ENGLISH 285
TEACHING COMPOSITION: EVOLVING A STYLE
William E. Coles, Jr.
University of Pittsburgh
(The following is a description of the first term of a six credit, two term graduate seminar (English 285) in the teaching of composition currently being taught at the University of Pittsburgh. The course is required of all T.A.'s new to the teaching of composition and is taken in conjunction with their first year's teaching assignment. The seminar is also open to (and regularly attended by) other members of the University of Pittsburgh composition staff: full-time faculty, part-time teachers, and T.A.'s who have already taken the seminar for credit.)

The main assumption out of which I've worked in selecting and arranging the materials for our seminar is that the teaching of writing, like writing itself, is an activity. It is something that people do rather than know, except in the same more or less general way that one knows about being decent or about growing up. The distinction is simple, and I will not bore you with an account of how many difficulties I have created for myself as a teacher by failing to behave as though I believed in it. Or even to pretend it. At any rate, in assuming that the teaching of writing is an activity, I am assuming also that when it comes to learning about it the best it would seem possible for anyone to do for anyone else is to enact their notion of what is involved in the activity in such a way as to demand that others respond with an enactment of what for them is involved in it. So far as I am concerned, this formulation is the heart of the teaching-learning process, a way of saying that what teaches finally is style; and that learning is a response either to style or to the absence of it; a response that is to more than a teacher only, to more than a subject just. When it comes to writing—this I submit simply as an article of faith—I believe that both these activities can be noble and that both can be enambling.

I think I am beginning to understand why this formulation should be the heart of the teaching-learning process, and why therefore, in the situation of our seminar, acknowledgement of it should be the basis of the best we can hope to do for one another. And though I have never been able to predict or manufacture with any certainty the conditions under which the best is going to happen, I have a couple of ideas about how to set things up so as to allow for that possibility. But there is much that is involved in this process that I do not understand, much indeed that I believe to be mysterious. Let me try to separate what I think I know here from what I know only about.

Style as I am speaking of it is not a role exactly, but the making of a role into a means of self-realization, and so a metaphor both of the self and of what the self would be. Thus it is a way of performing through the agency of a subject both one's understanding of experience and what he would have as the quality of his engagement with it. A style is a construct then, but as an organic outgrowth of wished for being, as well as of being, it is more than a manner, unconscious and inalterable. It is not simply an adopted presence either—a pose, a mask—any more than it is one's self displayed in nakedness. Style as I understand it is a form of self-extension, one's offering in the shape of a role of the best he is capable of imagining for himself at the moment enacted in terms of his subject. It is that which for the stylist is possible to grow with as well as to, that which is good enough for his own becoming he can in turn work at becoming good enough for. Thus my style as a teacher is the purest amalgam of desire and actuality I am capable of devising at any given point in time, and so the ultimate, though scarcely the final, refinement of those principles, convictions, standards, prejudices, assumptions—whatever you may wish to call them—which in their less articulate, unrefined and lumpish limitedness are the stuff of which my life is built and lived. To others this style may seem agaey, snuff-colored, impossible, but to me it is my way of getting to tomorrow, the saving illusion of all that I would be.

But in being that which "complements affirmation with limitation and with humility... the deference action pays to uncertainty"—the phrases are Robert Oppenheimer's—style argues not only its own involuntariness but also its own momentariness as a stay against confusion. Since style is a metaphor, a construct, a stylist succeeds in becoming his style only to find it no longer adequate as a style, no longer in fact a style at all. For when direction becomes destination, when a teacher becomes his subject, then style has frozen to manner, the self has begun to die within the prison of role. This is why a style more than admits the existence of other styles equal to itself. A style needs the performance of other styles not just to perfect itself, but in the name of its own transcendence, needs the perspectives of other styles from which to resee the confusion that must constantly, if a stylist is to remain a stylist, be better ordered, better stayed, better styled. From this point of view then, the performance of a style is the offering of a role as an act of self-definition at a moment in time which demands the response of a complementary act of self-definition in the name of their mutual refinement.

It is this that I have never understood, particularly as it works in a classroom, how and why exactly the calculated confrontation of styles should result in the growth that it sometimes does. And the nature of this growth, how far it can go and what it can mean, is what I find mysterious. The important thing for me, however, is knowing that it can happen, knowing that in the day by day pitting of our roles against each other in the classroom, in the never-ending process of compulsion, demotion, and recreation which such engagement brings, there is the possibility of our becoming strange to ourselves, awake to meanings and riches we had never felt, never known that we possessed—and perhaps in a way did not. As role collides with role, our roles can be adjusted to express our altered selves. The reach for our subject then, through the roles which make this reaching possible, can become the reach for each other through which we find ourselves. At this juncture, however precariously, role and style become one.

But what is more relevant to our purposes in this seminar than what anyone may believe can happen in it, is a procedure that will suggest our readiness to act as though we wanted to believe that certain things could. It is in this sense that I would have the title of our seminar understood. What lies this side of the colon is our subject; on that is what our involvement with this subject should have the chance to amount to. Or in social terms, on this side of the colon we function as a community in the name of what is on the other—in the name of the individualism that every true community is about and for.

We confront a mystery when it comes to learning about the teaching of writing (just as we do when we teach writing to our students), but it is a mystery we confront together, and this can make a difference. For though the barriers to learning I have to face in myself may not be those that are faced by another teacher, we both face such barriers. Similarly, though the problem reshapes itself as the arrows harden, I do not know a teacher working at having a life as a teacher who finds it easy to maintain an approach to his subject that is neither a Procrustean bed nor an excuse for indifference. And so on. The point is not that such a context suggests the need for A Fresh Awareness of Fundamental Questions, or the Value of Various Points of View, or that We All Have Things To Share; it is rather that unless a fundamental question is being seen freshly it isn't being seen as a question at all, that as a consequence various points of view on such questions are all we have, and finally that a teacher shares as a teacher in order to avoid dying as one. What, for example, is the
Answer to such questions as the following: Where do you begin with the teaching of writing? What do you move to and by means of what steps? What should students write about? What, that is, is a writing assignment? What's the difference between a good assignment and a bad one? What makes a good book on the subject of the teaching of writing? How do you use what you'd call a good book on the subject? How do you read a student paper? How do you read fifty of them? How do you mark what you read? What do you do in class with what your students write? How in a private conference do you handle what a student has written? And above all, what sense do you invite your students to make of what you do with the subject of writing? Where do you want to come out with a writing course? Where do you expect your students to come out?

How would you respond to a teacher of composition who claimed to know the Answers to such questions?

How would you respond to a teacher of composition who saw no reason to keep asking them?

In that bewilderment is our opportunity with our subject. I've set up the course so that it has both what I think is a direction, somewhere for us to begin and somewhere to come out, as well as room within its structure to discuss anything connected with the teaching of writing that the members of the seminar think we might profitably consider as a group. As things stand now, we'll spend two class meetings a week considering specific problems that I'll have mimeographed and distributed to you beforehand. Some of these assignments will ask you to write short papers, some will involve you in gathering and arranging materials for class presentations, some will have you coming to terms with readings, and so forth. Your final paper for Fall Term will be to put your experience with English 285 together for yourself in the form of a statement addressed to a group of students about to take a composition course that you are teaching. For English 285 Winter Term your project will be to prepare, as if for an NCTE or CCCC Convention, a presentation having something to do with the teaching of writing.

It should go without saying that neither of these enterprises need to be seen as finger exercises.

Monday will be an open class as described above.

This is, of course, a tentative schedule; more can be provided in the way of either structure or openness if we should feel the need.

Let us agree that all materials handed in by the members of the seminar (this includes your own papers as well as any student papers, articles, etc. that you'd like to have the rest of us see) be submitted in enough copies for every member of the seminar to have one. Any submitted material we consider as a group I think should be anonymous, unless whoever submits it should want things otherwise.

Plan to provide yourself with a scrapbook binder in which to keep copies of your own papers along with all other material given you this term, and please bring it to our class meetings regularly.

There are five assigned texts for English 285, Fall Term which we'll take up in the order listed:


Have finished reading Macrorie by September 17, Sale by October 1, Elbow by October 15, also Morse by October 29, and Lanham by November 12.

SUMMER SEMINARS FOR COLLEGE TEACHERS OF WRITING

Walker Gibson
University of Massachusetts

During each of the past three summers (1973, 74, 75), I've been privileged to offer, here at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, a seminar for twelve college teachers organized around the topic of "Writing in the First College Years." These seminars have been generously funded by the Fellowship Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities. This article attempts to describe for readers of Freshman English News something of what went on during those summers, and something of the kinds of people who attended.

First a word about the Endowment's program of summer seminars for college teachers. The seminars are intended, according to the Endowment's official brochure, "for teachers in the smaller private and state colleges and in the two-year colleges who are concerned primarily with improving their knowledge of the subjects they teach. The purpose of the seminars is to provide these college teachers with opportunities to work with distinguished scholars in their fields at institutions with libraries suitable for mature study. Through research, reflection, and discourse with the seminar director and with his colleagues in a seminar atmosphere, they will sharpen their understandings and improve their ability to transmit their understandings to college students." There have been about a dozen seminars each in English (as well as others in philosophy, history, and so on); they have tended to be concentrated at prestigious institutions on the two coasts. Furthermore, as the official language perhaps implies, the emphasis has been upon scholarly concerns, not pedagogical ones. My topic, "Writing in the First College Years," was decidedly not typical; "Studies in the Renaissance Imagination" and "Myth, Symbolic Modes, and Ideology" more accurately suggest the prevailing concerns. (Indeed the Endowment was clearly attacked, by a writer in English English last fall, for supporting the tired old literary themes of the academic establishment. And more recently, Senator Claiborne Pell himself, founding father of NEH in 1965, has complained that too much of its money is going to academics and not enough to locally inspired "grass-roots" projects. The Endowment continues to receive rising appropriations from Congress, through lean years and fat, and it remains surely one of the very few sources of funding left for activity in the humanities. But there may be some changes ahead, in the criteria for distribution of support.)

Probably because my seminar seemed to be a little more classroom-oriented than most, it attracted an enormous number of applicants. In 1975, over two hundred people from all over the country completed formal applications for just twelve spots. The result was that the selected participants were a bright and energetic group, highly motivated, highly conscious of their status as chosen ones. From my point of view, it was a teaching situation that could hardly go wrong.

In spite of its title, however, my seminar was not after all devoted to techniques of teaching writing in the classroom, at least not directly. This was partly because of my awareness of the Endowment's views on the matter ("improving their knowledge of the subjects they teach"), and partly because of my own prejudices and ignorance. Who was I to tell these people how to teach writing in all the variously different situations they faced in their enormously different institutions? (Most of these institutions I had never heard of before receiving the application!) So what actually happened during the seminars was, I guess, "knowledge" not "pedagogy"—though as every serious teacher knows, the distinction blurs.

We began with perception theory—acts of seeing the world around us. I had ordered offprints of a number of Scientific American articles, which I mailed out to the participants during the spring, and furnished them with more when they arrived. For some of them, at least, this examination of the "transactional" nature of seeing was as exciting and significant as it is to me. The observer's and the writer's distance from whatever it is he thinks he's talking about has long
been an obsessive theme of mine, and for this captive audience I played it hard. Then we proceeded to critical terms—by your terms, I told them, your students will know you. I demonstrated my terms, such as they are (voice, tone, attitude, metaphor, irony), and they demonstrated theirs. I think we pretty well avoided textbook jargon; the evidence was from experience.

From this base we went on to consider a number of issues confronting our profession, seeking not answers but (as the Endowment insists) “knowledge.” Some of these issues were: McLuhanism and the future of writing in an electronic world; the students’ “right to their own language”; bi-dialectalism; euphemism and “Public Doublespeak” (another hobby-horse of mine); the political implications of teaching composition. If all this seems unduly theoretical, it was to some extent alleviated by group meetings in which the participants arranged themselves on matters I neglected, like technical writing, how to grade a paper, how to organize a paragraph.

Meanwhile, according to Endowment procedures, each teacher had arrived with a plan for independent research, in the library or elsewhere. In some cases these projects were standard literary scholarship; in some, they were deeper investigations of some of our seminar issues. What especially gratified me in the reports of these projects was the way literary research and composition so often came together. An example was the well-trained young lady who labored over a poem of Yeats and how they’d be edited by W. E. Henley; before she was through, she was ready with a metaphor of the composition teacher as a certain sort of “editor.” As it happened, her metaphor was vigorously attacked by her colleagues, but it was the serious attempt at a marriage that pleased me.

Of possible interest to the readers of this journal is the general character and quality of the thirty-six college teachers I tried to entertain over these three summers. Well, as I need scarcely say, they were wonderful people. Out there in the boondocks (as we are likely to say from our coastal bastions) there are an awful lot of devoted and skillful teachers of writing who are trying heroically to improve themselves and their students, often under pretty appalling conditions. It will be obvious that thirty-six people selected out of several hundred applicants can hardly be called representative. (And I admit to one or two duds among my selections.) Most of them had doctorates; all of them had at least several years of college teaching experience; all of them came lavishly recommended. Nevertheless, the prospect of a summer in the boondocking colleges of all this talent and energy was inspiring to a provincial like me. My faith in the devotion and skill of our profession has improved.

During the lean and leaner years ahead, we may expect many excellent young Ph.D.’s from the “best” places to find jobs (if they’re lucky) in the “smaller private and state colleges and in the two-year colleges.” That their training has not prepared them for these jobs is notorious, though I believe that a standard literary education may be less irrelevant than is sometimes argued. There are, to be sure, great psychological problems of adjustment to roles the young scholar did not expect to play. But if these can be overcome, the net effect on education throughout the country has got to be a good one.

A final word in particular about the two-year colleges. The Endowment had hoped to attract a large number of teachers from these colleges into the summer seminars, but was disappointed, possibly because the seminar topics too often seemed remote from two-year-college concerns. The Endowment is now moving toward academic-year seminars, called “Fellowships in Residence,” paying stipends of up to $14,500 to participants for a nine-month tour of duty. Two such programs, scheduled for 1976-77, have been specifically limited to two-year-college teachers, one in history and one in English. The one in English, which I will direct here at Massachusetts, is to be called “Reading and Writing in the First College Years” and will develop and expand themes of my summer seminars. The Endowment hopes—and I hope—that this program will help to produce a few future leaders in these colleges.

I should perhaps add that the preceding paragraph is intended as induction, not as an invitation to apply. By the time this article reaches print, the selections will long since have been completed. Wait till next year!

THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF “TO WRITE”

Elizabeth Wooten Cowan
Director, English Program, MLA

If there is anything definite that we know about the state of students’ writing in America, it is that the subject is on everybody’s lips. Since December, I have been interviewed by the Cleveland Plain Dealer, The Sacramento Bee, The Chronicle of Higher Education, The New York Daily News, and Time magazine, with each of these reporters seeking causes and explanations for the deterioration in student writing. These interviews have raised a lot of questions in my mind. Do these questioners know enough about the process of writing to make the right inquiries? Is it "back to the basics" another way of the "March of the Good Ole’ Days’? There’s the very strong argument set forth that writing is not worse than it was ten or twenty years ago (for instance, I’ve seen figures on the cyclical nature of, say, classes in remediation), but that we now have more sophisticated testing, do more objective testing and measuring of the skills, so that the writing faults are not different from those we had in the past. We just notice more students with these inadequacies. It is fruitless, however, to pursue this question of whether writing is or is not worse than it has ever been, for regardless of whether the query is answered by the mental set of "the poor ye have always with you" or by a belief that the problem is recent and peculiar to the present, such pursuing means that the problem and not the solution gets the attention.

Even if we disagree strongly on the question of how bad writing is and why, we can find unity in the acknowledgement that freshman English is a course in frustration. It often poses more philosophical and logistical problems for a department than any other area of the curriculum. It is one of the costliest things we do; worrying about it, trying to re-do it, starting over, under, back and beyond are as perennial as wild onions on the lawn. Although I’ve spent most of my teaching career thinking about the purpose and the execution of the course, for the past three months, since the enormous surges of national interest in the subject, I have been plagued by the question—what makes this such a hard course? Where does the difficulty lie? Is there anything that could be done, thought, or discovered that would make life easier and success surer for the thousands of dedicated, strained teachers and students of freshman composition? I’m teased by a suspicion that in something there is the key, and ever so tentatively I’d like to offer my hypothesis about what makes the teaching of writing in college so difficult, what makes the freshman English course such a headache and so unnamable to remedy. Perhaps this will, if only indirectly, suggest a new way of thinking about the course.

Here is my hypothesis:

In freshman English, the term "good writing" has so many meanings that teachers and students are defeated by the very definition of the term.

If you will allow me to indulge in a piece of personal narrative about my own writing experiences, I will illustrate the changes I see the meaning of the term writing going through and the ambiguity in the use of that term when a teacher says, "You must do good writing." I offer this personal experience not as a generalization that is true for all people in all times; I do find, however, irrefutable evidence in freshman course descriptions that the stages of my own experience are the stuff of which the college course is made, and I imagine that you will go step by step with me, saying this is what you experienced too, though we might have done it in different grades or at different places.

The first experience I can remember with writing was in preschool when my mother gave me a scrap of paper and a pencil to keep me quiet during my daddy’s long-winded sermons. With what diligence I draw marks on the side of the bench and draw marks which usually were "letters" to important people like Grandmother, Maggie or Aunt Blanche. My writing was "good" if I just made marks on the paper, good enough to get put into envelopes and sent off to people I loved.
Then came first grade. Writing then became something else — learning to draw letters correctly from patterns on the blackboard. To learn to write was to learn a brand new skill, how to copy a letter in approximately the same shape every time. There was not much room for experimentation here; and always had the loops on the side they did regardless of what I thought or wished. But getting it right meant I was maturing, learning what big people knew — and there's not much else more important to a six year old. When I got an "A" in writing on my report card that year it was because I could finally print correctly all my letters in the correct shape and in uniform size.

Then there was the second grade where we learned to do cursive writing. Instead of drawing the letters this year, we learned to "write" them. We still had charts on the board to go by, and many penmanship drills. In this grade we discovered that good writing was not just to make the letters right but to hook them together and make them legible and pretty. We would practice our writing by copying the spelling words from the board, writing them 5 or 10 times each (15 if the class had been bad). So, an "A" in writing that year meant that I could hook my letters together, give them the shape they needed for that hooking, and make them attractive.

After these two years of much concentration on learning the literal art of making letters and forming words, I don't remember much about writing per se for the rest of my elementary school years. In those middle years, writing wasn't important in itself; it, for the most part, helped me study other things — to answer geography questions, write book reports, do extra credit encyclopedia assignments.

It was during these middle years, however, that my teachers introduced me to two activities which they believed would in the future be directly related to my ability to do good writing: learning ancillary grammatical facts about words and learning an elementary pattern of organization of sentences. We began in the third grade to learn the parts of speech and the elements of the sentence, and by the fourth we were taking the Weekly Reader tests to check our ability to find topic sentences and main ideas. The teachers, however, saw this learning in a sequence which alleviated our having to know it all at once. There was a limit. I remember wanting to know in the fifth grade where to put the prepositional phrase when we were diagramming sentences, and Mrs. Brock said for me not to worry — I wasn't supposed to know that until next year. What a relief!

These elementary grades were spent learning the "first time things" — things in graduated levels of difficulty about the language we spoke and wrote. The space on the report card became English or language arts, and writing as a subject took a back seat to the other things we were busy learning — the rules of traditional grammar, the names of the parts of speech, things our teachers felt we had to know for the future, things they considered basic to education.

It was in the eighth grade that I learned a new function for writing (you may have learned about it much earlier and in conjunction with other stages), and that was to imagine. I don't think I will ever forget Marjorie McKenzie, who gave us an assignment — in civics of all classes — to go to any country we wanted to in our heads and to write about our trip. What excitement! I "went" to Rio de Janeiro, and I remember how the writing went on page after page. I probably pretended a longer trip than she could conceivably need or desire, but I was enthralled with using my imagination and turning those dreamings into words which I could read again and again. We didn't exercise this use of writing much in English class those junior high school years, which may be the reason the civics creative writing assignment stands out so delightfully in my mind. If ever so briefly, I had realized a new use for writing words.

Some time in high school writing became a subject again — this time to learn to write themes. The concentration was placed on how to organize your thoughts, how to practice different approaches, like doing a comparison I compare these, or a persuasive essay, or a classification paragraph. And here writing began to be measured on something other than my grasping the "how to" of the process — I now was also evaluated on how well I thought. Getting an "A" in writing was not so easy; you didn't have just to do what you did in grade school — get the conventional signs and symbols right — you also had to think originally and impressively, in the teacher's opinion. The term good writing now meant it had to look right, sound right, follow the right form, and express a significant, well-stated idea.

Here in this stage the relation seen by my teachers between learning the parts of speech in middle school and being able to write well later became apparent. When the corrections on the paper read, "Don't split the infinitive," a lucky remembrance of what an infinitive was made the revision process much quicker. If you couldn't remember, you had double duty to pull — write the rule out of the grammar book and correct the paper. And you wished then if you had never wished it before that you had paid a little better attention to those earlier lessons.

Finally, there came one last part that writing had to have in my pre-college schooling, and that was to illustrate that I understood literature. We began learning about irony and point of view and characterization. In this stage the writing had to be correct and have an idea, and the idea had to show that I could interpret stories and poems. It was just a kind of introduction, a kind of glimpse into the future which conveyed to me as a twelfth grader that "good writing" at its best was all the things it had been before and on the subject of literature. It was, then, in the high school grades that the various components of what my teachers over the years considered to be good writing began to come together. Yet I was still seen in a "just learning" light and was not graded against a standard that demanded that I know previously how to do the work.

I think I can now draw for you the continuum I see on the multiple meanings of the term, good writing, the various, often unconnected things the words mean at different stages in our learning.

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I propose that perhaps the greatest difficulty in freshman English is that this is the first time in the students' education that they are expected to perform all the meanings of good writing initially, simultaneously, and never failingly. Note these excerpts from three course syllabus I recently received in the office:

[The freshman English course centers on] a loosely cladastic list of components of good writing: components 1 and 2, "correct" spelling and "good" handwriting; component 3, mastery of grammatical terminology; component 4, mastery of the grammar and salient points of usage of "standard" English; component 5, set of strategies, plans, based on a comprehensive and accurate model of discourse structure; component 6, creativity.

A programmed textbook is used to review grammar and usage while a writing workbook is used to provide structured writing assignments. A rhetoric handbook is used as a reference work when correcting papers. From time to time essays in an anthology are also read and analyzed and used as a basis for writing assignments.

During the first week of the semester, the students meet regularly in their assigned classrooms to complete a series of diagnostic tests: tests of grammar and mechanical skills, tests of syntactical proficiency, organizational competence, and over-all ability to develop ideas.

The difficulty in freshman English really has little to do with how strongly one believes that a good writer must be able to perform all these meanings of the term at random and at all times. Believing this firmly and striving for it assiduously seem only to affect how bad one
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feels when it's not accomplished. I would like to ask if it is fair for the freshman English course to bear all the weight of the learning or the lack of learning of the multiple meanings of "good writing" down through the years? No wonder college teachers turn to the high schools and say, "What have you been doing?" who turn to the elementary schools and say, "What's wrong with you?" who turn to the television and say, "You devil, you." Just another exercise in futility. So long as we see good writing possible only if the student can leap from one meaning of the term to another in a single bound and pull together a performance of all the meanings assigned in the educational process, there will be no way that a one-year course in freshman English can be successful. I would have us ask — who determined that X comes before Y in the process of good writing? Is there possibly a new space on the continuum—a brand new space—one which is not merely a telescoping of the spaces already there? I am worried that we let our tests and the order of things in our textbooks determine our "beliefs" about freshman English. All I would ask is that we question our assumptions. Can we find a way to teach writing that does not depend so heavily on what other teachers have or have not done before? There's hardly anything more dangerous or defeating, actually, than having the solution to your problem depend upon other people. We have the right as a discipline to take a new look at what produces good writing — even at a definition of good writing — and see if, in truth, there is another space on the continuum, an additional meaning of good writing, particularly a good look at the things we've been told a student must do before she or he can write.

We're assured of fifty more years like the last and hundreds of textbooks like the past, assured of frustrations and signs and sighs and failings, as long as we accept unchallenged the current meanings of "good writing" and the previous methods of achieving those meanings. Fritz Perls in one of his books tells us about an expert swordsman. This man was so skilled with his sword that when he went out into the rain he didn't even need an umbrella. He could with the speed of light and the dexterity of an eagle hit every raindrop with the tip of his sword before the raindrop hit his head.

We're trying to achieve this in freshman English — and we're not expert swordsmen. It's no wonder we are tired.

HUMANISTIC INVENTION IN EXPRESSIVE DISCOURSE

Wilson Curtin Snipes
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University

In the Oxford English Dictionary, among various basic definitions of "invention," we find the following description: "The devising of a subject, idea, or method of treatment, by exercise of the intellect or imagination." Likewise, in the same source, we find that invention is not only "the action, faculty, or manner of inventing" but also "the thing invented." In these remarks I wish to consider various approaches the writer may use in inventing a subject for expressive discourse through the use of such human capacities as intellect, imagination, sense experience. Certain obvious limitations to this purpose will appear through my selection of specific problems for consideration.

During the past twenty years we have experienced a revival of interest in the concept of invention. Professor Gary Tate recently summarized the contemporary problem of theoretical considerations of invention:

We have rediscovered the classical topics, and we have developed pre-writing procedures ranging from meditation to journal keeping. We now have Richard Young's 'nine-cell search procedure,' and we have available a fairly substantial number of journal articles on the topic of invention. What bothers me about all this work is its artificiality.

Tate's own illustration of one inventive process grew out of "the assertion-support unit" in which each student was encouraged to find in his past experience his reasons for making whatever assertion he made. Apart from the fact that Tate was using an assertion "model," an artificiality of sorts, he does not consider the problem of discovery or inventing the assertion, the a priori reasons or process for asserting in the first place. Of course, if we accept the conditions of the freshman classroom, an assignment, and a written "exercise," then the assertion model may be considered a proper unit at some stage in the discipline of inventing. Yet, somehow, we have skipped I believe a number of stages in or characteristics of the process, not only our arrival at the assertion proper but the psychological and rhetorical considerations which led to the assertion. However, Tate has given focus to the central problem: artificial processes as contrasted with those which emerge from the integrity of each human being expressing his human experience.

In our attempts to teach effective expression efficiently to large numbers of students we have uncritically accepted basic ideological models as substitutes for the personal process of invention, models through which each writer will express his thoughts and feelings, attitudes and experiences, criticisms and judgments. Perhaps we have put the cart before the horse, for such uncritical acceptance has generated a rhetorical formalism in our texts and teaching — it is difficult to distinguish one freshman composition text from another and one freshman classroom from another, and, significantly, such an approach has alienated the minds of student writers, who have become expert at role-playing, at performing "exercises" for the teacher, at attempting to figure out the rhetorical mode of each teacher of composition. In fact, too often, in many instances the student studies assiduously the teacher's preferences, such as the list of errors to overcome, formal organization, thesis and topic sentences, and he attempts systematically to satisfy the teacher's "demands." In theory at least, such a composition should satisfy the teacher, although it may neither satisfy nor interest the student; but, as we all know, such is not the case, for each of us has a new list to spring on the student on the next go-round.

Inventing, discovering, is not the same in expressive discourse as that in critical-analytical-argumentative-persuasive discourse; it is primarily self- not audience-directed. Invention in expressive discourse originates in the mind, imagination, and experience of the writer, the humanistic concerns, growing out of his perception and understanding of the meanings of his experience. It grows out of his knowledge of himself, what he thinks and feels, what attitudes he holds, what values he gives priority to, what his experiences have been and what they mean to him, both consciously and unconsciously.

Out of his translation of his human experience into knowledge and understanding the seeds of invention emerge, from a hint, a phrase, a perception, a question, a memory, a fancy, a hope. Such seeds as these bring into play the epistemological questions of how an individual "knows" anything about those things he finds in himself. The crisis-crossing, countering, modifying, embellishing, pausing, taking stock, retreating, repeating, beginning anew that we usually describe as discovering and thinking are at the base of invention. The process is both wordless and a verbal search, a joyful and joyless process of selection and rejection, of purposefulness and purposelessness, an aim with no target, a target with no bow, an arrow with no aim behind it — I do not intend the metaphor to substitute for thought but only to give an elementary suggestion of the complexity of the nature of invention when examined as self-expression.

A member of the English Department at VPI&SU told the story of asking the cook at his home one morning how she felt; her reply was, "Mr. Tench, I ain't arranged my attitudes yet." Her reply represents one of the stages of invention in self-expression, a perception of the self in the midst of invention. The cook had not established aim, target, bow, or arrow; she was in the process of selecting from among the arrows of her experience.
When we go to the testimonies of creative writers for autobiographical descriptions of their experiences in inventing, "creating," we are immediately struck by the variety of approaches they use, the human resources they draw upon to "discover" purpose, value, means of expression, generative discipline, even working habits. From an examination of these testimonies two matters of special consequence to expressive discourse emerge: 1) each writer or artist must pass through a series of subjective experiences before he discovers purpose; and 2) the route or discipline or stages through which each writer invents differs from the route or discipline or stages another follows.

Brewster Ghiselin has described seven basic characteristics or stages through which the creator or inventor passes: 1) an "impulse toward order"; 2) "a sense of value in the end sought"; 3) "management, including discovering the clue that suggests the development to be sought, that intimates the creative (inventive) end to be reached, and assuring a certain and economical movement toward that end"; 4) gestation, or what Henry James has called "the deep well of unconscious cerebration"; 5) an "organic need . . . rather than will, that must determine the choice of subject"; 6) preliminary labor, a time of "mastering accumulated knowledge, gathering new facts, observing, exploring, experimenting, developing technique and skill, sensibility, and discrimination . . ."; and 7) the "work of verification, correction, or revision . . . ." If I might oversimplify Ghiselin's descriptions, the inventor of expressive discourse must deal with the human sources of invention, such as the memory, images, feelings, ideas, etc., with the human means of invention, the translation of the non-verbal to the verbal, and with the human ends of invention, from the clue stage through the final stage of the thing invented, the discourse unit.

We find it quite easy to fall into the psychological and rhetorical trap of believing that invention must have a core process, when, in fact, we know that invention may emerge from a focus on any aspect of human experience. The generative process of creative writers indicates the variegated nature of inventive sources. So too those we describe as original thinkers describe their creative processes autobiographically in terms of the great variety and depth of sources of invention. The stimulus of something within — a memory, a word, a sense experience, an action, an attitude, a feeling — as well as without — a passing bus, a chance conversation, an accident, a cold day, a symbol — lead to invention, triggering a series of related, and oftentimes unrelated, thoughts, attitudes, tones, values, like the disconnectedness of a dream sequence or the details of a nightmare. That there is no primary or single process of invention is not a matter of great concern, for each composer must discover in his own experiences those processes which enable him to draw from himself his personal insights, his understandings, his feelings, his attitudes, his thoughts, and, finally, those things he would express.

The complexity of the nature of the inventive process as well as the variety of sources of invention are reflected in the following brief adaptation of the creative process to the objectives of invention. It is markedly clear that the composer must do his subjective homework in detail before he writes an assertion or purpose statement for a unit of expressive discourse.

an "impulse toward order"

This tentativeness, something we might call a process of introspective consciousness-unconsciousness, is clearly related to the psychology of motive, in particular the quality of motive. For example, the ethical nature of motive, the intellectual objectives of motive, the psycho-social effects of motive are all matters of concern. Perhaps the study of the theory invention in self-expression should commence with the deeper study, self-study, of motive and subsequently of will or volition. Motivational research has been committed to the effect of prose discourse; at the other end of the spectrum are the composer's motives for inventing, the approach of the humanistic disciplines to the theory of invention in terms of individual integrity, honesty, moral goodness, and such. In this instance a humanistic theory of invention would be directed toward the study of the composer, not the resulting discourse unit or the audience to whom the unit is directed.

Of special interest in the study of invention are the meanings of personality in the process. Most descriptions of style, both linguistic and stylistic, for example, follow formal criteria, which are usually external or language manifestations of the person behind the expression, a sorting out of the individually unique, characteristic, repetitious, habitual features of a writer's language. In many textbooks we find the suggestion that the writer humanizes his expression, as if the humanization of a unit of discourse is something added. The nature of the inventive process conveys the personality of the composer. There are dull processes of invention and dull discourse units produced; there are superficial processes, inspired processes, generalized processes, and such. Coleridge would describe invention in terms of a Hartleyan psychology: the fanciful process of invention generates fanciful discourse, such as Cowley's works; the imaginative inventive process generates imaginative units of discourse, such as Wordsworth's. If "a sense of value in the end sought" in the initial stages the inventive process is one of selection and rejection, of tentative purposefulness becoming an initial skimming-scanning of the self and personal experience followed by a more controlled and directed focusing of the searching process. In using an organic metaphor one must say that the composer is sorting among the seeds of the self, among ideas, attitudes, experiences, selecting something to suit his expressive purpose, his discourse aims, and his statement of purpose. Throughout the process he holds a tentative point of view, making assumptions, challenging premises, selecting related details, rejecting and entertaining the relatedness of details, offering and accepting compromises of meaning, phrasing and rephrasing what he wishes to say as distinguished from what the words and sentences and paragraphs say, infer, or imply.

"discovering the clue that suggests the development to be sought"

The traditional invocation of the poet was conventional on the one hand, yes, but it was also a search for the stimulation of invention. Likewise the oral formula of the epic bard was a disciplined vehicle for invention. Each writer must examine himself and challenge himself to find what works. But the generation of invention is not enough, although the command or disciplined understanding of what inventive processes work is a first step, is self-revelatory, rewarding, practically a way of establishing a working process of meditation, introspection, reflection, recollection, fusing, translating.

"the deep well of unconscious cerebration"

Once a clue or clues to the meanings of human experience have been found, the source of invention moves from the vague and indefinite to the interaction of the conscious and unconscious, including the preconscious, where not only is the language, the verbal, a primary focus, but where also the verbal processes of the will, imagination, memory — the conscious self — are dealing with perceptions and apperceptions, to use Leibniz' term, while the unconscious works with the clue or clues in its own inexplicable way.

The fascination of the interplay between the consciousness and the unconsciousness is present in almost every description of the creative process given by any creative writer in western civilization from Plato to the present. Perhaps the best description of this interplay comes from Carl Jung, who distinguishes between the psychological mode of artistic creation which "deals with materials drawn from the realm of human consciousness" and the visionary mode of artistic creation which draws from experience which "is a strange something that derives its existence from the hinterland of man's mind — that suggests the abyss of time separating us from pre-human ages, or evokes a super-human world of contrasting light and dark." Of these two modes Jung writes: "In dealing with the psychological mode of artistic creation, we never need ask ourselves what the material consists of or what it means. But this question forces itself upon us as soon as we come to take the visionary mode of creation."
Another view of invention will result from an examination of the quality of the character of invention, when the composer has selected a focus or a tentative direction for his unit of expression. The quality of the focus reflects degrees of the traditional dichotomous concerns with intellectual truthfulness and falseness, role-playing, “counterfeiting,” as President Truman would describe the process, moral goodness and badness, aesthetic beauty and ugliness, pragmatic usefulness and uselessness. At the focus of invention the composer tentatively stops at a series of uncrucial or unanalyzed assumptions, on the one hand, or at a nexus resulting from an examination of a series of carefully considered compromises; in either instance the quality of the germinal nexus is an intimate reflection of the self-hood of the composer. For example, such considerations as those suggested here are directly related to the intellectual maturity or innocence of the composer. Likewise the ethical strength of the writer, as distinguished from faith and behavior, is manifest. The ultrterior, both conscious and subconscious, to illustrate, is something that the composer confronts in the invention stage, if he holds integrity high among his personal values.

“an organic need . . . that must determine the choice of subject”

Invention is governed by certain principles, usually unstated. For example, the composer is governed not by what he knows to say but what he finds and chooses to say. The intimate freshman autobiographer, to illustrate, sometimes embarrasses the reader because the freshman writer occasionally elects to be “truthful,” to say what he knows about his personal experience rather than choosing what appropriately can be said. The matter of taste in one’s relationships with others and sensitivity to self function in the composer’s mind during the invention stage.

Another set of concerns in the study of invention appears when the persona or role-player concept is considered. To illustrate one facet of the problem, the character of the composer is, to some degree, manifest not only in the subjects he considers and the purpose he selects but also in his expression of self, his choice to disguise or reveal himself, as he sees himself, his basic character. Aristotle has described the value and significance of character in its persuasive effects. Walker Gibson has proposed a choice of a rhetorical person; Harry Truman, more Aristotelian than Gibsonian, has stated the problem succinctly when he rejects the “counterfeit” persona.

A theory or theories of invention must begin with individual self-study, not with study of the language system nor mechanistic and artificial generative systems, not through an in situational approach, not in anticipated audience effects. It must begin with the study of individual integrity.

“preliminary labor”

The nexus of invention is governed in great part by the intensity of the composer’s understanding and his ability to make choices. For the more “opinionated” writer the choice of a subject for self-expression is a relatively easy thing, requiring a short time-span; his choice is followed by radar-like searching of the self for related ideas, attitudes, recollections, things read, experiences, followed by a statement of purpose. On the other hand, the time may be greatly extended, even long-lasting, for the more tentative decision-maker, for he searches the consciousness, generating and stimulating the unconscious as well as the memory in the process of selecting a subject; in turn he repeats the process as he seeks to clarify and select a specific purpose.

The writer of a letter of sympathy or condolence, for example, given the situation and the degree of intimacy in the relationship of the writer to his correspondent, will find himself inventing contents, phrasings, tones that will convey exactly the nature and quality of the grief and sympathy he wishes to convey. And he will measure the quality of the letter, in this instance, through his anticipation of the human response of the receiver. The invention is a complex human relationship addressed through the language of the unit of discourse. Of course the writer may have selected a “sympathy card” from the shelf of the local card store, testimony to the mass way to address human grief and loss, without experiencing any of the more meaningful experiences of invention, although he may observe that he has searched for a card which he considers “appropriate.”

The freshman English classroom poses a special problem insofar as invention is an element in the composing process, for the immediacy and necessity of human personal relationships are, in great part, absent; the situation the writer faces is indefinite (“write a theme on”); the writer, and frequently the teacher, view the composing process and the compositions as “exercises” rather than as human expressions; and the audience is usually indistinct (“write for your classmates”). Moreover, the student has learned to role-play in class: find out what the teacher wants and give it to him.

“the work of verification, correction, or revision”

The preliminary labor of getting together a unit of expressive discourse does not guarantee a finished composition; in fact, in most instances the rewriting stage is very much a part of invention, for during this stage the critical and analytical nature of the composer comes to the fore, challenging the very humanity of the composition, from the precision and appropriateness of ideas and attitudes to those of dictional and figurative choices. Moreover, usually at this stage intellectual reservations in a thousand disguises appear, each with its accompanying valid reasons for rejecting, modifying, rewriting, embellishing each sentence of the discourse unit. Even the tangential ideas and values and expressions and phrasing challenge the validity, the “rightness,” of what the composer has written. In like manner the composition suddenly appears open-ended rather than a unit of anything. The composer’s inventiveness is challenged by the inventiveness of language itself, and he finds himself asking, who is in control here?

III

What, practically, may the composer do to invent? At the beginning of these observations I suggested that the traditional distinctions of the OED, that invention is a process and a thing invented, is a matter of focus. If the composer wishes to practice invention, to discipline himself in invention, he must discover what process or processes work for him. The descriptions of the prevailing process in most textbooks emphasize ideas and propose subjects which might generate the process. But such a process may, for many writers, lead nowhere; give limited results, even be quite unsuccessful; such a determination is a matter for each composer to discover for himself. Still, failure resulting from the commonplace ideological process, for example, should not keep the composer from experimenting to find what processes work best for him, what processes give results. It may be that a series of feelings will generate the process — if so, the writer should cultivate series of feelings; it may be that specific feelings associated with a symbol will be successful; it may be that working from an outward physical object to an inward response will spark the inventive process; it may be that a gestalt, a puzzle, a word or phrase, a passing laugh, an unpleasant smell will start the process, some combination or mixture of the verbal and nonverbal, of memory and the immediate, of the ideal and the physical. The absurd, the beguiling effect in a bathtub, an historical incident, a fictional account found in reality, a ritual, any of these may function efficiently as well.

If, practically speaking, the process must yield a unit of discourse, the composer must do more than spark the process and experience the excitement of discovery. In many ways the process is a kind of monologue, a verbal-nonverbal internal monologue of sorts. The discourse unit, the thing invented, is developed for a listener or reader. In fact, the anticipation of an audience may be a stimulus for the inventive process. There are things within the individual which he would express, to persuade others, to move them, to challenge, to refuse, to share, all of the human purposes of human discourse, comfort, loyalty, aspiration, ambition, love, contempt, joy.

What can a composer do to arrive at an assertion or purpose statement or guiding statement? The inventive process has as its object utilitarian expression; the creative process has as its object aesthetic expression. Brewer Ghiselin describes the latter as follows: “it is the process of change, of development, of evolution in the organization of subjective life.” For the inventive composer, his
psychic expression must begin in vagueness, in an attempt to discover his expression below and beyond the habitual expressions of everyday life in what Güsselich has called "a working sea of indiction," "a preverbal intimation."

The inventive process is a process of meditation, introspection, reflection, recollection, fusion, translating, a verbal-nonverbal interior monologue working toward consciousness and expression. The composer must stimulate this process consciously initially, allowing it time to take conscious reflections into the process, examine the germinations emerging, and repeat the process, in each instance attempting to "language" the germinations, the generations, the discoveries. Perhaps the translation from the nonverbal intimation to the language level is the most difficult stage in the process, for the attitudes-feelings-memories-insights-tones-motives-ideas-tenses are there, in the person, in the unconsciousness, available in part to call by the consciousness and in part available to the consciousness-unconsciousness stimulation of the motivational, of the occasion or reason(s) for beginning the inventive activity.

To illustrate, Max Ernst has defined the "mechanism of collage" as "the exploitation of the chance meeting on a non-suitable plane of two mutually distant realities ..." His illustration of the process is informative:

A complete, real thing, with a simple function apparently fixed once and for all (an umbrella), coming suddenly into the presence of another real thing, very different and no less incongruous (a sewing machine) in surroundings where both must feel out of place (in a dissecting table), escapes by this very fact from its simple function and its own identity; through a new relationship its false absolute will be transformed into a different absolute, at once true and poetic: the umbrella and the sewing machine will make love. The mechanism of the process seems to me to be laid bare by this very simple example. Complete transmutation followed by a pure act such as the act of love must necessarily occur every time the given facts make conditions favorable: the pairing of two realities which apparently can not be paired on a plane apparently not suited to them.

Ernst's theory of juxtaposition and activity is predicated on a series of choices or stages in the collage process, which may be adapted by the composer as an inventive process. The stages include selecting two entities (umbrella and sewing machine from the sensory world, sadness and a sycamore tree from the realm of feeling and physical reality, memory of an incident such as the time one was caught cheating in school with an idea from the Ten Commandments or Nichomachean Ethics), placing these two entities in nonnormal or unusual contexts or surroundings (such as placing the feeling of sadness and the sycamore tree at a wedding), and treating or inventing an activity in which the two entities may engage in the new surroundings, such as the sadness and the sycamore at the wedding contemplating the tragic nature of man, the man is born to sorrow refrain. The nucleus of invention is present in the collage process, however artificial the initiation of the process may appear at first. Moreover, the simple example given provides the nucleus for the development of complex experience and thought.

In like manner the composer may use apperception, in the Leibnizian sense of the term, as an approach to the inventive process, for the theme of what is in the person's consciousness and emerging unconsciousness may be apperceived without any conscious effort being made to generate ideas, thoughts, reasoning, images, recollections, etc. Apperception must be distinguished from free association, for the focus in free association is on the entities associated and the sequence, whereas in apperception the composer is making no conscious effort to stimulate either the consciousness or the unconsciousness, but isolates a "perceiver" from his self-hood which perceives what that self-hood generates. In metaphysics apperception has been described as the mind's being "conscious of its consciousness."

In these remarks I have suggested that the commonplace idealistic approach to invention is stifling to our students, that the hard work of thinking and inventing and discovering that goes on before an assertion or purpose statement is written is both prior to and includes the familiar prewriting concept, that courses or sequences or approaches to invention are as various as composers, that artificial models do serve composers but that honest introspection is generative in itself, that the "languageing" of invention offers a vehicle for discovery, that the humanity of man provides the centrality of expressive discourse. If we would restate composition in the curricula of higher education and in the life of our students, we might well begin with the humanistic value of expressive discourse.

NOTES

1 Searching for a Romantic Rhetoric, A Symposium in Rhetoric, edited by Dean Bishop and others (Denton, Texas: Texas Woman's University Print Shop, 1975), p. 8.
7 Gisselin, p. 66.
8 From Webster's New World Dictionary.

A CAVEAT FOR EDUCATORS

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East Carolina University

On the surface, CCCC's recent affirmation that students have the "right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nuture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style ..." might seem to be a landmark in progressive education. It bears the stamp of good will, equality, democracy in education, and that euphoria-inducing quality of progress. But in a time in which "bonehead English" is becoming a newsworthy item to the public at large (CBS News devoted some space to it, as well as Time and various newspapers), and in a time that is (perhaps rightly) being accused of "televising" youth into near illiteracy, the CCCC statement deserves reconsideration. Yet on the surface that statement seems to have aroused hardly a whiff of controversy the CCCC anticipated (perhaps eagerly). After all, who would deny the right of the Bostonian to tell the parking attendant to "pahk the caht"? Who would deny the Alabamian his invitation to his departing guests, "Y'all come back now, y'heah?" Who would deny the Cape Hatteras resident-harborman his observation that "hoig toide is at foive o'clock?"

But dialect, at least for the CCCC, includes not only oral communication, but written communication as well. Hence we are asked to accept as perfectly legitimate not merely variations in pronunciation and variations in denotations and connotations of words, but considerable latitude in grammar as well. For "Herbert saw Hermione yesterday," "Herbert seen Hermione" is perfectly suitable; for "Mary's daddy is at home," "Mary daddy home" is a quite legitimate substitute. Since the "deep structure," i.e., "content," supposedly remains the same, communication has taken place and
thus language has fulfilled its function. In fact, however, the deep structure has not necessarily remained the same; since there is no verb, the reader is required to supply his own: "Mary's daddy came home," "Mary's daddy went home," "Mary's daddy hates home," etc. are all conceivable possibilities. Nor is it the only way to misread the sentence. Without the possessive apostrophe and s, it is perfectly justifiable to assume that instead of the implied apostrophe-s, there should be an implied and. Thus, "Mary and daddy are at home" (again, supply your own verb).

The simple and undeniable fact is that "Edited American English" is far more precise than any dialect which tolerates such ambiguities. And the ambiguities assuredly exist, as indeed they do in all language; but to the extent that they can be eliminated, they should. For those who defensively argue that members within a dialect group have no trouble understanding the meaning implicit in something like "Mary daddy home," that may or may not be true. But is it sufficient to be able to communicate only with members of one's own group? EAE does not, in a case like this, depend on implicit meaning; "Mary's daddy is at home" is explicit — therefore more precise, therefore more communicative. The CCCG argument assumes that the superiority of one dialect over another cannot be determined because there is no criteria for establishing that superiority. This is simply not the case. That criteria is the extent to which the dialect fulfills its function, and that function is to communicate. Thus the dialect that communicates more precisely fulfills this function of communication better. The less ambiguity a dialect tolerates and the more precision it allows, the better it is.

The CCCG statement is, in effect, a not so tacit acknowledgement that segments of our population have not even a rudimentary mastery of what has heretofore been called, rightly or wrongly, "standard English." By virtue of that shortcomings, the reasoning seems to go, these students should not, ethically speaking, be undisposed to "standard English"; similarly, pragmatically speaking, they are not permitted to be "standard" grammar presumably has little or nothing to do with the deep structure, and that is all that matters.

The stated and constantly repeated thesis of the statement itself and its defense is that all dialects are equal and equally viable. Paradoxically, the implied thesis of the entire defense is that "standard English," or "Edited American English" is not as viable or at least merits a certain condensation; it is frequently attacked by being associated with such pejorative terms as "polite usage" (p. 12) and "social class etiquette" (p. 10). Equally suggestive is the condensation implied by using quotation marks with such words as "rules," "correctness," and "grammar" (p. 10). Not being bound by the argument that all dialects are equal, this paper makes no apologies for its own use of quotations.

As a point-by-point argument is not within the purview of this paper, perhaps a refutation of what apparently is seen by the CCCG as a central point might indicate the occasional boggy ground that it builds on. Under section VIII, titled "Does Dialect Limit the Ability to Think?" we find these remarks:

All languages are the product of the same instrument, namely, the human brain. It follows that, all languages and all dialects are essentially the same in their deep structure, regardless of how varied the surface structures might be. (This is equal to saying that the human brain is the human brain.) And if these hypotheses are true, then all controversies over dialect will take on a new dimension. (p. 9)

Sadly enough, these hypotheses are not true. Even given the superficial truth that the human brain is the human brain, it simply does not necessarily follow that the product of one human brain, whether language or some other invention, is equal to the product of another human brain. The contrivance that one person develops to overcome a particular problem, gravity let's say, is simply not necessarily equal to the contrivance that another brain develops to overcome the same problem. The product of the Wright brothers was born pregnant and superior to the products of the list of would-be fliers who either preceded them or were contemporaneous.

ous with them. On a more generalized level, a political system (a product of the human brain) which recognizes the rights of its individuals is both different from and superior to another culture's political system, which, for example, uses temporal slavery to support an elite minority. (At least it is superior in an ethical sense, and the CCCG has evinced a concern for ethics.) Thus the logic of the statement above is faulty at two points: first, the product of one human brain is not necessarily equal to the product of another one, and this works on a collective level as well as the individual level; second, even if we grant that the products of two brains are the same, this is not equal to saying that the brains are equal or even similar.

But let us move from the dubious logic of what the CCCG statement says per se to its equally dubious implications. First, there are some across-the-board means to consider concerning the student's own welfare. Assuming that the American educational community were to accept this new standard, or non-standard, is it even remotely realistic to assume that the non-educational establishment will? For example, if a student has had his English taught to him on this new basis in both high school and college, what happens when he begins writing letters for jobs, and the prospective employer finds him (to the employer's thinking) semi-literate? Should the student have consulted an English teacher who would translate his letter into "standard English"? One certainly hopes not, since doing so would be depriving the student of his linguistic heritage. Or what if that student does get a job that requires some written verbal skills, and he is found by the employer to be unequal to the task? He may languish in the job, feel uncomfortable in it, or be demoted or even fired. And who might this student justifiably hold accountable? The very institution that saw itself acting for his benefit. In short, convincing educators that the new standard is viable would be a Herculean task; convincing businessmen, an impossible one. Then too, we are still left with the problem of the student who claims that he has been ill-prepared by his educational system — a claim difficult to deny.

Given the new dialectal standard, it might be instructive to examine its logical extension. If no standards exist with regard to grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sometimes even syntax, the next ineluctable step would be to eliminate any kind of standard in what goes under the rubric of "content" on the grounds that it deprives a student of his intellectual freedom — his freedom to interpret, say, "Dover Beach" as a poem about a sea gull. If we cannot impose certain criteria or, to use the more pejorative term, "standards" on the structure of his writing, by what right do we impose any criteria on what he says? How can we recommend that he not speak or write only in generalities? By what right do we suggest that he use facts, details, and examples to support his point of view? Obviously we are not justified in imposing our conception of logic on a student, for how can we say that something in a student's paper is illogical when it is abundantly clear to him? By no means does this sentence argue that it is the student's contention that he wanted to be vague, if he places a premium on vagueness? In effect, it would be hypocritical to denounce "grammatical" standards unless we denounced "content" standards as well. But the latter would not be freedom of thought, but freedom from thought.

The CCCG statement is an egregious example of misplaced liberalism. Though standards in a progressive society are highly malleable, there is still a place for them; at least this should be the case in education. One does not eradicate a problem (the student who writes "Mary daddy home" has a problem) by eradicating the standard designed to combat it. Indeed, one might justifiably wonder what ethical standard has been transgressed in asking a student to be knowledgeable in more than his own dialect? Certainly at the college/university level, if that two-year or especially four-year education is to amount to anything, the student must be exposed to and cognizant of stimuli not found in his immediate home environment. It may or may not be true that most Americans speak only a single language more or less, but it certainly would be regrettable only to be aware of our inherited dialects.

Finally, it should not be inferred that those who object to parts or the whole of the CCCG statement are all stodgy obscurantists. The statement itself correctly reiterates the Heraclitean idea of change.
But in the first place, there is no real reason for us to assume that students with a college education should not have a working knowledge of two dialects (especially if their inherited dialects differ from EAE); secondly, as the statement also makes clear, change will come regardless of some teachers’ efforts to stop it—acknowledged. So why not let it come naturally?

NOTES

1Committee on CCC Language Statement, “Students’ Right To Their Own Language,” College Composition and Communication, 25 (Fall, 1974), 6. Subsequent references will be given by page numbers in the text.

A “NEWS” APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH PAPER

Elaine K. Ginsberg
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One of the English instructor’s most persistent problems is devising interesting and challenging subjects for the research paper which many colleges include as one of the requirements of the freshman composition course. Obviously one simple solution is to say to the students, “Write about anything you want to.” Under the best conditions the students will learn how to choose and narrow a topic, how to use the library, and how to find community and other primary resources. The experienced teacher knows, however, that this approach often brings disaster; with little control over the topics that the students choose, the instructor will receive hand-me-downs from older brothers, re-worked high school papers, and similar abominations along with a few serious and original efforts. A solution at the opposite extreme is what is sometimes called the “controlled” research paper or the casebook approach. Using the same primary work and the same set of essays about that work, the entire class writes research papers on a series of related topics drawing on those sources alone. The instructor is then assured that the resulting papers are the students’ own work and can easily ascertain whether the secondary sources have been legitimately cited. The students learn some of the techniques of research—note-taking, paraphrase, and citation—although other skills, such as using the library, have to be taught by other means. The major disadvantage of this solution is the resulting boredom for the instructor and the strong possibility that the twenty-fifth paper on the same subject may not be graded as objectively as the first.

Having tried and been dissatisfied with both of these approaches, last year I discovered a solution which successfully solved some of the problems of each and at the same time provided some valuable side benefits. About midway through the semester I had each student purchase one issue of the Sunday edition of the New York Times. The papers were ordered from a local dealer and were delivered to the class at a cost of one dollar per student.

Our first class activity involved dividing the class into groups, each of which had the responsibility of thoroughly examining one or two sections of the newspaper. Their assignment was to develop a list of possible research topics suggested by and related to the articles in their section of the Times. The possibilities were extensive, including current events, science, education, sports, business, advertising, entertainment, and the arts. I collected each group’s list and before the next class mimeographed all of the possible research topics. We spent the next class period discussing the merits of these suggestions, narrowing some, expanding others, and discarding those which were entirely unsatisfactory. Our next activity involved working out, as a class, the process by which several of the acceptable topics could be researched, including a consideration of both primary and secondary sources. For example, for one subject dealing with radio advertising the class designed a questionnaire which might be distributed to students on campus asking them about their listening habits, program preferences, and buying patterns. A topic concerned with the air pollution caused by auto exhausts raised the problem of prejudiced and unprejudiced sources and the evaluation of material produced by special interest groups.

The newspaper provided articles for practice in summarizing and note-taking. For this assignment the students chose articles of reasonable length which interested them and used these as the first source for their research papers. Since we had all our own copies of the articles, we could all evaluate the adequacy of the summaries. In the process we also discussed the differences between summary, paraphrase, and quotation, and when each is appropriate. The next step was to find in the library a second article in another newspaper or in a magazine on the same subject and to write a “mini” research paper using the two sources. This assignment introduced footnote conventions, footnote form, and bibliography form, in addition to providing further practice in summary, paraphrase, and the use of quotations.

At this point the students were ready to proceed independently in their research on individual subjects and in the writing of their papers. The resulting products dealt with topics as diverse as proposed changes in the Olympics eligibility rules and the latest theory about the cause of cancer. What is more important, all the papers were original efforts produced by students who were truly interested in the subjects they chose. Thus, using the newspaper combined the advantages of the controlled research paper with the advantages of the free choice assignment.

As a bonus, our copies of the Sunday Times provided some valuable additional class activities. The advertisements led us naturally to a discussion of persuasive techniques and audience. The headlines and the classified advertisements provided some entertaining exercises as we tested our abilities at saying as much as possible in as few words as possible. The ads, incidentally, caused some students to seriously rethink their career plans. The style and the content of the long expository essays in the magazine section were subjects for class discussion on several days. All in all, this one issue of the Sunday New York Times proved to be a valuable teaching aid and, at one dollar per student, a “bargain” as a textbook.

THOSE FRESHMAN ENGLISH BLUES

Andrea A. Lunsford
Ohio State University

Several weeks ago, I woke up humming a song I had been singing in a dream. Although the tune was the old and familiar “St. Louis Blues,” the words were ironically new:

I hate to see the Fall quarter begin;
I hate to see those freshman themes roll in.
Because grad school has never
Taught me to teach writing.
Got those Freshman English blues...

Chuckling over the vagaries of sleep, I went off to teach my composition class. But later, when my red felt-tip pen kept tapping out the tune and the words, I began to consider them more seriously.

Certainly the issue of TA training, or the lack thereof, is currently being discussed throughout our profession. I have read with interest H. R. Struck’s CCC article, “Wanted: More Writing Courses for Graduate Students,” which recommends detailed stylistic analysis based on categorized frequency counts, and Robbins’ Burling’s recent lament (CCC, October, 1974) that he failed to receive any useful training in writing until he found himself laboring over his dissertation. Also of interest are three articles in the February, 1974 issue of CCC which concentrate on what English Departments and freshman English programs can or should do to ready new graduate students for teaching composition, and James Kimmey’s recent article in PEN (Fall, 1975). Their suggestions (practice in writing, study of theory and methods, simulated class experiences, senior TA counseling, practice grading, and required course work in the history of composition) indicate that some departments do provide at least minimum basic help for TA’s. At Ohio State University, the Director of Freshman English offers many services, including a teaching practicum, a well-stocked composition resources room.
and a Freshman English workshop/retreat, and Edward P.J. Corbett's graduate seminar in rhetoric emphasizes applicable classroom techniques. However, many teachers and graduate students alike seem to feel that, at their very best, the training programs we now have are too often inadequate stop-gap measures or only tentative beginnings toward complete and coherent programs. And at worst, of course, such programs are either ineffectual or non-existent.

As I consider these criticisms, the calls for more and better training, the apparent dearth of such training, and the apparent failure of many departments to become committed to or even interested in such training, what I am struck most forcibly by is that our immediate needs are not being answered by all our discussion and planning, although these are also necessary and desirable processes. Indeed, our proposals for expanded and well-structured programs may well be years away from realization. In the meantime, if we find ourselves in need of more extensive TA training, what can we do besides wait and worry? What should I like to do is suggest some steps that have been taken in this department and that can be taken right now by anyone in any department, from the Director of Freshman English to a member of a policy committee or an individual instructor or TA. (Especially comforting these days, I think, is the fact that none of the suggestions listed below is at all costly or requires the use of credit hours.)

1. **Begin a journal or newsletter.** An inter-staff journal devoted to teaching composition, Ohio State's *Anonteris* is written for and edited primarily by graduate students/TA's. One recent issue provided twenty brief examples of "best teaching techniques" or "problems," reviews of eight frequently-used texts by teachers who had used the books at least twice, and a debate on grading procedures.

2. **Share subscriptions.** Since many TA's can't afford subscriptions to journals, those who do can share the wealth. Copies of *College English, College Composition and Communication*, and *Freshman English News*, for instance, now circulate constantly among our staff. Check-out procedure is easy and efficient; we have not yet lost a copy.

3. **Institute an informal buddy system** that is simple yet pays big dividends. In many programs, if new TA's receive any training in teaching composition at all, that training occurs simultaneously with the TA's first actual teaching. In these situations, especially, experienced TA buddies can provide invaluable help by going over lesson plans, helping with grading the first batch of themes, or just plain listening to problems and frustrations and fears. A buddy system can be informal or completely structured, but, most important, it can be organized and conducted by any group within the department. (At Ohio State, the English Graduate Organization and the Freshman English Policy Committee both provide the lines of communication and structure to organize such a system.) And an informal, on-going, revolving buddy system avoids the charge of merely perpetuating bad teaching which is made against many "apprenticeship" programs.

4. **Teach class sections.** The results are, predictably, both shocking and productive. Since this Department has a video camera, we have been able to have one of our classes taped and then meet in a group to watch the tape, analyze strengths and weaknesses, and hopefully improve teaching. It video tape decks are not available, however, inexpensive cassette recorders may be used with much the same results.

Group grading sessions (everyone marks one essay and then discusses that grading), informal weekly lunch meetings devoted to "the teaching problem of the week," a file of successful class-tested assignments, exchange of supplementary teaching materials, team-teaching for especially difficult lessons or for breaking a class into working groups, and volunteer tutoring are other useful and immediately available methods which may be instituted by anyone in a department. (Some Ohio State composition teachers are currently beginning monthly discussions of important rhetorics published in the last ten years. If successful, these discussions should provide more complete theoretical groundwork from which we may teach.)

Like many official departmental programs, such instant efforts to provide practice and training in the teaching of writing may be only stop-gap or tentative ones, but if English departments want or need to expand their training programs, they might consider beginning right now by formalizing and elaborating on precisely such informal and voluntary activities. (Casual discussion groups, for instance, can easily be parlayed into monthly workshops guided by experienced senior TAs and faculty. Or a loose system of learning journals and materials can be formalized into a complete resources room for teachers.) On the other hand, if English departments are not currently providing as much practice and theory in rhetoric and its teaching as we feel we need, there is no reason to wring our hands and lament. More constructively, while we wait for programs to be instituted and courses to be approved, we can start to prescribe our own cure for those Freshman English Blues.

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