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## The 1979 Ottawa Conference and Its Inscriptions: Recovering a Canadian Moment in American Rhetoric and Composition

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**MICROHISTORIES OF  
COMPOSITION**

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## THE 1979 OTTAWA CONFERENCE AND ITS INSCRIPTIONS

*Recovering a Canadian Moment in American  
Rhetoric and Composition*

Louise Wetherbee Phelps

In May 1979, Aviva Freedman and Ian Pringle hosted an international conference on “Learning to Write” at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, featuring a concentrated assemblage of eminent scholars as speakers and respondents. Those present sensed immediately that they were part of a momentous and historic event. Janet Emig, who delivered her famous “Tacit Tradition” speech at the conference, remembered it later as “the single most electric professional meeting I ever participated in” (Emig 1983, n.p.). Many delegates saw it as the rightful successor to the landmark Dartmouth Conference of 1966, and when Anthony Adams, the closing speaker, suggested it might even eclipse Dartmouth as the most important conference ever held on English education, “there was a general murmur of assent” (Oster 1979, 24).

Freedman and Pringle (1980) acknowledged and honored this heritage, but as editors of *Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition*, one volume of papers from the conference, they consequentially shifted its context, recasting the meaning and significance of the event in terms of the disciplinary study of writing rather than the teaching of English. Freedman spoke of the 1979 conference later as corroborating “the reality of a new, or should I say renewed, discipline: writing research or rhetoric or composition theory” (Maguire 1995, 83).<sup>1</sup> The primary theme of *Reinventing* is a coming-of-age story in which the conference is both the occasion and the means for writing studies to emerge on the scene as a full-fledged, intellectually compelling, and already international discipline. This is not the whole story, though, because the two other publications from the conference focused on layers of its meanings that more fully engage the broad concerns of internationalized English and

language-arts education. But it is this bold claim of disciplinary maturation and international scope, made at such an early date, that should have assured Ottawa 1979 a place in the origin stories of modern writing studies.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the high caliber of its scholarship left its trace: many of the published conference papers became classics of American rhetoric and composition.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, inexplicably, the Ottawa Conference has vanished from disciplinary memory and is rarely even noted in histories of the period, much less recognized as a seminal moment. Only recently has James Zebroski remedied this oversight in his revisionist account of English education's role in early composition, where he dramatically declares that "the 1979 Ottawa conference is one site where the discipline was born" (Zebroski 2012, 42). Zebroski credits Freedman and Pringle (especially in *Reinventing*) with being "among the very first to call composition and rhetoric a discipline" and to appreciate its multiple roots and traditions (44–45).

This discrepancy between contemporaneous judgment and historical memory is just the kind of anomaly that calls for microhistorical inquiry (Ginzburg, Tedeschi, and Tedeschi 1993, 33; Peltonen 2001, 349). In this essay, I follow Zebroski's lead and work to recover the 1979 Ottawa conference from the mists of history as a Canadian moment in American rhetoric and composition. Like most such events, this conference was captured—or, as I will say, inscribed—for contemporaries and for history primarily through its published accounts and products, in this case three volumes of conference proceedings edited by its organizers. I will focus my inquiry sharply on these volumes because the relationship of the conference to its public inscriptions lies at the heart of my study as a microhistory.<sup>4</sup> By embodying and disseminating the conference-as-event beyond the circle of those who directly experienced it, these texts permit us—using the method of clues (Ginzburg and Davin 1980)—to gaze *through* the inscriptions at the conference itself as a consequential enactment and lived experience of the field at a particular moment in time. In this instance we see it through the fresh eyes of Canadians, who were both learning about the field and participating in its development. At the same time, these edited volumes constitute purposeful texts by which authors and editors, as responsible historical actors (Magnusson and Szijarto 2013, 69), carry out important rhetorical, hermeneutical, scholarly, and pedagogical actions. By elucidating that relationship as it unfolds in the singular case of Ottawa 1979, this microhistory can point beyond its unique particularities to suggest how such events and publications serve to develop and sustain a discipline and its scholars.

This study draws on a range of microhistorical strategies, viewing microhistory in Levi's terms as "a series of practices and methods rather than a theory" (Levi 2012, 126). They include the microscale of description (Levi 2001, 99–102); attention to outliers (Magnusson and Szijarto 2013, 152) and the "exceptional normal" (attributed to Edoardo Grendi 1977); the conjectural model of clues or signs (Ginzburg and Davin 1980); contextualization (Magnusson and Szijarto 2013, 74–76); and generalization to questions, not answers (Levi 2012, 127). Conceptually, it relies on the notion of a fractal relationship between selected cases and a larger whole in which historians' contextual knowledge allows them to recognize patterns that crystallize more general understandings, especially from the exceptional or obscure case (Magnusson and Szijarto 2013, 64–65, 75). These methods also embody an ethic of historical practice that honors individuals' agency, an ethic I share with many microhistorians, including those represented in this volume.

## OTTAWA 1979: THE CONFERENCE AND ITS CONTEXTS

### *The Event*

The professional conference called "Learning to Write," sponsored by the Canadian Council of Teachers of English (CCTE) as its annual meeting, was held May 8–11, 1979, at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.<sup>5</sup> Professor John Oster, a Canadian delegate who provided impressions of the conference for a CCTE journal, wrote vividly of the spring setting: "Ottawa was beautiful, with clear blue skies, freshly burgeoning foliage, bright tulips bordering the canal and rivers, and grass so green it appeared freshly painted for our arrival" (Oster 1979, 23–24). Twelve-hundred-fifty delegates—many more than expected—registered for the conference and were housed on two campuses and in local hotels. Popular sessions were crowded to capacity, and discussions spilled over onto the campus and into local bars afterwards. The international mix of the delegates represented five continents, but the great majority was Anglo-American, from Canada, the United States, Great Britain (the UK), and Australia.<sup>6</sup>

The Ottawa 1979 conference had a general program in English and language arts ("all levels" of education), which ran from Tuesday through Saturday and a specialized program in ESL ("Anglais, French Immersion, E.S.L."), which ran concurrently on Friday and Saturday. Freedman and Pringle were general program chairs, and Janice Yalden was responsible for the ESL program. At the time, Pringle was an associate professor of English and linguistics at Carleton, and Freedman

was director of writing tutorial services at the university. Yalden chaired Carleton's Department of Linguistics and directed its ESL program.

Since the two parts of the conference each had its own printed program, it is possible to distinguish them in terms of both speakers and session types. English and language arts had 156 speakers and respondents sprinkled densely throughout the program like stars in a galaxy of multidisciplinary talent. The ESL program had another forty-seven speakers and workshop leaders, with Henry (H.G.) Widdowson, a prominent British scholar in applied linguistics and English-language teaching, as the keynote speaker. Together, the disciplines represented included—at least—education (English education, language arts), rhetoric, composition, linguistics, grammar, applied linguistics, cognitive psychology, ESL, and communication.<sup>7</sup>

The two conferences organized time differently. The English and language arts program was studded with featured presentations: opening and closing addresses, keynotes, and invited speeches. Distinguished respondents, often featured speakers themselves, assured that debates continued across sessions. Following an "Opening Day" of general interest, Wednesday through Saturday were devoted (though not exclusively) to particular educational sectors and interests: "Sentence-Combining Day," "Secondary Day," "Elementary Day," and "E.S.L. Day." This concern for the needs of different constituencies was echoed in the variations in session format, designed to enable different forms of learning and participation: besides the addresses, sessions included panels, seminars, practical workshops, sector or special-interest luncheons (like the "Post-Secondary Luncheon," with Canadian linguist H. A. Gleason as guest speaker), and meetings of special-interest groups (e.g., Canadian Community College Teachers). Some sessions were invitational, although Oster remarks that at least one, on teaching writing to nonmatriculated students, "immediately developed into a large panel discussion . . . limited only by size of the theatre in which it was held" (Oster 1979, 27).

Rather than a day-to-day schedule, the ESL program provides abstracts for the presentations, organized under three categories: research papers, public lectures, and workshops, with date and time attached. These are preceded by a program summary that maps out activities by day and hour, including besides concurrent sessions the keynote by Widdowson and an ESL lunch speaker (Richard Yorkey). There is little overlap between the two programs.

Many of the distinctive features of the conference programming, including its concurrent programs, mix of session types and focus, and

segues from research or theory to practice (in and between sessions) found expression in the three postconference volumes, each with its own content and audience. In *Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition*, editors Freedman and Pringle (1980) selected presentations from the English and language arts program for an audience of scholars in writing. It was published for CCTE in the United States by L and S Books (a bootstrap operation run out of an American English department). This press was then one of the few ways to publish a scholarly book in American rhetoric and composition, and for that reason *Reinventing* quickly entered the discourse of the field. Pringle and Freedman (1981) edited the next volume, *Teaching/Writing/Learning*, for classroom teachers. Published directly by CCTE, it sought to “cast into written form what happened” in the practical workshops distributed throughout the conference (O’Hara 1981, iii). Yalden joined Freedman and Pringle to edit the third conference proceedings, *Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language* (Freedman, Pringle, and Yalden 1983). This book, which draws on both programs (only two pieces overlap with *Reinventing*), was published for CCTE in London (and New York) by Longman in a series on applied linguistics and language study. As its title and publication venue suggest, it is oriented to a more international (especially British) audience, situates writing studies in disciplines of language study rather than in (American) composition and rhetoric, emphasizes language learning over a broader range of ages and levels, and links first-language and second-language learning and pedagogies through research on writing.

To unfold the potential meanings of the Ottawa conference and its inscriptions, I next reinsert them into broader historical contexts, retrospectively understood (Levi 2001; Magnusson and Szijarto 2013, 65; Phillips 2004).

#### *1979 and Thereabout*

In 2003, Martin Nystrand and John Duffy prefaced an edited volume on new directions in writing studies by asserting that “the leading edge of research on writing, reading, and literacy . . . is defined by its intersection with sociocultural, historical, political, disciplinary, institutional, and everyday contexts” (Nystrand and Duffy 2003a, viii). Their own historical overview begins with the provocative premise that “ideas take hold because some receptive context valorizes them” (xviii). While that receptive context includes ideas (extradisciplinary sources and influences), these are insufficient to explain the rapid development of composition in the late 1960s and 1970s: it is necessary to examine



the sociocultural contexts and events that “provided the critical catalyst . . . [and] helped set agendas of change and define issues in the particular forms they took” (xviii). A number of other scholars develop this connection in historical accounts of the period (Ede 2004; Faigley 1992; Goggin 2000; Zebroski 2012; see also Applebee 1974, 184–243).<sup>8</sup>

Briefly, here is the picture these scholars draw of the events and sociohistorical forces that shaped the “receptive context” for the rise of (American) composition and rhetoric throughout the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Maureen Daly Goggin describes how in the 1960s and early 1970s a “confluence of social, political, ethical, and economic upheavals . . . [including] the civil rights movement; the women’s movement; political assassinations of President John F. Kennedy [1965], Martin Luther King [1968], and Robert Kennedy [1968]; and the Vietnam War and the draft . . . radically realigned the social and cultural matrix in the United States and . . . had an enormous impact on education” (Goggin 2000, 75). Students were radicalized and campuses saw widespread protests and disruptions. Composition was not immune to this countercultural activism and, indeed, was deeply engaged with it (Faigley 1992, 48–79; Parks 2013; Zebroski 2012, 30)

At the same time, however, under a “liberal consensus” that prevailed throughout most of the 1960s, the federal government generously funded the War on Poverty and all levels of education, including the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Act and Higher Education Act in 1965 (Faigley 1992, 51).<sup>10</sup> By the late 1960s, community colleges were opening at a rate of one a week (Nystrand and Duffy 2003a, xix). A huge expansion was underway in higher education: postsecondary enrollment grew to 3.6 million in 1959–60; exceeded 8 million by 1969–70; and soared above 11.5 million in 1979–80 (Faigley 1999, 27–28).

As these contexts began to shift in the next decade, with the United States’ departure from Vietnam, Watergate and President Nixon’s resignation, the rise of oil prices with gas rationing, and a stock-market decline (Faigley 1992, 62), anxieties rose about education, fueled by conservative critics like John Simon and Edwin Newman. In 1974, NAEP issued a report on the decline of writing abilities, and, with *Newsweek*’s publication of “Why Johnny Can’t Write” in 1975, the literacy crisis was born. Ironically, the perceived literacy crisis and cries of “back to basics,” in tandem with postsecondary expansion, open admissions, demographic changes, increased ethnic diversity, and the 1960s-based emphasis on student-centered education, constituted a highly receptive climate for composition to thrive. Writing teachers and administrators were

needed for the influx of students, which meant jobs (unavailable to literature graduates), and federal and foundation money flowed liberally to support writing-related professional development for teachers as well as research on writing. Lisa Ede defines the climate as more than simply “receptive”: “Specific material *interventions* . . . enabled the field to—in a remarkably compressed period of time—improve its professional and disciplinary status” (Ede 2004, 50; italics mine). Ede (2004, 54–60), and Goggin (2000, 75–111) in her chapter “Sowing the Seeds, 1965–1980,” detail the copious menu of funded and unfunded professional-development opportunities, which were especially attractive—and necessary—to scholars educated in literature who wanted to retool in composition.<sup>11</sup>

The year 1979 has never been identified as particularly crucial in the annals of composition history, but these contextualizations and scholars’ narratives (e.g., D’Angelo 1999) tend to lead toward and away from it, treating it tacitly as a watershed that divides (and joins) the decade of sowing the seeds from the decade of harvesting their fruits. The Ottawa conference, falling precisely at that moment of transition, becomes identified with the watershed. Or, more precisely, if viewed broadly as a process, it crosses the watershed: it was proposed in 1977, planned and prepared between then and 1980, and inscribed over the next several years. Shifting the metaphor, we might say that the Ottawa conference rode and crested the rising wave of the 1970s while the publications from it (1980, 1981, 1983) flowed away into the new era.

A lot happened “around 1979,” to echo David Bartholomae’s (1993) afterword to *Pre/Text: The First Decade* in which he assembles bits and pieces of history “around 1980” as context for the founding of *Pre/Text* that year: articles published and books advertised, seven postdoctoral seminars one might attend, the scene at 4Cs, and so on. I can add one scrap to his collage: Ottawa 1979 was one scene where Victor Vitanza and others from Richard Young’s NEH seminar at Carnegie-Mellon plotted to start the journal.<sup>12</sup> *Pre/Text* was one of six new journals in rhetoric and composition founded between the Ottawa conference and its last published inscription in 1983 (Goggin 2000, 36). Over that time span, doctoral programs sprang up in sudden profusion. Of thirty-eight programs listed in Chapman and Tate’s (1987, 128) earliest survey of doctoral programs in rhetoric, half were founded during that period: a startling ten in 1979–80, and nine more by 1983.

Also in 1979, I completed my own self-designed interdisciplinary PhD in composition and rhetoric. When I found a job at the University of Southern California (teaching in one of the earliest doctoral programs in the field), I joined an emerging cohort of tenure-line faculty who,

together with the pioneering scholars who inspired them, formed the critical mass necessary to “legitimate [composition’s] situation in the academy—if it could develop a strong disciplinary project” (Ede 2004, 61). Most of the new faculty were still postdoctoral “converts” or had cobbled together ad hoc studies in writing and rhetoric in the absence of full-scale graduate degrees, but their credible scholarly expertise and growing numbers finally made possible the collective creation in the United States of discipline-based doctoral education in the 1980s.

## THE CONFERENCE AS INTERACTION RITUAL

### *Interaction Rituals as Scholarly Practice*

The scholars I’ve been citing tie this receptive or catalytic context to a trajectory of professionalization that accelerated during the 1970s and reached a plateau around 1980, which ushered in a decade of consolidating and securing the gains that had been made in achieving an academic identity as a discipline (see Goggin 2000, 113–46). In her history, Ede draws attention to the relationships between “individual career building and the effort to establish composition’s scholarly expertise in the academy in the 1970s and early 1980s” (Ede 2004, 51). Frank D’Angelo (1999, 2002) highlights this synchrony between autobiography and field, making the story of how he—and his cohort—invented themselves as writing scholars isomorphic with stages in the growth of the discipline. In his 1999 narrative, he traces their parallel trajectories from “initiation” through a “quest” stage to the triumphant emergence of an academic discipline of rhetoric and composition, which he places in 1978–1980. That success was manifest in a geometric increase in scholarly activity and social interaction: between 1978 and 1980, D’Angelo “participated in 22 conferences and symposiums, four workshops, and four colloquiums. . . . You could probably multiply the number of speaking engagements, colloquiums, seminars, and workshops by a hundred if you were to ask other scholars what they were doing at this time” (D’Angelo 1999, 277).

Ede challenges conventional histories of composition for focusing on “changes enacted at the level of theory” while neglecting “the *scholarly practices* that enabled various theories to gain ascendancy” (Ede 2004, 51; italics mine). I’m not sure she meant this phrase in exactly the sense I want to take it up, but the practices she goes on to describe (as “activities” and “opportunities”) are overwhelmingly embodied experiences of intellectual exchange with other scholars (55–60). They are the face-to-face, interactive, deeply engaging professional events—seminars,

institutes, conferences, workshops, and the like, ranging in length from a few days to a year—that D’Angelo (and Ede herself) attended.<sup>13</sup>

Ede perceptively highlights the importance of these face-to-face events—including appreciation of the Ottawa conference itself (Ede 2004, 57). But even she focuses on the achievement, dually, of scholarly careers for individuals and credibility and status in the academy for the discipline (“professionalization”) rather than on the events themselves as embodiments and experiences of scholarly activity. That focus on professionalism attends to the pragmatic consequences of such events rather than what happens there, specifically as a phenomenon of scholarly practice.<sup>14</sup> This section directs attention to the Ottawa conference in just those terms: as enacting a recurrent pattern of embodied scholarly practice, which reveals its fractal relation to a system of intellectual activity (see Magnusson and Szijarto 2013, 63). To crystallize this pattern from the hints and glimpses offered by the inscriptions, I will need some conceptual tools.

D’Angelo’s accounts express the nature of these events as recurrent encounters of small groups in emotionally stimulating exchanges (intense, involving, energizing) focused on ideas (D’Angelo 1999, 2002).<sup>15</sup> These are precisely the defining features of the “interaction rituals” (or IRs) Randall Collins (1998) deems essential to the motives and the intellectual work of disciplines.<sup>16</sup> They are also the qualities that Mary Catherine Bateson (1984) dramatizes in her memoir of her parents, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, vividly evoking the lives of two generative scholars for whom conversation was the primary medium for making knowledge. In Collins’s work, as in Bateson’s, the face-to-face encounter is a *sine qua non* for successful intellectual communities. (The role of texts, to be discussed later, is derivative).

In naming the conference an *interaction ritual*, I am invoking Collins’s (1998) grand theory of intellectual work as a function of social networks, whose structures and dynamics account for the life of ideas over time.<sup>17</sup> Although such networks have widening, concentric circles of participants, at their core are small, concentrated groups of leading scholars engaged directly with one another in developing ideas about common objects and concerns. These groups are organized into networks by their horizontal (peer) relationships and vertical (intergenerational) relations and by their alliances and oppositions.

Collins’s (1998) analytical framework offers here a tightly woven network of concepts, with interaction ritual (IR) at the center, to specify the eventful nature of the Ottawa conference. Bateson (1984) complements his abstract description of IRs with her poetic representation of

conversation as scholarly thinking, epitomized by the scholarly conference.<sup>18</sup> What Collins and Bateson share is a profound understanding of thinking as social and, specifically, as communication. For Collins, "Ideas . . . are first of all communication, which is to say interaction among bodily humans. . . . Ideas are formed in the process of communication between one thinker and another. . . . The communicative process creates the thinkers as nodes of the process" (Collins 1998, 2). Bateson's book recreates her parents' ideas and their lives as a tissue of conversations, from the microcosm of the family to the formal venue of the conferences they frequently arranged: "I had . . . spent my life in and out and on the edge of conferences, formal and informal, treating them as a normal mode of interaction—perhaps indeed as *the* normal mode of interaction . . . I had grown up to believe that conferences are the way to think" (Bateson 1984, 179). Both Collins and Bateson agree closely on the processes, structures, and qualities of this communication. Both emphasize small, generative groups who meet face to face—Collins's "innovative core" (Collins 1998, 5) and Bateson's "evolution clusters," her mother's term for "groups of people among whom ideas develop and within which the contributions of an outstanding mind resonate and are amplified" (Bateson 1984, 198). Both stress emotion as an indispensable component of scholarly thinking-through-communication: Collins, in his foundational concept of "emotional energy"; Bateson, in her portrait of intense intellectual conversation as a passion akin to lovemaking (199), infused with emotions like love, bewilderment, rage, dismay, and illumination (180).

Relatedly, each conceives scholarship as stimulated by diversity of viewpoint and energized by opposition among scholars, positions, and movements. Conflicts are, Collins (1998, 1) writes, the indispensable "energy source of intellectual life" and, as "lines of difference between positions," "implicitly the most prized possessions of intellectuals" (6). Although intellectual communities generate a huge volume or flow of thoughts, ideas and rival positions must compete for the network's attention, and only a few can become the focus of creative conflict at a particular moment. Collins argues there is only room for three to six successful "knots of argument" (38) to occupy niches simultaneously in the limited, stratified attention space of a field. These constitute a structured "field of forces within which individuals act and think"—stable until it is restructured in revolutionary moments (42). In contrast, Bateson emphasizes the productive potential for argument as joint performance: as in dance or jazz improvisation, enabling participants "to say something which no one of them knew as they came in the door" (Bateson 1984, 178).

We can recognize scholarly events as interaction rituals by these defining qualities: an assembled group (two or more) whose members are copresent in time and space; participants' focus on a common object or action; and a shared mood or sentiment (Collins 1998, 22, 47). As prototypical scholarly IRs, conferences are unlikely to achieve unity on issues—just the opposite since the intellectual network is characterized by its oppositional structure. Rather, what unifies participants is their membership in the community of scholars: “The consciousness of the group’s continuity itself as an activity of discourse” in a chain of IRs and their products (thoughts, symbols, discourses, and generations) that link past and future (Collins 1998, 28).

Functionally, IRs serve as engines of intellectual activity and creativity. By focusing collective attention and sentiment on particular objects or ideas, IRs infuse symbols (concepts, objects, images, texts, even scholars themselves) with emotional significance; the most meaningful become “sacred objects” for the network “that act as magnetic poles in intellectual thinking, that are the focus of the long and serious attention that is the activity of the intellectual world at its most intense” (Collins 1998, 41). Individuals store up these charged symbols as “cultural capital” (24), knowledge of the field Collins defines as a repertoire of “ideas and the sense of what to do with them” (71) or the ability to grasp the field as an evolving set of “fruitful tasks” and intellectual possibilities (28).

Like an electric battery, an IR event like a conference, through its social interactions, common focus, and mood, also “charges” up participants themselves—both speakers and audiences—not only with cultural capital but with “emotional energy” for conducting intellectual work (Collins 1998, 29–37). Emotional energy (differentially accessible to members of a network) encompasses motivation, enthusiasm, confidence, mental and physical strength for pursuing scholarly activity. But these charges fade with time, and scholars must constantly renew energy and cultural capital by forging their own personal IR chains in a “grid of encounters” from everyday meetings to the membership rituals of professional organizations (29). In the bigger picture, IRs are microsituations in a dynamic macrocontext of social interaction that links human bodies and minds (and, as we will see below, texts) into disciplinary networks through which ideas and emotional energy flow ceaselessly across time and space.

#### *Realizing the Ottawa Conference as Interaction Ritual*

For Collins and Bateson, conferences are prototypical sites for scholars to think and communicate, which is to say they are IRs by definition and

intent. So it seems a truism to call the Ottawa conference an *interaction ritual* and redundant to exhaustively document its IR features. However, the organizers of Ottawa 1979 faced a unique and challenging set of circumstances in designing and orchestrating this conference as an IR. I want to define these challenges and show how the purposes and strategies they adopted resulted in a distinctive IR with heightened qualities and special functions. I'll explore these points further in the final section, which portrays the conference as an example of the microhistorical concept of the exceptional normal.

A useful reference point for this analysis is Collins's (1998) three identifying features of an IR as scholarly practice: the copresence of participants in space and time; a flow of ideas and debates around a common focus in a structured attention space; and feelings generated in the encounter (shared mood, "charge"). His theory expects most conference attendees to belong to an intellectual community already bound together socially by chains of communication events so their copresence and coordinated thinking at the conference will be felt as part of a continuity of both network (people) and dialogue (ideas). Such members would bring to the conference shared symbolic resources for communication and expectations about which topics, arguments, and figures would dominate discussion.

In other words, Collins assumes a discipline as the context for any particular IR to make it both intelligible and involving for members of the network. But that context is exactly what the organizers did not, and could not, assume about the eclectic mix of conference delegates. Without a specific context, the conference had to conjure up the discipline for them as a living practice. Broadly, the strategy adopted was to make the conference itself a microcosm of the discipline—its structure and dynamics to be evoked, experienced, in a sense even accomplished by the conference itself. (As we will see in the next section, this strategy was flipped in the inscriptions to use the conference as proof of the discipline.)

To understand both the necessity and the execution of this strategy, we must start with the participants. Of the 1,250 delegates, about 16 percent were speakers or workshop leaders in two streams of meetings, English and language arts (156) and ESL (47). They were layered in a hierarchy that reflects Collins's portrait of the intellectual network, with leading scholars, "stars," at the "hot center" (Collins 1998, 30) and others in widening circles of membership out to a periphery. In *Reinventing*, Freedman and Pringle (1980, 173, 176, 178) clearly identify this inner circle and its members' role at the conference and in the field: as

"leading researchers and composition scholars," they were "at the vanguard," "at the forefront of the discipline," "operating out of a different intellectual matrix" from the outer circle of practitioners. Other layers included established scholars with different degrees of experience and eminence; novice scholars, including graduate students; and teachers from different levels of schooling. The periphery of the network was defined by "the outsider," as Freedman and Pringle noted about E. D. Hirsch (1977), a literary critic whose book *The Philosophy of Composition* was critiqued in his absence (Freedman and Pringle 1980, 176).<sup>19</sup>

On the surface, the participants in Ottawa 1979 may seem a typical conference mix, but they are different from Collins's model of IR participants in several striking ways. First, there was an enormous distance between the leading scholars and the most distant circle, the practitioners, many of whom (especially teachers from Canada) were complete newcomers to even the very idea of a discipline. In *Inkshed* (a Canadian newsletter), Phyllis Artiss wrote, Ottawa 1979 was "a turning point for me, as for a good many other teachers in this country. . . . Here I discovered that there were other teachers in English in this country who shared my commitment to teaching writing and were willing to actually talk about it in public! What was even more astonishing was to learn that there were lots of professors of English in universities (mostly in the U.S.) who wrote books and articles about teaching composition, got research grants to do this kind of work, and won awards for it" (Artiss 1991, 1).<sup>20</sup>

However, not even the speakers themselves, as a multidisciplinary, international group, came to the conference as members of a shared intellectual network or necessarily self-identified as writing scholars. In proposing a conference with a singular focus on writing, Freedman and Pringle "fantasize[d] . . . bringing together" the disparate and geographically scattered thinkers they saw as constituting a new, transnational discipline by their research on composing and writing development but who "seemed to be only dimly aware of each other's work" (Freedman 1995, 84).<sup>21</sup>

To make this nascent community come to life for delegates, the organizers had to envision it for themselves and then orchestrate the processes of a genuine IR.<sup>22</sup> To this task they brought complementary expertise, Freedman's in writing scholarship and Pringle's in linguistics (syntactic development). (Their vision included an ESL component, but that planning was delegated to Janice Yalden.) For a previous research project with Pringle, Freedman had developed a comprehensive reading knowledge of composition work in the 1970s; and in 1978 she attended Janice Lauer's two-week Rhetoric Seminar (then at the University of



Detroit), which provided her with a concentrated scholarly overview of American composition and rhetoric from representatives of its most current scholarship (Lauer 1998). That base was broadened by what each knew about lines of research on writing and writing development in international settings and in other disciplines.

Intuitively, Freedman and Pringle built the Ottawa 1979 IR around an inner core. To construct one, they first “approached a number of the real recognized stars in the field”; while Freedman was at Lauer’s Rhetoric Seminar, she invited all the speakers there to the conference (five of eight accepted). They successfully used these “big players” like magnets to attract one another, some to meet for the first time. When I interviewed Freedman in December 2013, she told me the call for papers drew “huge numbers” of proposals, suggesting that already they had tapped into an incipient sense of a common enterprise: “You could really sense the discipline burgeoning, flourishing at that moment.”

These charismatic figures, along with other major scholars speaking in concurrent sessions, became the key to the organizers’ strategies for creating a shared focus of thought and sense of community among such mixed participants. They used the choices and arrangement of speakers on the program to map out the event as an attention space (a synecdoche for the attention space of the discipline), establishing focal points for the delegates’ “micro-coordination” of thought and communication (Collins 1998, 23). This process was necessarily inductive; Freedman describes their reading the work of invited speakers along with hundreds of proposals to discover the shape of the “new psychic terrain” (Freedman 1995, 84).<sup>23</sup> They deployed the speakers throughout the program to articulate the objects and symbols—topics, concepts, issues, problems, arguments—that would order the intellectual space. The “stars” provided classic, eloquent statements that introduced these symbols (accessibly for novices), saturated them with social meaning and emotional significance, and initiated dialogue between opposing positions. The conference amped up the emotional energy that flowed to participants with the high density and quality of speakers distributed over each day (and adding their presence to other sessions); the generative sparks of conflict; and opportunities in the crowded spaces of small classrooms for social interaction among all levels of participants, continuing in “even more valuable, extended conversations over beer in the evenings and over lunch on those magically lovely days on the campus” (Freedman 1995, 84).

Both Pringle and Freedman came increasingly to appreciate the role agonistic conflict plays in energizing scholarly practice.<sup>24</sup> The

speaker-respondent pairs were designed to dramatize differences around argument “knots,” but there were also confrontations arising from the audience. In an e-mail message to me on February 17, 2014, Pringle described a “magic moment” early in the conference when British educator Tony Adams confronted cognitive psychologist Carl Bereiter “cogently and forthrightly,” including the statement that “we have already heard too much about cognitive psychology at this conference.” Pringle continued: “It literally made the hair on the back of my neck stand on end, and the reaction in the audience as a whole was all a conference organizer could hope for in terms of setting the tone for the conference and starting discussion and debate which could and did continue throughout the rest of the conference.”<sup>25</sup> Such conflicts hint at divisions with complex correlations to disciplinary orientation, level of education, and national identity: for example, Oster reports, “Basic British distrust of the North American obsession with models, classifications, and techniques was revealed by a number of British comments, in tones not suggesting reverence, about heuristics, tagmemics, and sentence-combining” (Oster 1979, 26). Referring to the deepest division at Ottawa—the “clash of paradigms” initiated by Emig’s “Tacit Tradition” speech—Oster says “the sparks from these collisions certainly contributed to the liveliness of the conference and . . . to igniting new areas of thought and research for many participants” (26).

Through the inscriptions and other sources, in spite or because of these conflicts, we get a glimpse of the affect of the conference, which suggests its success in creating a high degree of energy, emotional investment, and sense of common purpose. The terms characterizing mood include “buoyant, exhilarated, confident” (Freedman and Pringle 1980, 176): “electric” (Emig 1995, 79); and “vibrancy” and “air of excitement” (Oster 1979, 24). In an e-mail message to me on February 7, 2014, James Reither described the conference as “enormously exciting and invigorating . . . an injection of energy into my sense that this was a field I could devote myself to.”<sup>26</sup>

Freedman and Pringle have much to say about what these feelings signify in terms of the accomplishments of the conference as event. But their powerful claims take us from reconstructing the event as interaction ritual *through* the inscriptions to examining the inscriptions as texts performing their own acts and functions within a larger discourse.

### CONFERENCE INSCRIPTIONS AS SCHOLARSHIP, RHETORIC, HERMENEUTIC, AND PEDAGOGY

Collins's insistence on the primacy of face-to-face interaction for intellectual life doesn't prevent him from understanding the crucial role played by texts: "An intellectual IR is generally a situational embodiment of the texts which are the long-term life of the discipline. Lectures and texts are chained together: this is what makes the distinctiveness of the intellectual community" (Collins 1998, 27). Indeed, reading and writing amount to virtual IRs, producing similar effects from participating vicariously in "coalitions in the mind" (36). Collins points out that intellectual communities depend for their sustainability on writing, more specifically on a text-distribution structure that allows ideas to cross time and space, transcending embodied occasions and persons: "Intellectual events in the present—lectures, debates, discussions—take place against an explicit backdrop of past texts, whether building upon them or critiquing them" (27).

Conference proceedings, as inscriptions of actual IRs, play a special but unexamined role in these textual functions. In particular, they have attracted little notice from historians as artifacts that document—as a kind of "history of the present" (Ash 1999; Little 2009)—how scholarly practice was enacted face to face, from which we might trace the trajectory of intellectual movements, restructurings of the attention space, development of symbols and sacred objects, and other phenomena of disciplinary dynamics. But in their own time they have their own, variable discourse purposes and intended functions within disciplinary discourse. The three volumes of conference proceedings edited by Freedman, Pringle, and Yalden display the possibilities for a rich range of goals that such inscriptions might serve, of which four kinds stand out: *scholarly*, *hermeneutical*, *rhetorical*, and *pedagogical*.

To consider these, I will sharpen the focus in several respects. First, there are two layers of text in an edited volume, corresponding to the roles of authors and editors: (1) essays reproducing (or derived from) scholars' conference talks; and (2) the editorial writings and features of each volume. These purposes independently animate both levels, but I'll be concerned only with how they figure in the editorial work performed by the volumes, individually and collectively. Each volume, differentiated by audience, integrates these four purposes in different ratios. Given space limitations, I'll devote the most detailed attention to *Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition* (Freedman and Pringle 1980).

This first volume, aimed at the emergent scholarly community, is key to grasping the editors' goals in producing inscriptions of the

conference, so I will begin with their own statement of purpose: "No book can hope to give more than a hint of the excitement generated on the campus of Carleton University as the 1250 delegates to the conference listened to each other's presentations and then argued, challenged, discussed, explained, and argued further throughout the conference. . . . But if the impact of the conference on those who attended cannot be recreated, at least some of the most important of the presentations can be shared, through publication in book form, with those who did not attend" (Freedman and Pringle 1980, ix). The preface goes on to frame this particular volume as an expression of three strands "in the fabric of the conference," emphasizing how the papers "deal with the relationship of the rhetorical theories discussed at the conference (and their practical applications), to the rhetorical traditions which they are superseding" and to note that the epilogue provides "our own view of the larger context of these theories," that is, of the discipline. Two strands refer to concepts: tradition as it relates to the contemporary field and invention as a distinctive focus of scholarship on writing. The third is mood: the pervasive excitement that reflects delegates' discovery of their commonality in a scholarly enterprise. The editors then briefly place the essays in the book in relation to these themes of emergent disciplinarity and add another, "pedagogical implications of the new discipline" (xi). From this starting point, we can discern in *Reinventing* a complex integration of codependent scholarly, hermeneutic, and rhetorical purposes, acting both as subgoals and as means to accomplish a broader editorial function for the inscriptions (with a hint at how pedagogical purpose will become dominant in the second volume).

A fundamental goal of the inscriptions is to enlarge the circle of those who can participate vicariously in the conference and, therefore, the discipline. At the most basic level, that means providing directly—in inscribed talks or, in the case of *Teaching/Writing/Learning* (Pringle and Freedman 1981), translations of workshop events—the scholarly ideas and arguments that circulated at the conference. The editors perform a scholarly function in selecting material from the conference for inclusion, framing it, summarizing it, and synthesizing it (in all three volumes). However, in *Reinventing* they go well beyond this minimal editorial work, in part through the synecdochal relationship they set up between conference and discipline. The epilogue here, and collectively all the background materials written for workshops in *Teaching/Writing/Learning*, use the conference as a platform for painting a picture of the (evoked/imagined) field at that critical, watershed moment in 1979.

That portrait includes sketching (illustrating with figures, essays, and moments at the conference) the partitioned and hierarchical shape of its intellectual activity, its motifs, differences, and oppositions; characterizing the “mood of the profession . . . as it revealed itself at the conference” (Pringle and Freedman 1981, 176); historicizing the field’s development; and projecting its future trajectory.

But this image of the discipline is not neutral, of course; it has a hermeneutical dimension and rhetorical force. In a comment posted to the blog *Understanding History* on August 2, 2009, Daniel Little’s language defining a “history of the present” works surprisingly well to characterize the editors’ work as hermeneutic: “This is an act of ‘apperception’—taking many separate pieces of evidence and experience and forging them together into a unified representation” (Little 2009, 1). As contemporary observers of the conference, Freedman and Pringle sought to grasp, in Little’s words, “what is occurring, over what terrain, by what actors, in response to what forces and motives,” producing an “evidence-based integrative narrative of what the processes of the present *amount to*”—that is, what they mean (Little 2009, 2; italics mine). Broadly, the hermeneutical task in *Reinventing* was to *interpret what the conference meant for/about a discipline of writing*, not only in their present but in our future.

One way to observe this interpretive work is to look at the symbols Freedman and Pringle foregrounded in *Reinventing*. Tradition is a condensed symbol for a set of questions debated at the conference about the discipline: From what (competing) traditions has it drawn ideas and values? How relevant are those traditions today? Which is most “congenial” and productive for future development of the field? (Freedman and Pringle 1980, 178). The editors’ historical review places the contemporary (1979–1980) field in relation to two past traditions: the “current-traditional” practice of teaching composition that has been repudiated (173) and the tradition of classical rhetoric, whose primacy is now challenged (most powerfully and controversially in Emig’s “Tacit Tradition” speech) by “the contemporary intellectual matrix,” whose genealogy includes twentieth-century thinkers about language as well as paradigms and research from fields like cognitive psychology and linguistics (178). By constructing historical relationships in this way, the epilogue largely ignores an alternate way of framing the past in terms of the broader realm of English or language-arts education, internationalized (in IR terms) by the Dartmouth Conference, in favor of the more explicitly disciplinary history of rhetoric and composition in the United States. (However, this alternate tradition reappears in the third volume, *Learning to Write* [Freedman, Pringle, and Yalden 1983].)

This clash of traditions, dramatized at the conference, presents Freedman and Pringle with the specter of a deep fracture in the field, even at its (re)birth as a discipline of writing studies. It threatens one of their major (rhetorical) claims, that the conference mood expresses commonality, signifying the emergent disciplinary network. They resolve this problem hermeneutically by using their second highlighted symbol, invention, as a mediating term. In the context of new research on composing, they cast the term as bridging the two traditions by reinterpreting the concept in light of modern research. This term is then resituated to characterize the new discipline itself as "reinventing" the rhetorical tradition so that "there is no great difficulty in reconciling" the rhetorical distant past with the modern tradition evoked by Emig (1980, 179). "Reinventing" is a "fundamentally eclectic" approach: "seeking out those theoretic statements most consistent with our shared assumptions and explicit formulations which might give shape to our intuitions and perhaps suggest further implications. But these insights and formulations have been reconceived from a modern perspective and set within a contemporary philosophical context" (179). Much of the epilogue is devoted to advocating this understanding of the discipline by showing how it applies to illustrative issues and concepts in the conference papers, often to the effect of reconciling positions many regarded as opposed or incompatible.

This position is grounded rhetorically, first, in an expanded definition of *commonality* and, second, in the treatment of *the discipline* itself as a symbol. For their rhetorical purposes at this moment in time/space, the editors needed to emphasize unity over "the issues that divide us" (the theme of the second Ottawa Conference, only six years later). The editors argue that commonality is not just a sentiment or spirit, though it is that. First, it is a shared, active relationship to the competing traditions—the ongoing activity of "reinventing" the one with the other. Second, they insist, despite its diversity, the intellectual network embraces a body of shared assumptions, specific concepts, beliefs, and values (named here and greatly detailed for practitioners in *Teaching/Learning/Writing* [1981]). Among these are focusing on processes of composing and viewing texts as fundamentally social, not autonomous, "within a total rhetorical context which includes writer, audience, and world" (Emig 1980, 177).

Emerging from this conference, the most sacred object, saturated with social meaning, was the idea of the discipline itself, not as a status but as a transcendent scholarly practice. Freedman and Pringle are careful to place the discipline in a time stream that has both a past

(traditions, IR chains) and a future of “tremendous ongoing activity: the sense of work in progress, of what remains to be done; the active involvement of so many researchers, theorists and pedagogues in charting the new territory” (Freedman and Pringle 1980, 184). Moreover, they powerfully assert the “immense importance” of the discipline insofar as composing/invention is an “essential human activity” of thinking, learning, and knowing (180).

A cascade of rhetorical claims, then, flows from the fundamental one of existence: there is now a discipline—a scholarly study with this object, nature, and scope, these qualities and premises, a network of participants both international and multidisciplinary. While I can’t analyze the other two volumes in detail, I want to note briefly how each works within this hermeneutical-rhetorical framework and also modifies and extends it.

*Teaching/Learning/Writing* (Pringle and Freedman 1981) is an unusual effort to extend the conference event and its effects—the sense of community, the energy and intellectual capital generated by the conference—to include practitioners as an integral part of the discipline. Its method is to capture in writing the most quintessentially face-to-face component of the conference, its workshops: “to translate ‘happenings’ into pieces of transactional writing, a creative act akin to transforming a poem into a painting, a symphony into a drama” (O’Hara 1981, iii). But these translations become pedagogical and rhetorical through an extensive layer of contextualizing editorial material specific to each workshop, which persuasively explicates theory and research relevant to the practices embodied there. Unlike the relatively autonomous essays of the other volumes (as collections), this editorial material is used to make the book a cohesive reading experience through explicit linkages (backward and forward) to other workshops so it could function pedagogically as a kind of textbook (perhaps, one speculates, intended for use in professional-development settings for teachers). The editors are frank advocates for particular values and positions, but, more broadly, they seek to persuade teachers that scholarship in the new discipline can and should inform and guide their classroom goals and strategies. Thus, this volume embodies a position on theory-practice relationships, a fundamental division (and question about the nature of the field) that was muted in *Reinventing’s* drive to articulate the discipline as first and foremost an intellectual enterprise.

The final volume in the series represents the ESL strand of the conference, but not autonomously (as one might expect from its separate, parallel programming at Ottawa). Instead of that easy option, in *Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language*, Freedman, Pringle, and Yalden

(1983) use their selections and editorial writings (introductions to each of four parts) to put disciplinary studies of writing developed in the context of first-language learning in dialogue with the field of ESL, concerned with second-language learners.<sup>27</sup> Compared to *Reinventing*, the book, published in an applied linguistics and language study series, exposes readers more richly to British, Australian, and Canadian perspectives as well as multidisciplinary linguistic, cognitive, and developmental research on a wider spectrum of educational levels. The emphasis on commonality as defining a disciplinary community in *Reinventing* shifts in this volume, where differences are between two independent disciplines (although many familiar polarities cut across ESL and the new writing studies). The editors conduct a respectful examination of how different contexts—first-language versus second-language learner, or developmental levels from elementary to adult—explain and justify differences, intellectually, in the foci of scholars' attention, and pedagogically, in educational practice. From this base the editors suggest different modes of compatibility and complementarity with the hope of engaging the two fields in mutual learning.

The rhetorical purpose of putting composition and rhetoric into dialogue with ESL has the paradoxical hermeneutical effect of reframing a writing discipline as less autonomous. In *Reinventing*, the discipline is differentiated from a larger, nebulous (international) field of English education by its strong scholarly focus on writing. But the US base of this discipline (despite important contributions from scholars in English education) was limited by its overidentification with American "college" composition. This volume situates writing in the full developmental span, encompassing all levels of learning, and expands the geographical compass of its study and teaching. Although the editors never suggest a merger, the intellectual pressure of this dialogue reinserts writing scholarship into a broader, more diffuse intellectual enterprise—more frankly pedagogical than the discipline of *Reinventing*—and blurs some of its carefully drawn boundaries. Besides ESL, Candlin's preface argues that the issues discussed here (e.g., "The Use of Writing for Learning and Knowing") affect not just writing but "language learning and teaching as a whole, and one might add, the entire process of education" (Candlin 1983, ix).

#### THE MICROHISTORICAL VALUE OF OTTAWA 1979

It seems obvious, in theory if not in practice, that we should return to primary sources, not only to reconstruct the disciplinary past but to



teach it to the next generation of scholars. Through this microhistory, we see the added value of studying these sources in their original context. Conferences and their editorial inscriptions offer a usefully circumscribed context for this purpose: to understand a particular historical crisis or change as enacted at a given moment in talk and text; as meaningful for a range of historical actors; and as interpreted and integrated by contemporaneous participant-observers writing “histories of the present.” Microhistories are distinctive in incorporating both emic and etic perspectives. They foreground participants’ own language expressing their “experiences, how they saw their lives and what meaning they attributed to the things that happened to them”; at the same time, relying on historians’ contextual knowledge, microhistories “give explanations with references to historical structures, long-lived mentalities and global processes using a retrospective analysis, all of which were absent from the actors’ own horizons of interpretation” (Magnusson and Szijarto 2013, 75). This principle signifies microhistorians’ profound respect for historical actors not only as active agents “operating within the interstices of contradictory normative systems” (Levi 2001, 111) but also as reflective thinkers about those systems. Their own attempt to understand themselves historically “makes a claim on the future,” as Eiss describes an object whose inscription “was a demand to be read not only by contemporaries but perhaps by others who might one day understand the events of that day as the beginning of a history that was yet to take place” (Eiss 2008, 74).<sup>28</sup>

What makes the case of the Ottawa conference doubly valuable is that it represents what microhistorians call the “exceptional normal” if we stretch that concept to its more general interpretation (Magnusson and Szijarto 2013, 19; see McComiskey, introduction, this volume). By describing the Ottawa conference through the template of Collins’s “interaction ritual,” I assimilate it to “normal” intellectual practices in academic disciplines. In fact, one of Freedman and Pringle’s implicit premises in *Reinventing* is that these typical features and qualities of scholarship *signify* the disciplinarity of writing studies. But the inscriptions themselves bear witness to its singularity, first, as a historical moment: “To many who were present . . . it seemed that the conference served as a culmination of all that had been achieved in the study of rhetoric since the beginning of the recent resurgence of interest in the discipline . . . [and] provided a moment to pause and reflect on these developments” (Freedman and Pringle 1980, 173). Unspoken, but embodied in their own identities, is the additional uniqueness of the conference and its inscriptions as performing an early Canadian

intervention in the discipline. So it is the chronotope that defines the event and its inscriptions together as exceptional: the nexus of time—the watershed moment of 1979; place—Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada; and agency—that of Canadian scholars whose participation in the discipline then troubles many unquestioned assumptions about that period of composition and rhetoric.

The context of 1979 created a watershed moment when certain things were possible. What difference did it make that it was Canadians who seized that moment?

In relation to the mainly US-based discipline of composition-rhetoric in 1979, Canadians who had taken up the discipline were outliers with an ambiguous and sometimes ambivalent identification with its American sources and viewpoints. Freedman and Pringle had Canadian-based contexts and experiences of writing instruction, but they had educated themselves in the scholarship of American rhetoric and composition through reading and (Freedman) face-to-face interactions with US scholars. If we think of rhetoric and composition then as becoming a community of practice, in Lave and Wenger's terms, these two scholars can be thought of as "legitimate peripheral participants"—newly engaged learners who had certain advantages in that role. One was the clear eyes and fresh perspectives of outsiders; another was that, as members of other (national and disciplinary) communities, they were in a position to articulate related communities (Lave and Wenger 1991, 36). As Lave and Wenger recognize, legitimate peripheral participation as a process of learning is a two-way street: in developing "knowledgeably skilled identities" through their participation, newcomers also transform the community of practice itself (55).

After preparing for and closely observing the conference, Freedman and Pringle (1980) were able, in *Reinventing*, to present a complex, nuanced historical overview of composition and rhetoric as it had developed, largely in the United States, and to interpret its value and importance in emic (insider) terms. As Canadians, however, they dramatically changed the concept of the emerging discipline by internationalizing it. To my knowledge, this was the first conference outside the United States to focus on writing as a disciplinary study; and, in the inscriptions, Freeman and Pringle were surely the first to proclaim it as not only a discipline but an international one. The template of the discipline in *Reinventing*, despite its debt to American work and perspectives, is already rhetorically presented as international, and in the third volume, *Learning to Write: First Language/Second Language* (1983), edited with Yalden, they more fully realize this ambition, although still limited

in its global reach. As I pointed out, that volume foreshadows a much broader conception of the future of writing studies—to encompass studies of writers, language learners, and users of all ages; English across geographical and cultural boundaries; even writing in other languages—an interdisciplinary with multiple roots, branches, and traditions only now finally taking shape.

Viewed through the microscope, Ottawa 1979 reminds us vividly of things we know—or thought we knew—heightened by the qualities of lived experience, like the intellectual pleasure scholars felt in talking and thinking together. The exceptional chronotope also defamiliarizes and revitalizes ideas, debates, and figures flattened and oversimplified by grand narratives that read them deductively through the lens of stereotypes and reductionist categories (Levi 2001, 114). Microhistory changes their sedimented meanings by recontextualizing them in the globalized community of the conference, a landscape populated by actors, ideas, and traditions unfamiliar to us as part of the discipline in that era, with consequences for how we view its American history (e.g., its roots in English education: see Stock 2012). “The micro-scale acts as a solvent on the alleged trajectory of macro-developments. Such a research agenda then links scale, possibility, agency, and the desire for a usable past” (Gregory 1999).<sup>29</sup>

This microhistory prompts a rethinking of Americanist histories of the discipline in light of an exceptional Canadian intervention at its watershed moment. But as an exceptional *normal*, it suggests that conferences and other interaction rituals are at the leading edge of scholarly practice, as important to disciplinary formation and advancement as journals, textbooks, and monographs. As fractals, they should not be treated as unique events (as we have Dartmouth 1966). Rather, we need to design fine-grained studies to trace ideas, scholars, and scholarly networks through IR chains and examine inscriptions of these events as historical artifacts and scholarly contributions. In making such investigations, we can test Collins’s model of intellectual activity for its value and limitations when applied to the messy, complex, multirooted, and multi-branching field we have become. Especially, we need to find out whether a hypothesis that may be historically true—that face-to-face interaction is essential to creative scholarly practice—holds up in a world transformed by digital technology, where IR events like conferences, seminars, even graduate programs can be experienced virtually, synchronously and asynchronously; inscribed, interpreted, and circulated by participants and observers as they happen; and extended in continuing interactions through multiple modes and media. Collins predicted that “the

importance of personal connections will not decline in the future, no matter what overlay of new communications technology is invented"; he argued that no "dispersed and defocused structure of communication" can take the place of focused, face-to-face interaction (Collins 1998, 73). Will digitally mediated interactions and all their inscriptional capabilities replace or complement embodied ones to form and sustain peer and intergenerational networks and fulfill those social and intellectual functions that have enabled "coalitions of minds"? How can we study the rapid transformation of scholarly practices to foreground this question . . . and facilitate that possibility?

## Appendix 2.1

### MAJOR SPEAKERS AND RESPONDENTS AT THE OTTAWA CONFERENCE, CARLETON UNIVERSITY, 1979

*General Program: English and Language Arts*

Merron Chorny, University of Calgary, Canada

Lee Odell, SUNY Albany, USA. Respondent: Carl Bereiter, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada

Richard Young, Carnegie Mellon University, USA. Respondents: Janice Lauer, University of Detroit and Marygrove College, USA; Anthony Adams, Cambridge University, UK

James Squire, Ginn and Company, USA

James L. Kinneavy, University of Texas-Austin, USA. Respondents: Richard Larson, Herbert H. Lehman College, City University of New York, USA; Alan Coman, University of Toronto, Canada

Carl Bereiter, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada.  
Respondents: Elsa Bartlett, Rockefeller University, USA; Merron Chorny, University of Calgary, Canada

John Dixon, Bretton Hall College of Education, UK. Respondents: Janet Emig, Rutgers University, USA; Don Gutteridge, University of Western Ontario, Canada

W. Ross Winterowd, University of Southern California, USA. Respondents: Bruce Bennett, University of Western Australia, Australia; R. E. McConnell, University of British Columbia, UK

Donald Graves, University of New Hampshire, USA. Respondents: Bryant Fillion, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada; Nancy Martin, University of Surrey, UK

Marshall McLuhan, University of Toronto, Canada

Andrew Wilkinson, University of Exeter, UK. Respondents: Donald Graves, University of New Hampshire, USA; Peter Evans, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada

Janet Emig, Rutgers University, USA. Respondents: Murray F. Stewart, University of New Brunswick, Canada; H. A. Gleason Jr., University of Toronto, Canada

Elsa Bartlett, Rockefeller University, USA. Respondents: Andrew Wilkinson, University of Exeter, UK; Doris Etherington, Toronto, Canada

Randolph Quirk, University College, London, UK.

Edward P.J. Corbett, Ohio State University, USA. Respondents: Frank O'Hare, Ohio State University, USA; Michael Herrick, St. Mary's University, Canada

James Britton, University of London (Emeritus), UK

Anthony Adams, Cambridge University, UK

*E.S.L. Program: Anglais, French Immersion,  
English as a Second Language*

Henry Widdowson, University of London, UK

Richard Yorkey, Concordia University, Canada

#### Notes

1. Freedman and Pringle left open the naming of the new field. At that time, *composition* or *composition studies* or *composition and rhetoric* were the most common designations in the United States.
2. Despite a consensus among historians on dating the modern rebirth of composition in 1963 (see Harris 2012; Rice 2007), James Zebroski argues convincingly that composition and rhetoric didn't achieve full disciplinary status until the late 1970s, preceded by a decade or so of its development from informal collectives he calls "social formations" (Zebroski 2012, 28–29). (Goggin [2000] concurs in a timeline based on the history of scholarly journals.) "The Winds of Change," Maxine Hairston's (1982) famous proclamation of paradigm change in the teaching of writing (implicitly disciplinary), didn't appear until 1982, three years after Ottawa, while articles and books explicitly defining the discipline emerged later in the '80s (Brannon 1985; Lauer 1984; North 1987; Phelps 1986, 1988). But see Park (1979) for an early effort to discuss the potential disciplinarity in what he saw as a chaotic and ill-defined enterprise.
3. Besides Emig's "The Tacit Tradition," other memorable essays in *Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition* (Freedman and Pringle 1980) included James Kinneavy's "A Pluralistic Synthesis of Four Contemporary Models for Teaching Composition"; Richard Young's "Arts, Crafts, Gifts and Knacks: Some Disharmonies in the New Rhetoric"; James Britton's "Shaping at the Point of Utterance"; and Ann Berthoff's "Learning the Uses of Chaos."
4. Besides the three book publications from the conference, other sources that count as inscriptions for this inquiry include the conference's own artifacts (e.g., the printed program/s) and contemporaneous postconference reports. Some inscriptions

were not available for this project: neither the original CFP nor audiotapes of major speakers sold by the conference sponsor (Council of Canadian Teachers of English, then CCTE, now CCTELA). I limited other types of inquiry (for example, extensive interviewing of participants) as outside the bounds of the project but gathered supplementary information about the conference from sources like personal communications, retrospective interviews or commentary, and published histories. I myself am a potential source since I attended the conference as a graduate student and presented a paper based on the dissertation I was then writing. However, I will not be treating myself as a primary informant, although I have occasionally drawn on memories of the experience.

5. The conference was originally titled "The Carleton Conference," but subsequent references are most commonly to the Ottawa Conference of 1979. The following description assembles historical facts of the conference event from multiple sources.
6. In 1986, Freedman and Pringle collaborated on a second international conference, "The Issues That Divide Us," on the teaching of English worldwide. This one was sponsored by the International Federation of Teachers of English (IFTE) in a series established after Dartmouth 1966 to continue international meetings on English education (Watson 2013). Ottawa 1986 had much broader international representation than Ottawa 1979 because Pringle ensured that delegates were invited from every English-speaking country; in addition, a much greater effort was made to include teachers as well as scholars (Maguire 1995, 29–30; Pringle, e-mail, Feb. 15, 2014).
7. All major speakers from both programs are listed in appendix 2.1.
8. These scholars, like most other historians (e.g., Rosner, Boehm, and Journet 1999), assume the American provenance of the twentieth-century discipline as a unique phenomenon of US higher education. Accordingly, their surveys of sociocultural contexts (and the educational scene) are almost entirely US based. I don't have the space or expertise to expand them here to other countries. However, we will see later how Ottawa 1979 upends this assumption.
9. Most of these scholars examine intellectual as well as material contexts for their receptive or catalytic influence on the "reinvention" of composition. I omit those here for two reasons: (1) the question of which intellectual contexts (traditions, sources, ideas, figures, seminal events) are pertinent is highly disputed, as more and more scholars write alternate histories of composition's roots and construe the discipline they produced accordingly, and (2) I don't want to anticipate or bias a reading of the conference and its inscriptions—as contemporaneous expressions and representations of the discipline—by imposing one or more of these lenses. For example, Nystrand and Duffy's (2003b) lens foregrounds the expansion of composition's contexts to encompass the "rhetoric of everyday life"; Faigley's (1992) explores the complex relations of composition to postmodern thought and culture.
10. Zebroski demonstrates how educational projects for the schools, like Project English curriculum study centers, deeply influenced rhetoric and composition, as did "the larger amounts of capital invested invisibly and directly in the education of working-class students," like the work-study program, tuition grants, Upward Bound, and SEEK (Zebroski 2012, 35).
11. Scholars' personal narratives provide insight into the role played by these activities in developing an intellectual community around the study of writing (see D'Angelo (1999), Lloyd-Jones (1994), Roen, Brown, and Enos (1999) and Williams (2002) on the role of institutes and projects).
12. I sat in on this conversation in Ottawa as an interested observer, having met the group as a visitor to Young's NEH seminar that spring.
13. Lloyd-Jones notes that "it is easy to overlook these programs that were essentially oral, and much of the exchange of ideas in this period has been oral or bureau-

- cratic. Here the reports, ephemeral documents, memoirs, and other materials created at the same time offer symptoms of what was a messy, shifting, uneven series of personal encounters. At times connections seem to be quite accidental, results serendipitous. The early stages have less structure than a cocktail party conversation. Yet, the basic institute idea looms behind the most important devices for dissemination of new ideas about teaching composition and, I suspect, directly but less evidently behind much of its scholarship" (Lloyd-Jones 1994, 166).
14. There is an implicit argument in my contrast between professionalization and scholarly activity that has to do with what constitutes disciplinarity. In previous writing (Phelps 2014), I developed a distinction between a discipline, referring to an intellectual community and its work, and a field's academic identity, roughly, its ethos in the academy as a recognized discipline, coupled with the resources that both support and symbolize that status. The process of achieving and connecting the two is professionalization (cf. Collins's analysis of the three requisites for successful intellectual fields: "the intellectual network and its dynamics"; an "organizational base" like the university in the Western academy, providing material resources and status; and a receptive context in terms of political and economic forces)(Collins 1998, 51, 622).
  15. D'Angelo's (1999, 2002) narratives emphasize intellectual motives (to learn, explore, discover), and the sheer intellectual joy of conversation and debate with other scholars, over either pedagogical applications or professional status in the academy; he describes this period as an intellectual quest for an "object of study" (D'Angelo 2002). I take his narratives as representative of the experiences of the core group that met in these venues.
  16. The term *interaction ritual* is adapted by Collins (1998) from Goffman (1967).
  17. Collins (1998) developed his sociological theory of how intellectual communities work based on a global, comparative history of philosophy, but he intends its general application to disciplines as sites of scholarly thinking, including a pedagogical component (how it is taught and learned through intergenerational chains). He recognizes important variations from the philosophical archetype but lacks any account of the role in certain fields of relations between scholarly thought and activities like teaching, artistic expression, professional practice, or advocacy. The concepts in Collins's theory are embedded, richly elaborated, and interconnected. In pulling them selectively from that context, I necessarily simplify their definitions and relationships. But I've kept his vocabulary (often clunky to humanists' ears) as the most precise guide to those concepts.
  18. Besides her memoir, Bateson invented a novelistic genre to represent the intellectual exchanges at one of her father's conferences, based on tape recordings (*Our Own Metaphor*, Bateson 1991). This conference distilled the essence of Collins's IRs, creating a dialogue among a very few eminent minds laser focused on a single problem. Bateson's parents orchestrated conferences deliberately to achieve a heightened quality of scholarly thought, in part through compressing the event in time and space. Bateson writes that the conference narratized in *Our Own Metaphor* can be seen as "a world in itself, sealed off in its own self-definition, as the participants are lifted out of their normal lives and backgrounds and forced into the effort of mutual adaptation. One is held in an envelope of time and inaccessibility, like the glass sides of an aquarium, as different kinds of mind work sometimes toward conflict and sometimes fall into a sort of dance or symmetry or counterpoint that leads to moments of revelation" (Bateson 1984, 181).
  19. Collins describes five levels of stratification among scientists: stars, inner core, outer core, transients (occasional participants in scholarly conversation), and "audience and would-be recruits" (Collins 1998, 43). Arguably, in writing studies,

- teachers fall into the last category as both readers who may use scholarship and also as potential scholars.
20. Inspired by the conference, Artiss went on to attend Janice Lauer's Rhetoric Seminar (by then at Purdue) and graduate school at the University of Texas-Austin.
  21. In fact, the title "Learning to Write" cleverly finesses the gap between scholars and practitioners, between studying writing and teaching students, providing an inviting scope to contributions and easing accommodation of other potential divisions: disciplinary differences (e.g., composition/rhetoric versus English education), national differences (British versus American), levels of schooling, first- and second-language teaching, each associated with completely different IR chains.
  22. Information about their backgrounds and planning activities is drawn from an interview I conducted with Aviva Freedman (December 2013) on behalf of Andrea Williams for her study of Canadian scholars (in progress); a 1990 interview of Freedman by Mary Maguire (1995); and personal communications with Freedman and Ian Pringle. Janice Lauer (personal communications) provided a list of Canadians who attended the seminar as well as a list of the 1978 speakers.
  23. For comparison to the discipline today, as represented in the United States by the annual IR called Conference on College Composition and Communication, organizers issuing a call for proposals to the 2015 conference prestructured the attention space into fourteen areas, specified as over one hundred specialized topics. IRs that frame the discipline internationally (e.g., the writing-research-across-borders conferences now under the auspices of the International Society for the Advancement of Writing Research), still lack that fine grain of prestructure, with attention spaces more inductively constructed from invitations and proposals.
  24. For Freedman's nuanced position on this issue, see her 1990 interview in Maguire (1995, 91–92). The interviews in this book (which put six international women scholars, including Janet Emig, in dialogue with the interviewer, Mary Maguire, and one another) frequently reference the 1979 and 1986 Ottawa conferences. In that context, Freedman and other scholars, notably Emig, discuss agonistic argument and its role in scholarly conferences and disciplines.
  25. In a February 15, 2014, e-mail message, Pringle told me the memory of this moment deeply influenced the way he and Freedman designed the program for the 1986 conference, "The Issues That Divide Us," as a set of strands with "some kind of exposition of differing positions by two major figures in the strand."
  26. Reither went on to become founding editor of the *Inkshed* newsletter, a primary force in developing a Canadian disciplinary community for writing studies in its early years.
  27. The table of contents is divided into "The writing process: three orientations"; "The development of writing abilities"; "Text and discourse"; and "Implications for teaching." In the preface, Candlin describes each part as patterned by three themes: a comprehensive review of writing research and pedagogy; "a characteristic applied linguistic interplay between research and practice"; and the broader implications of writing issues for language education (Candlin 1983, ix).
  28. The inscribed object was a crude carving of a gun, left by insurgents in a hacienda in the Yucatan in May 1913, after an uprising (Eiss 2008).
  29. Gregory was referencing the research agenda of microhistorians like Wolfgang Kaschuba, who argue for relating microphenomena to macrohistorical processes, in his review comparing Italian microhistorical approaches with the German "history of everyday life."



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