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AUTHOR Gere, Anne Ruggles
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ABSTRACT

Within the last 20 years, community colleges have increased and have redefined themselves and their purposes. This paper discusses the relationship of graduate schools and community colleges and describes an in-service seminar that was conducted by two university faculty members for English teachers at a nearby community college. The seminar focused on language and defined the following six general topics for discussion: styles of learning, scope of language, nature of literacy, students' confidence in their own use of language, critical thinking processes, and evaluation of language development. Student responses during the seminar showed that attitude changes--willingness to see things a new way--are essential to teaching (students or teachers) in a two-year college. (JM)

In-Service Work with Community College Teachers

by

Anne Ruggles Gere

When I was in Africa I met a man who sat quietly in his yard for over an hour each day. He wasn't sleeping, he didn't seem to be meditating, and I couldn't figure out what he was doing. We became friendly and finally one day I asked him what his sitting was about. He smiled as he explained, "I'm allowing my soul to catch up with my body." A lot has happened since that summer in Africa, but I still think about that man who allowed his soul to catch up with his body. In the past 24 hours my body has travelled over 3000 miles, and I think my soul is still somewhere over Wyoming!

We English teachers could use some time to allow our souls to catch up with our bodies. In the past decade we have hurtled from growth through English to behavioral objectives to competency models to basic skills. Research has made some of our practices obsolete. And community pressures--from censorship to standardized tests--have modified what and how we teach. Change is not limited to curriculum and method; our institutions have changed also. Those two-year colleges which fed students into universities 20 years ago have become a major force in higher education today. Existing two-year colleges have grown and redefined themselves, and many new two-year colleges have been established.

At the risk of sounding like Mr. Gradgrind of Hard Times--and these are hard times--I'd like to give you some facts. From 1960-70 two-year colleges increased by 61%, students at two-year colleges increased by 271% and the number of staff at two-year colleges increased by 327%. Put another way: in

1960 there were 521 two-year colleges, and 827 in 1970--in 1973 that number increased to 929. In 1960 there were 451,000 students attending two-year colleges; in 1970 there were 1,630,000, and in 1973 nearly two million. Now here are some other facts. The National Board on Graduate Education was established in 1971 by members of the American Council on Education, the Social Science Research Council, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the National Research Council. These prestigious groups established the National Board on Graduate Education to analyze graduate education today and its relation to American society in the future. In 1975 the National Board on Graduate Education published a technical bulletin titled "Graduate School Adjustments to the 'New Depression' in Higher Education." In 1976 the National Board's technical bulletin was titled "Graduate Education and the Community Colleges: Cooperative Approaches to Community College Staff Development." This report resulted from a meeting of representatives from graduate schools and community colleges, the first meeting between the two groups. My cynical side cannot resist wondering if the two reports are related: depression in graduate schools leads to greater interest in community colleges?

The lack of communication between two-year colleges and graduate schools isn't news to most of you. Since 1972 the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges has identified staff development as one of its highest priorities. Staff development has been important because two-year colleges were unhappy with the training university graduate schools provide. Regional centers designed to train community college teachers and staff are being developed by the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges. The prototype for these centers serves Dallas and Tarrant counties in Texas. This three-year-old center currently enrolls over 500 community college teachers.

Courses and workshops are taught by faculty from nearby universities and by community college administrators and faculty themselves. Other staff development centers are located in Los Angeles, California; Miami, Florida; and Portland, Oregon. Two-year colleges aren't just expressing displeasure with graduate school training--they are doing something about it.

Graduate schools respond to regional training centers by saying that such centers are expensive to establish, they tax community college resources and duplicate many university resources. Graduate schools also defend themselves by pointing to special Ph.D., D.A. or M.A. programs designed for community college teachers, but the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges remains unconvinced. Demonstrated research proficiency in a single discipline--the thing which most graduate schools pride themselves upon--isn't very useful in community college work. And so we face the question: How do we prepare people to teach in two-year colleges? Even before our graduate school souls catch up with our bodies we need to find answers.

This session is titled "Preparing to Teach in Community Colleges" and I take the word "preparing" to mean both pre- and in-service. I am enough of a traditionalist to think that graduate schools should have a role in preparing community college teachers. My conviction is not based on graduate schools' need to find new markets in the current depression within higher education. I am convinced that universities do have something to offer community colleges. But, having said that, I must tell you that I come from a very traditional English department, one which rejected a D.A. program several years ago, one which offers very few courses useful to community college teachers and none designed for them specifically. This English department is part of a large unviersity located in a metropolitan area of over two million and there are scores of community colleges within a thirty mile radius.

As you can imagine I was surprised when a colleague and I were asked to conduct an in-service seminar for English teachers at one of these nearby community colleges. Surprise gave way to determination--we didn't want to muff what might be our only chance to work with community college teachers. I'd like to share some of that experience with you--not because we did everything right but because we learned some things about preparation of community college teachers.

After some initial discussion we settled on language as our focus of study, proposed Bradford Arthur's Teaching English to Speakers of English as our text, and defined six general topics for discussion. These topics were:

Styles of learning

In what specific respects are typical classroom settings (both physical arrangement and emotional tone) different from non-academic situations? In what respects is the teacher a model of linguistic form? In what respects is the teacher a model of processes in which language is the medium of exchange? What are the advantages and perils of small-group work? How can reasonable allowances be made for individuals to work in their own unique ways while still preserving a common group purpose and unity?

Scope of "language"

How do the students' natural uses of language and reasons for using language differ from the typical aims of school language learning programs? Is "language" actually like what it is represented to be in textbooks and in performance standards set up by schools? How can natural language learning processes be incorporated in school programs?

Nature of literacy

What is a literate adult? What conflict in definition arises because of "classical," college-oriented aims for literacy and the

kind of literacy used in the popular culture? What proportion of emphasis might there be between 1) print reading/essay writing literacy and 2) video-film viewing/oral-cinematic expression literacy?

Confidence in own use of language

How do choices of a school dialect and standards for linguistic performance often work against the intentions of the people who control schools by undermining students' confidence to use language precisely and with ease? In what respects is a fully developed confidence in one's use of language different from being totally "natural" in language?

Critical thinking processes

What kinds of critical thinking are minimal for functioning in the popular culture? What kinds of critical thinking does the "educated adult" employ? In what ways is the medium of expression uniquely related to certain critical thinking processes (e.g., newspaper, magazine, TV news broadcast, TV documentary, TV serial, pop fiction book, serious fiction and non-fiction books, pop movies, serious movies)?

Evaluation of language development

Can use of language be diagnosed and evaluated validly in school settings that are, as they now exist, different from those in which various styles and purposes for language are normally used? How can emphasis on evaluation of form at the expense of content in language communication be avoided? Do uniform standards for evaluation tend to reduce possibly desirable idiosyncracies in language use? What are some alternatives to using grades for reporting progress?

We met every other week through the fall term and had a concluding evaluation meeting in January. Attendance varied between 8 and 16 and averaged at 12 per session, participants taught courses ranging from college level composition to study skills to elementary reading. One teacher would agonize over how to prepare students for university literature courses while another sought new ways to teach word attack skills. Age, training and attitudes of participants

were likewise diverse, and few had had training specifically designed for community college teaching. My colleague and I team-taught the sessions and used a variety of methods including simulations, discussions and small group exercises. The climax of the encounter came during the third and fourth sessions as we explored the nature of literacy and students' confidence in their own use of language.

One of the illustrations we used was the following composition:

[An Embarrassing Experience]

When I were in High School we had a football Banquite and I had not Ben to a fromer accesson Befor. and I also included a young Lady along.

I were like the young man in the story we read in class. I came to the Banquite Proper dressed But I did not have no table Manner. Everyone Began to set down, I did not know I sirpose to assit the young lady with chair until she told me. after about 30 min the guss spoke Began to spake & I did not know when to Began to eat & after I saw all the other People eating I look around for my silverware, But I did not have any, than I tryed to get the water attanson. They finily Brage me my silverware. I though that were the lose embarrassment monet for tonight, But they had just Began. The main dish were chicken & it were fride cripe & when I Bit off it, it would make a loud nose and the other People would look aroung at me & my date would look the other way. From then on I promer myself I would learn good table manner.

You may recognize this as being from Baily and Robinson's Varieties of Present-Day English. Older and more powerful teachers in the group seized upon the spelling and mechanical errors, calling them "loud noises" which spoil the paper. Despite our discussions of students' rights to their own language and despite our attention to the rhetorical strength of this paper, many of the participants

remained convinced that correcting errors was their most important function. In simulations they demonstrated the red marks they would put on this paper, and the result was as bloody as the one Robinson offers in the book.

This incident triggered my usual scholarly response--I started reading. I read about community college teaching. Among other things, I read of a survey done by two teachers at Miami Dade. These two teachers polled community college teachers and administrators asking what skills and attitudes were most important for community college work. These were the four most important skills and attitudes:

a genuine interest in students

commitment to the open door philosophy and to working with a more complex student body

good interpersonal skills

willingness to re-evaluate ideas and to adjust to changing conditions

As you can see, all of these attributes involve attitude changes, willingness to view things a new way. The next time I'm involved in preparing community college teachers, I will give much more direct attention to attitude change. And I think there will be a next time because, despite our failures, we did effect some change. We received this letter from one of the participants after the seminars were completed:

> Thank you for coming to us (at our convenience) and, in so doing, reminding us that generalizations about institutions are fragile.
>
> Your willingness to come under all the unknown circumstances, willingness to prepare, participate, be patient, and contribute a style, a message and a method--these are much appreciated by me and our instructors.
>
> I, further, appreciate Anne's benedicting comment that she

> wants to build bridges. I hope we can not only continue to participate in the building of bridges, but also of walking out and meeting at least as far as you two came, or, if not that far, then half-way.

The writer is the chair of the humanities division and is most resistant to linguistic insights or changes in usage. The line I value most is his "generalizations about institutions are fragile." I value this line because it indicates an attitude change; the writer is willing to revise his view of my university. In time he may change his view of language.

I don't want to leave you with the impression that change was one-sided. My colleague and I were constantly changing our views on how to run the most effective seminars, what working together meant, and what the university-community college relationship should be. But, for me, the most significant change involved giving up a long-cherished belief. I had always assumed that one had only to present compelling information and change would follow. In believing this I was a good student of my discipline. In 1948 when Pooley investigated the status of English instruction he found a significant gap between current knowledge and practice. His response was to urge that English teachers be informed of current research, that professional organizations make greater efforts to disseminate information. And so through the years our profession has assumed that presenting research will effect teacher behavior. I don't believe that anymore. I believe our profession has to take change theory much more seriously. Thinking back to my African friend, I know that allowing the soul to catch up with the body is the most effective means of implementing significant change. In our culture few people can wait for the soul, but there are systematic strategies for change. I believe that preparing to teach in two-year colleges--whether to teach teachers or students--should involve study and use of change theory.