, a passionate and powerful exhortation to revolt, as further evidence.

Walker's text was especially troublesome to them. According to the "Brief Sketch of the Life and Character of David Walker" that accompanies the 1848 edition, the *Appeal* "caused more commotion among slaveholders than any volume of its size that was ever issued from an American press" (vi). It's not hard to see why. Walker's *Appeal* strikes at the heart of all slaveholders' fears. First of all, it is addressed to "Colored Citizens" and assumes a literate slave audience. This rhetorical move excludes white readers, placing the issues of freedom and liberty out of their control. Walker repeatedly addresses his audience as "my beloved brethren," and sometimes even more pointedly selects his audience: "Men of colour, who are also of sense, for you particularly is my appeal designed" (40). For the planters to imagine an audience in the way that Walker demands they imagine it, would be to destroy their image of slaves as subhuman. By way of brilliantly critiquing not the most racist planters but "moderate" arguments such as Jefferson's section on slavery in *Notes on the State of Virginia* and Henry Clay's plan for Liberian colonization, Walker repeatedly argues for open insurrection. His image of literacy is, I believe, representative:

> You have to prove to the Americans and the world, that we are MEN and not *brutes* as we have been represented, and by millions treated. Remember, to let the aim of your labours among your brethren, and particularly the youths, be the dissemination of education and religion. . . . Some few of them, may make out to scribble tolerably well, over half a sheet of paper, which I believe has hitherto been a powerful obstacle in our way, to keep us from acquiring knowledge. (42)

This "knowledge," Walker makes clear, is knowledge of the brutality of slavery, knowledge that will "make the tyrants quake and tremble" (44). Literacy has power because slaveowners will know that "their infernal deeds of cruelty will be known to the world" (44). Additionally, Walker argues that, once educated, slaves will no longer tolerate slave conditions:

> Do you suppose one man of good sense and learning would submit himself, his father, his mother, wife and children, to be slaves to a wretched man like himself, who, instead of compensating him for his labours, chains, handcuffs and beats him and family almost to death, leaving life enough in them, however, to work for, and call him master? No! No! . . . The bare name of educating the coloured people, scares our cruel oppressors almost to death. (44)

Walker's rhetorical identification with slaves, his knowledge of history, his skills in argumentation, his unrelenting assertions of African American humanity and power, and the widespread dissemination of his pamphlet, gave Southern planters good reason to fear literacy.

The slaveowning South, both the legislative and social power structure, seemed to understand this role that literacy could play in challenging oppression. While it is difficult to imagine, given the reductionist views of literacy today, literacy was at the very center of the debate about slavery in the 1830s.

African American slaves and freedmen sought literacy as a means of challenging and transforming their communities and the nation. In doing so, they shook the ideological underpinnings of Southern slavery.

In the face of a threatened and determined opposition, slaves felt very powerful motives for writing. Many, if not most, of these motives were pragmatically political, but I'll begin with one that may seem less immediately so. Among the means of political action was resisting the definitions of (in)humanity imposed on slaves by white society. As many commentators on literacy have pointed out, literacy in the Western world has been associated with humanity, the very quality of being a human. The racists beliefs that allowed slavery to exist defined slaves as subhuman, incapable of or unsuited to many intellectual tasks, not the least of which was literacy, and especially writing. Robert Stepto, in *From Behind the Veil*, argues that the reason that many slave narratives had to be "authenticated" by white people was that their audience, while perfectly willing to believe that slaves could be free, had difficulty believing that slaves could write. Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. concur, arguing that the slave narrative "arose as a response to and a refutation of claims that slaves could not write" (xv). The act of writing itself, for a slave, challenged the very ideological structure of slavery.

Writing also involved an assertion of a collective identity that the removal from Africa, the separation of families, and the various laws that prevented assembly (many of which accompanied antiliteracy laws), made urgent. Opposition to the very humanity of slaves, paradoxically, made writing more urgently important. Davis and Gates write:

> The slave narrative represents the attempts of blacks to *write themselves into being*. What a curious idea: through the mastery of formal Western languages, the presupposition went, a black person could become a human being by an act of self-creation through the mastery of language. Accused of having no collective history by Hegel in 1813, blacks responded by publishing hundreds of individual histories. (*xxiii*)

Literacy—especially writing—carried with it this oppositional stance. For instance, the fact that Frederick Douglass's master opposed his learning to read and write made Douglass all the more determined to become literate. In fact he credits in part the opposition of his master: "In learning to read, therefore, I am not sure that I owe as much to the opposition of my master as to the kindly assistance of my mistress" (qtd. in Cornelius 1). Thomas Webber, in *Deep Like the Rivers*, claims that "the efforts of the white community to discourage the learning attempts of their slaves only strengthened the slaves' resolve" (135). He cites the experience of Austin Steward as representative; after he was flogged for studying a book, Steward reported:

> [I]nstead of giving me the least idea of giving it up, [flogging] only made me look upon it as a more valuable attainment. Else, why should my oppressor feel so unwilling that their slaves should possess that which they thought so essential to themselves? (135)

Literacy was an individual and collective argument against the various, increasingly absurd defenses of slavery in the early 19th century. The assertion

of collective identity was not so much a psychological act as it was a political action against slavery.

Indeed, most of the reasons that African Americans claimed for learning to read and write were pragmatic. Writing, in particular, was linked with freedom in the form of a pass. So entrenched was the belief that slaves could not write that a slave could write himself a "pass" that would allow him mobility or facilitate his escape. Although Frederick Douglass's autobiography is the most famous example of a slave writing his own pass, many other slave narratives tell similar tales. Passes could be used to gain time to escape to the North, or, as Cornelius notes, could be used to gain temporary freedom to visit family members in other locations.

Writing became identified with freedom on this individual level, but it also became a part of the collective struggle, as the pamphlets of Walker and others show. African Americans wrote—and read—to be involved with the ongoing struggle for collective freedom. This first protest literature took many forms: political pamphlets, slave narratives, court petitions for emancipation, and written accounts of slave rebellions. The volume and force of this literature tied literacy—in both the slave populations and in white slaveowners—to resistance.

This brief account of literacy learning among African Americans in slavery seems, and is, a dramatic contrast to the institutional history of composition. Chronologically, the pre-Civil War period pre-dates most common public schools, pre-dates the sense of nationalism that was a consequence of the Civil War, and pre-dates the linguistic standardization of the second half of the century. The context of African Americans' literacy, the fact that it worked against and outside dominant institutions, gave it a particular stamp of urgency, of action, and perhaps, of political effectiveness, too.

EMANCIPATION AND THE DOMESTICATION OF LITERACY

Some white Southerners saw the unbridled nature of African American literacy as its most dangerous feature. Instead of arguing for anti-literacy laws, which they perceived would be ineffective (correctly, since literacy learning had gone on outside the purview of repressive masters), many white Southerners argued that the best way to preserve slavery would be to institutionalize literacy. In fact, in the public discussions preceding South Carolina's anti-literacy laws, some Southern whites argued that formal schooling for slaves would better control the content of their learning and make slaves more submissive, industrious, and accepting (Cornelius 45–46).

Regardless of Southern white wishes, institutionalized schooling and literacy instruction came soon enough. As soon as Northern armies began to conquer Southern lands, slaves were set free. And as soon as slaves were set free, a wide variety of people with vastly different sets of purposes began to set up schools. Ultimately, these schools were governed by a federal agency, the Freedmen's Bureau. The Freedmen's Bureau was originally created to deal with the immediate needs of freed slaves, such as food, shelter, and health. Within a year of its creation, the Freedmen's Bureau concentrated on education to the exclusion of other more urgent political issues (such as land and franchise). This sole concentration on education as the one means to equality

deserves scrutiny. Most scholars of education, with the notable exception of Ronald Butchart's *Northern Schools, Southern Blacks, and Reconstruction*, see the Freedmen's Bureau's activities as anomalous in the otherwise persistent neglect or antagonism towards African American education in our history as a whole. They note that the Freedmen's schools brought over 2500 teachers (many of them Northern white women) to the South to teach newly enfranchised slaves (Butchart 4). And as the first system of institutionalized instruction in literacy to African Americans in this country, the Freedmen's schools altered the symbolic—and actual—role that literacy had played in the lives of African Americans.

In the pre-Civil War period, literacy for African Americans symbolized freedom by contradicting the dominant class's definition of Africans as subhuman. Once emancipated, freedmen retained these ideas about literacy. They attended Freedmen schools in droves and at great sacrifice. Teachers were faced with class sizes from fifty to one hundred, and many children and adults were turned away. Teacher after teacher remarked on the seriousness of their students. Butchart writes: "The intense desire for knowledge and literacy was reflected in the classroom. Teachers and observers marveled at the Freedmen's zealous application to schoolwork, rapid advancement, and evidence of mental quality" (170). Northern teachers, steeped in the same racist ideologies as the South, were particularly astonished to find ex-slaves already reading and writing. James Anderson sees this fact as evidence of the "former slaves' fundamental belief in the value of literate culture" and their determination "to secure schooling for themselves and their children" (5).

Motives for attending Freedmen's schools were much the same as motives for learning literacy before emancipation. Freedmen went to school to achieve practical power. It was as much a part of the collective movement for freedom as before slavery. Ex-slaves learned to read and write so that they could read their employment contracts and, for the lucky, their papers that allowed them to own property, so that they could participate in a newly opened political process, and so that they could foster collective race pride. Ex-slaves also retained the ideological, and symbolic understanding of literacy from days of enslavement. In the words of James Anderson, "emancipation extruded an ex-slave class with a fundamentally different consciousness of literacy [from whites], a class that viewed reading and writing as a contradiction of oppression" (17).

Ultimately, both the practical political ends of education and the ideological hope for equality through education were betrayed in the years after the Civil War. Whites, both Southern planters and Northern reformers, conceived Southern schools differently from ex-slaves. Schools were central to the Freedmen's Bureau; in fact, after a year of its existence, schools were just about all that the Freedmen's Bureau was engaged in. Reconstruction had promised land reform and a fundamental redistribution of wealth. It had promised real opportunity. In the years shortly after the war, one by one, the bureau and the nation—as the Southern planters regained their dominance—turned their backs on real reforms, leaving only schooling. Butchart is most succinct on this point:

> The Afro-Americans were on the threshold of freedom. They needed land, protection, and a stake in society. They needed and demanded meaningful power. They were given instead a school. The gift was vastly inadequate to the needs of men and women set free in a vengeful, vindictive society. Indeed, as the school fell under the control of a race and a class with interests opposed to those of southern blacks, education was not merely inadequate, it was utterly inappropriate. (9)

As the Freedmen's Bureau became more and more concerned with schools, and as it took control of even the schools run by blacks, literacy instruction for ex-slaves switched from literacy for liberation to literacy for social control. Curricular materials from the Freedmen's schools clearly show the stress on manners and individual industry. While capitalizing on motives for demonstrating "humanity" and achieving economic freedom, the texts for freedmen represent literacy in a fundamentally different and conflicting light from the image of literacy as liberating. Some of the schools used the same textbooks as white schools, while others used materials specifically created for Freedmen's schools. These materials, as would be expected, vary according to the ideological leanings of the groups who published and used them. Since many of the Freedmen's schools were founded by evangelical aid societies, the readers reflected religious values of temperance, piety, and domesticity. In most cases, very few texts addressed the conditions of slaves or the conditions of freedom. The more conservative books, those published by the American Tract Society (ATS), did address slavery and freedom, but avoided all criticism of planters and presented the freedmen in demeaning ways: lazy, unkempt, docile, dependent, mentally inferior, and always in the role of an agricultural laborer. Prior to the war, the ATS published numerous religious tracts, but in no way could the organization be considered antislavery (Morris 188). Its materials reflected its opposition to black equality.

The ATS readers stand out in contrast to another choice for freedmen, Lydia Maria Child's *The Freedmen's Book*. In many ways, Child's book extends the ideology of literacy that the slaves held prior to the war. Child's story, "The Meeting in the Swamp," for instance, draws upon the ways that collectivity and literacy served liberation. It is the story of a slaveowner, Mr. Duncan, who follows a slave to a secret meeting. There he witnesses a man who proclaims that "at last I finds out how de white man always git he foot on de black man" (108). His answer is literacy, and he holds up the newspaper to show it. The man describes learning to read by tricking his master's son; he describes the use of reading in order to inform himself and his fellow slaves about possible political developments that pertain to their freedom.

More than other readers, Child's selections (most written by herself) openly criticize slaveholders. In "The Beginning and Progress of Emancipation in the British West Indies," Child takes particular aim at the fact that West Indian slaveowners kept their slaves "in brutal ignorance." She ridicules the response of the slaveowners to missionaries intent on teaching bible literacy: "They said if slaves were instructed they would rise in rebellion against their masters. The English people replied that it must be a very bad system which made it dangerous for human beings to read the Bible" (128). Additionally, in her biographies of Madison Washington and Frederick Douglass, Child represents literacy learning as, in part, an act of rebellion.

Certainly, by the very fact of her inclusions of writing by Francis W. Harper, Frederick Douglass, Phyllis Wheatly, and other African Americans, and by the

fact that her text more openly represents the cruelty of slaveowners and the resistance of slaves through literacy, Child's text differs from both McGuffey's readers, which were used throughout the Freedmen's schools, and the more conservative texts from ATS. Yet *The Freedmen's Book* also represents literacy learning as more domesticating than liberating. In the final essay, "Advice From an Old Friend," Child stresses the power of individual character as a means of political reform. She claims that her biographies of black revolutionaries "prove that the power of *character* can overcome all external disadvantages, even that most crushing of disadvantages, Slavery" [emphasis in the original (269)]. The content of this character prevents the kinds of critical incisiveness or collective action that would have served the Freedmen's political needs at the time. Child's essay argues for the following (not surprising) features of characters, and makes her claims for the validity of these features on the biographies of black revolutionaries that she herself wrote. She argues that for emancipation to be successful, the ex-slaves needed to be "sober, industrious, and honest." She devotes paragraphs to the virtues of manners, personal appearance, and thriftiness. And while these characteristics veer significantly from the pragmatic education of the slaves, they are couched in similar political frames. After informing her readers that slavery remains legal in other countries, Child relates the following lesson on the virtues of tidy homes:

> if your homes look neat, and your clothes are clean and whole, and your gardens well weeded, and your work faithfully done, whether for yourselves or others, then all the world will cry out, "You see that negroes *can* take care of themselves; and it is a sin and a shame to keep such men in Slavery." (270)

In addition to being insufficient political advice, the use of this story in a pedagogical context sets up a sharply divided sense of literacy, one originating in slavery that builds on a real and symbolic connection with liberation, yet one that also misuses that connection by displacing the tremendous political needs of the ex-slaves for political power in the domain of individual manners.

Obviously, the curriculum is not the same as the education. There is no evidence that the ex-slaves took Child's advice and traded political action for planter boxes in front of their homes. Indeed, most of the evidence suggests a great deal of resistance to white teachers in general. Anderson's history of Black education is the most thorough on this point. Even before the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, ex-slaves had set up schools for themselves. Thomas Alvord, superintendent of schools for the Freedmen's Bureau, found a whole system of black-initiated, black-run schools. Du Bois, Woodson, and others all point to this system as the foundation of public education in the South. The freedmen showed a clear preference for black teachers, too, sometimes offending Northern teachers. This preference stemmed from deep mistrust of whites, to be sure, but also from a desire to "resist external control," and, according to Anderson, test "their capacity to restructure their lives, to establish their freedom" (12).

For Northerners as well as for Southerners, the Civil War and the potential political and social enfranchisement of the freedmen broke open their world.

Reconstruction promised a radically new political and social system. Literacy for African Americans was a part of this new society, though by no means as important for political transformation as land ownership or voting rights. Yet the remarkable, perhaps unprecedented commitment to schooling reflected a continued belief in the power of literacy to "help raise the freed people to an appreciation of their historic responsibility to build a better society and that any significant reorganization of the southern political economy was indissolubly linked to their education in the principles, duties, and obligations appropriate to a democratic social order" (Anderson 28).

Once institutional writing instruction was made available to ex-slaves, and made available with rhetoric that drew upon established notions about the connections between freedom and literacy, schools betrayed the rhetoric of emancipation through the curriculum and pedagogy of character and manner. The social agenda became selection, indoctrination, and gatekeeping. "Emancipation" changed from a politically pragmatic process of writing to a once-removed process of admission and acculturation. The standards of admission and acculturation were (and in many respects *remain*) a driving force that more often reproduces the academic manners of the elite. These standards evolved into present day standards that delineate racial and linguistic boundaries based on culture.

The literacy history of African Americans in the 19th century, like the literacy history of most any group, is a complicated mix of hope and despair. The utility of this history to composition teachers isn't self-evident. On one hand, I hope that with more inclusive histories we can begin to see our responsibility for creating more inclusive institutions by reforming writing programs and abandoning remedial ideologies that have plagued us for over a century. The continuing critique of institutionalized teaching of writing is far from completed, and the troubling exclusion of African Americans from higher education continues. Applied to the Freedmen's schools, this critique shows us with historical depth the ways that literacy education has for the most part failed to generate social or political power for African Americans. Additionally, the stories of the heroic commitment to literacy during slavery and after prevents the easy dismissal of school failure by arguing that African Americans live in an "oral culture" or in a culture that doesn't support education. Legitimating these histories in academic classrooms and journals has important consequences to teachers and students of composition.

This history is of special importance to African American students in composition studies or considering composition studies. If we imagine the extracurricular history of composition as entering institutional curriculum, then the history of the struggle for meaningful literacy by African Americans makes our institutional context richer and more relevant to African Americans, providing them both with new opportunities to locate critiques of literacy instruction and opportunities to forge historical continuities with the remarkable uses of literacy for resistance.

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The Status of Composition and Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1880–1902: An MLA Perspective

DONALD C. STEWART

FOR MOST OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, composition or rhetoric papers were not considered suitable for the annual programs of the Modern Language Association. As a matter of fact, from the beginning such papers never were accorded significant places at these meetings, but in the association's early history they appeared more frequently than one might suspect. They appeared because many of those who founded the MLA in 1883 were, among other things, professors of rhetoric and oratory, and they were still preoccupied with the problems of teaching writing. They were not preoccupied happily, however, because their primary interest was in demonstrating that the study of English and modern literatures was as intellectually legitimate and pedagogically beneficial as studying Latin and Greek. However, increasing college enrollments and, with them, increasing numbers of students who wrote poorly kept the problem of teaching writing constantly before those who taught in emerging English departments. The chore of giving instruction in this uncongenial subject, as wearying to college English teachers then as now, did have one significant compensation. The freshman composition program rapidly became an economically sustaining force in an English department's existence (Kitzhaber 1–71; Parker 347).

In the first twenty-seven annual programs of the MLA one finds considerable range in the quality of papers which deal, to some extent, with rhetoric and composition. Some were marginally original and, one suspects, of little interest even to the informed composition teacher of that time. Others touched more closely on problems, such as usage, that preoccupied composition teachers. A few bore directly on central theoretical and pedagogical questions

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