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ABSTRACT

A professional development model for teachers of literature (K-13) was conceived in the context of the current disjunctions between literary theory and pedagogical practices in the teaching of literature on the one hand, and a different set of disjunctions between teaching practices in literature and in composition on the other. Recent developments in Postmodernist or Poststructuralist theory have challenged and puzzled almost two generations of teachers schooled under the old New Critical paradigm. The development of the model was begun when a community of experienced English and language arts teachers representing all grades from elementary school through college collaborated through a National Endowment for the Humanities-sponsored Literature Institute for Teachers to study a number of difficult literary texts. The institute demonstrated how powerfully the fundamental pedagogical principles that inform practice in writing programs apply to the teaching of literature. The participants were placed into reading groups as a means of resolving certain social and hermeneutical crises. Through techniques of believing and doubting, the competitive dynamics of argument were replaced by a dynamic of collaboration. Attempts were made to expand the repertoire of reading and teaching practices of the participants, especially those classified under the heading of re-reading practices. Many other reading strategies were fostered among the teachers, such as ways of problematizing a reading, ways of fostering collaboration, and methods of building fluency for students. In short, the Institute demonstrated how contemporary theory can transform literature teaching practices in many compelling and useful ways. (Contains 42 references.) (HB)

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Building Bridges Between Literary Theory and the Teaching of Literature

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This paper explores a particular professional development model for teachers of literature (K-13) in the context of current disjunctions between literary theory and pedagogical practices in the teaching of literature on the one hand, and a different set of disjunctions between teaching practices in literature and in composition on the other. At the center of the discussion is the story of what happened when a community of experienced English and language arts teachers, representing all grades from elementary school through college, collaborated through an NEH-sponsored Literature Institute for Teachers to study (with some guidance from leading specialists in literature and in pedagogy) a number of difficult literary texts. In addition to studying the literature, they examined their own processes as readers of literature, reflected on their own teaching methods, and learned about recent developments in literary theory and critical practice. The point of the story is that teachers of literature who are experiencing what Judith Langer (1990) has described as a "schizophrenic" split between process-oriented approaches to teaching writing on the one hand, and right-answer approaches to teaching literature on the other, can and will liberate themselves from conventional teaching practices in literature (which are also inconsistent with recent perspectives in literary theory) when they have the opportunity to experiment with alternative reading and teaching practices and to construct a coherent theoretical framework which sanctions and supports their expanding pedagogical repertoire.

The story of this particular NEH project is significant because it presents a model for the professional development of teachers of literature at a particularly problematic moment in English education--a moment when the sophistication of our profession in the teaching of literature is not only two decades out of touch with literary theory and criticism, but a decade behind our sophistication in the teaching of writing. It occurs when many of the teachers who are most expert in the teaching of writing find their goals and methods for teaching literature inconsistent with the process-oriented pedagogy that they have come to implement in their teaching of composition. Whatever professional progress we may have witnessed during the past decade in the teaching of writing, the teaching of literature appears to remain largely text-centered rather than student-centered, competitive rather than collaborative, and product-oriented rather than process-oriented (see James Marshall's 1989 study of secondary school literature teachers, and Don Zancanella's related 1991 study of junior high teachers). Why such conditions should exist, why we might want to change them, how we can go about making the appropriate changes, and what a more satisfying set of literary teaching practices would look like are the principal subjects of this paper.

The Critical Climate for the Current Predicament

New Criticism

Let me begin my account of the present predicament in the teaching of literature by providing a rough and rapid sketch--"on one foot," as ancient exegetes would say--of the main currents of literary theory and criticism over the past forty or so years. This will help us see how recent developments in literary theory and criticism have challenged and puzzled almost two generations of teachers who were educated according to a set of critical practices that were revolutionary and unsettling to the academic community of the 1940s and 50s but that now represent "old fashioned," if not discredited, practice. For most active literature teachers over the age of 40, this will be the story of our lives as students, readers, and teachers (also see Lynn, 1990).

The now old fashioned but once new fangled literary culture out of which or against which critical theories and practices of the past 20 or 25 years have emerged is the culture dominated by what we still know as the "New Criticism." The New Criticism was "new" because in the decades of the 40s and 50s when it was championed by its most influential exponents (W.K. Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks, Randall Jarrell and John Crowe Ransom, among others) it represented a set of critical practices that were proposed to replace an earlier critical tradition that had emphasized the biography of the writer, the historical or theological contexts for particular works, the moral and ethical enlightenment conferred upon readers, and the highly impressionistic and "appreciative" accounts of the aesthetic and ethical features of literary works (see Wellek & Warren, 1949/1956, p. 127). The New Criticism was a formalist criticism because it emphasized the formal features of a literary text. It treated the text as an artifact, something constructed and subject to objective, scientific description and then to an evaluation based on observable features (see Brooks, 1947, esp. Appendix I). It is no accident, I think, that formalist literary criticism emerged most forcefully in the 1950s simultaneously with formalist or descriptive linguistics, which sought to provide scientifically accurate accounts of the workings of specific languages.

New Critics were inclined to forego discussions of an author's biography and the background for literary works in favor of a discourse that honored the "integrity" of a literary text, its coherence as a unified artifact whose every detail must be regarded as meaningful, whether consciously intended by the artist or not. For John Ciardi (1959), who attempted to build a program for teaching poetry based on New Critical principles, a poem was a performance of itself in time and space, a formal structure which he delighted in defining as "one thing against another across a silence." The job of the reader or critic of such an artifact was to apprehend all of its features (to engage in "close reading") and to uncover the structures of meaning that informed the text, particularly revealing the ironies and paradoxes that create "tensions" and explicating the "unity" that resolved those tensions. In this enterprise, which was typically as much an evaluative as an interpretive one, critics were expected to conduct inquiries in a way that was finely tuned to the emotional nuances of their own reading experiences, yet to do so in a

spirit akin to scientific objectivity, eschewing any response to the text that might represent the biases or special pleading of any particular reader or group of readers.

To attend to a text as a New Critic, then, was to treat the text, in Wimsatt's memorable title phrase, as a Verbal Icon (1954), an object requiring an almost religious devotion, if one wanted to apprehend all its features and account for how those features produced a particular set of meanings--meanings which might be said to inhere distinctively and uniquely in this particular self-contained structure which constituted the text. Students and critics of such icons would dutifully devote themselves to producing detailed, objective studies of image patterns, word frequencies, and so on in the interest of showing how every detail of a text conspired to produce a unified work of art with a determinable, if not final, meaning (cf. Wellek and Warren's description of a literary work as a stratified system of norms which the reader attempts to grasp, p. 139).

Yet since meaning was conceived of as an integral function of a unique formal structure--the concrete particulars that constituted a literary work--it would be fallacious to attempt to abstract a meaning from a text as if it were detachable from the formal operations through which it was realized. Thus, John Ciardi used to insist, "we talk about the meaning of a poem only when we don't know what else to say about it." For Ciardi, as for the school of New Critics whose principles he made available to a generation of high school and college students, the essential question for readers or interpreters of literary works was not "what does a poem mean?" but the question that he used as the title of his widely taught textbook, How Does a Poem Mean (1959). As much as the New Criticism may be said to represent a set of prescribed reading practices, it may be even more characteristically associated with a set of critical proscriptions--that is, with an opposition to a number of alternative critical practices which it was a reaction to or in competition with. These were characteristically classified by practitioners of New Criticism, following the example of Wimsatt and Beardsley (1954), as critical "fallacies" or even "heresies," including the most famous pair; "the intentional fallacy" locating textual meaning in the determinable intentions of an author, and "the affective fallacy" locating meaning in the way a text affects readers. Other spokesmen (they were virtually all men) for the New Criticism, warned teachers and students alike against the temptations of what became commonly referred to as "the biographical heresy" (interpreting a poem, for example, as an autobiographical document), "the political heresy" (allowing political values or class biases to influence interpretations or judgments of literary value), "the moralist heresy" (allowing ethical or moral judgments to substitute for aesthetic criteria in determining literary value), "the psychological fallacy" (interpreting a literary work as an expression of an author's unconscious drives and preoccupations), and what Cleanth Brooks (1947) called "the heresy of paraphrase" (the idea that works ought to be valued or even discussed largely in terms of their paraphraseable content).

Virtually all of these critical heresies or fallacies were represented by the practice of some critics and scholars of the period (including such leading literary figures as Yvor Winters, C. S. Lewis, and Leslie Fiedler), and it is surely the case that the most eminent practicing critics and literary scholars who associated themselves and their pedagogy with the New Criticism would not have hesitated to avail themselves of any perspective on a literary work that promised to illuminate a text they were interested in. Nonetheless, teachers raised on the New Criticism

(whether they were aware of their critical heritage or not) were inclined to avoid certain practices in their teaching or to feel apologetic for practices that could be associated with one of the critical heresies. In my own teaching career for example, I used to feel apologetic and was sometimes criticized by observers for "getting away from the text" in my lectures and class discussions. It was not as if I spent class time discussing extraneous topics, but that I often asked students to consider how they had personally experienced psychological states or moral dilemmas in their own lives, analogous to those described in the literary works we were studying. Class discussions therefore entailed stories told by students about personal experiences associated with the fictive events we were reading. And such discussions were seen as violating a pedagogical principle derived from a narrow conception of New Critical doctrine: that the text itself--the words that appear on the page, rather than related discourses such as parallel stories by students--must remain the exclusive focus of discourse in instruction.

Postmodern or Poststructuralist Criticism

By the late sixties and more vigorously in the following two decades there emerged on the critical scene a variety of highly influential literary theories that self-consciously defined themselves as oppositional to New Critical doctrine and that almost perversely embodied the various fallacies and heresies conventionally proscribed by the New Critics. It was almost as if each of the fallacies or heresies that New Criticism had discarded now sprouted like the teeth of a dragon into an autonomous literary theory seeking to supplant the New Criticism in eminence and authority.

Two of the earliest and most explicit American challengers to the hegemony of the New Criticism were E.D. Hirsch and Stanley Fish whose major critical works in 1967 and 1968, respectively, turned the intentional fallacy and the affective fallacy into authoritative standards for literary interpretation. Hirsch's Validity in Interpretation (1967) argued that authorial intention is not only relevant to the interpretive enterprise, but constitutes the only valid source of authority for an interpretation. Without such authority, he insisted, the entire field of literary criticism is reduced to a game of rhetoric without standards for evaluating the validity of one claim over another. In the following year Fish published Surprised By Sin: The Reader in Paradise Lost, an account of how the meaning of Milton's epic can be found in the intellectual and emotional temptations to which an attentive reader succumbs psychologically in the course of reading the poem. In his introduction to the book Fish acknowledges that his critical method may be attacked as an enactment of the affective fallacy, but that, if he is guilty of such treason, he is willing to make the most of it.

With Fish's rebellious gesture against his literary mentors, American reader-response theory was inaugurated as a respectable, though still controversial, school of criticism which quickly moved toward an increased emphasis on the role of the reader as a kind of co-writer of the text being read--at the least an active participant in the construction of whatever meaning may be attributed to a text. For many practicing critics who now align themselves with reader-response theory a work of literature is an inert text that can hardly be said to have more than a potential for meaning until it is called into being by a reader who constructs a reading,

thereby giving meaning to the text. A single text (like a musical score) may therefore be performed or construed in as many ways as there are readers (or communities of readers) to perform it.

Such an endorsement of the subjectivity and relativism that New Criticism sought to protect against was only the first wave of the attack that theorists of the past two decades have launched as part of the larger postmodern or poststructuralist project to disestablish the authority of the text. In doing so, they have moved to desanctify the verbal icon in favor of the more pluralistic and problematic authority of readers, particularly situated readers--which is to say biased readers who read from the particular perspectives they occupy by virtue of their race, class, gender, ideology, personal experience, psychological profile, academic training, and historical location. Thus, aside from the school of reader-response theorists (see Tompkins, 1980), which would include such critics as the continental theorist, Wolfgang Iser (1978), the rediscovered Louise Rosenblatt (whose pioneering work in 1938, Literature as Exploration, was generally ignored outside the field of teacher education prior to the emergence in University English departments of an important school of reader-response theorists), Fish himself, and the subjectivist critic David Bleich (1978) there developed in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s a variety of critical schools identified by their particular situated identities--all of them methodologically committed to one or another of the fallacies or heresies anathematized by New Critics. These would include such critical schools as those of the Marxists, the feminists, and others that might identify themselves with "cultural criticism" broadly conceived. Such critics have presented cogent arguments for the reevaluation of the literary canon from feminist or nonEuroccentric perspectives and have urged readers to recognize the ways in which literary texts implicate their readers in racially biased, class-biased, or gender-biased cultural assumptions.

Feminists have pointed out, for example (Schweickart, 1986), that many of the poems most favored and most taught (by a predominately male faculty in literature) to undergraduate literature students (most of whom are women) are poems that express admiration for the bodies of women, poems which, quite aside from the attitudes they engender toward women, implicitly ask female readers who would appreciate the poem to read as if they were men. To understand the psychological discomfort that such reading practices entail for many women, heterosexual male readers would have to be required to read poems written in admiration of mens' bodies or sexual parts. But, of course, few such poems are ever encountered in the course of a conventional canonical literary education.

The notion of the situated reader has its counterpart even in recent critical theories that would appear to continue to honor the authority of authors and texts. Indeed, in recent critical practice the figure of the author or what is sometimes referred to as "the author-function" (Gilbert, 1987) and the idea of the text are now generally seen as so situated that they nearly disappear into the context of the culture and the prevenient discourses that produce them. Thus, the author as conceived by postmodern or poststructuralist critics, either disappears entirely (Barthes, 1968) or becomes less an originator of a text or source for an individual vision than a ventriloquist through whom a social class or culture speaks, less the one who writes than the one who is written upon by prior social and cultural forces. Similarly, where New Critics would speak of the integrity and discreetness of a literary text--its separability from all other texts (treating

it like a person with an individual personality and identity--two concepts also called into question by modern theorists), postmodern critics emphasize the notion of intertextuality, the ways in which every text derives its meaning and its capacity to carry meaning from its relationship to a universe of other texts, including those that define its genre, those that it may be read in contrast to, those that make its language accessible to readers, those that teach us how to read it, and so on.

Operating on such conceptions of authors and texts, an influential group of critics known as the New Historicists (see Thomas, 1987) now tend to treat literary texts much the way anthropologists treat cultural artifacts--as pieces of a larger cultural mosaic. An English Professor with a New Historicist's orientation might teach Shakespeare's Tempest (as one of my colleagues actually did) not as an artistic monument or the achievement of an individual sensibility, but as a cultural document in the discourse of colonialism--a text to be read in juxtaposition with accounts of voyages of discovery, colonial diaries, and slave narratives. Such a critic, moreover, would likely refuse to privilege the Shakespearean play over the less well-known and nonliterary texts as a cultural document, arguing that our sense of Shakespeare's greater importance derives not from qualities that are inherent in the play but from culturally determined biases (based possibly on considerations of class, gender, or race) about what sorts of authors and texts deserve to be canonized as high art or literature.

Even those critics--most notably the deconstructionists--who seem most to resemble New Critics in their focus on the text itself and in their scrupulous attention to textual patterns and details ("close reading"), have abandoned the New Critical faith in a literary text as a unified, discrete structure with a determinable and coherent meaning. They have declared, in contrast, that textual meaning is always undecidable in literary works and that, insofar as meaning can be apprehended at all, it is inevitably self-contradictory in its import. Where New Critics would once have found a determinate meaning successfully resolving whatever opposing thematic tensions might have been expressed in a work, deconstructionist critics (following the theory and example of such French writers as Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida and such American theoreticians as J. Hillis Miller and the late Paul de Man) typically find a site for an unresolved contest between competing values, meanings, and even authorial voices (see Crowley, 1989).

The impulse of deconstructionists and other postmodern critics to demonstrate that texts are not the sites of unified numinous meanings, but may be used to support competing ideologies or interpretive claims, that they speak not so much for genius authors but for larger cultural and political forces, and that their claim to privileged status is itself imposed by politically and economically determined cultural forces is all part of a movement among many poststructuralist critics to desanctify literature and challenge the hierarchy of values that privileges literary texts among the many textual discourses that people encounter in their daily lives. Such iconoclasm seems particularly central to the critical project of a school of British and American critics who engage in what is known as cultural studies or cultural criticism. Cultural critics (for whom the seminal theoreticians are Frederick Jameson, 1981, and the late Raymond Williams, 1979) have been among the most forceful exponents of the idea that literature has no inherent claim to superiority over any other class of texts, including films, pop song lyrics, tv scripts, advertising copy, journalism, or technical writing in cultural significance or human value. Cultural critics

would ask those among us who continue to believe in the special power and value of literature to ask ourselves what authorizes our view of its superiority except cultural values that we subscribe to as members of a certain social class--the class that happens to control curriculum in schools.

While such a critical posture may seem to threaten the entire institution of literature and literary studies, it need not do so. To desanctify literature is not necessarily to dismiss it as an object of serious attention. On the contrary, it can be an invitation to us to admit other kinds of texts--including texts written by our students--for our equally serious attention. In other words, the effort of cultural criticism to disestablish literature as a privileged discourse is not an anti-literary impulse but a democratic one, urging us to broaden the range of texts to which we are willing to apply our interpretive and critical apparatus.

The Literature Institute for Teachers

Goals and Methods

The basic goal we proposed to the NEH for our Literature Institute for Teachers was to improve the teaching of literature in our region of California by faithfully replicating the National Writing Project model (Blau, 1988) for professional development, including the NWP model for conducting a summer institute, sustaining a professional community of "Fellows" through an ongoing follow-up program, and extending the influence of the professional community to other teachers through school-site inservice programs conducted by LIT teachers.

Faithful to the NWP model, our Summer Institutes in Literature were characterized by the following features:

* Four full weeks (20 days) of full-day participation by all 25 participants
* Participants representing all grade levels from elementary school through university (our proportions were approximately 30% elementary, 50% secondary, and 20% tertiary--including community college, college, and university).
* Participants (all of whom had previous experience in a Writing Project summer institute) were selected for their expertise and experience as language arts teachers, and their experience (or promise) as leaders for inservice programs for their colleagues. All were paid a $750 Fellowship stipend.
* A commitment by all participants to reading difficult literary texts together (and under the guidance of established scholarly authorities), to discussing problems and progress in making sense of those texts, and to writing about the reading.
* A presentation by each participant of an effective classroom-tested approach to teaching a literary text, using whenever possible one of the texts selected for the Summer Institute (these always included Paradise Lost and a Shakespearean play--the Tempest or Merchant, and a children's novel, Lynne Reid Banks' The Indian in the Cupboard--plus additional works, which varied from year to year and included Walden, the poems of Emily Dickinson, Morrison's Beloved, stories by Zora Neal Hurston, and Cisnero's House on Mango Street).

* Reading, supplemented by guest lecturers, on current literary theory and the major schools of criticism.

Insofar as our first Summer Institute in Literature constituted an experiment in applying the Writing Project model to the teaching of literature, we initiated it with a number of concerns about its outcome. These can be stated as the questions we expected our experiment to answer:

* Would the teachers participating in our Institute find the experience as transformative for their teaching of literature as the Writing Project had been for their teaching of writing some years earlier?
* Could we build a collegial community through talking and writing about literature that would be as personally and professionally nourishing as the community of writers typically built in a Writing Project summer institute?
* Would small-group work be as effective as a model instructional method in the study of literature as it had been in the context of the Writing Project?
* Could our Institute yield for its participants the kind of new knowledge about literary theory and the study of literature that we hoped for without sacrificing the egalitarian model of staff development that characterizes the Writing Project? In other words, could the teachers learn new literary theory and critical methods as participants in a collegial community where their expertise as practitioners is as valued as the expertise of staff members and eminent visiting scholars?

To note that all of these questions were answered affirmatively by the end of our first summer and confirmed emphatically in our subsequent summers is not simply to say that we found that the Writing Project model for the professional development of teachers was as valid for our work on the teaching of literature as it had been in our work on the teaching of writing. In fact, many of the participants reported that their work in the Literature Institute was even more transforming for them in terms of its impact on their teaching; i.e., as measured by the degree to which it brought about changes in their classroom practices. But since all the teachers in our Literature Institute had completed an earlier Summer Institute in Composition and were already experienced as participants in collaborative groups and used to working in a collegial community, it may not be accurate to characterize our experiment as a test of the Writing Project model.

What our experiment did demonstrate that we didn't know in advance, however, was how powerfully the fundamental pedagogical principles that inform practice at virtually all Writing Project sites apply to the teaching of literature or at least to the development of pedagogically satisfying and intellectually sound practices for the teaching of literature. I think it is likely that we would have learned similar lessons working with teachers who were not already experienced Writing Project teachers and expert teachers of writing, but I doubt if we would have made equal progress with a more naive group of teachers or if we would have been nearly as able to frame our experiences in sound pedagogical principles or translate them so effectively into workable instructional strategies.

It is surely the case that the major crisis of our first Summer Institute in Literature (a

crisis which might have suggested that some essential Writing Project practices were not applicable to the study of literature) and our first important pedagogical discoveries may not have emerged so instructively among a group of teachers who lacked the experience and sophistication of Writing Project teachers in the teaching of writing and in the processes of sharing written work in small writing-response groups. I want to tell the story of that crisis and of its resolution because I think it is emblematic of the pedagogical predicament that defines current standard practice in the teaching of literature--especially among language arts teachers who are well-informed and highly professional teachers of writing. It also reveals the theoretical and practical grounds for a solution.

Reading Together: A Social and Hermeneutic Crisis

At the end of our first week of work as a community of teachers examining literary works (focusing largely on The Tempest and the beginning of Paradise Lost), several of the participating teachers began to complain that their work in small reading/writing groups wasn't enjoyable as it had been in the Writing Project and that the consequence of their group work was that they felt themselves becoming less rather than more confident and competent in the exercise of their literacy. Many teachers noted, moreover, that in contrast to their experience in Writing Project writing-response groups, discussions in their small reading/writing groups were competitive rather than collaborative and led them to feel discounted rather than affirmed, ignored rather than heard, and alienated rather than affiliated in a collegial community.

The problem seemed to derive from what the teachers took as their obligation to arrive through their discussions in their reading groups at a "correct" or authoritative interpretation of the difficult texts they were studying. Although these same teachers had become fairly expert at responding to student papers and to each other's writing without posing an "ideal text" to which their responses directed the writer, their discourse on a literary text seemed to be directed to finding an ideal or right reading or at least a reading that satisfied their sense of what, according to New Critical criteria would constitute an adequate reading. Such a reading, they seemed to suppose, would discover the determinate meaning of the text and account for how that meaning was the product of the various strata of meaningful structures or features of the text (see Wellek & Warren, 1949/1956, pp. 138-141). The test of correctness, of course, lay in the strength of the arguments that a reader could mount in defense of a particular reading or in the consistency of a reading with the readings provided by experts in critical introductions, guidebooks, or lectures. The nature of the discourse in the reading groups was therefore largely argumentative, competitive, and characterized by appeals to the authority of experts--appeals which appeared to discount the immediate reading experience of many members of the reading group.

To participate in a typical reading group with a bunch of English and language arts teachers is surely to make oneself vulnerable to a set of feelings quite opposite from those characteristically experienced by Writing Project teachers in small writing-response groups. In a writing-response group a writer is called upon to tell her own story or elaborate her own ideas. The auditors in the group who hear or read the written piece typically provide the writer with an account of what they understand the writer to be saying, what they can't understand, and what

they might want to hear more about. Respondents typically encourage writers to tell more or clarify or experiment with other ways of getting across the story or idea that the writer seems to want to communicate. The focus of the discourse is on informing the writer on how each reader apprehends the written text so that the writer may reshape the text to achieve his or her own intentions (see Nystrand & Brandt, 1989). In a writing-response group, if you are the writer, then my discourse as a respondent is never competitive with yours. Rather it is designed to help you construct a meaning which is distinctively your own or over which you are at least in control.

If we are colleagues in a reading group, on the other hand, and we subscribe to the view that there is a best or correct reading which our own readings must approximate, then unless our readings are alike, we will find ourselves competing for the same discursive space, making statements about a single text that, insofar as they disagree, appear mutually exclusive and competitors for the status of a correct reading. Moreover, whoever finds his own readings invalidated by the authority of normative or critically sanctioned readings must be tempted to doubt his capacity to arrive at a right reading--which is to say, to doubt the efficacy of his literacy. Such doubting is an invitation to literacy by proxy--to the kind of pseudo-literacy that is regularly practiced by student readers who characteristically make no attempt to understand texts for themselves, but wait for a teacher or a guidebook to tell them what a competent reader is supposed to know.

The problem we faced, then, as a community was first a social or interpersonal one: how could we work together in reading groups in a way that would produce the social and personal benefits that we had experienced in writing groups and that ultimately foster the development of more confident and competent writers? (cf. Blau, 1987). But it was also an intellectual and literary problem, for, finally, we could not value even the most mutually affirming techniques for working together on interpreting difficult literary texts, if we could not regard the process and product of such groupwork as intellectually responsible. The challenge we faced, then, was one of finding a way, in the context of a reading group, to produce intellectually responsible readings of difficult literary texts, while working together in a spirit of collaboration and mutual affirmation rather than competition and disconfirmation.

Resolving the Social and Hermeneutic Crisis

The first step toward solving our social problem was offered to us by Peter Elbow (1986) with the technique of methodological believing and doubting (Embracing Contraries, pp. 254-99), a method of encouraging more collaborative rather than competitive discourse between persons who take opposing views on any subject. The technique entails responding to a claim that you disagree with by first offering three reasons to support the position you oppose and then offering three reasons to oppose it. The real impact of the technique, however, in the context of our reading groups, derived from the power of believing. To try to support a literary interpretation that you initially oppose is to try to see a text from a perspective unlike your own, a perspective which often yields insights otherwise inaccessible to you. Moreover, your good faith effort to read a text from another reader's distinctive point of view (instead of arguing for your own) often frees the other reader from having to defend his position against yours, liberating him to see the

defects in the arguments you are yourself trying to mount in support of his position. (Believing, of course, also becomes--and did become in our institute--a powerful epistemological and critical stance to take as a reader of a literary text, especially of a text like Paradise Lost, where doubting is relatively easy and offers the reader almost no opportunity to apprehend the perspective of the text).

The introduction of the technique of believing and doubting into the discourse of the reading groups in our Literature Institute offered the teachers an alternative to the competitive dynamic of argument, substituting for it a dynamic of collaboration, still initially in the form of an argument in which all participants became equally invested in all sides. More importantly, the readers within the reading groups found that the process of believing and the dynamic of collaboration offered them richer and more comprehensive readings of literary texts than they had access to before. Within a few days of first practicing methodological believing and doubting, most reading groups moved beyond the formal practice of the technique to group practices that were generally more dialogical than argumentative and more open to alternative and variant readings. Instead of competing for the same discursive space, members of reading groups found themselves collaborating to construct more inclusive readings or to a process of negotiation with each other and with texts that yielded multi-voiced readings which were valuable for the degree to which they revealed subtle features of texts at the same time that they reflected a range of plausible interpretive responses. If groups were prepared to argue for a best or most correct reading of a text, it was the reading that best captured the polyvocal conversation of the group itself

Experientially, most teachers found the composite reading, representing the voices and perspectives of all the readers in their group, more intellectually satisfying than any single normative reading or than any authoritative reading available from a visiting specialist or from a critical text. On the other hand, many of the teachers also worried that any reading aside from a normative and authoritative one might have no real authority beyond the community of a reading group and might not, therefore, be sustainable in the wider literary community. From this perspective readings arrived at collaboratively and the collaborative approach to literary interpretation might seem acceptable in a Literature Institute for Teachers but might not be in classrooms where students were preparing for more advanced literary study and for examinations calling for conventional and authoritative readings (cf. McClelland & Blau, 1990, on standard practices in college prep classes).

Two responses presented themselves to these concerns, one of them appealing to the authority of modern literary theory, and the other appealing to the authority of the teachers' own experience as readers and interpreters in our Literature Institute and elsewhere. First, the theoretical challenges to New Criticism that have been launched in the past twenty years by such critical approaches as those of the reader-response critics and various poststructuralists have called into question the intellectual validity and authority of any meaning attributed to a literary text, so that the entire question of a determinate or correct meaning is at least problematic. Thus, teachers concerned with the intellectual value of the multi-perspectived readings arrived at through collaboration would find as much or more theoretical justification for such readings as they would for more conventional and normative readings.

Second, the experience of the teachers in the Literature Institute in the first few days demonstrated to them, first hand (frequently reminding them of their experience in college literature courses), how the imposition of an authoritative reading on a reader whose own experience of a text is not represented in that reading undermines the capacity of the eccentric reader to exercise his own interpretive skill in the interest of making sense of literary texts. That is, instruction directed at achieving an authorized interpretation of a text may provide readers with literary knowledge in the sense that it offers them information on what constitutes a right reading, but insofar as it invalidates their own experience as readers, it disables their capacity to function as authentically literate persons. It will therefore be "false knowledge," precisely as Milton used that term--knowledge that opens their eyes but closes their minds. Moreover, students need not be deprived of access to normative readings or the readings conventionally offered as authoritative, so long as these too are introduced as alternatives with no more prior claim to credibility than any other reading. Just as it discounts the perceptions of students to impose any authoritative reading on them, so does it discount them as members of a larger community of readers to deprive them of readings that are well-known and generally available to the literate community at-large.

Expanding the Repertoire of Reading and Teaching Practices

The crisis in our reading groups in the first year of our Literature Institute for Teachers was resolved in a way that set a pattern for three years of Summer Institutes that characteristically exhibited a spirit of intellectual generosity and collaboration (punctuated by memorable debates and controversies, including a nearly destructive few days of "gender wars" ignited by some intensive work on feminist issues: for an account of this experience, see Armstrong Smith & Papoulis, 1990) in reading groups and in plenary sessions with respect to variant and alternative readings of literary texts. Throughout the three summers, moreover, the most powerful continuing impetus toward hermeneutic generosity remained the intellectually and personally satisfying experience of the teachers who practiced it, even more than the force of any critical theory that might challenge New Critical presumptions or conventional practices. On the other hand, it is also the case that as teachers became familiar (through readings and presentations by guest consultants) with the alternative reading practices made available by recent critical theories--most especially by reader-response theory, feminist theory, and cultural criticism--they became increasingly inclined to offer strong readings which explicitly acknowledged their "situated" character and to recognize the intellectual legitimacy of a wide range of readings, including those that may have seemed "against the grain"; that is, readings that explicitly resisted the values or cultural point of view that a work implicitly constructed as the shared culture of author and reader.

Out of such reading practices and the cumulatively developing critical sophistication of the teachers participating in our Literature Institute and in continuation meetings over the past several years, there has emerged in our LIT community of teachers a repertoire of teaching practices (most of which were demonstrated or employed experimentally in Summer Institutes) that are currently employed in the classrooms of many LIT teachers and have gained wider currency from having been introduced more recently to large numbers of teachers at conferences

and in staff development programs and inservice workshops conducted by LIT teachers. To present the flavor of the classroom teaching practices that have been fostered by our Literature Institute I want to describe a few of the most typical of those practices (some have been described in earlier articles by LIT teachers and staff members: see Dunstan, 1989; Roemer, 1989; Robertson, 1990) and suggest how they derive from or are supported by particular theoretical perspectives (not all of them literary) that extend our pedagogical vision beyond the familiar boundaries of conventional teaching practices and possibly beyond the constraints of what we think of (somewhat reductively, perhaps) as conventional New Critical doctrine.

Re-reading Practices

A number of teaching practices that have become standard for LIT teachers in their classrooms and inservice workshops can be classified under the heading of re-reading practices. Re-reading would seem hardly to deserve recognition as an innovative teaching strategy, yet its importance to the reading process and to the acquisition of literacy is often not recognized in conventional curriculum planning. Re-reading becomes particularly important, however, when literary instruction and the act of reading a literary text are reconceived, as they were in the Literature Institute, as versions of writing instruction or the act of producing a written text. Such a reconception of the reading process was fostered in the Literature Institute by theory and by reflection. That is to say, the experience of the teachers in the Literature Institute, reflecting on their own layered processes of making sense of the difficult texts they were reading by re-reading and gradually reconstructing their sense of the text, revealed to them the degree to which they were engaged in a process that closely resembled the writing process and in which revision was an even more compelling and necessary move. Of course, their inclination to perceive their reading practices as a version of the writing process was surely a function of their familiarity with a large body of discourse about writing as a process and their introduction during the Institute to current theorized conceptions of reading as a matter of text construction.

To see reading as a process of vision and revision, moreover, is to acknowledge the status of early readings of a text (more dramatically than subsequent readings) as always provisional and very often partial or "mistaken," yet no more inadequate or symptomatic of illiteracy than a writer's rough and scratched out portions of a first draft are signs of the writer's incompetence or illiteracy. In fact, just as we have come to see the roughness and provisional character of a first draft as evidence of an emerging writer's competence (Calkins, 1979), so can students come to recognize that their own sense of puzzlement and confusion in their first reading of a difficult text is no sign of their insufficiency as readers, but part of the process of reading difficult texts which is experienced and endured by all competent readers.

Yet our experience in our Literature Institutes (and in observing classes) suggests that most teachers and surely most students--are simply not aware of the degree to which reading difficult texts is a layered, onion-peeling (and sometimes tearful) process which in its initial stages can feel frustrating and daunting even to the most accomplished and literate readers (Blau, 1981). Hence many of the teachers in our institute reported later that one of the ways that the institute influenced them most profoundly as readers (and subsequently as teachers) was in showing them

that the confusion, puzzlement, and frustration that they often experienced in their initial transactions with difficult literary texts were not signs of their illiteracy or incompetence as readers, but experiences that come with the territory of trying to read many of the texts that are most worthwhile reading--worthwhile, in part, precisely because they enact structures of meaning that are unfamiliar and therefore difficult to grasp.

Composition theory and reading practice thus conspired in our Literature Institute to produce a model for literature instruction that gave a preeminent place to the notion of re-reading or revision and yielded a number of teaching strategies that fostered re-reading. Let me describe a few of those strategies now by presenting a typical sequence of instructional activities--a sequence I have witnessed in varying forms at virtually every grade level from the primary grades through teacher education classes.

The sequence typically begins with the introduction of a short literary text that students are asked to read to themselves, possibly making notes on what sentences, lines, or segments are most troublesome to them or possibly making entries in a double-entry journal as described by Berthoff (1981). Students are then asked to work in small groups or as a class and re-read the text aloud by engaging in "jump-in reading." This means that readers are free to "jump in" and read aloud, whenever a previous reader pauses to indicate the completion of a turn as reader. Students are free to read small or large segments of text but not to read so much that nothing is left for others to read. A paragraph or two would be a well-mannered "helping" with a short short story. Besides one can always read again, later, if no one else jumps in.

The virtue of jump-in reading is that it allows students the freedom to read or decline to read without pressure from a teacher and to participate in a reading as members of a community of readers. Moreover, having already read the text once to themselves, they are less likely to read stumblingly as they try aloud to make plain syntactic sense out of what they are reading. Reluctant readers especially appreciate jump-in reading, because it allows them to avoid reading aloud, but also because it gives them the freedom to jump-in when they feel ready. And they often gain confidence (and competence) from hearing prior readers whose example teaches them how to pronounce unfamiliar words that may recur in a selection. I have even observed first graders, who are just learning to read, enjoy jump-in reading because it gave them a chance to read (sometimes with struggling pauses and sometimes aided by neighbors) their favorite parts of a story or a small segment of text that they felt they knew how to read. (For a particularly difficult short text--typically a lyric poem--students might be asked to read it a third time individually or with a partner).

Another re-reading technique that is often employed after jump-in reading (punctuated first, perhaps, by some small group discussion identifying and addressing problematic lines or issues in the text and a return to the double-entry journals) is a technique known as "text rendering" (developed initially by a group of teachers working under Peter Elbow's direction at the Bard Institute for Writing and Thinking), a version of what Peter Elbow (1970) has called "pointing" in his instructions to students on responding to the writing of their peers by pointing to or saying back to the writer a short passage or sentence or phrase, or even a word that was particularly resonant or memorable for the reader or struck the reader as particularly apt,

interesting, or even puzzling.

In the context of literary study text rendering entails reciting such passages from a text out loud for classmates to hear, and usually to do so "Quaker style," which is to say, as the spirit moves the participants. Moreover, teachers typically encourage students not to feel preempted when another reader has called out a line that they had intended to render. Repetitions of portions of a text reveal something about the weight of meaning in particular passages and commonalities or contrasts in the responses of readers within a group (see Robertson, 1990).

In most secondary school or college classes these re-reading activities would be followed by a related activity in which students would be asked to write interpretively about the text being read. A favorite activity in the LIT community of teachers is to have students at this point select from the text being studied any line or sentence or phrase (possibly one that they heard read aloud in text-rendering but perhaps not) that they regard as particularly important, interesting, or problematic and to write about it ("focused freewriting" as described by Elbow & Belanof, 1989; and Hammond, 1991; or a "quickwrite" is often called for here) for about ten minutes. Students are then instructed to read their writing in small groups (with selected pieces read to the whole class) and to report on the issues of interpretation, value, and response that emerge from the readings and small group conversation. Some teachers follow this activity with another writing activity which asks students to discuss what their previous piece of writing reveals about them as "situated" readers; i.e. as persons of a particular race, gender, class, social experience, sibling position, religious orientation and so on. Taken together, these two writing activities open up a range of responses to and interpretations of the assigned text and begin to look at how such responses and interpretations may reflect different reader perspectives. When students offer contradictory readings of a text they are also encouraged to practice Elbow's method of believing and doubting.

Other Changes in Teaching Practices and Expectations

Other clusters of new teaching practices also characterize the methodological repertoires of the teachers who participated in our Literature Institutes. These include strategies for fostering hermeneutic generosity, numerous strategies for problematizing a reading (identifying questions and problems encountered in trying to make sense of a text--emphasizing the centrality of "re-vision" to the reading process); strategies for fostering collaboration and building a community of readers (in which a shared literary history fosters intertextual perspectives and shapes responses and interpretations), strategies for building fluency for students (such as expanding literary tastes, building confidence, and promoting reading for pleasure), and strategies for exploring and shaping individual responses to and interpretations of texts.

Beyond extending their repertoire of teaching practices, participants in LIT reported changes in themselves and in their expectations as literature teachers that seem more fundamental than changes in methods and that underlie and account for methodological innovations. When asked to provide a series of statements (including some using the format of "I used to, but now...") describing how their teaching changed as a consequence of their participation in the Literature

Institute, virtually all of the teachers included at least one statement indicating that they had shifted the locus of authority in their literature classes from themselves and authoritative interpretations to the students' own constructions of meanings. As one teacher put it: "I used to think there were certain ... right interpretations of texts that I had to teach my students, but now I see that 'making meaning' of texts is a more individual process and I need to ... encourage my students to trust their own experiences and responses to texts." This same teacher notes that now she does "less teaching and more modeling" of her own processes as a reader. Other teachers echo these ideas: "I used to lead the students to the 'meaning' of the work, but now I allow all ... the students' meanings to come forth in discussion." Another says, "I used to explain the meaning of difficult texts to students, but now I allow students to respond to texts from their own perspectives." And another: "I used to take more of an authoritative role in the classroom, but now I'm comfortable if the students take over." Another grants some authority to professional scholars, but wants it shared by teachers and students: "I used to ... rely on the views of authorities and not trust myself, but now I feel that my students and I are the authorities, willing to listen to published scholars, but also ... to trust ourselves."

This same theme of having moved, as some teachers themselves expressed it, "from a teacher-centered class to a student-centered class," recurs in slightly different terms in the responses of many teachers who speak of having learned to appreciate alternative responses to and interpretations of texts rather than becoming threatened by them. As one teacher put it: "I don't feel threatened; I feel challenged, nudged, surprised, uncertain, and sometimes hit in the face ... but it's good. It's conversation." Along similar lines many teachers mentioned that they "used to ask questions from the book" or direct discussion according to their own agenda, but now they "let students ask their own questions." Several teachers also mentioned a new awareness of the possibility of reading resistantly and of the value of acknowledging situatedness in readings--the possible influence of a reader's group membership by ethnicity, gender, class, and socio-cultural experience. Noting a related change in their approach to reading, many teachers spoke of a new sense of responsibility for fostering in students a personal connection to literary works and for allowing students to write essays which reflect on and explore those connections. Some of these comments came from teachers who said, typically, that they "used to spend more time on imagery, theme, and structure" in teaching literary works.

Most teachers reported a new emphasis on re-reading as part of the literary reading process and linking the teaching of literature to the teaching of writing in classes where they had formerly been treated as wholly separate enterprises. They also spoke of how they used to think of the act of reading literature as an isolating activity, but how they came to see it as a communal activity and an occasion for collaboration. In general, they became more willing to try new things, including a new willingness to introduce a greater variety of literary works into the curriculum--works that are not part of the traditional canon, particularly works by women and non-white authors.

Relations Between Theory and Practice

The specific teaching activities I have described and the more general changes that took place in the teaching practices and expectations of the teachers who participated in our Literature Institute for Teachers suggest a complicated and interanimating relationship between a teacher's learning about current literary theory and changes in pedagogical practice. Although the changes I have reported in teachers attitudes and practices seem to parallel some of the ways in which modern literary theory and critical practice have challenged the doctrines and practices of the New Criticism, it would hardly be accurate to say that the teachers who participated in our Institute were liberated from the constraints of an intellectually limited and pedagogically unsatisfying paradigm for literary instruction by a healthy dose of modern critical theory.

On the contrary, one of the most compelling forces for pedagogical change that teachers found during the Literature Institute was their own discomfort with New Critical practices as they tried to employ them in the context of the collaborative groups that they adopted from their Writing Project experience. That is to say, the teachers of the Literature Institute were persuaded to relinquish their allegiance to New Critical practices and notions about the need to establish an authoritative reading for a text not so much by newer literary theory as by the extreme social and intellectual discomfort they experienced by trying to employ New Critical practices in a collaborative context that they otherwise trusted pedagogically. The processes of believing and doubting and entertaining multiple readings, for example, were adopted as solutions to what was perceived as a pedagogical problem. Those solutions were then found to be sanctioned and supported by postmodern critical theory.

In this process of pedagogical transformation, literary theory still played a critical though secondary role. For one thing, literary theory conferred upon the teachers a sense of their efficacy by validating the uncertainties, the multiple readings, the resistances and the difficulties that they encountered in their transactions with literary texts and with each other, particularly by sanctioning personal or cultural responses and situated readings that teachers may have formerly felt constrained to suppress. Theory also relieved them of the academic responsibility they had thought to be theirs for leading students to the "correct" or authoritative readings of canonical texts. Pedagogical experiments in the Institute (and since then in classrooms) that invited a broader repertoire of responses to texts or encouraged readings from a wider range of perspectives were occasioned by the teachers growing awareness of theory. Conversely, theory also served to sanction and refine a number of instructional practices that individual teachers had previously employed with great satisfaction in their own classrooms and demonstrated for their Institute colleagues--practices like creating dramatic improvisations to explore events in literary work, inventing alternative endings, sharing personal experiences analogous to those in fiction, reading a poem from the point of view of its recipient or its subject, writing imitative texts, and so on.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that much of the theory that influenced and supported Literature Institute teachers in transforming their literature teaching practices in their own classrooms is not literary theory at all but composition theory and related theory in the areas of language acquisition and the social construction of knowledge (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Hull,

1989). For aside from developing teaching strategies which were based on applying a writing process model of text construction to the process of constructing meaning in reading, teachers participating in the Literature Institute were most profoundly influenced by current formulations about the ways in which writing is a process of constructing meaning that takes place within the rich social and cultural context of a community of writers--precisely the sort of community of writers and readers that the Literature Institute teachers were constructing for themselves in their summer institutes.

Many of the instructional activities that have become distinctive marks of Literature Institute teachers in their classrooms--reading aloud, using collaborative reading and interpretation groups, attending to a variety of interpretive perspectives, and using various strategies to encourage hermeneutic generosity--are precisely those that help to establish and sustain a classroom culture or community in which authentic literary activity takes place and literary power is exercised in the service of socially valued goals. It is no accident that most of the inservice workshops that teachers from the Literature Institute now conduct at professional conferences and at school sites locally and nationally are announced under some variation of the title, "Building a Literary Community in the Classroom."

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