DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 137 805 CS 203 309

AUTHOR Stewart, Donald, Ed.
TITLE Focus: What's Really Basic in Composition.
INSTITUTION Kansas Association of Teachers of English.
PUB DATE Dec 76
NOTE 30p.; The Kansas Association of Teachers of English is an affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English; Some pages may not reproduce well due to small type
JOURNAL CIT Kansas English; v62 n1 Entire Issue December 1976

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Basic Skills; *Composition (Literary); *Composition Skills (Literary); English Education; *English Instruction; *Language Arts; *Teaching Methods; Writing; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

The articles in this issue of "Kansas English" discuss and define what is basic in composition. The first article, by Richard Lloyd-Jones, discusses the teaching of composition and the preparation of teachers of composition. The second article, by Hans P. Guth, suggests a positive modern approach to language, designed to help students become more effective users of language in their own right. The third article, by David Bronson, asserts that, when we talk about English as a subject, we are talking about writing. His discussion of English as writing includes historical background, the relationship of writing and cognitive development, and pedagogical possibilities. Peter T. Zoller, in the fourth article, reviews "Teaching Composition: 10 Biographical Essays," edited by Gary Tate. The final article, by Lois Caffyn, discusses the recent attack on minicourses and makes suggestions for teachers and administrators. (LL)

KANSAS ENGLISH

Volume 62 December, 1976 Number 1

Focus: What's Really Basic in Composition

The Bulletin of the Kansas Association of Teachers of English--An Affiliate of the National Council of Teachers of English--A Member of the NCTE Information Exchange Agreement

Donald Stewart, Editor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Silver Lining's Dark Cloud

RICHARD LLOYD-JONES
University of Iowa

For teachers of composition there is good news and bad news.

The good news is that the public, the media, and the big time college professors are complaining about the way young Americans write. Every day sees a new screed about our national illiteracy, and some of the attacks even make sense. But all, apparently, sell newspapers.

The bad news is that some college English department executives are bragging that all of their faculty members "including full professors" are required to teach freshman composition. "No favorites." They still think that composition teaching is a simple minded activity assigned to teachers as an unpleasant duty rather than as an extremely rewarding teaching activity requiring many kinds of special knowledge. They seem to say that nobody can teach writing so anyone might as well try.

Even good news, of course, has a bad side. The "Back to Basics" slogan is a symptom of what might be a return to the blind alley. Folks are being encouraged to believe in simple solutions. There is no clear image of what we are asked to go back to, in part because we don't really have comparable descriptions of how most people write in whatever era we are supposed to admire. Some compare the best of the past with the average or below average of today, and few bother to note how many weren't counted at all then. Most simply depend on memory, a function notoriously susceptible to wishes and fantasy. "When I was young, we had to . . ."

The same urge for simple solutions encourages a definition of "basic" in terms of the most isolated, the most easily defined, and often the least important features of writing. No single element is basic; the fusion of elements into discourse is what writing is all about, and that is extremely difficult—so difficult that it takes a lifetime. The wishful thinkers want a single course—preferably one taken in childhood—to make good writers forever, but the truth is that all of us constantly have to relearn how to write well, and we write better in some situations than in others, and on some topics better than on others. Writing is so much a part of the learning process that even though some separate and concentrated instruction in writing can be helpful, the skill must be a part of all study.

Still, in the attacks is cause for rejoicing. Last March the meeting of CCCC was affirmative and proud. Instead of worrying about whether composition was worth teaching, the groups heard papers on the intellectual bases of the study. Instead of feeling ignored, the people were trying to cope with newly experienced celebrity. For the moment, anyway, some of the people saw composition teachers as experts to be consulted or damned, according to taste, but not be taken lightly. The challenge is to take the interest of moment and make it the basis for real educational reforms.

The bad news, I suppose, should have some silver lining, but I am not able to see it. By assigning everyone to teach composition, the department leaders are telling the

Richard Lloyd-Jones was 1976 Program Chairman of the Conference on College Composition and Communication. The subject of the meeting: "What's Basic in Composition?" In July he assumed new duties as Chairman of the English Department at the University of Iowa. In December he will begin his term as 1977 Chair of CCCC.

public that anyone can teach composition, that it requires no knowledge or skill beyond that known to students of literature, and furthermore that the teaching of literature itself has such minor importance that it can be cut out of the curriculum—a view apparently shared by many vocationally minded students and their advisers.

Not all composition teachers need unusual training, to be sure, and most of the current crop of writing specialists are self-taught, there having been no programs of special study when they were in graduate schools. They may on occasion have taught themselves eccentrically—that is the danger John Henry Newman cited as afflicting those who learn outside of the corrective dialogues in a *program* of learning—but they have delved into appropriate social studies, and a group of such self created teachers can combine forces to train new teachers well. There *are* competent teachers, and if they are given resources and authority, they can run good programs, but they also can be subverted by the conventional practices of demanding that routine labor be spent on minor details.

Part of the difficulty in making a case for properly trained teachers is that certain kinds of good teaching can be done by people with little training in either writing or speaking. After all, communication is basic to society and it is perfected in practice. Most of the skills are learned outside of schools. People who are socially sensitive and care about the kinds of language used in actual discourse can recognize failures and pinpoint causes and recommend remedies. They may not know much theory, and they probably are limited to the worlds in which they normally carry on their own affairs, but within their own range they can be exceedingly effective. They have the most important single quality of the good comp teach—they care about what is being said—not whether it conforms to some book prescription, but whether it will in fact work in its intended world. I might note that such care may include spelling and punctuation and middle class usage, if those happen to be an issue in the chosen world, but those characteristics are not equally important in all situations. In the best sense they teach by example.

An editor is likely to be a fine instructor of journalists, but not necessarily of children. The local insurance agent may be able to teach more about writing letters than can most English teachers specializing in lyric poetry. Because communication generally is bound to situation, for any particular kind of situation the person who works regularly with the language of the situation may well be the best instructor. In short, all sorts of people who are not ordinarily considered trained to teach writing may do it very well—better than the person whose training in language led away from practical discourse. Furthermore, the conventions of classroom teaching—the large classes, the emphasis on accountability via standardized tests, and acceptance of prose without content or audience—undermine what practical wisdom the instructor does have. In fact, just as engineers may have real trouble writing reports useful and meaningful to city councils because they are preoccupied with the rules of technical prose designed to enhance credibility among the technical people, so a person wholly consumed by literary study may have language habits which limit the range of discourse to other literary situations. Amateur teachers tend to recreate themselves.

In defending the usefulness of people of common sense and social maturity as teachers of composition—the people with fewer preconceived notions about language than possessed by the usual teacher of English or editor—I do not mean to

suggest that we should call them adequate. They have a place, and they could be hired to teach writing at a much lower price than that commanded by the professor of literature. For the purposes of teaching composition the professor and the educated layperson are about equal, but no educational system responsive to need should settle for that. The lowest common denominator may be too low.

What, then, should a teacher of composition know? In brief, the teacher should know about writers and audiences, about language and reality; those are the variables to be found in almost any diagram of communication. All liberal arts education claims to provide such knowledge, but sometimes the focus is a bit bleary so students don't get the point.

Any socially mature person knows something about writers and audiences, but additional study of psychology and sociology helps. Because specialists thrive on detail and nuance, anyone who dabbles in someone else's specialty has trouble getting the information needed for general understanding, yet the mental processes of making and interpreting symbols, of learning generally, of creating, of coping with drives and fears, of organizing sensations are among those human activities a teacher needs to study. They tell us about the writer, but they also suggest much about the audience, and they help us extend our concern to how societies work, how individuals accommodate, how sub-groups exist and interact, and how language forms relate to social values. Granted, courses alone won't suffice, and we can't hope to qualify as experts, yet one needs enough basic training to be able to read to current studies in the fields and to be suitably skeptical.

Most of us take the systematic study of language for granted, although startlingly few English teachers have had more than a hint of linguistic study, often a quick but charming overview of the history of English. At least the history of language changes suggests that forms can be identified according to the groups which used them and the "correct" forms are the ones used by the politically and socially dominant people, but the studies of syntax are often excessively technical and the studies of meaning quite skimpy. Dialects, systems larger than the sentence, language disorders and relations between oral and written language are almost ignored. The ways a poet or an advertising copy writer experience language can be important substitutes for linguistics—one needs a "feel" for language—yet if the teacher is to diagnose and prescribe for students who are different from the teacher in background and goals, some theory is needed.

A theory of knowledge also helps. Perhaps epistemology as taught in the philosophy department will be too rarified, and the sciences may spend so much energy on procedure as not to consider questions of how the language of a field shapes the study itself. Because we like the results of technology, we accept the propriety of mathematical language for scientific study, but we rarely consider that the acceptance of mathematics as the language of science requires an assumption about the nature of reality which is reflected in the carefully limited verbal categories of scientific discourse. Walter Pater writes of the "solidity" with which reality is invested by language. Much of memory is verbal and thus selective, categorical, and structured —subject not to external consideration but to the individual will.

Most of these separate studies are synthesized in courses in rhetoric or communication theory or even in advanced courses in writing. For many people such

courses may be adequate introductions to the issues, although those who aspire to be specialists will have to discover in or out of course more of the ideas from related fields. Perhaps, too, it should be admitted that a literature program which puts heavy emphasis on the theory and practice of literary criticism will probably spread into these appropriate kinds of knowledge as a by-product of literature. If recent trends in literary study continue—that is, an inclination to define English to include literature of all nations, to stress contexts in time and place, and to use the insights of other disciplines to provide insight—then once again a literary major may be more helpful to teachers of composition. Perhaps even they will see that non-fictional prose is possibly literary—or that "discourse" is a broad term which includes literature as one of the varieties. Such a broad definition was once taken for granted, and oratory, journalism, and "language" were routinely parts of "English." Now we have "language arts" and assign the study to the schools, but we don't really expect the school teachers to have training except in a narrowly conceived study of literature and a course in "methods."

The continuing bad news for teachers of composition is that some academic administrators cling to the comfortable thoughts that anyone can teach writing, that no special training is needed, that one course ought to do the job, and that if we take care of the obvious but superficial problems of mechanics, then the hard-to-define problems of fusing ideas in language for real readers can be ignored. Essentially, they want to cut costs in the schools by assigning the left over time of any teacher hired for sports or driver's education or foreign language to the teaching of English. At any level they want to avoid having the one-to-one contact and cost required for teaching a subject which at times is perilously close to counseling and therapy. They want to avoid the risk that students will write about something of concern to them and an embarrassment to adults. In short, they'd prefer a cop-out.

The most convenient cop-out in the standardized test of "writing." The lay boards of education want evidence that something really goes on in the classroom, and most of the members have grown up in the era of mass testing programs, so they learned to believe in tests before they learned how to doubt. Later on some may have felt that they knew more than their tests had shown and that perhaps the important parts of their own education had not tested. Still, people who scored well on tests were pushed ahead and generally they have done well in their communities and they have been elected to school boards and only occasionally question the results of tests—especially when the schools offer little else in the line of real evidence. A conscientious board member wants something "objective" which can be understood by a non-specialist.

Nor is that the end. Board members usually come from a class of people who are concerned about propriety and also feel that their positions require that they take stands. They know that communication is important and they suspect that it is complicated. Still, when it comes to talking about writing they lack a critical vocabulary, in part because they were taught by teachers who didn't have much critical vocabulary either. Therefore, they talk about the notions they can. After a generalized observation about not communicating, or perhaps not having a point or not having evidence, they launch into discussions about spelling and mechanics and usage. That they know—or think they know—and they resent comments that this

knowledge is unimportant. Many of them invested a good bit of effort and suffered substantial intimidation in the process of acquiring their own mastery so such knowledge *HAS* to be important. And if they had any other doubts, they know that standardized tests thrive on such detail. Items are discrete, easily testable. Results can easily be compared. By and large students who score well on the ACT usage test, for example, earn good grades in the first year of college. That must mean they can write well. Or does it mean they have accepted the middle class language which is standard in most college classes? Or that they have accepted the standard procedures of academic systems? Whatever it means, teachers have not been notably successful in explaining what else is at stake, and that may be because so many are unprepared.

As a practical matter the current tests are good predictors, but that does not mean they assess the ability to write. Possibly the tests of reading come closer to implying writing skill because they at least deal with the ability to examine discourse, but even that is speculation. Probably the ability to write is only moderately necessary for getting through college. Most "A" students will have acquired the skill, although graduate and professional schools regularly claim that "A" students can't write. If they are correct in their assertion, we can only conclude that writing is not even essential for the good undergraduate, at least in getting a degree. And if it isn't needed in what ought to be a highly verbal segment of society, writing can not be as much needed in the adult world of business as much as is claimed. A few writing formulae and a lawyer or an editor or a secretary-scrivener will get most people through the day's work. So perhaps calling a non-writing test a test of writing may make little difference in the practical world.

Such a claim deserves a bit more attention.

What is a test of writing? Properly it should be a sample of discourse systematically examined. Despite centuries of examining pieces of writing we don't know for sure how to talk systematically about the individual parts except in terms of a particular rhetorical situation That allows us to speak wisely about one selection, but less well about several, and rather ineptly about the size of sample ordinarily associated with standardization. Perhaps one piece of writing depends upon the use of the pronoun; the next one doesn't; one depends upon elaborate sentences; the next one on simple sentences; one depends upon gaudy imagery; the next one is properly plain. Two different people may solve a sample writing problem well, but in contesting ways. Almost all of the advice in books on writing must be hedged with limits and special circumstances or it is but half-truth, and that makes life difficult for the critic of writing, not to mention for the tester who wants to isolate a feature for a multiple choice test.

Still, a test of vocabulary probably agrees moderately well with the ability to write. Having a large vocabulary is usually helpful even though some people with large vocabularies produce writing which is virtually unintelligible. Perhaps a large vocabulary and writing skill are both related to some other human trait. Quite likely, the size of vocabulary is not affected so much by the school as by personal experience within the whole community, including the school, and if the test is not standardized upon people in the same community as those being tested, the counts of words may be wrong, for each sub-group develops some language which is special for it.

Properly an objective test should be correlated to scores on actual writing

samples taken from the standard group, but then we are up against not knowing how to report the quality of groups of samples. The Educational Testing Service and others have perfected reasonable techniques for comparing samples of writing but their holistic ratings serve little other function than gross comparison. If we could find an element of writing always appearing in "top" papers, we would have a device to measure, but "top" in one situation is not necessarily "top" in another. In short, neither objective tests nor tests of discourse are now very helpful in evaluating schools but the standardized tests are available, popular, and satisfying. Teachers can learn the limited range of the tests and teach to them, and pupils can get good scores, and school boards can feel responsible. Why should one complain?

The first complaint should come from those who believe that the use of language defines a human being, and written language is the medium of the most precise feelings and ideas of which a human is capable because it is stable enough to permit minute reconsideration. Even though language is a social instrument and subject to all of the vagaries of social institutions, it is also the device by which we know ourselves. It binds us to others and at the same time validates our personal sense of the world. If the accountants force us to define a human in the countable categories then we have reduced our vision of what we are. In the jargon of the trade, we have denied the affective, the tacit, and perhaps everything but the mechanically rational. In our concern for naming the separate trees we lose sight of the composite forest.

Even those who make a more modest claim for language must recognize that what results from the use of language, not the form of language, is important in social situations. The politician or advertisers who ask, "Does it sell?" talk about human purposes; the decadent folks worry about forms for their own sake. "Between you and I" is an "error" which will justify points off in school, but the "error" is well below the threshold of awareness of most middle-westerners, at least. To be sure, careful test makers avoid disputed usage, but the point is that no single feature is equivalent to discourse in a clearly defined situation. How simple it would be if the teacher could really devote Tuesday to the objective case and believe that the point was covered! Or that it really made much difference in the life of a language user—a person who grew up bathed in language. In order to be useful the teacher must know lots more in order to imply, to hint at, the complications represented by each form in the language as it is used in a particular situation.

The burden of my commentary is not to present a lesson in rhetorical or linguistic fact or theory, nor to attack tests (which can be very informative, if properly used), nor even to quarrel about people who quibble about some special constructions in the language (it's great fun and often illustrates how language and people interact with engaging illogic), but rather it is an appeal not to surrender to the seductive easy solutions which are no solutions to inadequate writing.

In a proper sense all writing is inadequate simply because humans are not wholly wise, witty, or worthy. Quite possibly even the best writing has but a transient perfection, for it is a product of one time and place. It follows then that those who help us with our writing ought not be the intellectually unwilling, or the rigidly formalistic, or the mechanistically overworked. Although they can't be all knowing, they must be willing to understand before they judge and be eager to consider new solutions. Although they must always be at "work," they must play at it, toying with words and

ideas, building new shapes, exploring old maps with the zeal of restless adventurers.

One of the favorite slogans of current mechanists—garbage in, garbage out—implies an inability to transform, to recreate, to exceed the limits of their gadget. It is a powerful gadget, and quick, and within its limits beyond error, but like a child it cannot really make its errors into metaphors, its garbage into food. An adult human, open to language and experience, must do that. That is why we need to insist that teachers of composition draw upon all of the realms of discourse, not just "imaginative literature," and seek the aid of linguists, rhetoricians, sociologists, psychologists, and philosophers. That is why it is bad news when administrators think anyone and everyone can teach composition.

Forward to Basics: Developing the Language Potential

HANS P. GUTH
San Jose State University

Like much of the rest of our society, our profession is today experiencing a crisis of leadership. As teachers of English today, we lack a clear sense of direction, a clear sense of purpose. Many teachers, not to mention administrators and parents, have become disillusioned with the more open, colorful, experimental approaches to English popular in recent years. But few of us seem to have a strong sense of where we are to go from here. Instead, we are in many places witnessing a confused retreat — to the discredited methods and materials of the year before yesteryear. In the name of basic skills and basic literacy, we see a revival of methods and routines that the profession abandoned because they DID NOT WORK — because they were, for many or most of our students, wrongly based, counterproductive, pervasively negative in their whole orientation. What is needed today is a concept of English as a basic subject that offers solid focused productive work while at the same time doing full justice to the imaginative, creative, human dimension of language. Our need today is for instruction in English that is not remedial in the old discredited sense but that offers a positive modern approach to language designed to help students become more effective users of language in their own right.

THE POSITIVE APPROACH

For many years, movements feeding new content into English have by and large headed for a common goal. They have made possible a positive modern approach to a subject that had traditionally been treated in too negative a fashion. Much debate over new content was really a struggle over the spirit in which English should be taught. What had defeated the "old" English was its negative attitude toward language as it is used every day. Students knew the English teacher first and last as the policeman of the language. An English teacher was someone who would interrupt people in midsentence to say "*Whom*—not *who!*" or "*As*—not *like*." The student who was asked to write his heart out on the topic of the day soon discovered the real purpose of the assignment: to provide the opportunity for an error count, to give the teacher yet another chance to write in the margin *sp. frag. agr. ref. rep. CS*, and *ww*. While little attention was paid to the student writer's opinion on war, women, or juvenile delinquency, much attention was paid to misuses of the comma.

No matter how dedicated individual teachers might be, they were ultimately defeated by a basic orientation that put the emphasis not on where language succeeds but on where language fails. No matter how constructive or encouraging the approach of individual teachers, they were part of a larger system operating on the assumption: "The student does things wrong; it is our job to set him right." Students knew in their bones that "English is where you make mistakes."

Hans Guth is Professor of English at San Jose State University. He is the author of a number of books on the teaching of writing, among them *English for a New Generation* (McGraw-Hill) from chapter one of which this paper is derived. The article, in its original form, was a speech given at the 1975 Meeting of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. We reprint it from the *IATE Bulletin* of December, 1975.

English teachers have had to learn to start on a different foot. A positive modern approach to English puts the emphasis on what language is and what language can do. English is concerned with the resources of language, the power of words, the student's language potential. Language is a fascinating, rich, and glorious thing. English as a subject lives up to its potential when the student begins to feel some of that fascination. The student must get a sense of personal satisfaction out of what he is doing. An English class is successful when students emerge from it feeling "That was good—good to know, good to feel, good to do."

Whatever we teach in detail, our basic message as teachers of English is simple: *Language works*. If we have something to say, there is something to say it with. Whatever else we do, we try to keep before our students the example of people—young and old, amateur and professional, living or dead—who have the gift of words. Our basic source material in English classes is always the living example of people able to say what is on their minds:

> Nature made ferns for pure leaves, to show what she could do in that line. (Henry David Thoreau)
>
> All electric appliances, far from being labor-saving devices, are new forms of work, decentralized and made available to everybody. (Marshall McLuhan)
>
> It requires enormous intelligence, innate or acquired by cultivation, to discharge the full responsibilities of managing a household, doing its endlessly repetitive work without deadening the mind, bringing up children, restraining, encouraging and helping them, being a companion and helpmate to one's husband, helpful and intelligently interested in his work, and being, at the same time, able to take on his duties and responsibilities if she must, as thousands of women have had to. (Dorothy Thompson)

How do we implement a positive approach in our daily work with language? We have to change familiar habits. We used to teach diction in order to get at words *misused*, to teach coherence in order to get at the *lack* thereof in the student's writing. We have to develop habits of the opposite kind—making sure that the prevailing slant of all language activities be *constructive*. Thus, doing exercises once meant finding the mistake in a sentence that to the unspoiled ear of the student was in itself a mistake:

> Had we known your desire to go with us, we most certainly would of invited you to join our party.
>
> Neither Harriet nor Claire was completely convinced by Joan's insisting that it was them who were to blame.

Today, doing exercises means doing productive things with language. Thus, we look for *sentence-building* exercises that show, not how a writer gets trapped, but how he manages to be articulate, how he loads a sentence with freight. We look for "muscle-building" exercises that make a student feed simple parts into a large structure:

Five Statements:	The astronaut entered the capsule. The astronaut was a *boy*. The astronaut was a *Russian*. The astronaut was *handsome*. His entrance was *quick*.

One Statement	The *handsome Russian astronaut [illegible]*, entered the capsule.
Statement	The hall burned to the ground.
Added Statement	The hall was a *fireproof multimillion dollar structure.*
Result	The hall, *a fireproof multimillion dollar structure*, burned to the ground.
Statement	The police found the murder weapon.
Added Statement	The murder weapon was *an Italian-made rifle.*
Result	The police found the murder weapon, *an Italian-made rifle.*

A large part of our repertory used to be horrible examples. Today, we look for examples of how things are done right. When we teach the adjective, we quote Mark Twain, who put the adjective to good use, and who once called a person he disliked a "middle-aged, long, slim, bony, smooth-shaven, horse-faced, ignorant, stingy, malicious, snarling, fault-hunting, mote-magnifying tyrant." When we teach verbals, we turn to writers who use verbals well:

> Zurito, *sitting on his horse, walking him toward the [illegible] not missing any detail*, scowled.
>
> Manuel, *leaning against the barrera, watching the bull, waved his hand and the gypsy ran out, trailing his cape.*
>
> Manuel, *facing the bull, having turned with him [illegible]*, offered the cape with his two hands.
>
> (Ernest Hemingway)

When we teach figurative language, we no longer concentrate on the mixed metaphor, the inept metaphor, the extravagant metaphor, the trite metaphor. Instead, we concentrate on what figurative language can do:

> Putting the hubcap back on the rim is *like putting an undersized lid on an oversized jar.*
>
> The candidate *sailed* to the speaker's table on a nice *wave of applause.*
>
> Cornelia's voice *staggered and bumped like a cart on a bad road.* (Katherine Anne Porter)
>
> She would look for dark spots in his character and *drill away at them as relentlessly as a dentist at a cavity.* (Mary McCarthy)

Just as we look for a positive slant in the materials we bring to our students, we look for what is promising in what our students bring to class. We look for interests and habits that an English teacher can relate to and build on. Anyone who listens to children knows how language-conscious and verbally oriented they are. Their favorite jokes and stories revolve around a play on words, the repetition of a catchy phrase, the repetition of a familiar verbal pattern. For the adolescent, much that for the jaded adult has become trite is still fresh and entertaining. The adolescent delights in the discovery that language is not always businesslike, responsible, admonitory. He prefers the casual, colloquial style to the self-important, pompous style (and takes delight in mimicking the latter). He has a weakness for outrageous puns and other ways of playing games with language. Students with allegedly "low verbal aptitude" will expend loving care in constructing something like the following:

> In a small town in the USA there came a day when the town ran out of funds. They didn't have enough money to run the schools, pay the teachers, or run the libraries. The town called a large meeting. What could they do? They already had tax on cigarettes, luxury, sales tax, alcohol, property, income, etc. One gentleman stood up and said, "It's time to get down to the brass tax."

In our eagerness to stamp out "immature" informality and extravagance, we have at times banished from our classrooms much of what gives language life, sparkle, human interest. Today we try to keep alive in the students' use of language the very elements that make the difference between sparkling, spontaneous, living language and gray, homogenized committee prose.

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE STUDENT

True teachers do not turn out a product according to specifications. One of their most basic objectives is to make the student *actively participapte* in learning. One of the most important things a successful student learns is to carry [illegible] take his own contribution. An essential part of our task as teac[illegible]h the crust of apathy, indifference, and dull routine. We try [illegible]nt's spontaneity and creativity. We try to foster student init[illegible] response.

Ideally, to make something new his own, the student participates in its discovery, tries it out in practice, tests it in new contexts, learns from the trials and errors of his fellow learners. The teacher, in turn, gets "involved." He brings in his own experience and commitment; he *listens* as well as talks; he respects students as people; he learns from their confusion and rebellions, their triumphs and mistakes.

The requirement for active participation in fundamental ways shapes daily classroom routine. Put in the most elementary terms, there must be things for the student to do. There must be things for students to get involved in and become intrigued by. There must be *activities* that stimulate their initiative, that provide scope for the exercise of their imagination. Thus, when we present the subject-verb skeleton of the simple sentence, we catch ourselves early in the hour, lest we provide all the explanations and all the examples ready-made. Instead, we early say to the student: "Your turn." We let the students explore the full range of the "intransitive" verbs that fit into the "Birds fly" pattern. We ask them to find other single words that fit into the identical slot:

> What do birds do? They _____ (They fly. They chirp. They tweet. They hop. They flutter. They soar. They swoop. They dive. They nest. They brood. They migrate. They depart. They return.)
>
> What do angry people do? They _____ (They shout. They frown. They glare. They argue. They fume. They sulk. They boo. They hiss. They rebel. They demonstrate. They riot. They organize. They petition. They march. They protest.)
>
> What do happy people do? They _____. (They smile. They whistle. They hum. They dance. They skip. They grin. They smirk. They dawdle. They relax. They sing. They wander. They roam. They chortle. They chuckle. They guffaw.)
>
> What to students do? They _____. (They work. They play. They study. They read. They write. They groan. They complain. They doze. They cram. They pass. They fail. They experiment. They bluff. They flatter. They conform. They learn. They graduate.)

Whenever possible, we put students through their paces. When we talk about the way modifiers build up a barebones sentence, we have students write open-ended practice exercises that show the process in actions:

> The cowboy rode.
> The *tired* cowboy rode *into town*.

The cowboy, *a famous outlaw*, rode *slowly into the sunset*.
The cowboy, *a lean-jawed matinee idol in an $800 suit*, rode *onto the set*.
The man approached the gate.
The man *in the convertible* approached the gate *at high speed*.
The man *in the shabby coat* approached the gate *at the end of the park*.
The man *with the kangaroo* approached the gate *at the end of the park in a devil-may-care mood*.

Again and again the teacher should say: "Your turn. You put it to work." For example, in a substitution exercise like the following, we put verbals to work in improvising variations from the basic pattern:

Pattern: *Something* is a pleasure.
Variations: *Skating* is a pleasure.
Popping corn is a pleasure.
To walk slowly in a cool lake on a hot summer day is a pleasure.
To see someone try to worm his way to the head of a long line in front of a movie theater, and fail, is a pleasure.

Here are some sentences produced by a group of students for a similar frame:

Frame: _____ is a drag.
Answers: *Getting up in the morning* is a drag.
Going places with your parents in public is a drag.
Having to write a long book report about a book you haven't even read is a drag.
*Waiting for a phone call all day and finally getting one–from Wayne–*is a drag.
Not being old enough to drive when your family has three cars, two trucks, and four motorcycles is a drag.

Ask the students to fill in, with their own "content," the structure of a model sentence. Here are model sentences from Irwin Shaw's short story, "The Eight-Yard Run," with student-written imitations:

Model 1: Darling tucked the ball in, spurted at him,
driving hard.
hurling himself along.
all two hundred pounds bunched into controlled attack.
Imitations: Carol took her diary back, sneered at her,
walking fast,
forcing herself along.
all her secrets uncovered by the uninvited intruder.

James reeled the fish in, beamed at it,
feeling exuberant,
dragging the five-pounder up,
all fears of defeat dispelled in an instant.

Model 2: He smiled a little to himself as he ran,
holding the ball lightly in front of him with his two hands.
his knees pumping high.
his hips twisting in the almost girlish run of a back in a broken field.

Imitation: Bob cussed a lot to himself as he drove.
holding the wheel tightly in front of him with his two hands,
his feet braking often,
his lips curling in an almost devilish pout of a drive in a traffic jam.

The need for active participation by the student is equally strong in all major areas of English. When we teach poems, we have to show that people are not related to poetry as mere passive consumers: Poetry is first of all something people *do*. When we read E. E. Cumming's "Portrait" of blue-eyed Buffalo Bill, who "used to ride a water-smooth silver stallion," our students should want to do a similar portrait of someone more recently "defunct," who meant something in *their* lives. When we read Edgar Lee Master's poetic epitaphs about the people of Spoon River, we want our students to get into the spirit of the thing. We want *them* to pretend that they are among the Lucinda Matlocks and Ann Rutledges "who sleep beneath these weeds." This is what the junior high school student did when he wrote the following poem:

My

Out of me unworthy, and unknown,
The vibrations of the theater grew.
"With malice toward none and charity for all,"
Out of me came hit after hit,
Shining with youth and talent.
I am "John Fitzpatrick" who sleeps beneath these weeds.
Beloved in life by theatergoers:
Wedded to the stage, not through pull,
But through years of hard work.
"The show must go on!"

To get a feeling for what literature is all about, students need frequent opportunity to read, pin up, edit, publish, anthologize *their own writing*. They need to learn that a poem is not dead letters on a page. It is something cherished and fussed over by a lonely individual; presented with trepidation and yet with secret pride; received, if the author is lucky, by someone who appreciates, who understands.

THE CREATIVE SPARK

English teachers have always believed in imagination, creativity, and individuality. But in practice they have often treated them as a bonus for the gifted few, while the great unwashed labored in the salt mines of "fundamental." Today, we recognize imagination, creativity, and individuality as a legitimate and necessary part of *all* of English. In our work with oral and written expression, this recognition has two fundamentally important results: (1) We are more and more allowing for a whole *range* of oral and written activities, with the full-length theme only the most finished or most substantial of various kinds of verbal expression. (2) We are more and more relying on literary and other creative materials as *stimulus*, model, or context for the student's speech and writing. We find that a poem or a picture can have "something to say" that leads directly to a student's response; we find that at the same time it can suggest ways of "seeing," of exploring experience.

Looking for alternatives to the formidable 400-word or 500-word theme, we

turn first of all to the *limbering-up activities* that help make writing a habit. For years, teachers have reported on the success of free writing in breaking up the stiff, solemn "Sunday-Go-to-Meeting" prose of intimidated and inhibited students. They ask their students for "automatic writing"—a stream-of-consciousness kind of prose. The student is asked to keep pen or pencil moving, repeating the same word or slogan even if necessary, but finally, as their minds start wandering, writing down the stray thoughts that come into their heads. S. I. Hayakawa asked students to write "rapidly and continuously . . . without pausing, without taking thought, without revising. . . . In a matter of weeks, student writings, at first so labored and self-conscious, become fluid, expressive, and resonant with the rhythms of the spoken American language." Ken Macrorie's students, asked for free writing, "returned with papers that spoke disjointedly and fragmentarily, but in language often alive . Some natural rhythms appeared, a striking metaphor once in a while, and often a bit of reality that jarred me."

To stimulate the flow of impressions and ideas, hundreds of teachers have asked their students to keep **journals**, in which there is room for random notes, for the trivial as well as the important, for [illegible] as the public. At the same time [illegible] journal or log gives stude[illegible] some of the things that writing can do for us: When something [illegible] happens, we want to tell somebody—even if only our diary. When we are unjustly blamed, we want to explain—if only to our journal.

As student writing becomes more spontaneous, the native sparkle and humanity as well as the hurt and bewilderment begin to shine through. But as we try to convince our students that "everybody is a writer" and "everybody has got something to say," their getting-the-habit activities will by no means be all unstructured, all free flow. Students bring to us a naive delight in pattern, in shape; in is part of our job to keep it alive. Students take to the *haiku* because they delight in its simple, predictable three-line form; they catch on to its ability to clear away the debris, to capture some essential impression on feeling:

Roller Coaster

The roller coaster
Shocking, thrilling as it goes
I scream all the way.

Students take to capsule portraits and thumbnail sketches because of the challenge of condensation, which is a challenge of form. They delight in opportunities for **parody**, such as the "updated proverbs" that take a tired old pattern and give it a lively new twist:

It's a long street th[illegible]as no parking meter.
He who laughs last [illegible]ll never be part of a studio audience.
A watched bus never comes.
Where there's muck there's headlines.

Something very basic happens as we encourage the creative and imaginative elements in student writing: We begin to read their papers the way we would "literature." We read them with an anticipation of *pleasure*. We expect to be pleased, disturbed, elated, shaken up, moved. We encourage our students to look for the poetry of their own daily lives: the

buildings built for a different time and those built for our time; the life histories written in the faces of old people; the pompousness and cleverness of advertisers; the humor and pathos of signs:

SMILE—YOU MAYBE ON RADAR
PAINTINGS CHEAP—ARTIST STARVING
FIGHT SMOG—RIDE A BICYCLE
WELCOME: Parents and other visitors on school business are always welcome in the Chicago Public Schools. Please go directly to the office of the principal.

We thus encourage students to bring their sensitivity, their creativity, their imagination to bear on the things of every day, on the life around them:

I Am Rain

I am rain
I drop down one by one from the clouds.
I drop down on fields to help farmers grow crops.
I drop on hills and roll down waterfalls.
I help people by killing their thirst.
I am rain.

These Things

These things are good.
The bird in the wood,
The wind in the trees,
The small crawling things,
The child and her mother,
The love of a brother,
These things are good.

Like Master, Like Dog

Manard was a German [illegible]herd and the friendliest dog on Hayes Street. Every child that walked by Manard's residence [illegible] astonished, not only by his friendliness, but also by his size. He was about four feet [illegible] all fours and weighed between 150 and 200 pounds. He was a beautiful shade of gray and [illegible]

Oddly, Manard was friendly with others but not to his master, a man we called Scrooge. Manard felt the same as we did toward Scrooge. All Manard received was orders. "Go get the paper. Get my slippers. Sit down. Shake hands."

He began leaving home when he was let loose to roam the yard. He first began to stay away for two days and from two days to two weeks. When he did return home Scrooge would take him by the collar, drag him [illegible]ly to the rear of his house, and lash him with a whip.

Manard was no longer [illegible]nyone. He barked at the children and tried continuously to jump the fence [illegible]ht to themselves: "Two Scrooges. Like master, like dog."

The hand is the dog [illegible]an
This measly piece [illegible]sh that gives
the signal for life [illegible]
This panting extrem[illegible] thrusts
war, poverty and p[illegible]
The instrument of [illegible]y and war
Stop!

Lower your filthy fist
Lower the pointer of destruction
Stop!
Go back
Resume your natural form hand
Be what you are
The human tool of love and peace
The extremity that shows friendship
and affection
The instrument of fortune, beauty,
and resurrection

Here is the only real "breakthrough" in the teaching of English in the last few decades: English teachers have come to approach student writing not as judges but first of all as readers. They show by their response that they value the personal elements in the students' writing—their honesty, doggedness, or wit. They show that they cherish imagination, the free play of the mind that opens up new perspectives. They show that they cherish the telling phrase, word play, verbal mimicry. They also show that they are willing to listen seriously when the time to be serious has come.

When we ask what basic problems English teachers have always faced, we can probably identify three major hurdles familiar to all of us: First, in the students' minds, English has too often had negative connotations as the result of our preoccupation with faults and errors. Second, many of our students have remained too passive, doing only the required minimum, deciding early in their career that English was not for them. Third, we have often been trapped into thinking that to be practical and useful our work with language has to be grey, pedestrian, pedantic, dull. We can overcome these familiar obstacles if we concentrate on developing positive competencies, if we concentrate on mobilizing the student's own potential, and if we do justice to the human and imaginative elements in language that make it a living force in our world.

"English" *is* writing

DAVID B. BRONSON
Cambridge, Mass.

It will help if we understand that when we talk about "English" as a school subject or as a curriculum for students or as what certain teachers do, we are talking about *writing*. This is not to exclude literature, drama, media, linguistics, communication, and all that language involves, but it is to insist on the primacy of writing. It is certainly not to ignore what has emerged in our generation as the problem of reading, but for a number of reasons I think that is a distinct area of work.

To understand that "English" is writing makes it clear, perhaps for the first time, what a student is supposed to do. He or she is supposed to write something—and we should include here the possibility that the written words may be a shooting script for a film or TV presentation and may also be "creative" or "expository" and so on. What is to be written can be specified simply, it can be tempered to the shorn lamb in heterogeneously grouped classes, and it lends itself to progressively more demanding forms to challenge and satisfy the growing student. Furthermore, it is more measurable than any other indicator of student behavior, and it is measurable in ways that make plain sense to all kinds of students, so the evaluation of their performance can be expressed in terms that are acceptable to them and to their parents, as well as to employers and admissions directors.

To approach the subject this way will enormously clarify and strengthen our position as teachers of English, not only giving us something with which to justify our existence in school and community, but also letting us do something that is really important and straightforward. This thesis has firm historical foundations, it fits into contemporary views of congnitive process and development, and it suggests some practical pedagogical possibilities.

Historical Background

The history of communication is becoming a familiar subject now. It was introduced to the public and to the teaching profession in general by Marshall McLuhan[2], who thrust the word 'media' upon us as the technical term for the means of communication. Behind McLuhan, of course, is considerable historical background, some of which he supplied in the *The Gutenberg Galaxy*[8] and more recently in *From Cliche to Archetype*[9].

There are studies of communication as social behavior and of communication theory, there are anthropological and specifically cross-cultural studies[4], as well as grand theorists and model makers, of whom Claude Levi-Strauss is king. Starting with the work of Norbert Wiener, who popularized (but did not coin) the word "cybernetics," there have been studies aimed at the nontechnical reader, and to one of them, Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*[1], I shall refer later.

David Branson of Cambridge, Massachusetts, has had a rich and varied professional life, the two poles of which have been service in the ministry and in the teaching of English. His last administrative position was Chairman, English Dept., Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School. His publications have appeared in the *English Journal, Harvard Educational Review*, and the *Educational Forum*.

Finally, in the field of the humanities there are books like E. R. Dodd's *The Greeks and the Irrational*[5] and Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato*[6], which open up the classical foundation of our thinking, as described by Bruno Snell in *The Discovery of the Mind: the Greek Origins of European Thought*[10]. I would refer here to my article on some of the pedagogical aspects of this history of thinking in *The Educational Forum* for March, 1975[3].

We can see, now, that writing has a distinct function when it is compared with the preliterate and preclassical cultures, on the one hand, and with other media or means of communication, on the other. Writing involves specific skills, as does reading, and this in turn means that specific kinds of thinking or uses of the mind are involved. Writing makes possible the construction of a particular set of models, as, for example, the electronic computer makes possible the construction of a different set of models. When we write we are forced to choose our words and to join them by means of appropriate connective words. *To write is to edit*, in the mind or on paper or with the help of someone else, and this is to make us, among other things, self-conscious.

The history of communication, as well as the ethnological comparisons, shows us that our normative mode of expression and comunication, writing, is historically traditioned, just like any other medium of expression and communication. If, then, we are able to look objectively at the strengths and limitations of other media, at communication in preliterate societies, and at the connections between writing and thinking in our own history, we are now, and really only now, in a position to evaluate writing as a distinct mode of expression and communication. Historical understanding, in other words, can free us from the burden of including everything in "English." Teachers of "English" may, and probably should be interested, both as teachers and as persons, in many things, but what they must teach—or no one will teach it—is writing; "English" *is* writing.

Cognitive Development

By the time children enter school or even preschool they have attained most of the linguistic competence that a functioning human being possesses. Certainly by the time they enter secondary school they are masters of their native tongue, and so in that sense we do not have to teach them English. As a matter of fact, of course, we do not even know how they—and we—learned it in the first place! Our students do speak and read and write, and what actually concerns us is not their linguistic competence as a whole but, instead, the fact that we do not *write* well enough. We are troubled about their reading ability, and properly so, and I shall discuss that in a moment, but we might not notice that so much or take it so seriously if we were satisfied with their writing. It is when we ask them to write, particularly on assigned topics or in answer to specific questions or in a prescribed form, that we are overwhelmed by their failure to express much of anything sensible and their attendant failure to express even the little they have in an acceptable, much less an effective, form.

This is worth stressing because it approaches the problem of reading from what many will consider the wrong end, putting the cart before the horse. To this, without presuming to meet all objections or to overcome all obstacles, I have three answers.

1. It is the students' inadequacies in writing that disclose to us their lack of comprehension and their inability to analyze the material and construct a cogent,

articulate, and convincing response to it. Perhaps it would be easier to see the other way around: if a person could write a decent paragraph or a good essay, we would not question him much further, whether he is in the 9th grade or is applying to a university. In the context of the institution and its responsibilities, it is writing that "counts."

2. The relation between reading and writing does seem to be a simple, linear one-to-one connection. People seem to learn to read in a variety of ways, some by writing, some by drawing, some by typing, some by playing with the sequence of numbers, some by one set of perceptual devices and some by others. When we speak of reading, then, we are referring to a complex set of behaviors, which varies not only between individuals but within individuals with the material they are reading, the reasons why they are reading it, and with all the distractions of life itself.

I would not suggest the separation of reading from writing in the whole context of linguistic competence and performance, but I think it is essential to distinguish between reading as an internal process and writing as an external one, and I submit that it is essential to approach these two kinds of process differently for the purposes both of study and teaching. I think that the teaching of English-as-writing can stand by itself and claim the support of the institution, and that reading should be dealt with by quite a different set of people. I would suggest that the people responsible for helping students in reading not only be broadly trained in cognitive psychology but also be included in the program of the institution in such a way that they can work with the student and all of his teachers and probably his parents too. Reading, I would say, is a psychosocial matter, with the emphasis evenly distributed on both elements of the term.

3. Writing can be taught in a way that speaking and reading, the other two kinds of verbal behavior cannot. It can be taught by a form of operant conditioning, leaving the solution of the linguistic problems to the brain of the student. Writing thus has precedence because it is teachable in the sense that the student can be given specific tasks, can learn to undertake specific tasks on his own initiative, can see the results and evaluate them, and in the sense that the teacher can plan for the student's development and can also see and evaluate the results and adapt the program to them.

Linguistic competence is not the whole of cognitive development, and writing is not the whole of linguistic competence. But writing is an excellent indicator because when the message is finally completed it has to stand or fall as it is. It has to be right. There is no second chance. In much the same way that you don't quite know what you are going to say until you actually say it, so you don't quite know what you have said until you have written it and you, and others, can look at it. You don't know how it fits in with what other people think until they can read and think about and respond to it. The social relationship that is largely based on the exchange of written messages is quite different from that which relies on spoken messages. The written word exists apart from the writer and from the reader in a way that the spoken word does not exist apart from the speaker and hearer. Writing is a third party, as the camera is the third party in the communication of film. Between people who use writing communication is *through* the writing.

The studies of Gregory Bateson, mentioned above, in anthropology, psychiatry,

animal communication, and cybernetics or communication theory, have led him to make a most useful distinction between messages about relationship and messages which do not concern or involve relationship, the former being what we call "emotions" or "feelings" and the latter "thoughts" or "ideas." His thinking is original, difficult to follow, and immensely stimulating. I cite it here only to note that, to put it crudely, if emotions without words (so to speak) are best conveyed by tone, expression, gesture, and so on, thoughts separated from emotions or relationships (so to speak) are best communicated by words, that is, writing.

A complex, radically interrelated and interdependent, tightly ordered and integrated society like ours needs the clearest abstract thought that can be generated, the clearest thinking about the whole and the parts, the most careful analysis and the most critical synthesis, the most informed and realistic understanding of systems and sets and subsystems. It needs, not only for comfort, but for survival, the best objective thinking it can get, and that means the kind of thinking that uses writing. Maybe in the unimaginable future a kind of super-thinking which can make use of a globally integrated electronic communication system will be the rule, but if so, those who rely on written thoughts will not have much to say about it.

We have to deal with the kind of thinking that uses written messages. We have to find those who can do it best, to help us, and we have to find those who do it not so well, to help them do it better. Reading is the sensory heart of the process, but unless you can write an interesting criticism, no one is interested in what you have read. Not until you have written can anyone really know if you have read and if on some level you have understood what you have read. In our society the ability to write, to participate, that is, in the exchange of written messages, is decisive. The colleges are absolutely right in maintaining that the ability to write expository prose is the most important criterion for admission because it is the preliminary to study and to the kind of intellectual work our society requires. And it can be taught and one can judge whether or not it has been learned.

Pedagogical Possibilities

"*English is writing*" is a rule for use in a specific context, the "English" classes and curriculum, particularly in the later stages of the educational system. Some people seem to think that writing is a skill that can be taught in isolation from its content, and that therefore people can learn to write whether or not they have anything to say. Writing, however, not only depends on the content in the way that the rate of reading is a function of the difficulty or the importance of the material read, but the truth of the matter is as different as it could possibly be. Writing is fairly easily done, in most circumstances, when the writer has something to say, and this is the foundation of the teaching of writing. To write a good sonnet or to write one's way to conceptual clarity over a lifetime as, for example, Freud did, or to construct the great verbal models, whether they be simple like Einstein's papers of 1905 or complex like Lévi-Strauss's *Mythologiques*[7], or even to produce the perfect essays, these are all best left up to Fate, and we can give our attention to more mundane cases.

In the context of communication, even between such ill-assorted parties as an adolescent in school under compulsion and an "English" teacher, writing is done for a purpose. Communication is not only expressed purpose, it is *exchanged* purpose. If

there is no exchange, there is no communication. The student may have many purposes: to escape the teacher's sanction, to clarify his or her own thoughts, to prove a point or two, to fill time, to make an important personal statement. But *unless it is done because the writer has something to say which has to be said right, it will be bad writing.* The reverse, that if he or she has something important that has to be said right, it will be good writing, is not true. But more often than not, if the writer wants to communicate, if he wants to say it "right," which means that he wants the reader to "take his meaning," to know how he feels and something of why he feels so, both form and content will be acceptable to himself and to his reader. More often than not, spelling, handwriting, syntax, and organization will be appropriate, and the writer's thoughts will be clear. More often than not, the traditional hobgoblins of starting and stopping, of getting from one sentence or paragraph to another, will be absent. More often than not, if it is important to the writer, the writing will be tight, straight, and clear, and anyone who can talk, can write, to a useful and, for pedagogy, a usable extent.

This is the basis for requiring people to write, that they can do it. Maybe they cannot do it well enough to satisfy us, maybe they find it difficult to write exactly what they mean first shot out of the box, or second or third, maybe the result will not every time impress a director of admissions, but normal people can put words on paper pretty well when they feel they have to. In addition, if it is important to them, they will be more ready to struggle to get it right and to accept the kind of criticism which convinces them that they have unintentionally misled the reader.

This need not be labored, and we can go on to the next step: how does the young writer find something to write about? How does he, in other words, recognize what is writable, what is possible to write about, worth writing about, and desirable or necessary to write about? This, in a word, is the responsibility of the teacher. Life, anyone's life, is full of things to write about, responses to internal and external stimuli that are worth saying "right," and the written messages that are constructed draw on and clarify the deep structure of one's thinking and provide palpable models of social relationship because they are exchange or communication.

But in the context of the social and educational system it is the set of written messages called "literature" which provides the broadest and most varied set of stimuli to good writing and the most useful set of models. These are not models to copy, but models in the sense that they show how a written message has to be constructed with "blood, sweat, toil, and tears." The interchange of models between the literature, the teacher, and the student calls attention to the model-making or pattern-making capacity of the human mind which is shared by writer, teacher, and student. This is the pedagogical purpose of summaries, paraphrases, analyses, translations or transpositions into other genres or media, reports, and projects to set out your response in a form intelligible to yourself and to others so that you and they can look at it, revise it, and accept it as valid. Models vary in complexity and comprehensiveness, and people can develop their ability from the initial stage of simple feeling or seeing (and responding simply and directly) to the stage of real "distancing" through analysis and explanation of why they feel or see whatever it is. Students vary too, of course, in how far they can go, but however far they finally do go, their construction of models is true and valid and can, if they choose, be built on. Anyone who can talk can write.

It would help if the teacher had or took time to read material new to him or her and could share his or her own efforts at model-building. Nothing would be more impressive to students than to know that their teacher had voluntarily undertaken a version of the struggle into which they are cast. It would seem wholly reasonable to say, further, that the teacher of writing *must* write, if not for publication, at least for some colleagues or for some congenial but strict editor, so as to be personally aware of the work of constructing written models that reflect focussed thought and that can be exchanged with another literate thinker.

If the teacher will undertake—and be given the time for by the administrators—a realistic production schedule for him- or herself, then my practical suggestion will make sense. It is that *the course requirement for a given "English" course be one good thing a term*. A teacher faced with a self-imposed schedule of one good poem, essay, story, what have you per term, two per semester, four per year will be very sympathetic to the poor student!

The "one good thing" will be written, of course, and will vary widely. The time of teacher and student may profitably be spent in finding the "thing," and the method of search, too, will vary with the age, competence, maturity, and social experience of the students. By establishing the ironclad requirement: write one good thing!, many of the problems of motivation, rewriting, deadlines, heterogeneous grouping, research, and the host of other horrors will vanish, for a choice well within his competence has been assigned the student, and a task also well within his competence thus earns him a straightforward reward, one credit.

Finally, what may be the best reason of all for establishing the simple requirement of writing one good thing to get one English credit is that it meets the needs (imposed by the educational system) of all kinds of students. For the college-bound the one good thing can be an essay or a report, for the terminal student it can be a simple contractual arrangement involving a variety of assignments and forms, and for the ubiquitous middle student it provides justification for the individual attention that this inconspicuous person so often needs. For the student who needs little direction or encouragement, the one good thing is limited only by the time available, for the student who needs "structure," it provides the possibility of programmed courses or units.

Conclusion

To say *"English" is writing* is not to say all there is about language and linguistic competence, and it is not to ignore the broader dimensions of all those areas which the study of "English" touches. It is, on the contrary, to concentrate on one aspect of verbal communication, and in doing so it must make use of just that material in the liberal tradition. It is, however, to say that reading is something else again, and that the social and psychological dimensions of this field are such that it should not be left to the informal abilities of the general English/writing teacher.

To say *"English" is writing*, further, is to tell students what they will be doing in a given course—which may, of course, take off from Shakespeare or Black Literature or Poetry Today as well as from 6th grade, 9th grade, Senior English or what have you. It is to provide concrete material for evaluation which is realistic to the writer, satisfac-

tory to the teacher, and reasonable to the parents and their representatives in the administration.

And finally, because everyone can do it and do it well on an appropriate level, it will in general be a Good Thing. High time the teachers and students (who are most deeply involved in school) had one.

NOTES

1. Bateson, Gregory, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1972).
2. Bronson, David B., "Reading, Writing, and McLuhan," *English Journal* (November, 1968).
3. Bronson, David B., "Thinking and Teaching," *The Educational Forum* (March, 1975).
4. Cole, Michael and Scribner, Sylvia, *Culture and Thought: a Psychological Introduction* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1971).
5. Dodds, E. R., *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1956).
6. Havelock, Eric A., *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).
7. Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Mythologiques* Paris: Librairie Plon, 1964ff. Translated by J. and D. Weightman as "Introduction to a Science of Mythology" (New York: Harper and Row, 1969ff. The first volume *The Raw and the Cooked*).
8. McLuhan, H. Marshall, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).
9. McLuhan, H. M. and Watson, Wilfred, *From Cliche to Archetype* (New York: Viking Press, 1970).
10. Snell, Bruno, *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

FROM A READING DESK:

TEACHING COMPOSITION: 10 BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAYS, ed. Gary Tate. Texas Christian University Press, 1976. 304 pp.

PETER T. ZOLLER
Wichita State University

Few teachers are surprised to hear that teaching Composition, writing, is a work of great value, but little prestige. Most English Departments will admit in their collective wisdom that the Composition Program supports extensive graduate programs, specialized graduate seminars, and Chaucer courses. So, too, those departments will admit that everyone ought to teach Composition, especially Teaching Assistants. But that there is little to know and less to learn about the teaching of Composition goes without saying. No student would long be permitted to remain in such ignorance were the subject 18th Century British Literature. But because the teaching of writing has so long been considered Martha's work rather than Mary's, such a state of ignorance has been permitted if not encouraged.

It is to the credit of Gary Tate and others like him that Composition is more and more recognized by professors of English as a discipline with a record of past experiments both successful and unsuccessful. Tate and Corbett's *The Teaching of Freshman English* and their *The Teaching of High School English* will be familiar to many who read this journal. Both were anthologies carefully selected and helpful, at times provocative. But, as more and more teachers take Composition seriously and wish to know the body of material that can guide them in making choices for the classroom and for research, the need for bibliographical works increases.

At the present time only three such works exist in anything like a finished state. With the May, 1975, issue of *College Composition and Communication* Richard Larson began what has become an annual bibliography for Composition. It is to Larson's credit that he undertook such a task. For the 1975 bibliography he supplied an annotated list of 66 items; for the 1976 bibliography the list was comparable. By the same token, the Modern Language Association Bibliography runs to some 9,000 items. Clearly, there is a need for the 4 C's and other organizations to band together to produce a bibliography that is more complete than Professor Larson can do by himself. I do not disparage Prof. Larson's efforts in any way. He has supplied a valuable service, but if Composition and those who teach it are to achieve some of the prestige we want, then the time has come to stop doing things in an *ad hoc* kind of way.

Professor Larson used as his markers the years 1973 and 1975. He attempted to supply an annotated list of works published during this period. Those items published before 1973 are the materials for Tate's *Teaching Composition.*

Prof. Tate has amassed a distinguished list of contributors: Richard Young, Richard Larson, Ross Winterwood, Mina Shaughnessy, to name but four. As Tate writes, "My approach was to find the best people I knew and turn them loose, asking only that they write bibliographical *essays* rather than mere listings of important works." As with the contributors, so the topics appear to be of Tate's choosing: "The topics discussed are those that seem to me central to the teaching of composition today, but I am aware that another editor might well have chosen other topics, different authors, etc."

The topics in *Teaching Composition* are those one would wish to see: Mina Shaughnessy's essay is "Basic Writing," and who better than Ms. Shaughnessy could be chosen for that subject? Her essay reflects her experience with basic writing at the City University of New York. Richard Young, with whose work in tagmemics many are familiar, is the author of the essay "Invention: a Topographical Survey." Edward P. J. Corbett is the author of "Approaches to the Study of Style." For the most part all the essays in the book are interesting, informative, and thorough. Each reflects the opinions of an author whose opinions are worth knowing. Each is the distillation of knowledge gained through considerable effort and study.

But not all are equally good. Prof. Corder's essay, "Rhetorical Analysis of Writing," could do with some revision. Statements like, "The MLA bibliography shows no heading or sub-heading for rhetoric. That error can be corrected and a wiser perspective can be gained by this simplest of means, the appropriation of the MLA bibliography as a partial record of rhetorical studies." do little to engender trust in the critical abilities of the bibliographical essayist.

So, too, Prof. Winterowd is not at his best with the essay, "Linguistics and Composition." Prof. Winterowd is justly famous for his work with rhetoric. His freshman composition text is rhetorically based, he has a book of readings on rhetoric, and he is the guiding force behind the University of Southern California's Ph.d. in rhetoric. He would have been much better served to have been asked to write on rhetoric and to have let linguistics for a person who is an expert in the field.

But these comments should be construed as more critical of the editor than of the individual authors. The job of an editor of a collection of bibliographical essays is difficult. He must bring a sense of coherence to the whole by guiding the individual contributors in their arrangement of materials. He must insist that each contributor keep the standard he as editor has set. He must prevent too much duplication of effort. Finally, he must supervise the time-consuming but essential task of making a cross-referenced index. An index may appear to be a small point, but how does a reader find an essay without one? The bibliographies produced by the Victorian section of the Modern Language Association are comparable to Prof. Tate's book, with one exception — they have indices and Prof. Tate's book does not. This more than anything else is a serious blot on what is otherwise a fine job.

But despite this omission, everyone who teaches writing should buy and read *Teaching Composition*. The authors and titles mentioned in the essays are those that supply the foundation of our discipline. Prof. Tate is right to quote Paul Bryant's 1973 speech at the 4 C's:

> Too often we behave as if there is no continuity in the teaching of composition, as if the subject has just been invented and every idea for teaching it is new at the moment. We fail to draw on the experience of colleagues. We learn neither from past successes, of which there have been a few, nor from past failures, of which there have been all too many. As a group, we are the living proof of the adage that those who do know know history are condemned to repeat it.

Teaching Composition is the book from which to learn history.

K.A.T.E.

FROM THE STATE SPECIALIST'S DESK

LOIS CAFFYN
State Department of Education

In response to a number of inquiries about the present status and the future of the minicourse electives, it seems appropriate to look again at this program used in many high schools in Kansas and elsewhere across the nation. The question most often asked is "What are other schools doing about minicourses?" The simple answer is that other schools are asking, "What are other schools doing about minicourses?"

The present status of the minicourse program seems, then, to be one of questioning. Although some writers and speakers state that minicourses are responsible for the drop in standardized test scores and in composition skills, those persons apparently are not involved in mini-electives in the secondary schools. Individual college and university staff members, testing agencies, the press, some business leaders, and — by ricochet — school boards and communities make the accusations. Those who are directly involved are not reporting intent to discontinue their programs, though some are considering modifications.

If you are beginning to doubt your minicourses, you might check out their failures and successes in the following ways:

— Seek documentation from writers and speakers to support their statements that mini-electives are responsible for the alleged decrease in language skills. Are they referring to carefully developed programs or to abuses of the term?

— Request specific definitions of such expressions as "can't read," "can't write," and "illiterate." Compare the definitions with dictionary explanations and your understanding of the responsibilities of elementary and secondary schools. You may be surprised by their personal definitions.

— Compare actual examples of writing done by minicourse students and students in traditional 36-week courses. Many schools have kept no pieces of writing from pre-minicourse days to provide a basis for comparison. A few larger schools offer both programs concurrently. Look for some evidence more substantial than your own vague feeling that you ought to be giving everyone another good stiff unit in grammar. Remember that language analysis and composing are not the same thing.

— Learn whether a minimum number of mods in each area — composition, language study, literature, speech/drama—are required. Your program needs these. (See *Nongraded Quarter Selectives,* Kansas State Department of Education.)

— Learn whether some composing is required in every language arts minicourse offered, regardless of title. It should be there.

— Find out whether the term "elective" is being interpreted for language arts courses as it is for other subject areas, meaning a subject chosen for study. If some teachers equate electives with unplanned or do-as-you-please sessions, try to improve their concept. Minicourses should be packed with vital learnings.

— Review the purpose of each offering to be sure it is included in the program for the students' education and not for the teacher's or the students' special indulgence. Be sure it is worthy of the percentage of language arts time the student devotes to it.

— Determine the desired student ... of the total program and of each course. Be sure they are justifiable, ... reasonable.

As you plan for the future, consider ... these alternatives to minicourses that have been suggested from far and ...

— Discuss thoroughly the implic... movement across the country to make the high school diploma indica... uage competence by requiring a proficienc... in the junior year. St... ould not pass it would be required to take an ... sive course in gramm... ch they would have to pass in order to graduat... a few states the le... e mandated a passing grade on a designated standardized test for gr... norms move up or down according to scores m... what is to become ... cannot reach the passing line? What are their alt... ives in a world tha... h school graduation for nearly all jobs but self-em... ment?

— Co... der the effects of "s... illiterates before they reach high school." Then the high school would ... diploma problem, but what is the alternative for those "illiterates"?

— Consider the implications of ... a minicourse to an 18-week mod in order to allow greater scope and de... pth ... of a given topic. The advantage of the longer relationship with your st... need to be accompanied by the addition of at least one other topic o... broader topic and course title. Most students will take only four or six ... ster mods, depending on the years included in the elective program, so ... worthy of its part. Remember that college courses are a week or so sho... at for subject majors.

— Consider returning to the ... urse, which has the advantage of permitting the teacher to include and ... y different units and adjust a variety of unit lengths. It also permits a poor teac... waste an entire year for the students. Remember that in spite of the possibi... adapting those required courses to student needs, minicourses were institu... use of dissatisfaction with the "lock-step" use of the traditional course.

— Consider the concept of cor... based curriculum in the secondary school with no use of the Carnegie Ur... urement. A few colleges are trying it in place of semester hours of credit. A... permitting each student to progress in a linear fashion to his/her own ex... h school, you will find yourselves reassessing the values of communica... ing, social and cultural growth, and a sense of belonging, all of which might be ... this plan. Maybe you believe in the school experience and spirit after all.

The minicourses were set up to give ... ents a chance to experience limited self-determination for motivation ... h getting the basic competencies everyone needs, and give teache... do something they like best. Self-determination without limitation, ... ns to frustration rather than to motivation. The mini-elective program ... ents who will manage their own lives.

Teachers differ intensively ... of working effectively with students. Some excellent teachers prefer th... ow development of mutual respect and growth. Others prefer to work inter... for a short time and pass the students along. Would that each teacher could ser... kind of program where he/she is most effective!

It is difficult to predict the effect of the huge amounts of funding being provided for the handicapped and [illegible], while the teaching force for the other students, approximately 85%, in [illegible] schools is being cut in reverse proportions. Except for funding for Career Education, handled by Vocational Education, most Federal monies for this 85% [illegible] merged into Title IV, which may not be used for personnel except in [illegible] and Counseling. Funds for general education have never been allowed [illegible] teaching personnel, teachers for this 85% who will run the businesses, [illegible], pay the taxes do the voting and probably hold most of the govern[illegible] of this country in the years ahead.

[illegible] justifia[illegible] classroom teachers [illegible] excellent teaching res[illegible] when society and [illegible] communities have furnished them with the best po[illegible] teaching situation [illegible] this [illegible] can provide. Then [illegible] justifiable to expect le[illegible] results within th[illegible] students only when th[illegible] and society have surrounded them with the [illegible] atmosphere they [illegible] provide — with the priorities of the culture [illegible] setting an example that coincides with desired educational outcomes. [illegible] learning cannot be forced.

Even if this minic[illegible] seems too short-legged for the rising waters, do not get off until it proves [illegible] or until you find a giraffe. This may be only a mini-flash flood.

30