

FUNDING AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR RESEARCH ON WRITING

Speakers: Nancy McCarthy, *The Ford Foundation, New York*
Richard Hendrix, *Empire State College, State University of New York*

Introducer/Recorder: Melanie Sperling, *University of California, Berkeley*

Nancy McCarthy began the session by giving background on programs that the Ford Foundation has funded, saying of the Foundation, "In my father's house there are many mansions." She referred to Donald Graves' project, for example, from which came the report, "Balance the Basics: Let Them Write," from a Ford series on research and learning. Ford's high school interests are now in the area of urban poverty, with a focus on science and math, not writing.

However, Ford is beginning to fund writing programs in higher education institutions, this being McCarthy's own focus. Ford is going to be looking at "model program" approaches such as the Writing Across the Curriculum Program or the University of Pittsburgh's program to teach basic writers to be their own editors. This latter program draws on Shaughnessy's concepts of error analysis. At the University of Pittsburgh, the two basic objectives are to teach word processing and to create appropriate software. The computers free teachers to work on other aspects of the writing process. McCarthy noted that the best aspect of private funding is the flexibility of the programs funded.

The Ford Foundation also is now looking for a more structured approach to funding, instead of simply giving funds to writing programs in one institution after another. McCarthy is concerned that no one seems to be examining the structure of the field as a whole, that is, the structure of writing programs across the nation. She feels there is no sense of strategic planning, which is why Ford is concentrating on a more structured approach to program support, with the entire nation in mind. One of their interests in this regard is how to teach faculty to teach writing to college students. Such programs are scattered and limited, with only a small number of institutions offering formal programs to train graduate students to teach writing. The questions that institutions should be asking, she advised, include: What kind of general or model guidelines can be constructed? What should a curriculum look like? How does one avoid simply being a "service" organization? She said there is also a need for post-graduate opportunities for faculty who are not up-to-date on what has been happening in the field over the last decade. Another concern of the Foundation is community colleges. McCarthy said that she has heard that 99% of the writing programs in community colleges are not touched by the process method of teaching. Ford Foundation would like to help remedy this situation.

Richard Hendrix posed the question of whether there is a current "system" for getting writing programs funded. His answer—"Probably not. If there ever was

one, it's changing greatly." He said that in the past there have been opportunities for funding for small, special projects that are in the lead with ideas and development in the field. This was true especially in the '60s, when budgets at private foundations were large. In the '70s, he noted, several federal programs also stepped in. He mentioned NEH (National Endowment for the Humanities), which supported some important and productive programs—for example, the National Writing Project. To Hendrix, a "pleasant surprise" was that NEH has stuck with funding these programs, for usually basic skills isn't their priority (their approach to writing programs being in the Great Books tradition). Hendrix went on to note that NIE (National Institute of Education) was created fifteen years ago as the government's research branch. NIE has funded some fairly important research projects, usually favoring interdisciplinary programs. He noted that there were some important research projects on writing development and the writing process, as well as on writing assessment, these areas being excluded from NEH. NIE, he said, is now about to fund a national center for the study of writing. This center should be a magnet to pull in researchers from many fields to look at writing from an interdisciplinary standpoint. Hendrix then said that he was mentioning lastly what he felt was the most creative funding agency, FIPSE (Fund to Improve Post-Secondary Education). FIPSE was a mandate from the federal government for higher education project development. Several years ago FIPSE decided to make a concerted effort in the area of writing. The program has included research by people such as Sondra Perl and Richard Sterling, as well as research that has tried to get the "bugs" out of writing-teaching programs. They also have funded programs on writing across the curriculum, teacher-training, writing outside school, writing using computers, and one at Cal Irvine to look at the writing process and revision process working with classroom teachers. They also funded a project with the New York Police Department to see how policemen write; and they looked at writing in law schools. And they funded the National Testing Network in Writing.

But, Hendrix pointed out, all federal programs are now radically threatened by the current government. It has been proposed that FIPSE, for example, be phased out, and other programs in the area of education are being severely reduced. Decisions about what to fund at the federal level, he said, are made in Congress. Someone, therefore, needs to speak up for education. For while it is true that student aid programs and Pell grants take higher priority than special programs such as writing and research programs, it is essential to hang on to the special programs, too. In response to a question from the audience about writing to our congressmen, Hendrix said we should definitely do so, and that phone calls make an even bigger impact. He said it is important now, too, to seek local funders who give out one to two thousand dollar awards, instead of looking to Washington. He advised arming ourselves with our best ideas and then working with these local institutions.