

'YEAR OF COMPOSITION'

Composition is alive and well on Oahu, having received an additional boost from the recent "Year of Composition" workshop held at BYU--Hawaii Campus and co-sponsored by the Hawaii Council of Teachers of English, on Saturday, September 18.

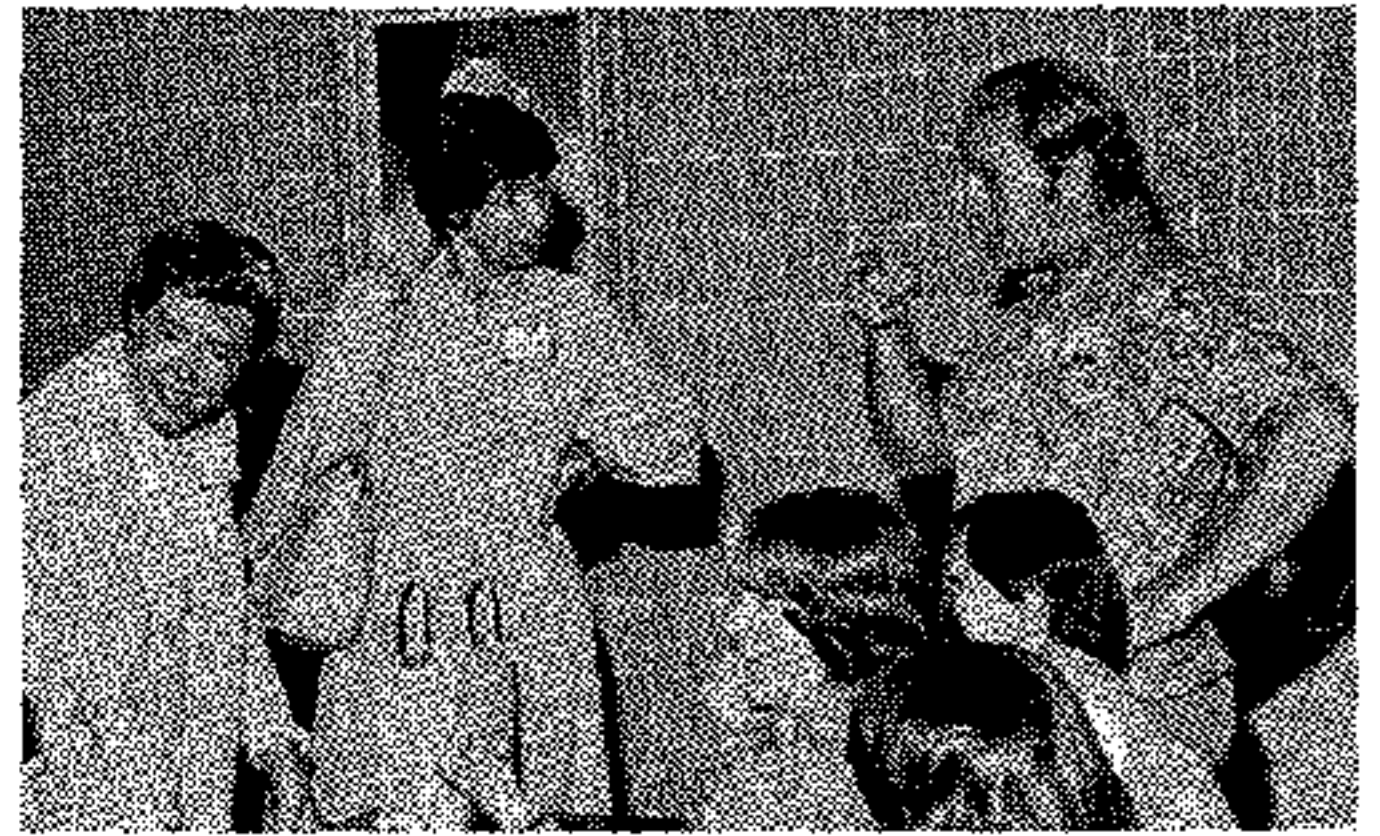
The workshop was designed to accomplish two major objectives, which will continue to be the mainstays for future efforts. The two major goals were: 1) to give composition teachers at both university and high school levels the chance to associate with each other and learn from each other individually, and 2) to give teachers as a group a chance to see exactly what programs and offerings are available at other schools. During the day, many opportunities were provided for the participants to mingle with each other for discussions, both formal and informal. For many, this brainstorming opportunity was the highlight of the workshop.



The workshop attempted to include the whole range of the composition student's progress, from placement in the appropriate class, through both in-class and out-of-class teaching techniques, to evaluation devices used to test the student at the end.

Those making presentations came from five different high schools, three different colleges, and three different universities, so participants were exposed to a wide range of ideas and programs throughout the day.

"Variety" was one key word of the day. Concerning the placing of students in the proper class, some schools revealed careful testing procedures, while others went strictly by previous grades and experience. For in-



stance, the University of Hawaii's new essay placement test for all incoming freshmen generates four class levels into which students are separated. BYU--Hawaii uses a similar entrance test, which also includes a reading and a listening test; however the students are only divided into three separate classes based on test results. Some uniform placement system seems to be either in use or desired by nearly every school.

The in-class teaching technique section was an exciting part of the workshop, as specific teaching devices were demonstrated. For instance, the college teachers learned how to paragraph writing using geometrical shapes, introductions using a common child's puzzle, outlining using an analytical grid, and logic using a series of deceptively simple anecdotes. One certain conclusion of the workshop, contrary to currently prevailing notions in some quarters, is that the classroom is not dead as an effective educational environment. Innovation, experimentation, and new ideas are readily available.

The highlight of the out-of-class demonstrations was a tour through the BYU--Hawaii language skills lab with its director, Alice Pack. Participants saw specific materials for all levels of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Sophisticated programs, such as the use of automated readers or computer-assisted programs, were demonstrated side by side with old standbys, such as tutorials and easy readers. The laboratory approach is one that seems to be gaining everywhere, primarily because it can be personalized to isolate each student's individual problem.

WORKSHOP

by Greg Larkin

Finally, during a section on exit tests, the participants were introduced to the BYU-Hawaii portfolio program, which is used in all required general education English classes. In this program, teachers exchange papers at the end of each semester, to check on the progress of other students and to have the progress of their own students also checked. This ensures that each student gets an objective and fair evaluation of his work and that no student can pass the course without attaining minimum proficiency standards. Few schools currently use such a structured exit system as the portfolio program, but in the face of the continued decline on national test averages, such a program is one very promising approach to achieving "quality control."

Although the workshop was favorably reviewed by almost everyone who attended, many had some reservations. These reservations are significant to anyone planning a similar workshop.

First, many people felt that too much was crammed into too little time. The pace was very rapid, making retention difficult and at times forcing a halt to much worthwhile discussion. Second, many who attended the workshop felt that the suggestions were not specific enough to apply to the individual teacher, and that therefore, although everyone got very "excited," little measurable improvement in teaching composition was gained. "More matter and less art" was a frequent request of those who attended.

Therefore, we plan to hold a second annual composition workshop this coming winter. The plans are being laid now for a two-day workshop, featuring guest participants from the mainland, the South Pacific, and Asia. We are planning to have a TESL section, featuring major names in TESL theory and practice. If you would like to help, especially if you have some specific teaching techniques to present, please contact Dr. Greg Larkin, Communications and Language Arts Division, BYU-Hawaii Campus, Laie HI 96762.



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CHECK ONE OR BOTH:

I am interested in attending the Second Annual Composition Workshop and having a pleasant summer vacation in the middle of winter as well. Please keep me posted as planning for this workshop proceeds.

I have some ideas that I think might be worth including, and I'll send TESL Reporter a prospectus shortly.