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The tendency of modern English and speech teachers to turn away from vital issues has resulted in the present "undistinguished state" of rhetoric teaching and its lack of relevance to life. The proper subject matter of rhetoric is "the thought, opinion, and information revealed in the great, persisting, and unresolved problems of a civilization and culture." Teachers must reestablish rhetoric in the classical sense of practical discourse. Once this is done, they should present the ethical problems facing a communicator and emphasize the need to consider not only the means of communication but also the morality of these means. A consideration of practical discourse requires an evaluation of the similarities and differences between speaking and writing. These two skills should be taught in a learning situation where their weaknesses are minimized and their strengths reinforce each other. (LH)

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Towards a Rationale for Teachers of Writing and Speaking

Karl R. Wallace

The relationship of writing and speaking is of vital interest to the high school teacher of English. In examining that relationship, Professor Wallace, of the Department of Speech and Theatre, University of Illinois, deals with the question: "In redoubling our efforts to make Johnny more literate, are we sure we know the sources of literacy?"

WHEN teachers of writing and speaking seek guides for their future, they will find them, I believe, not primarily in grammar, linguistics, and logic, but in the ancient and honorable art of rhetoric.

If rhetoric be properly regarded, it may be defined as the art of practical and popular discourse. To systematic, persistent education in this art, teachers should pay far more attention than they now appear to do. On them rests the special responsibility for the improvement of public thought and discussion. The deficiencies in public advocacy and persuasion and in the talk of the home, the school, and the market place are too painfully evident to need specification and explanation. The Churchills and the Stevensons are too rare. So are the Walter Lippmanns. Social communication too rarely goes beyond the desultory exchange of inconsequential bits of information, the firm pronouncement, personal feelings, and traditional prejudices. Much of advertising has long since replaced information and decorum with egocentric appeals to sex, status, and security—all delivered in a style and tone appropriate to seduction or to national disaster. The salesmanship of commerce and politics, refining its methods of market research and attitude measurement, strives for the success of the moment. It is today that matters, not tomorrow. Perhaps most unfortunate of all are the new turns given to group discussion and conference. One twist is the strategy of All-Must-Agree, or Don't Rock the Boat, or *You* Don't Count. *Disagreement* has become a horrid word and nonconformity shares the opprobrium of sin. The other twist is revealed in certain tactical maneuvers, such as, Ask for the Moon, Stack the Cards, or Bluff. Postural tactics produce discussion by attrition, in which reasonableness, personal integrity, and manly compromise have become strange words.

The undistinguished state of public discussion and persuasion has many causes. We cannot lay the blame entirely on teachers of English and speech. Yet as the natural and professional authorities on verbal communication, they have been looking the wrong way. Teachers of English long ago discovered that the mechanics of grammar and syntax, whether taught directly or "functionally," were pretty dull stuff at any level of in-

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struction. The elements of paragraph construction and composition and the reading of listless themes were among the chores of teaching. No more rewarding day after day was the teaching of reading. In brief, teachers found themselves confined to a bare bones segment of the old, full-bodied rhetoric. They no longer saw rhetoric as the art of adjusting ideas to people and people to ideas. Instead of dealing with invention—with the ideas that permeate public discussion and the sources of them—instead of dealing with the full range of *dispositio* and style and with the problems of memory and delivery—in a word, instead of working with a humane rhetoric, they claimed only the simplest elements of style, the unphilosophical aspects of grammar, and the less sophisticated notions of structure and rhetorical forms.[1] Porter Perrin takes a similar view of the fall from Rhetoric to Style. He allows himself to say that "for the last seventy-five years a large part of the instructor's time and effort has been spent in purifying the students' English." In the tradition of rhetoric, he adds, "this is a weak and static doctrine, on a par with the medieval limitation to the topics of style and delivery."[2] Perrin suggests that a lamentable consequence of limiting composition to style and form is that the study of literature, as well as the teaching of writing, has been divorced from the healthy associations with rhetoric which it once enjoyed.

Why did such things happen? Somewhere along the way the natural and social sciences declared that *they* were the only sources of trustworthy fact and knowledge. We not only came around to believing them, but came to reject argument and persuasion that was not manifestly grounded on evidence which had been precisely weighed up by scientific investigation. Belief and confidence had to meet the five per cent test! Even teachers of public speaking were seduced. In the early 1900's a few of them, believing that elocution and elementary stylistics offered little intellectual material, took up classical rhetoric. They soon discovered that in its company they had a challenging art to teach. But they, too, were seduced by the Siren of Science. In their fundamentals courses they used to assign readings on controversial subjects and they and their students would discuss them in class, often with point and spirit. This was heady stuff. The ensuing round of speaking, always accompanied with full-sentence, deductive outlines and occasionally with manuscripts, was usually direct and real. It had the ring of communication because it was focused on an audience and because its subject matter was vital. But this realistic union of substance and form, of content and technique, was for the most part abandoned. The speech teacher began to assign a few more speeches than he used to, encouraging student confidence through increased practice on the platform, and administering dilute doses of formal logic

[1]An excellent, brief survey of the art of rhetoric is provided by Donald C. Bryant: "Aspects of the Rhetorical Tradition—I. The Intellectual Foundation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 36 (April 1950), pp. 169-176; "Aspects of the Rhetorical Tradition—II. Emotion, Style, and Literary Association," *QJS*, 36 (October 1950), pp. 326-332; "Rhetoric, Its Functions, and Its Scope," *QJS*, 39 (December 1953), pp. 401-424.

[2]*Perspectives on English: Essays to Honor W. Wilbur Hatfield*, ed. Robert C. Pooley (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960), p. 122.

and psychology. From time to time he would exhort the student to run down the most authoritative and up-to-the-minute information possible by beating over the specialized indexes. And what did the teacher of English do? He turned to literature for much of the content of writing and the materials for reading.

We could all wish that this state of affairs were history—but it isn't. There seems to be widespread popular agreement that Johnny can't read or speak any better today than he did forty years ago. Some persons have been brutal enough to remind us that we have trained many generations of his teachers. We must confront the fact, too, that our escape slogan hasn't produced results. The slogan of forty years?—Every teacher should be a teacher of English. The stark, awful fact is that he is not, and it seems highly improbable that he is going to be. Because the scientist believes that only he is responsible for subject matter, he is fair-minded enough to believe that only we are the proper teachers of the communication skills.

Subject Matter of Rhetoric

The history, the theory, and the practice of rhetorical discourse tell us plainly what to do. Rhetoric has a subject matter which no other discipline has or wants to claim today. It is the thought, opinion, and information revealed in the great, persisting, and unresolved problems of a civilization and culture. They are the problems of war and peace, race and creed, poverty, wealth, and population, of democracy and communism. They have many faces and present many aspects from generation to generation. Specific issues arise on which we must take decision from time to time. One day it is Suez, another Cuba. One week it is the Congo, another it is the plight of the American farmer or the railroads. One decade it is symbolist literature, another abstract art. On these subjects the experts as well as the many take sides. These subjects constitute the materials of a wide-flung dialectic and rhetoric which are, and should be, the intellectual property of every good citizen. They are also the property of rhetoric precisely because everybody deals with them in language symbols and forms. In them idea and language are compounded as inextricably as stimulus and response. If our teaching is to produce the results we intend, these are the materials with which to associate grammar, the principles of composition, the techniques of style and delivery, the principles of logical analysis and argument, and the methods of exposition. Such materials the student and citizen encounter every day as speaker and audience, writer or reader, learner and critic.

In returning to such subject matter we need not worry about superficiality of idea and opinion. Our efforts could hardly render public discussion more shallow than it is. Experience shows us, moreover, that students upon getting interested in a subject dig into the more specialized sources of information. Teachers have discovered, also, that preparation for public discussion is by no means limited to the reading matter of contemporary journals and magazines. No group can be genuinely concerned over censorship of the press, for example, without finding that Milton's *Areopagitica* and Mill's *On Liberty* present most of the classic and timeless ideas and arguments rele-

vant to the subject. Finally, teachers who embrace a mature rather than a puerile rhetoric know that the emotions, feelings, and characters of men cannot, and should not, be expurgated from either exposition or argument. Knowing this, teachers realize that the young speaker can learn much about himself and others through the drama, novel, and the short story. It is the literary artist of these genre who deals most profoundly and truly with men in action, with their values, motives, and moral standards. From the characterizations by the artist, the student acquires a sensitivity to what is typical and representative in human behavior. In fact, the credibility of the speaker's portrait and the credibility of a literary character present analogous problems. So if the subject matter of practical discourse be construed correctly and studied appropriately, it will be seen to be the counterpart of scientific studies. Specialized man functions effectively on the public stage only when generalized man can translate technical information for the public mind or transmute it into argument for the public will.

The kind of endeavor I have been describing would seem to be applicable to grade and high school education as well as to the "higher" learning. Human experience is enlarged chiefly through symbol systems, and for most persons in their developing years the principal system is the native language, spoken and written, and gesture. Through language, mind and intellect are expanded in breadth and depth, and disciplined in rigor. One can guide the process, and keep pace with it, by using materials and projects appropriate to the level of educational development. To the extent that education can be identified with systematic change from language naivete to language sophistication, the student is a novice rhetorician and the teacher is an expert rhetorician. It makes all the difference in the world what kind of a rhetorician the teacher is. Clearly he must be more than a teacher of finger exercises and elementary skills.

Emphases in Teaching

In the future, so I believe, teachers will do more than make practical and popular discourse the center of our endeavors. They must select their emphases. One emphasis, as I have indicated, should be on the subject matter of practical discourse. Another emphasis should be on the ethical problems of the writer and speaker, particularly on the *ethos* of the communicator.

The new interest in communication has, among other things, given rise to much research on communication phenomena. Moreover, most of the research has been experimental. The investigator with an experimental cast seems to have gone one of two ways. If he is an electronics engineer, a linguist, or a voice scientist, he has directed his attention to the medium of communication and the problems of transmitting signals over it. He is not concerned with questions about the right and wrong of communicative behavior. Indeed, he doesn't want to get tangled up with meanings because the meaningful aspect of signals and signs necessarily involves value judgments. If the experimenter is allied with one of the social sciences, he is usually measuring the success or effect of a communication. He wants to know whether the communicator achieved his intended effect. If the

communicator was successful, good; if he was not, bad. Such research gives us well-grounded information about the effectiveness of methods and techniques. This is praiseworthy. Most lamentable however, is the ethic which is implied, if not stated, namely, that in a particular case the end justifies the means used to secure it. So we have the scientist apparently providing fuel and sanction for the narrow pragmatism of the political speaker and the advertiser, and indeed for any communicator who is tempted to short cut his way to success. The integrity and ethics of the communicator have been neglected almost entirely. Serious and sustained attention to them is long overdue.

The morality of the communicator will not bother persons who believe that rhetoric is a tool and, like logic, bears no ethic in itself. The morality, so the argument runs, is a function of the character of the communicator, not of the art. But this view overlooks a basic fact: that rhetoric is an art, and like any art it involves much more than skill. Central to art is the power of the artist's conceptions—his ability to select his effects and purposes, to search for all available materials, and to choose and mold them to the task at hand. The power of *invention* is the soul of any art. It is likewise the soul of the art of practical discourse.

The Ethic of Discourse

When one sees rhetoric as an art rather than as an amoral tool, he is ready to face the question: What are the ethics of practical discourse and what are the obligations of the speaker and writer? Now is not the time to set forth the duties of the communicator as I see them. I must be content with saying firmly that there is an ethic within the art of rhetoric, not outside it.[3] Here I shall point only to the two principal places where one would look for an ethic.

First, one looks primarily at the means which a communicator uses to achieve his end. The means of doing something give rise to methods and techniques. From these are formulated the standards of production and conduct which govern the artist, or in our case the communicator. To find the standards of practical discourse one turns to the theorists on rhetoric and to those regarded as the best writers and speakers, past and present. Once the standards are recognized, the proper question can be asked of a communication: How *well* did the communicator measure up to the standards which apply to the case in question? It is the quality of the production judged as a whole which counts. Whether the communicator gained his purpose or not is but one of many criteria. It seems to me that a speech or its visual equivalent is good if it meets proper standards; it is bad if it does not. So I urge that teachers formulate their standards of practical discourse, stating them as explicitly and as clearly as they can. The task is not difficult, for there are broad areas of agreement. The solid principles have not changed significantly for 2000 years or so, although each age has had its own stylistic foibles.

The second source of an ethic is found in the region which rhetoric and discourse share with political science

[3]This point of view is fully expressed in my "Rhetoric, Politics, and Education of the Ready Man," *The Rhetorical Idiom*, ed. Donald C. Bryant (Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958), pp. 71-95.

and the art of government. We cannot here describe the ideals and state the directives for public discourse that they imply. Teachers must search for themselves. We can only hint at the kind of ethic they will find. If, for example, they discover that democracy assumes the dignity and worth of the individual, that he is the ultimate source of power in the democratic state, that he is supposed to be educable, and that his education depends on knowledge and information disseminated widely and freely—if they discover such doctrines surely an ethic of public address will assert ideals congenial with the doctrines. The ideals will concern the knowledge and equipment of the communicator, the kind of respect he owes an audience and his obligations to it. It will emphasize truth-telling. It will condemn distortion of ideas and facts and the suppression of significant information.

Writing and Speaking

Teachers who become committed to an art of practical and popular discourse will not worry over dubious and jurisidictional distinctions between writing and speaking. They will respect both language that is addressed to the eye and language addressed to the ear. A number of traditionally bothersome questions will seem pointless. We mention but two: Which is superior, writing or speaking? Are there significant and useful distinctions between written style and oral style?

The ends of practical discourse and the methods appropriate to them provide the correct perspective for an examination of style. If the ends of discourse may be designated in broad terms as understanding and persuasion, the essential task in any particular communication is to find ways of achieving the end. The choice of the medium—that is, whether to write or speak—is a subsidiary matter. The medium doubtless influences style and its techniques. Yet the purpose and method of a composition wield larger and more significant effects on style than the medium. They influence the composition as a whole, determine its parts, and account for interaction of parts with each other and the whole. They are the true sources of energy, force, and movement of the whole and set its tone and temper. Indeed, the pervasive influence of purpose and method extends to the narrowest aspects of style, even to the mechanics of handling the sentence. On the other hand, it is doubtful whether the mastery of stylistic mechanics has any significant effect upon the larger, more organic aspects of style. In a word, the whole has ever been stronger than its parts. In redoubling our efforts to make Johnny more literate, are we sure we know the sources of literacy? Is literacy best obtained when made an object in itself or when regarded as serving and facilitating the ends of communication? Should we not periodically face such questions anew?

The time has come to examine more closely than we have the traditional comparisons and contrasts between writing and speaking. From them come the arguments for teaching writing and speaking together as similar skills, or apart as dissimilar skills. On such matters can we not systematize our thinking and lay the basis for probing more deeply into the arguments? Above all we need to remind ourselves of what is entailed when we speak of skills and techniques. We are

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talking about motor responses, specifically about motor processes of language, and even more specifically about *encoding*, that is, the act of translating "thoughts" and "ideas," stored somehow in the intricate networks of the brain, into visible and audible linguistic signs. Teachers of English and teachers of speech most directly and technically meet the human being as an encoder. We might say that professionally they aim to help him develop habits of encoding efficiently and effectively.

The Encoding Process

Although little is known with certainty about the encoding process, there is little dispute about some things. First, as a child enters upon formal schooling, he is in possession of the oral code to the extent that he has acquired a bread-and-butter competence in translating his experience into the code. He has been a successful communicator in the most direct and immediate of speaker-audience relationships. On the other hand, he has had almost no experience with the written code. This he must learn virtually from scratch and must be kept at it for a number of years until he has formed a firm and ready hand. Second, the two codes involve different pathways of sensory and neurological activity—on the one hand, vocal and articulatory responses monitored by the ear, and on the other, arm and finger movements monitored by the eye. The sounds and letters so made have no intrinsic relationship to each other. The two codes are alike so far as their word elements carry similar meanings and their formal components are similar structurally. Third, the act of speaking and the act of writing differ markedly in speed. Speaking is about five times faster than writing.

These facts prompt observations which teachers should examine and pursue. First, learning the written code appears to be so difficult that the schools have to work at it a long time, through the high school years for all youth and into the college years for some persons. The difficulty is such that until the advent of the American democracy, reading and writing were only for the select few. One consequence was that men of letters won a superior status. Second, the spoken code receives relatively little systematic treatment during the public school years. Its style is allowed to solidify and remain geared to the narrowest requirements of utility. Its vocabulary is far outstripped by that of the written code. Its vigor and force, its directness, liveliness, and imaginativeness, best seen in its short, fragmentary expressions and its slang, go largely undirected and undisciplined. Indeed, the standards of speech are set by the individual's peers and influenced but little by his teachers and by literature. Finally, the slowness of the encoding process in writing and the swiftness of encoding in speaking appear to breed quite different consequences. The speaker encoding rapidly under the compulsion of a real subject and audience finds his attention riveted to the task at hand. The circumstances discourage criticism and revision of his mental experience before he commits it to language. His revisions, if any, are likely to be evident as spontaneous repetitions, the result of lightning search for the clearer statement and the more familiar word, if not the more precise word. Yet the circumstances which stimulate encoding and

inhibit criticism would seem to make for facility of utterance. So the young speaker, conscious of ready language, acquires confidence and develops a sort of public image of himself. The writer, encoding slowly, finds it hard to keep his attention focused until the idea in mind can be laboriously written down. He finds that he has the leisure to criticize and revise prior to commitment in writing. In fact, after writing he can still reconsider and revise; he can recode the code, for he is not pressed by an audience demanding the instant production of language. Thus he communicates with himself, and if he learns to do so satisfactorily he creates a private image of himself.

If these observations are valid, how similar are speaking and writing? They are much alike linguistically, for whether one is writing or speaking he is subject to the same conventions of grammar, syntax, semantics. When viewed physically and psychologically, they are different, for the processes of encoding use different motor schemes and involve habits developed under different sets of circumstances. Yet in the climate of school and college, would it be possible to bring the two skills together in learning situations in which writing and speaking would reenforce and complement each other? The two skills could be given comparable settings and subject matter if both were in the service of practical, popular discourse. Once the child had solidified the act of writing, the spoken and written codes could be carried on together in each learning assignment. Practiced together and directed to audiences, the strengths of one might be acquired by the other and the weaknesses of each be made minimal.

The alternative is to continue doing, as teachers, pretty much what we do now, changing a detail here and there and hoping to graduate before long to loftier enterprises—to advanced courses in the literature and criticism of speechmaking and in the literature of creative writing. Unless teachers of the native language arts and skills find a better rationale than this, I have no reason to expect that Johnny in 1970 will speak or write appreciably better than he does today.

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