FRESHMAN ENGLISH: AN AMERICAN RITE OF PASSAGE*

James L. Kinneavy
The University of Texas at Austin

In an irresponsible moment last summer I gave Forrest Burt, our section chairman, a title which reflected a dichotomy between two movements which I saw in some Freshman English programs — on the one hand the use of specialized sections devoted to training the incipient engineer or social scientist to write the kind of papers he or she would have to write in undergraduate courses, a movement I labeled "the professionalization of freshman English," and on the other hand an emphasis on the individuality of the student typified by such approaches as those of Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, or Lou Klette. Curiously, for reasons which I hope to develop, I now see both tendencies as symptoms of a larger unity which can support the apparent discrepancy.

Indeed this larger unity I now see as comprehensive enough to encompass many of the multifaceted functions of freshman English. Freshman English is supremely, for a large sector of the populace, a major rite of passage in our civilization.

I. The General Nature of Rites of Passage.

The classic treatment of rites of passage is Arnold Van Gennep's work, The Rites of Passage, written in 1908.1 The basic thesis of the work is that there are recurrent patterns and sequences of crises in the development of the individual in a given culture. He enumerates these crises differently in different parts of his work, but the most common life crises he lists are: birth, social puberty, marriage, fatherhood or motherhood, advancement to a higher class, occupational specialization, and death.2 There are other secondary or subsidiary crises, such as betrothal, introduction into religion, funerals, etc. But the seven which I mentioned earlier loom large throughout the work.

I might say, at this point, that I do not at all claim to be an expert in anthropology. But I do believe that importations from other disciplines can be extremely fertile in enriching a given study. This borrowing from anthropology into rhetoric is intended to be only an exploratory diagnosis — maybe it will prove useful and maybe it will turn out to be only a delightful but fictional metaphor.

In each of these seven life crises — and in others which he mentions at various times — Van Gennep sees a recurrent sequence, the stages of separation from a previous situation, the transition to a new situation, and the final incorporation into a new situation.3 The sequence and the similarities of the rites of each stage are surprisingly parallel in many cultures.

For reasons which are not very clear, modern translators and editors of Van Gennep point out that the study of these sequences and ritual equivalences has been usually limited to primitive cultures. For example, there have been no systematic applications of the rites of passage to modern, urbanized, mobile, technological America.4 Yet if there is any universal validity to the notions of Van Gennep, they ought to hold in our own society, as well as in the tribes of Australia, South America, eighteenth and nineteenth century American Indians, Africa, etc.

Today about 52% of the graduates of our high schools go on to college. And though American colleges are remarkably dissimilar in some respects, in other respects they are remarkably similar. It is worth examining what happens to this large sector of the populace from an anthropological point of view.

II. The College, Freshman, and Freshman English Experience from an Anthropological Point of View.

What makes this investigation all the more interesting from an anthropological point of view is that the college experience in America embodies three of the seven basic life crises enumerated by Van Gennep: social puberty, advancement to a higher class, and occupational specialization. This is a significant concurrence. Now it is true that, from the viewpoint of Van Gennep, the college experience is only a transition (not a basic separation or a basic incorporation), yet it is longer than most of the basic seven crises. Such long transitions have their own separate sub-separations, sub-transitions, and sub-incorporations, and even sub-sub-separations, etc.

Indeed, it should be immediately clear that the freshman experience is itself a transition (from adolescence to the college experience), preceded by its own separations, and followed by its own incorporations into college life.

Even more specifically, freshman English is the core freshman experience, with its own three stages. There are several reasons for this. Usually it is the most intimate of the freshman's classes, especially in a typical large university. I polled my own class the other day. The 25 students in my class had typically one other small class (defined as having 25 or fewer students). Their other three classes ranged from 50 to 100 or 100 to 250. Some were even larger. In other words, the students could only get to know the class as individuals in two of their classes. The other small class usually was not a discussion class (sometimes it was PE, sometimes math, etc.). Often only in the freshman English class does the student get a chance to discuss with his equals in the rites of passage the problems which beset all of them. My students typically know each other by name and can characterize each other as intelligent, uninform, belligerent, apathetic, conservative, liberal, radical, or whatever. They cannot so characterize their classmates in other courses.

Second, in many colleges and universities — and across the nation as a whole — freshman English is almost the only course one can count on as required. In one very strict sense freshman English is the last residue of 2000 years of the liberal arts tradition — it incorporates, if ever so weakly, grammar (the study of literature, understanding generously), rhetoric, and logic or dialectic. In a very real sense this is the only required initiation into the educational culture of historical Western civilization.

Third, it is often the only class in the freshman and sometimes the college experience that encourages an experiential, personal, expressive reaction to the myriad changes which are going on around the transplanted student. Even the expository papers and the anthologies encourage the examination of areas of existence which are simply not treated in other classes. The freshman English experience, typified by the

*A paper delivered in the "Rhetoric Section" of the South Central Modern Language Association, December 3, 1975, in New Orleans. This version adds several sentences to the original.
current anthologies, is a sampling of a whole cultural heritage. I will return to this facet of freshman English below.

Fourth, the freshman English experience is an ordeal. When I suggested this topic to a friend of mine in anthropology, he agreed that freshman English probably was an important rite of passage to college culture — it certainly was an ordeal, he immediately added. It is an ordeal sometimes because of the ruthless grading practices which make freshman English the filtering screen for future university life. But there is a more serious reason why students view freshman English as an ordeal. Until late adolescence, because of intellectual immaturity, most students are incapable of writing intelligently to an audience about abstract issues. The freshman year in college in the United States corresponds closely to the period of emergence of that intellectual maturity which enables students to engage in the act of writing about expository matters. Vygotsky, Britton, and Piaget generally agree on this period.8

For all of these reasons and others which I can't mention now, the freshman English experience is at the heart of the critical anthropological transition called college life.

III. The Life Cries and Freshman English.

The co-occurrence of the three crises, social puberty, advancement to a higher class, and occupational specialization, gives to the college that quintessential character which Van Gennep calls sacredness.9 There is no doubt that the college universe is, by his definition, a sacred cosmos, distinctly separated from the profane otherness of its surroundings. The characteristics of this sanctuary are revealing and immensely relevant to the themes and discussions of freshman English. Some of the features of this world are separation features, others are transition rites, and others incorporation rituals.

First there are provinces of new responsibility for the student. Often he is financially, in whole or in part, self-reliant. He frequently incurs indebtedness, another characteristic rite of coming maturity.7 The student determines his own hours, often chooses his own food. Nearly always, except for some commuters, there is a change of residence involved and change of residence involves ceremonies of separation, of sometimes owning and operating one's first car, of such details as choice of furniture and paint, etc. My students' themes often reveal the importance these seeming trivia have in their eyes.

Important winds of change swirl around the incoming student. At college, the student's moral and religious backgrounds are often severely questioned. You have undoubtedly received, as I have just this semester, for example, themes on the legalization of heroin and marijuana, on the legalization of prostitution, on the virtues of cohabitation as distinct from marriage, on atheism, etc. Suddenly, in fact, the student has to assume more emotional maturity or be swept into horrid maestrosms. College life, for a large percentage of the populace, is the transition stage from the asexual world to the sexual world. This is the definition Van Gennep gives to the term "social puberty," and he sharply distinguishes social from physiological puberty in a long chapter in which he draws examples from many cultures.8 Whether we approve or not, the permissiveness found on college campuses is rapidly fostering the major transitional role in the transference of students from an asexual to a sexual world. Politically, the student, often from a conservative background, suddenly finds himself in what is frequently a liberal, often a radical environment. He encounters real live Marxists, Maoists, anarchists, neo-Nazis, socialists, many of whom are aggressive and certainly not apologetic. It is a world of different types, nationalities, and ethnic groups. Indians, Arabs, Egyptians, exchange German students and French professors, etc., make the sacred world of the college a very cosmopolitan world.

There are some subsidiary accomplishments. In different cycles, college students manage to isolate dress and hair styles — Van Gennep has a long discussion of transitional hair styles in rites of passage.9 College students, like high school students, speak their own dialect. In fact, Crosby and Estey, in a current text, devote an entire chapter to the curious dialect which students are expected to assume for the freshman English theme.10 Frequently, for the first time, the student is no longer called by his first name but is addressed as Mr. Szidowyi or Mr. Petricelli. The student is swept into identification with a specific institution and has college spirit. At the University of Texas at Austin, for example, where I teach, the regents carefully plan their annual fall pageant — firing a popular dean or president, hiring a president that neither faculty nor students want, spending millions on Chinese walls around the campus while laboratories and classrooms deteriorate, etc. The result of all this is that the student joins the marches, the demonstrations, takes part in the strikes. He or she also cheers for the Beavers or Cavaliers or whatever and learns to hate the Aggies, the Buffaloes, etc.

I hope that these facts, all of which you are familiar with, may now possibly be seen in a new synthesis. The freshman experience, with freshman English at its heart, is a very important, maybe the most important, transitional rite of passage in the lives of many Americans.

We are not just the depository of responsibilities for punctuation, sentence structure, paragraphs and themes, or language skills. We are also responsible, in a way no one else in the educational world is, for the cultural future of our students. We have an anthropological responsibility which we cannot shirk.

We sometimes wonder what theme topics we should assign our students. The atmosphere out students breathe is the most stimulating, exciting, exotic air they will ever breathe. And if we assign dull and irrelevant topics to them we are failing to exploit the most adventurous years of their lives. There is a necessary content to their themes and discussions. Fighting through three concurrent life crises, our students should have no trouble at all finding topics for writing fascinating themes — if we are willing to read.
NOTES

2 Cf., for example, an early listing on p. 3. To several of these a separate chapter is devoted.
3 See pp. vii and 11 and passim.
4 See p. xvii.
6 See pp. 15, 26, 89ff., and passim.
7 On some economic aspects of rites of passage, see pp. 119-120.
8 See especially pp. 65-70.
9 See pp. 166-167.

THE CLEP GENERAL EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH COMPOSITION: WHAT DOES IT REALLY TEST?

Robert S. Rudolph
Richard M. Summers
University of Toledo

"To meet demands from our campus recruiters, our administrators have unilaterally imposed the acceptance of CLEP general exams at the 30th percentile this year." This statement from one of Ron Smith's 1973 survey respondents (Freshman English News, Winter, 1973) precisely represents the way CLEP credit has been imposed on much of our profession across the country. Faculty opinion has often not been solicited. But even where it has, CLEP credit has been instituted hurriedly, sometimes with the hope that its efficacy would be demonstrated later. At The University of Toledo, three years after adopting CLEP credit, the Faculty Senate decided to evaluate the program. The English Department's responsibility in this was to analyze the CLEP General Examination: English Composition. Our findings leave us genuinely shocked.

There are three ways to evaluate the CLEP tests: Do follow-up studies of students who have received such credit, measure the performance of an experimental group on the CLEP test against their performance on some other kind of test or in a course, or analyze the content of the test in relation to the aims and content of the course for which credit is granted.

Our study used the last method. Because of the nature of our curriculum, we found it impossible to get a sufficient amount of data for a reliable follow-up study. We had neither the expertise nor the funds to set up an experimental testing program. But we felt we could analyze the content of the CLEP General Examinations in relation to the aims and content of our Freshman English courses. Our findings are relevant to other programs in which improvement in writing is the primary aim of Freshman English.

This CLEP test contains 100 multiple-choice questions, divided into three nearly equal parts, to be completed in one hour. In the versions we looked at, Part I contains 35 questions. Each asked the student to judge whether underlined portions of a given sentence are standard written English. The possible kinds of errors are in the areas of grammar, usage, word choice, and idiom.

Part II contains another set of 35 separate and unrelated sentences. The student is told that these sentences may contain examples of any of the following weaknesses: faulty diction, verbosity and redundancy, clichés and mixed metaphors, and faulty grammar and sentence structure. (The instructions define each of these terms.) He is to identify which error is present or to indicate (answer "E") that the sentence is acceptable as it stands.

Part III contains 30 separate and unrelated sentences which the student is to reword according to instructions given with each sentence. In his rewording, he is to try to preserve the meaning of the original and then to choose which of five phrases would appear in the correct revision. A simulated example will show what this kind of question is like. Suppose one were asked to begin the following with "The plans": "During the long winter night, the engineer drew the plans for the new office building." On his question booklet or in his mind, the student would make the revision, "The plans for the new office building were drawn up by the engineer during the long winter night." Then he would scan down the list of phrases (A "night, the engineer", B "plans during," etc.) for the correct phrase (in this case, B "were drawn by the engineer").

(Another type of question that may occur in place of one of these three parts of the test asks the student to choose which of five phrasings of an original sentence or sentence part produces the smoothest and least ambiguous statement. Neither version of the test on which our findings are based contains this type. Nevertheless, we feel our findings are valid for all versions since Walter Shea of the Educational Testing Service assures us that different versions of the test are comparable in coverage.)

Even from a cursory description of the test, certain emphases emerge. The test stresses knowledge of the conventions of standard written English and the ability to recognize certain stylistic problems and to reword sentences without regard to the result of effect on paragraph coherence or emphasis within the paragraph.

To pin down more precisely what is covered by the examination and to find the proportions of emphasis in it, we analyzed each possible answer for every question to see what is involved in selecting the right answer and rejecting the wrong ones. In this way, we hoped to arrive at a complete inventory of the knowledge and skills covered by the test. Our method can be illustrated by the following simulation of the kind of question found in Part I. Again, the student is to judge whether any of the underlined segments of the sentence contains an error in standard written English:

A While working on an experiment, the sulfuric acid, which had been temporarily placed in a test tube, spilled on the scientist's hand.
B While working on an experiment, the sulfuric acid, which had been temporarily placed in a test tube, spilled on the scientist's hand.
C While working on an experiment, the sulfuric acid, which had been temporarily placed in a test tube, spilled on the scientist's hand.
D While working on an experiment, the sulfuric acid, which had been temporarily placed in a test tube, spilled on the scientist's hand.
E — no error.

Instead of merely concentrating on the knowledge involved in seeing that "A" contains an error, we assumed that the test also examines one's knowledge of the other items. Thus, we would classify "A", "B", and "D" under the heading, Knowledge of Standard Usage, on the grounds that they require the ability to recognize correct punctuation and dangling modifiers. "C" would be classified under the heading, Knowledge of English Idiom. Our conclusion would be that in this question the knowledge of standard usage is tested three times and the knowledge of English idiom once. (In our findings, we have used the term 'skill units' to refer to a single instance when a student must use a certain kind of skill or knowledge. So we would say that this question contains three skill units under Knowledge of Standard Usage, and one under Knowledge of English Idiom.)

This method enabled us to determine with some exactness what is covered by the test. Almost one-third of the skill units
(30.3%) fall into the broad category of Knowledge of Standard English Grammar, Usage, Word Choice, and Idiom. (These are mostly "correct" answers from Part I which could not be more narrowly analyzed.) A little more than one-fifth of the units (22.4%) involve the Ability to Detect Verbosity, Redundancy, Clichés, and Mixed Metaphors. Another one-fifth (21.1%) fall under Knowledge of English Grammar. The remaining one-fourth fall into three separate categories: Ability to Detect a Lack of Clarity in Diction (11.7%), Knowledge of Standard Usage (10.4%), and Knowledge of English Idiom (4.1%).

In other words, almost four-fifths of the emphasis in this examination is on one's knowledge of standard written English. If one knows how to use punctuation marks, can recognize number agreement problems, can handle elementary sentence transformations like active to passive and direct to indirect discourse, has a fair vocabulary and some feeling for English idiom, he should do well on the CLEP General Examination: English Composition.

The question remains, however, whether such a limited test provides a legitimate basis for granting credit for Freshman English courses which aim to improve writing ability. For while a knowledge of standard written English and the ability to detect certain kinds of stylistic infelicities are important in such courses, students enrolled there are expected to practice and demonstrate competence in other skills as well: the ability to choose a workable subject, construct a good thesis, develop an appropriate strategy, generate a logical plan, develop ideas sufficiently, write coherently, etc. Performing well on the CLEP General Examination, then, simply means that a person can be granted credit for having certain skills in which he is never asked to demonstrate competence. To us, this does not seem a legitimate basis for granting such credit.

In light of these findings, those of us concerned with college composition should either have equivalency credit based on this CLEP test abolished at our institutions or—if that is a hopeless battle— require the student to pass an essay test before being awarded credit. Above all, the present situation should not be allowed to continue.

### COMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE IN RURAL AMERICA

R. W. Reising
Pembroke State University
Ralph J. Hills, Jr.
Atlanta Junior College

Composition as generally taught in the United States has little relevance to the needs of rural students. This weakness we attribute to the nature of the educational background of composition teachers which predisposes them to favor nonghetto urban students and priorities.

Comp teachers are trained in colleges or universities whose values are those of the non-ghetto urban centers which house them or those of the urban centers which the colleges or universities have consciously chosen to emulate. At these institutions, they gain mastery of the intricacies not only of linguistics, education, writing, and literature, but also of the urban manners and mind-sets which historically have marked the educated American. They depart academically and socially from the rural centers, as well as patrons of symphonies, art galleries, theaters, museums, restaurants, and movies.

It follows that students experienced in or exposed to nonghetto urban life will have fewer difficulties than will rural students when confronting their composition teachers. They share with those teachers a background and a set of values rooted in the metropolitan. These students bring to the university or college sensibilities and proclivities destined to serve them well. Nurtured in the aggressive montage of city life, urban students can "dig" the premises and styles of the thirty-second commercial or the "medium cool" of John Chancellor, the form and content of Playboy and Rolling Stone, Ms. and Mademoiselle, The East Village Other, and The Great Speckled Bird. They "dig" all three of the Browns—Jimmy, James, and Charlie; to them, Robert Redford, Roberta Flack, and Al Pacino are "very heavy" indeed.

Not so rural students, who are neither urban-centered nor urban-sensitive. Generally, they are not aggressive in style or critical in stance. Unlike their fellow nonghetto urban students, they probably have not seen a live symphony, a professional theater production, a rock concert, or a psychedelic light show—perhaps not even a building with size and equipment enough to house one. Neither have they eaten foods other than those of their own regional or ethnic cultures. Moreover, they probably lack access to reasonably useful libraries or to any bookstores or newsstands at all. Their intellectual and cultural world is essentially that of their fundamentalist religious beliefs. To top it all, they are probably self-deprecating or even have a sense of inferiority in the face of the mainstream or national culture.

But instead of understanding from their comp teachers, rural students commonly receive indictments such as "unteachable," "indifferent," and "They can't write, think or appreciate." The best they can hope for is sympathy throughout the semester and a D (for disadvantaged) at the end of it.

Yet we maintain that these "weaknesses," as perceived from the urban viewpoint, quickly become strengths when seen from a shifted perspective; that, rather than disadvantaged, these students are simply different; and that when approached and appreciated in their own contexts, they quickly become exciting and able students. We maintain, also, that it is the comp teachers, rather than the students themselves, who are too often disadvantaged by urban biases and popular distortions of rural life.

Far from being recent refugees from Dogpatch or Mayberry, rural students bring to the classroom many advantages which composition teachers can exploit if they will take time to find out what they are. Rural America traditionally provides a strong sense of family in an environment defined by stability rather than flux, a sense of security more practical than pastoral. Rural life provides, too, for a distinct sense of place, a conviction that, despite Thomas Wolfe's cry to the contrary, one can go home again, any time. And this feeling for place, combined with the presence of an extended family, provides these students with a personal history, a sense of continuity which nurtures identity and emphasizes human interdependence. The oral traditions which are both the chronicle and the celebration of their lifestyle permit them a lifetime's experience of the power of the word: not only does the word describe community, far more important, it also continually creates community.

Historically, in the more densely populated areas of New England, the town meeting served as a forum for townspeople to exchange information and to debate policy. But elsewhere, and certainly in the South, people more isolated from one another gathered originally for even more serious, more social purposes. Thus, while analytical and argumentative modes of discourse have pursued urbanities through the centuries, the rural have developed, and have been developed by, narrative modes. The storytelling mode, more sympathetic as it is to the mythic, provides simultaneously for
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unique personal testimony and for a reassessment of heritage; the word truly affirms both identity and community in rural America.

Despite evidence that these traditions persist in rural America, there are still many academicians who would have us denigrate the potential of rural students to learn in the urban-oriented university, particularly in its comp classrooms. Preferring to limit the rich alternatives of language study to those students who enter the classroom speaking and writing "correct" Edited American English, these academicians would have us conduct slum city, pinchpenny, and finals, ed, ing drills for students who can amen-punctuate the rhetorical splendors of the fundamentalist preacher, or dance the National American or Spanish-American language rhythms, or spin a tale a yard long, or even, in some cases, speak in tongues. Small wonder rural students aren't much taken by English 3200!

Indeed, rural students also possess tremendous practical knowledge of the conditions which have given rise to the dominant pastoral themes of classic American letters. The contexts of forest and farm, mountain and swamp, and the hunt and the revival, and of the omnipresent grandparents, we assert, firmly ground these students, and prepare them, in ways which their urban peers can only envy.

Further, rural students who are likely to attend church or shoot doves with the editor of the county weekly or the manager of the local, farm-oriented radio station, are far more likely to realize publication of their comp classroom efforts than are students whose most active connection with the media has been peddelling the San Francisco Chronicle or the Pittsburgh Press in rush-hour traffic. Too, the primary research rural students may perform in their own cultural contexts produces the stuff of state and local archives, material appropriate for regional, denominational, and agricultural magazines, and even for state folkslore magazines and arts council publications.

Clearly, composition teachers who have made the lessons of the non-ghetto urban-oriented university their own find themselves in a peculiar web of circumstances in rural classrooms. And we are certain that, if such teachers want to teach effectively, they must be willing to cultivate an increasing measure of perceptual relativity. To achieve this altered perceptual frame, we are convinced that they must not only assent to but act upon three pedagogical commitments: empathy, enrichment, and experimentation.

Empathy. We refer here to the respect for the individual student's writing which we have all been called to in recent years by Macrorie, Kelly, Dagon, Murray, Friedrich, and Kuester, to name a few voices. These efforts to establish the dominance of the organically human over the socially acceptable in eliciting discourse, to grant primacy to student content rather than to style-book artifice in determining form, demand consideration in any comp classroom. But the concern we emphasize goes still further: it edges over into an active empathy with rural students.

This active empathy means, for instance, that comp teachers must scrutinize freshman readers from rural perspectives. Examining prospective texts, they can quickly determine whether thematic explorations of human problems are confined to the urban ones of alienation and social fragmentation; whether their illustrations stereotype students as bearded men and bra-less young women marching in demonstrations; whether the language they contain offends the public sensibilities of fundamentalist students; whether, in fact, such crucial issues as the impact of industrialization on rural America receive any attention at all. Comp teachers must also ascertain whether multi- and mixed-media texts might not perplex rather than excite students who have never witnessed a light show. And they must question, too, the usefulness of militant social awareness texts for students who have just begun to achieve prestige as the first members of their families to attend college.

This commitment to active empathy makes still more direct demands on comp teachers. They must be as ready to acquire themselves with the songs of Merle Haggard as they were the name of Shakespeare, and as willing to expend the same energy on learning to recognize the names of current NASCAR heroes as they did to recognize the names of the famous Italian film directors. These are minimal efforts. We assert that instructors of rural students must become students of rural life, values, and expression in all their complexity. These instructors must, in effect, become students of rural students.

Enrichment. As the bearers of the dominant urban culture, comp teachers, along with their colleagues in other disciplines, have a responsibility to help make the forms of that culture available to rural students. But the stance taken in providing the "cultural enrichment" of the guest symphony, theater troupe, or lecture should invite and encourage, rather than demand, student attendance. Just as no one forces the urbanite into the art museum or the opera house, so no one should browbeat the rural student to a chamber concert or a Bergman festival.

The implications for comp teachers as the dominant culture bearers, as one of the few connections the student may have with the mainstream culture, go deeper yet. In addition to concerning themselves seriously with the implications for language study and use outlined in "Students' Right to Their Own Language,"2 approved in 1974 by the Conference on College Composition and Communication, comp teachers must consider, questions of form and value as well. We suggest that they begin with the immediate traditions and milieu of the rural student and then make connections outward to the wider traditions of the West. Comp teachers have been schooled in recent years to the value of proceeding from the Beatles to Shakespeare. We propose that they equip themselves to move from "Lightnin'" Hopkins to the Beatles to Shakespeare.

In attempting to teach analysis and argument, they must also recognize that students in rural America, secure in a primary, unreflective group identity, can and will begin to adopt a reflective attitude toward that identity only if approached in a totally unthreatening manner. Obviously, rural students who assert that "God speaks Hebrew" are more likely to respond to a discussion of attitudes reflected in local proverbs and folk beliefs than they are to discussion of an essay on the underground church. Similarly, if comp teachers hope to lead them toward media literacy, there is every reason indeed to begin with their minimal visual experiences, with television programs that they actually watch, rather than with the Norm McLaren 'shorts' which were staple fare at the Graduate English Society's annual film festival. In brief, comp teachers in rural classrooms must stand ready to enrich by humbly offering more and different riches to students already bountifully endowed.

Experimentation. In a recent issue of Freshman English News, Joseph J. Compro is describes the cyclic tendencies of comp teaching. He indicates that at midpoint of the current decade, there exists a "rage for order" one-hundred and eighty degrees away from that "romantic agony" which typified the sixties. Yet, as Compro notes, the validity of any approach depends entirely upon whether or not it helps a given group of students "discover both something to say and an effective way to say it."2

Compro's sentiments are ours, too. Comp teaching anywhere — and especially in rural areas — is successful only when it moves the students to crystallize, organize, and record their thoughts. Because rural students are not urban kids, because their heads are and have been in different places, comp teachers working with them must be sensitive not to the cycles discernible on a national level, but to the possibilities latent in a particular situation. Experimentation,
we maintain, must be as integral a part of the pedagogy of rural America as are the students found there. Without a flair for and a commitment to it, without a desire for self-improvement as well as student improvement, comp teachers risk insanity or ineffectiveness, maybe both. Complacency or a conviction that the way has already been found is obviously ridiculous; too little is known about the composing process in any setting, and especially the rural, to make either position defensible.

By way of illustration, one experiment with an oral base promises unusually rewarding results for rurally located comp teachers. In Rabin, Georgia, students participating in the Flossfire project have compiled and published two anthologies of the folklore and folk-life of the Southern Appalachian. By working on the project, they have learned English in its simplest form, "communication—reaching out and touching people with words, sounds, and visual images." They have doubtless learned more from their work in photography, text editing, lay-out, make-up, correspondence, cover and art design, fund raising, public speaking, typing, retailing, and advertising than, in the words of Project Director Eliot Wigginton, "in any other curriculum I could design."

Terry Allen, the creative writer who has worked with Indian students and teachers under BIA auspices, probably is in her teaching from the personal and familiar, particularly with materials and thoughts gathered through the five senses. She notes: "These students, many of whom have been growing up close to animals and nature and been immersed in the harsh realities of reservation life, almost regularly recall images and experience from earlier childhood that become charged with universal truths. . . . The classroom is soon filled with self-aware, confident persons who are writing and being read with respect."

While college and university teaching staffs have been debating the merits of everything from casebooks to encounter groups, from transformational grammars to programmed instruction, projects like Flossfire and the BIA effort have been training skilled researchers and publishing worthy writers in great numbers. What does it say about our own professional orientations and expectations when we have been so thoroughly outstripped by the eminently sensible and even rather "traditional" experiments of persons working with secondary school and even primary school students? What do both oral based projects teach us about our own commitment to experimentation? What do they tell us about our priorities?

The first obvious conclusion is that we should be rethinking, rather than a concern for self-aggrandizement. We should recognize, further, that experimentation and innovation mean evolving techniques with our students rather than subjecting them to the rigors of particular methodologies of which we may be personally enamored. Projects such as those described above thrive without concern concerning themselves with varieties of modular scheduling, systems theory, behavioral objectives, or any of the other extremely important, but pedagogically peripheral, administrative matters that are currently popular. Most important, both call our attention to the inescapable and inescapable responsibility of all writing teachers: helping students become more effective and appreciative citizens of various worlds of discourse.

Far from being marginal assets in higher education, rural students bring unique vitality to the classroom. The institution which cannot or will not welcome them is the weaker for their absence.

NOTES


DISCIPLINED CREATIVITY VS. BACK TO BASICS: THE DESTRUCTIVE "VS."*

Marie Jean Lederman
Baruch College, CUNY

Today's panel topic is "Disciplined Creativity Vs. Back to Basics." There are three points which I would like to make:

1) "Creativity" has become a dirty word in educational circles, and it deserves a better fate. There is nothing pornographic about creativity.

2) While I would argue that creativity is basic, I deplore and deny the concept of V/s. in the title of this panel, there is no inherent contradiction between the concepts of creativity and the other basics.

3) While it is true that our students are learning better and better how to write worse and worse, I don't believe that we are going to discover the reasons for this phenomenon so long as we focus on this particular V/s.

The incantation "Back to Basics" has gained great popularity in the media these past few years. When a major New York department store advertises in The New York Times "Back-to-Basics" Dressing for Sizes 14½ to 26½ and 36 to 46, we know that "Back to Basics" has arrived. After all, it sells, that is the ultimate American test. Our newspapers, popular periodicals and professional journals agree that "Basics" is the wave of the future; certainly, "Back to Basics" has been selling well in educational circles. This movement asserts that if we would only return to teaching the "basics," our troubles would disappear: our students would be able—magically—to read, write, and compute as they did in what has now become our common mythological past. Several things trouble me about the "Back to Basics" movement, not the least of which is the fear that, to quote H. L. Mencken, "For every human problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong." When we talk about writing, "Back to Basics" usually refers to grammar, usage, sentence structure, punctuation, and spelling. In Mencken's words, this indicates a solution which is both simple and neat. To my mind, what is wrong with this solution is that it rests on two rather rocky assumptions.

The first assumption is that English teachers have been systematically ignoring these basics and have not been teaching and evaluating such things as grammar, sentence structure, spelling and the like, that they have, in fact, been indicating to their students that these skills are unimportant. However, in my own experience as a teacher and an evaluator of English teachers at Baruch College at City University of New York, this is not the case. No less than in the past, teachers give formal lessons in grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and, to a lesser extent, spelling. The papers which I see graded are, if anything, overcorrected. No error

*Talk given at NCTE meeting in Chicago, November 26, 1976.
of any kind is left un-red-pencilled or un-green-pencilled. English teachers in my college cannot "return" to these basics; we have never left them.

The second — and allied — assumption of the "Back to Basics" movement is that English teachers have been fostering a notion of "creativity" in our students by encouraging them to write reams of shapeless material, telling them that all expressions of self are significant, all utterances equally valid. In short, we have been encouraging our students to "let it all hang out" linguistically.

This second is a widespread assumption in the professional literature. In an interesting article in College Composition and Communication in February, 1976, Glen Matott makes the claim that "The modern trend in teaching composition is characterized by a desire to assist the student toward self-awareness and self-expression. In the abstract, these are admirable goals and ones which are recognized as legitimate even by teachers who do not have the new orientation. However, self-expression —creativity— is the usual term — is now an end in itself."

My own perception is that it just isn't so; we have neither abandoned teaching the "basics" nor have we been pushing the notion of creativity as an end in itself. I decided that it would be interesting to test my perceptions against the perceptions of my students, so I asked students in four classes to fill out a questionnaire which I devised. I administered it to my three Freshman Composition classes and my literature class, in which we had not been discussing student writing. Eighty-two students in all responded. I wanted to find out my students' priorities when confronted with a purposely jumbled list of writing abilities. In addition to asking them to rank their own order of importance this list of abilities in writing, I asked them to write brief responses explaining why they had made the choices that they had made. I wanted to know, for example, what they perceived the relationship to be between those items which they ranked as the most important and those which they ranked as the least important. I wanted to know if they thought that the items which they ranked at the bottom of their list were comparatively less important or not important at all.

Would they pick the "creative" abilities and reject those abilities prized by the "Back to Basics" movement? If this was a generation of students who had been taught to "let it all hang out" linguistically, then they would tell me that creativity and the imaginative use of language were most important and such things as sentence structure, verb forms, punctuation, and spelling were either less important or, in fact, totally unimportant. Right?

Absolutely wrong. The responses of the vast majority of my students indicated that they thought that all of the abilities which I had listed were important. In fact, 66 out of 82 students said that none of the items could be omitted. What of the 16 students who indicated that there were items which should have been omitted because they were not important to good writing. Did these 16 students agree that spelling, sentence structure, verb forms, and punctuation are unimportant?

Hardly. In fact, only one of these 16 students responded by saying that a writer's creativity is hampered by paying attention to such things as sentence structure, verbs, etc. Only that single student out of 82 made the "let it all hang out" statement. About the other 15 students? What abilities would they have omitted?

Five of the students would have omitted (1) "using humor where appropriate. " As you can see by the average score for this item, this was an ability which many students saw as being of relatively little importance. Either they couldn't see the value of utilizing humor in writing or they believed that their English teachers couldn't. As one student wrote, "Through literature and writing courses I have learned that English teachers are rarely in a humorous mood; it usually works to one's disadvantage to include humor even where appropriate."

Four other students out of the 16 listed (R) "finding and maintaining a natural voice." This too, as you can see by the average score, was listed as rather unimportant by most students. In general, these students either did not understand what I meant by a "natural voice" or, if they did understand, couldn't see what it had to do with good writing, at least the writing which they were being asked to do at school. One perceptive student wrote, "Maintaining a natural voice is dependent on what you're trying to relay in your paper. If you're writing a Graduate Thesis a natural voice is not appropriate." (There's a student who knows something about graduate education in this country.)

So of the 16 students thought that unimportant abilities in writing were utilizing humor and finding a natural voice. The other 7 students who would have omitted abilities on this list would have omitted:

(M) using anecdotes
(G) having a basic attitude toward your subject
(L) relating material to your own experiences
(P) getting a creative and exciting idea

These responses tell me that, far from having been brainwashed in the direction of creativity, my students feel great constraints to keep it all hanging together — and hanging inside, not out. Expression of the self? They seem scared to death of it. They seem to have an instinctive suspicion of "creativity."

Unfortunately, many of my students talked about the Vy's of today's panel. Over and over again in their explanations of why they had ranked some abilities lower than others, students wrote, "It is more important to have an organized paper so that the reader should understand it, than to have a thoroughly imaginative paper, where it can't be understood at all." Students seem to have internalized the Vy's of their English teachers; they believe, at any rate, that teachers look more for errors in form than they look at content. One student asserted, "Most teachers feel content is secondary. They feel that punctuation, grammar, and using correct verb forms makes the paper." Another student, who ranked abilities in punctuation, spelling, sentence structure, very high on the list, wrote that she ranked other abilities lower because "the ones at the bottom of the list tend to have little effect upon the grade one receives on a given essay or composition." At the bottom of this student's list were the abilities which the student believed teachers give little priority to: a natural voice, imaginative language, etc. Always practical, still another student commented about English teachers, "If a paper lacks humor but does not have any spelling errors it is looked at as a better paper than one with creative ideas but every other word spelled wrong."

I do not think, therefore, that we have to return to teaching the "basics" of spelling, punctuation, sentence structure. Most of us have never stopped teaching and evaluating them, and our students know it. (I am not saying, mind you, that our students have learned these basics any more than I'm suggesting that they have learned the place of creativity in writing. That they have not learned either disciplined creativity or the so-called basics accounts for the problems in writing which we see in every set of student compositions at every educational level.

What would I have liked my students to tell me in this questionnaire? I heard my own priorities expressed in very few papers, but it was expressed best in this one:

Without a creative idea, it seems that nothing follows. If the idea can also be exciting, especially when writing expository work, this will give you the energy to carry on through what sometimes can be tedious. Also, if one can feel the work, have an attitude towards it, and relate
it to personal experiences, the paper cannot result in a mere conglomeration of facts; it won't merely function, it will live.

The mechanics are important in good writing in that one has to perceive an audience. The purpose of the writing is to do more than manipulate of verbs, structure, etc. the purpose is defeated. However, one has to start somewhere and the most natural place is within.

"The most natural place is within," the student writes. Yet it is this "within" with which most of my students seem to be most lost. For numbers of students, if they discussed creativity, the natural voice, and the relationship of their own experiences to their writing, they discussed it all rather wistfully — as if these were things which would be good but which were somehow out of their reach. Sometimes students saw this as a result of assigned topics on which they had to write. One optimistic student wrote that "even the worst subject that has to be written about can be fixed up to make the paper more interesting. If the subject is extremely boring, the contrasting of it with something more colorful and interesting may bring the subject into a different light." A more pessimistic student wrote on the same problem that "getting a creative and exciting idea is something that does not always come to one or, as in the case of an assigned topic, may be irrelevant."

If one looks at the choices which my students made in all four classes, one can see clearly their perceptions:

1) organizing your thoughts 3.41
2) developing a thesis statement 6.17
3) developing good introductions 6.43
4) developing logical paragraphs 6.71
5) writing a creative and exciting idea 7.62
6) using correct sentence structure 8.23
7) developing good conclusions 8.90
8) using correct verb forms 10.26
9) using correct punctuation 10.27
10) using specific examples and references 10.44

Far from making the "let it all hang out" statement, these students show strong preferences for ideas, organization of these ideas in a logical manner and in the first ten choices, using correct sentence structure, verb forms, and punctuation.

I am not unhappy at this ranking by my students. Many of them were persuasive as they explained their choices. One wrote, "I selected them both because they are personally important to me and because it seems as though other people's writing is often as unclear as my own." Another wrote, "I agree that in the beginning comes the idea, and the organization of that idea is crucial; I agree with my 66 students who believe that all of these abilities are important, but I am saddened by the awareness that my students have a kind of gut reaction — a distrust for words like "creative," "imaginative," "humor," "anecdote," and "your own experiences." It tells me that some of those qualities which I value in writing are, somehow, not being transmitted to my students as effectively as I am transmitting, and as their English teachers before me have transmitted, the message of the importance of thesis statements, organization, paragraphing, sentence structure, and grammar.

The assumption that in these last years English teachers have fostered "creativity" and neglected the "basics" of writing is simply not so. The problems which our students have in writing have not been caused by our excessive focus on "creativity." Yet this is a popular notion today, when much of our society is in reaction to what we remember as the traumatic atmosphere of the sixties. The word "creativity" has become attached to long hair, unpatched jeans, and pot.

I was teaching at City University in the sixties, teaching Black and Hispanic inner-city young women and men. I remember that a few, a very few, of my colleagues believed that all student utterances were equally valid and that White society shouldn't impose its values (Standard Written English) on the "downrodden poor." But even then most of us, including and especially the Black teachers with whom I worked, believed that this was not so. We knew that Standard English is the language of the majority, of the powerful, if you will, and that if for no other reason than that, we were doing our students a great disservice if we did not help them learn how to use it. And teach it we did — without putting down their first language or dialect. We all knew that Standard Written English was the name of the game of survival in college and in the wider, often unfriendly world waiting out there for our students when they left us.

The majority of us never ignored the "basics" at all. What we attempted to do was to find out why the teaching of our language was failing and how we might succeed better with our students. This led to a reexamination of everything: our reading material, our teaching techniques, our writing assignments, our methods of correcting students' papers and holding conferences with them. All traditions were suspect. We switched back and forth among methods and materials, ultimately rejecting some of the newer ones, replacing them with older ones, moving back and forth selecting and borrowing and experimenting to find methods which worked consistently for us. We were creative, for imposing order out of initial chaos is a creative act — and creativity precedes everything else.

In writing what precedes everything is the creative urge; if "creativity" has become a dirty word in educational circles in the seventies, a really pornographic phrase is "creative urge." For this is perceived as a code phrase meaning the negation of grammar, spelling, sentence structure and punctuation. It is not a negation at all; it stands in relation to these other basics in writing only in that it comes first. Unfortunately, it also stands in relation to the other basics in that it generally isn't there.

Why this is so is interesting. It may be that teachers don't know how to foster the "creative urge" in their students. But I believe it is because most teachers suspect "creativity" and do not believe that it is necessary in the first place. A good example of this is a new syllabus developed for a writing course in my department over this past summer. Because of budgetary cuts our remedial program was dismantled and students were to be placed into what had previously been our "middle level" Freshman English course; there was a need to revise the syllabus. When I read the syllabus in draft form I had to admit that there was little that was overtly objectionable about it. The basic statements and requirements and the skills demanded were those with which none of us could disagree. The suggested texts were not objectionable. Nothing was objectionable about it except the tone in which the document was written. An unspoken assumption was an adversary relationship between "us" and "them."

Nowhere in the document was anything said about helping students to enjoy writing. Nowhere was anything said that indicated that there could—or should—be the least pleasure in the process of learning how to write better. Instead, what came out clearly were all of the negative aspects of the writing experience: concentration on how to avoid "errors," concentration on how to prevent students from conniving us into thinking that they were more verbal than their writing indicated, warnings about not over-grading. There was certainly no mention of the word "creative" or any word which might by any stretch of the imagination be considered as meaning anything like "creative." From that syllabus it is clear that the
only reason students must write is to get out of that course. The only reason teachers must teach the course is that our jobs depend on it. In another, better world, neither the students nor we would be there. From that syllabus it is clear that not a single one of us in these classrooms in Freshman English is there voluntarily; what we share is the same goal: to get out.

What will save us, of course, is that few of us read syllabi and, if we do, most of us manage to misplace them between the first and second weeks of the semester. And I suspect that this is a good thing. I would like to feel that this syllabus reflects the thinking of a few tired and dispirited English teachers working in a hot office in August. Yet I am more inclined to think that it reflects the same thinking as the rest of the "Back to Basics" movement: an emphasis on tasks to avoid "errors," a negative approach to learning how to write.

In this time of increased workload and larger classes, this is a seductive approach. If we believe that students will write better if we drill them in these basics, it follows that we can spend our time in class with workbooks and other drill materials. Homework assignments can be corrected by other students because there will be "right" and "wrong" answers. Fewer essays will need to be assigned, read, discussed. Given the situation of most of us in English classrooms, we are ripe for seduction.

We need to resist. Instead, we need to spend more time figuring out how to reach that part of our students which, unfortunately, much of our society conditions us not to reach—that part of our students which is buried deeply behind a wall created by years of passive television watching and parental, sibling, and peer inhibitions. Every student has within him or her something that needs to be said. Every student has ideas and beliefs which need to be related to the new ideas to which our students are exposed at school. It is finding out how to help our students say these things that is basic to the writing experience and essential to the learning experience. Syllabi and materials must begin with this, but it is just a beginning. Creativity is only the initial impulse for writing; the rest of it, the editing, the rewriting, the proofreading, are all basic to communication. Oscar Wilde (not generally known for his obedience either to conventions or discipline) discussed creativity versus the critical faculty and said, "The antithesis between them is entirely arbitrary. Without the critical faculty, there is no artistic creation at all, worthy of name... No one who does not possess this critical faculty can create anything at all in art."

There is, you see, no "Back to Basics" movement error is in its assumption that our students write poorly because we have not taught the "basics." Quite the contrary. If we have erred on one side it has been to teach and prize the "basics" of sentence structure, grammar and the like and neglect the other—primary—basic, creativity. We must resist the temptation to continue in this error. We must not allow ourselves to be seduced by the easy appeal of "Back to Basics." It is not our answer. Our students will write better as they write more and as we read and discuss their writing; they will write better as they learn how to deal with problems in their own—and each other's—writing. They will write better when they value the importance of writing and realize that while it is a wonderful thing to do, it is not easy for any of us.

The real villains are those who force us into more and more and bigger and bigger classes and tell us that we can teach as well (if not better) as we become more and more "productive." They woo us with the seductive notion that teaching skills in a vacuum, isolated from the act of writing itself—a supremely human endeavor—will teach masses of students to write. The villain is not creativity.

INTRODUCING THEMATIC READING IN FRESHMAN COMPOSITION

Mary Elizabeth Devine
Francis P. Devlin
Salem State College

Using literature with a common theme or subject in freshman composition has obvious advantages, as well as obvious pitfalls. What the thematic approach offers in terms of course unity and in-depth examination of a specific issue may be totally overshadowed if the students remain indifferent to the issue and its ramifications. More than a few composition teachers have found, to their dismay, that a course structured around thematic reading, no matter how appealingly described in the syllabus, can turn into a tiresome routine unless students get involved and interested in the material. Thus when we decided to use literature about war and war-related issues as the reading focus for our Composition II course (the second part of a required two-semester writing sequence for freshmen at Salem State), we were not content to assume that the issues raised by the literature (which included Billy Budd, A Farewell to Arms, All Quiet on the Western Front, Night, The Diary of Anne Frank, and Man in the Glass Booth) or the diversity of the selections would insure student involvement and response. We therefore determined that we needed some way to get the students actively engaged in the issues of the course, before assigning any of the literature to be read. The essential outlines of the technique we devised, described in detail below, can be adapted to almost any composition course which employs thematic reading.

We wanted, first of all, a technique which would not only show the students some of the difficult moral issues raised by war but would also force them to explore their own feelings about such issues. Thus, we constructed the following five situations, each one based on something that actually occurred during World War II or the Vietnam War:


Gerald Ford has been sworn in as President and has announced that one of the first priorities of his administration will be a position dealing with those who resisted the draft or deserted to avoid participating in the Vietnam War. Last week Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird told you he had heard of a commission which will recommend a policy on this issue to him. After considerable debate, the commission narrows its final choice to one of three alternatives: 1) unconditional amnesty; 2) earned re-entry (e.g., returning deserts or draft resisters would be required to work at public service jobs for one to three years); 3) no offer of amnesty to draft resisters or deserters. Approximately 1/2 of the commission supports each alternative. You must choose which of these alternatives you will recommend to the President. Which would you choose? Why?

**Situation II: Time: Late spring, 1945. Place: Washington, D.C.**

Harry S. Truman was sworn in as President on April 12, 1945. The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, but the war in the Pacific continues. President Truman has been briefed on the options open to him for bringing the war against Japan to a conclusion. One option is an invasion of the Japanese mainland. This invasion could cost the lives of 300,000 soldiers on both sides and leave as many as 1,000,000 persons maimed for life. The other option is a new weapon still being developed—the atomic bomb. Since the atomic bomb has never been used before, it is impossible to forecast the short-term or long-range effects accurately. President Truman has asked you, as a senior White House adviser, to recom-
mend to him which course ought to be followed. Which alternative would you choose? Why?

You have served as an officer in the United States Army for fifteen years and now hold the rank of Colonel. Since the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States government has initiated a policy of moving all American citizens of Japanese background out of California and other West Coast areas because of the state of war between the U.S. and Japan; these citizens are to be interned in camps in the interior of the country. Your commanding General has placed you in charge of the logistics of this operation—supervising the evacuation of these citizens from their homes and arranging their transportation to the internment camps. What would your response to this assignment be? What alternatives (e.g., actions you might take) do you have? Which one would you choose? Why?

As a leader of the local branch of the French Underground, you are in charge of organizing and executing any sabotage ordered by the Free French Army (headed by General de Gaulle and based in England). Through your own sources among German soldiers occupying France, you learn that Germany has begun a policy of reprisals for any acts of sabotage by the Underground. Shortly after you learn this, the Underground in a neighboring community assassimates a German officer; in reprisal, the village is demolished and every one of its inhabitants shot on the following morning. On the same day as the reprisals, you receive orders from Free French Army headquarters to blow up a train which will pass through your village during that night. The train will be carrying a large number of German troops to the front, as well as tanks, artillery, guns, and ammunition. Would you blow up the train? What are the reasons for your decision?

As the Commandant of the German Army of occupation, you have the responsibility of evacuating your troops in a retreat ordered by headquarters in Berlin. You have also been ordered to destroy the city, especially the area bordering the harbor, because the harbor could be used by the Allies to bring in an invasion force. The area near the harbor contains two 14th-century cathedrals regarded as important cultural monuments. You are also aware that many of the art treasures removed from the Louvre have been locked in the vaults of these cathedrals for safekeeping. If you order the destruction of the harbor, both the cathedral and the art treasures will be destroyed. Would you order the harbor and surrounding area destroyed? What are the reasons for your decision?

Each situation requires the students to adopt a persona, a character with a specific job, confronted with a significant and difficult choice. The use of a persona has a number of advantages. First, it precludes the students' remaining indifferent to the issue, since they must assume the role of someone with a substantial stake in the situation, someone who cannot avoid making a decision and for whom the consequences of any decision could be severe. Though in one sense complicating the issues for the students, the adoption of a persona at the same time simplifies their task by providing a perspective from which they can approach the problem and by avoiding the general query ("How do you feel about ___?"). which presumes, often incorrectly, that students will automatically relate to serious human issues raised by their reading. Moreover, assuming a persona quickly makes the students see that decisions are not typically made by abstract theorists but by people whose lives provide the context in which certain alternatives become more acceptable than others. Thus, the adoption of a persona also prepares the students to understand the interrelationship of the case and situation which informs most of the literature they will read later in the course.

In constructing the situations in which the personas were placed, we employed the following guidelines: a) Though the situations shared war as a common theme, each had to raise a different war-related issue (for instance, the rights of American citizens in number three and the relative value of artistic treasures in number five). We did not simply vary the personas and leave the dilemma essentially the same. b) Each situation had to offer only a limited number of clear-cut alternatives. c) Each situation had to define clearly the official role and responsibility of the persona. d) Each situation had to provide enough relevant details to allow the persona/student to make an informed choice. e) Each situation had to present the alternatives objectively, without loading the question in favor of any particular choice.

These situations became the basis for two classes and a writing assignment. At the end of the first class of the semester, we distributed descriptions of the situations and divided the class into five groups; each was to deal with a different situation. (Thus, before meeting with their groups, the students had time to think about the situations they had been assigned.) During the next class, the groups met for forty minutes of a fifty-minute period and were given the following suggestions for focusing their discussions:

1) Define the options (alternatives).
2) Consider each option separately. Take notes. What are the issues involved in each option? What are the reasons for accepting or rejecting each option?
3) Review your notes for each option and decide what position your group is going to take.

We also gave each group a ditto master along with instructions for preparing the group's statement about their decision, to be written on the ditto master:

1) State the course of action you are going to follow.
2) In complete sentences, state the reasons for this course of action. Include not only the positive things your course of action will accomplish but also the reasons that the negative aspect(s) of your course are not compelling enough to make you choose another course.

At the end of forty minutes, we collected the stencils, ran them off, and gave each student a copy of the five group statements.

These statements served as topics for an out-of-class writing assignment, due the next meeting, as well as the subject for discussion during the next class. For the writing assignment, the students were instructed to review the responses of the five groups and select the decision with which they most disagreed. (It was even possible to disagree strongly with the decision made by the majority of one's own group.) They were then to write a one-page expansion of their reason for disagreement. The ensuing discussion was lively and intense. Issues which had initially appeared clear-cut to the students no longer seemed so, and they became more sensitive to the ethical dilemma posed in each situation. The students were surprised at how diverse the opinions of the class were on each issue. Some were even disturbed by the discovery that each position could be honorably and validly defended.

The exercise, however, did considerably more than one class period. It opened up to the students in a dramatic way many of the issues that would surface again in subsequent readings. And by forcing the students themselves to think through and defend their own decisions, it exposed many of the clichés and shibboleths that
surround these emotionally charged subjects. Moreover, the concluding phase of the exercise immediately got the students writing about the issues of the course; and since what they wrote was essentially a defense of their own positions, the responses had little of the artificiality and stiltedness which mark so much freshman writing.

As we stated earlier, most composition courses structured around thematic reading could profitably employ the techniques we have described. Once an instructor decides on the focus of the reading, it requires only a little imagination and planning to construct situations which force the students from the very beginning to engage the central issues of the course.

THE COLLEGE BOARD ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAMINATION IN ENGLISH: A BRIEF REVIEW

Sterling Eisminger
Clemson University

In May of 1976, after a year of instruction, some 76,000 high school students took one or more of the nineteen College Board Advanced Placement Examinations. Almost 30,000 students took the AP Examination in English, and of these, 3,159 made a score of 5 (extremely well qualified), 5,553 made a 4 (well qualified), 12,178 made a 3 (qualified), 7,362 made a 2 (possibly qualified), and 1,245 made a 1 (no recommendation). The mean grade for the examination was 3.1.

In the fall of 1976, the Freshman English Committee at Clemson University conducted a poll to determine what credit was being given for a score of 3 on the AP English Examination. This score was chosen because the College Board recommends granting a year of college credit in a given subject for a score of 3 or above. Twenty colleges and universities were polled, and sixteen indicated that some placement credit is given for a 3. Many schools qualified their responses, however, and these comments may be of interest.

University of Alabama: Alabama no longer grants advanced placement on the basis of tests taken before coming to the University of Alabama. "Students who do well on AP, A-Level, or CLEP become eligible to take an essay examination graded by the full-time staff." AP tests are not reviewed.

Auburn University: "A 3 generally qualifies a student for the Honors Freshman English sequence. Upon satisfactory completion of these two courses, a student receives an additional three hours of advanced standing credit." AP tests are reviewed.

University of California, Berkeley: A 3 exempts a student from courses A and 1A. Ten quarter hours of credit are granted. The AP test is not reviewed.

University of Florida: A 3 earns three semester hours credit; a 4 earns six, and a 5 earns nine. There is no review.

University of Georgia: Five hours of credit are awarded for a 3; ten hours are awarded for a 5. The tests are reviewed.

Georgia Institute of Technology: A score of 3 earns credit in English 1001 and 1002 (six quarter hours); for scores of 4 and 5, nine quarter hours credit are given. There is no longer a review of the test.

Harvard University: An individual Advanced Placement score is not given degree credit at Harvard/Radcliffe since credit is granted only in a one-year block (Sophomore Standing) for three or more AP scores of 3 or above. There is no review of the test.

University of Kentucky: "Students with scores of 4 or 5 receive an "A" in Advanced Freshman English and three credits. Students with a 3 receive an "A" in the regular 101 course, but they must take the advanced course." The test is no longer reviewed.

Louisiana State University: "The English Department now accepts a 3 for complete and unqualified credit in Freshman English (six hours credit for English 1001 and 1002). Formerly LSU required a theme of the AP student to verify the acceptability of the 3 score." The test is not reviewed.

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill: A score of 3 is worth three semester hours credit. Scores of 4 and 5 are worth six credit hours. Students who exempt English 1 and 2 may take advanced honors literature courses, several of which emphasize writing skills. There is no review of the test.

North Carolina State University: "Students who score 3 or higher are allowed to enroll in English 112H, which carries credit for both English 111 and 112 for those who make "C" or better. No entering student is automatically given credit in English." There is no review of the test.

Northwestern University: "No credit for a 3 is anticipated after Fall 1977. Perhaps a 4 will earn one unit; two or three units may be awarded for a 5." There is no review of the test.

University of Oregon: Scores of 3, 4, and 5 earn exemption from the two-course writing requirement and earn six hours advanced placement credit. There is no review of the test.

Pennsylvania State University: "A 3 is not a very impressive score. Giving composition credit for what was really knowledge about literature, only serves to perpetuate a misconception in the minds of students, high school teachers, and administrators. There is no review of the test.

University of South Carolina: "Students who earn a 1 or 2 exempt English 101; students who earn a score of 3-5 exempt English 102. Exemptions for 101 may be revoked if satisfactory work is not done on a diagnostic theme." There is no review of the test.

University of Tennessee: "Eight quarter hours credit are given for a 3 only if the student's high school grade point average is at least 3.0 on a scale of 4.0, and he has ACT scores which average 25 on English and the composite." There is no review of the test.

University of Virginia: After academic year 1976/77, no credit will be granted for a 3. Presently, there is no review of the test.

Virginia Polytechnic Institute: It is likely that soon no credit will be granted for a 3. It was not reported whether the test is reviewed.

While a clear majority of schools do grant credit for a score of 3, there does seem to be some discontent with this practice. Three of the twenty schools polled indicated that they will no longer grant credit for a 3 beginning in the fall of 1977. And there seems to be a growing concern about AP scores. Professor James Raymond, Director of Freshman English at the University of Alabama, puts it, "I suspect that a score of 3 doesn't mean much."

There also appears to be some slight dissatisfaction with the fact that the AP essay examinations are tied closely to the reading of literary works even though many Freshman Composition programs require their students to write a much wider range of discourse forms. The two-hour essay portion of a recent AP Examination, for example, required a discussion of Philip Larkin's diction in "Poetry of Departures," an essay drawing on the work of a recognized essayist or novelist on the theme of the conflict created when the will of an individual opposes the will of the majority, and finally a third essay on which the world and the way of life described in a passage reprinted from John Gardner are briefly characterized. Miss Jane Schumann, Associate Program Director for the Educational Testing Service, admits, "The AP Examination is not an English Composition test per se. However, the examination is designed to examine reading and writing skills generally expected of college students at the completion of introductory courses in composition and literature."

Reviewing the AP Examination after it has been scored nationally is less of a problem. Many schools reviewed the tests when they began giving advanced placement credit but
have now discontinued the practice. Only three of the schools polled continue to review the examinations, but many do require a departmentally administered diagnostic theme of AP students. One reason for the curtailment of reviewing is cost: AP Examinations used to be sent to schools without charge, now there is a $5.50 charge per examination booklet. If the University of Michigan, for example, requested all the examination booklets of its 1976 AP candidates, the bill would be over $750. Curiously, the 1973 test booklets are sent without charge to school administrators who wish to review them.

The Clemson poll included only twenty schools. But nationally there are 215 schools which do not offer the assurance of normal action on receipt of a specific grade or score. This may be because no use is ever made of the examination at hand, or it may be because the college requires additional interviews or local tests."

Five schools normally accept a 1 or above for some sort of placement, exemption, and credit, or all of these. Twelve schools accept a 2 or above; 97 accept a 3 or above; 155 accept a 4 or above; and six accept a 5. Those schools accepting a 1 or above are Lake Land College, Illinois; Garden City Community College, Kansas; Mayville State College, North Dakota; Northampton Community College, Pennsylvania; and Alvin Junior College, Texas. Those schools which accept only a 5 are Northwood Institute, Michigan; Carleton College, Minnesota; Northeast Missouri State University, Missouri; Houghton College, New York; Polytechnic Institute of New York; and Grays Harbor College, Washington. The other 1146 schools and the scores they recognize are listed in the College Entrance Examination Board's publication "College Placement and Credit by Examination: 1975.

Clearly then, there is a disparity among colleges and universities in evaluating the credit value of AP scores. To lessen the incongruity, the College Board has conducted validity tests of its own in French, calculus, and physics. A score of 5, according to the Board, is equivalent to an "A+"; 4 is an "A"; 3 is a "B"; 2 is a "C"; and 1 is a "D." These rough equivalents were determined by giving college freshmen who had completed a year's work in physics, for example, the appropriate AP examination. Generally, students who received a 3 on the AP Examination received a "B" or lower in their college course. Testing AP students with college final examinations was not done.

Mr. David A. Harnett, Director of the Program of Advanced Standing at Harvard University, writes concerning the validity of the AP scores:

We have had over twenty-five years of experience with the AP program and have found that the test scores are an extremely accurate index of college level achievement through that procedure. Our experience has shown that the extreme care and rigor that accompanies these grading procedures. In fact, it has always astonished me when I have looked over the CEEB booklet which lists the AP policies for institutions across the country that many institutions peg their AP award scores at such a high level (4 or 5).

Harvard's experience notwithstanding, if a department head or director of Freshman English has doubts about the validity of an AP score, exemptions should be granted tentatively until a departmentally administered examination or theme or both has been given.

NOTES

1. Two schools did not grant permission to cite their policies on advanced placements.

Book Review


"Errors and Expectations is an attempt to be precise about the types of difficulties found in basic writing papers at the outset, and beyond that to demonstrate how the sources of those difficulties can be explained without regard to such pedagogically empty terms as "handicapped" or "disadvantaged." A definition and some background are needed at this point. The author identifies basic writers as students too poorly prepared for college that their "difficulties with the written language seemed of a different order from those of the other group [college bound], as if they had come... from a different country." Her exposure to these students and the complexity of their writing problems came as a result of CUNY's open admissions policy initiated in the Spring of 1970. Enrollment in the city colleges jumped from 174,000 to 266,000, and many of those who produced that increase were basic writers. The examples which form the data on which this book is based, she tells us, are drawn from approximately 4,000 placement essays written by incoming freshmen between 1970 and 1975.

Given the title and the subject of this book, we are not surprised that five of its eight chapters deal with errors: in handwriting and punctuation, syntax, verb forms, tense shifts, pronoun cases, dangling and misplaced modifiers, faulty parallelism, spelling, and vocabulary. The author is fully aware, however, of the kinds of objections which might be raised to her apparent preoccupation with errors. But she argues that for basic writers, "academic writing is a trap, not a way of saying something to someone... but a line that moves haltingly across the page, exposing as it goes all that the writer doesn't know, then passing into the hands of a stranger who reads it with a lawyer's eyes, searching for flaws." Unfortunately, the academic setting only increases the basic writer's preoccupation with error and consequent paralysis of his/her writing efforts.

The author is also fully aware of the positions of contemporary linguists on the arbitrariness of linguistic forms and of the philosophical bases for the 1974 CCC language statement. "When one considers the damage that has been done to students in the name of correct writing," she says, "this effort to redefine error so as to exclude most of the forms that give students trouble in school and to assert the legitimacy of other kinds of English is understandable. Doubtless it is part of a much vaster thrust within this society not only to reduce the penalties for being culturally different but to be enriched by that diversity."

She argues, however, that the whole problem of error, both socially and intellectually, is extremely complex. The basic writer's errors may be traceable to a "number of interacting influences: the generally humiliating encounter with school language, which produces ambivalent feelings about mastery, persuading the child on the one hand that he cannot learn to
read and write, and on the other that he has to; the pleasures of peer and neighborhood talk, where language flows most naturally; the contagion of the media, those hours of TV and radio and movies and ads where standard forms blend with all that is alluring in the society." What surfaces in the writing of these students is a mix of variant and standard forms, "as if students had half-learned two inflectional systems; hypercorrections that belong to no system [and] jut out in unexpected places; idiosyncratic schemes of punctuation and spelling [which] substitute for systems that were never learned and possibly never taught; evasive circumlocutions, syntactical derailments, timid script, and near-guesses for the meaning, if any remains after the student has spent himself on the sheer mechanics of getting something down on paper." The consequence, too often, is confusion and paralysis in the basic writer.

I have given considerable space to the author's defense of her lengthy treatment of errors because hers is no ordinary discussion of this topic. Unlike the material in most of the handbooks on the market today, her discussions of errors are extremely penetrating and consistently informed by the best current scholarship. Basic writers are not stupid or non-verbal or indifferent to succeeding in college, she says. They are beginners who must learn by making mistakes. Applying insights from behavioral psychology, Ms. Shaughnessy discovers, for example, that erratic capitalization may be caused by a student's ignorance of the means for forming certain upper or lower case letters. More generally, because many of these students have done so little writing throughout their educational careers, they may not have mastered the physical act of writing by the time they graduate from high school! She regards traditional efforts to teach basic writers the rules of terminal sentence punctuation as fruitless because basic writers do not understand the units of the grammatical sentence: clauses, phrase, connectives, etc. Once they begin to perceive these, they begin to comprehend just what they are punctuating. Her discussion of syntactic errors is equally enlightened and informed. In writing sentences, she says, students mismanage complexity.

This mismanagement gets explained in different ways. One explanation focuses on what the student has not internalized in the way of language patterns characteristic of written English, another on his unfamiliarity with the composing process, and another on his attitude toward himself within an academic setting. And each of these explanations suggests a pedagogy: the pedagogy that stresses grammar, whether in the abstract or as a series of forms to be generated through practice with sentences, tends to assume that students do not have command of many of the forms required in written English and must therefore learn them through explicit instruction; the pedagogy that stresses process (pre-writing, free writing, composing, re-scanning, proofreading, etc.) tends to minimize the value of grammatical and rhetorical study and assume, rather, that students already "know" the wanted forms but cannot produce them, nor anything resembling their own "voices," until they are encouraged to behave as writers; the pedagogy that stresses the therapeutic value of writing and seeks the affective response to whatever is read or discussed tends to see confidence as central to the writing act and to dismiss concerns with form or process as incidental to the students' discovery of themselves as individuals with points of view, and memories that are worth writing about. A teacher should not have to choose from among these pedagogies, for each addresses but one part of the problem.

And her discussion of the way in which each addresses a part of the problem is a measure of the eclecticism which informs the entire book.

The two chapters which follow those on errors (the first in the book is the introduction) are entitled "Beyond the Sentence" and "Expectations," and in them the author deals with larger organizational and thematic matters. My only objection to this material is that the academic prose model she offers is too much like the five paragraph essay. Perhaps such a paradigm is the best place to begin with basic writers provided that they do not acquire the idea that this is the only organizational paradigm writers use. In the final chapter she offers a skills chart to define areas which need work in any basic writer's papers and four pedagogical perspectives for dealing with each of the skills. They are concerned with goals, methods, and modes of instruction and with their sequencing in any learning program for the basic writer.

What should one say, generally, about this book? Its obvious strengths are its brilliant and penetrating insights into the writing problems of basic writers and a prose style which is rich in metaphors which please and inform. "The territory I am calling basic writing (and that others might call remedial or developmental writing) is still very much of a frontier, unmapped, except for a scattering of impressionistic articles and a few blazed trails that individual teachers propose through their texts. And like the settlers of other frontiers, the teachers who by choice or assignment are heading to this pedagogical West are certain to be carrying many things they will not be needing, that will clog their journey as they get it out of their system. So too, I think, will the teachers discover the need of other things they do not have and will need to fabricate by mother wit out of whatever is at hand."

I have but one criticism and that concerns an assumption underlying the book. There is an implicit suggestion that CUNY and its open admissions policy "discovered" the basic writer. Teachers in the nation's state universities, land grant colleges, and community colleges have known this student for decades. Beginning instructors in the University of Kansas Freshman English program in the early 1950's still fondly remember an essay entitled "The Wolverine." A student's transcription of the first chapter of Victor Calahane's Wild Animals of North America, it began, omitting an important qualification in Calahane's book, "The wolverine [wolverine] is a lonely bad-tempe animal. Its father is a bear and its mother a snuck. And it got progressively worse. This is basic writing. So, basic writers have been around a long time, but seldom have they come to college in the numbers encountered by Ms. Shaughnessy and never, to my knowledge, have their problems been analyzed so keenly and so compassionately as by her.

Errors and Expectations, no matter what your orientation to and familiarity with contemporary composition theory and methodology, is a book not just for teachers of basic writing; it is a book for all teachers of English composition.

Donald C. Stewart  
Kansas State University

ENGLISH TEACHERS: AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

Richard Koch  
University of Iowa

It is clear today that English teachers are involved in an extensive and sometimes bitter controversy. There is wide public concern about the degree of literacy in our society. And there seems to be nearly as wide a feeling that English teachers have failed us and that English as a field has strayed from its rightful place and purpose. There is, for example, the continual suggestion that English is failing its "fundamental" responsibility to teach people to read and write.
Whether or not there is a crisis in literacy in our country is one question, and a very hard one. But I don’t propose to answer that question here. I think there are two narrower questions worth answering in the midst of society’s broader failures. And, I think these narrower questions can add perspective to the overall public dialogue. The first question is: What should be the basic direction of our profession today, whether there is a crisis or not? And the second is: Given that English teachers are not the only participants in the dialogue on our profession, nevertheless what position, if any, should English teachers advocate for our future in their role in the swirl of public discussion?

Given the widespread pressure being brought to bear on elementary, secondary, and university departments of English by legislatures, school boards, and citizens at large, and given the continuing economic crisis in our country, it is not too strong to suggest that these questions concern not just our rightful “interests” but our material and spiritual survival as a profession. I mean to answer the first question, and to thereby imply an answer to the second by taking another look at recent thought and research. There are studies we all know about. But I fear that under the latest flood of criticism, our memories of them may grow vague. And, in any case, we need to turn the light of these studies onto the current debate, and onto this latest crisis in our profession.

In 1969 Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner published *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*, and with that book a great wave in the field of English flowing toward innovation and toward experience-centered approaches to the classroom finished rising and crested into its downward arc. Several old self-declarations in our profession had become inadequate in the face of works like Postman and Weingartner’s. Among these was our sense of ourselves as keepers of the keys to culture, as intercessors between mankind and the sacred books in literary history, and as ego-centric but necessary aesthetes.

Now English had come to the point where it said it realized it had its own small responsibility for assisting individuals in their attempt to survive in the world and also some responsibility, perhaps smaller still, to assist in the survival of the world as well. Postman and Weingartner were devastating in their listing of challenges people of the sixties needed to face, citing everything from the existence of the laser beam to the challenge of fields like biochemistry. It seemed clear to many of us that English had been teaching “subjects” rather than students, as Postman and Weingartner said, and that to meet the challenge we would have to change our ways somehow.

Describing the way in which English ought to become more relevant became an activity fraught with controversy, however. And from the start there were some extreme definitions of “relevance” offered. At one extreme was the insistence that school in general needed to prove that what it was doing was “practical” and “basic” to society somehow.

Also in 1969 John Fischer, previous Editor-In-Chief of *Harper’s Magazine*, wrote an essay in that magazine called “Survival U,” proposing that universities be reorganized around a concern for the survival of the world ecologically. Only courses and attitudes related to the field of human ecology would be taught in these universities. Fischer had ideas about how Biology, Engineering, Earth Sciences, Math, and Politics might work toward this goal. But about English he had almost nothing to say, except to note in passing that “Students interested in music, junk sculpture, the Theatre of the Absurd, and the literary *dicta* of Leslie Fiedler can go somewhere else.” English teachers were left to figure out for themselves as best they could how they might fit in. But one thing we could be sure of with attitudes like Fischer’s was that nothing but the most practical explanation of what we were about would do.

About the only part of most English programs that clearly could fit into Fischer’s Survival University was the freshman writing course, or the “basic” writing course. Surely the graduates that Fischer envisioned would need to be able to communicate. So, if the freshman writing course taught students to better function as communicators in relation to questions of survival, there might be a place for it.

The concern for survival that Postman and Weingartner shared. But while that issue raised for Postman and Weingartner vast and rich possibilities for the profession, for Fischer it suggested that perhaps there wasn’t any future for our profession at all. We could all go slobber over Leslie Fiedler if we wanted to; but Fischer was damned if he was going to sanction it, or support it.

I believe Postman and Weingartner showed us responsibilities our profession could never again rightfully deny. But with equal clarity John Fischer showed us the direction from which public and economic pressure would come to bear on our profession in the seventies. As he led us to expect, there has been tremendous pressure on English teachers to demonstrate the practical nature of what they are teaching. And the ability to demonstrate these attributes clearly has become a fundamental test of survival for many departments across the country. The survival of English teachers seems to depend on our willingness and ability to define ourselves in practical terms and in terms of the material survival of our society.

Postman and Weingartner have offered a way of understanding and meeting the challenge of the Fischer society of the seventies, and some ways of surviving as a profession as well. And thought and research in several fields has led to a set of profound conclusions about language and language learning.

Third Force psychology (Carl Rogers, Karen Horney, and Abraham Maslow especially) has demonstrated that the healthy person is one who develops skills appropriate to his needs and to the exigencies of his world, who is able to respond imaginatively to situations and to other people, able to conceive of new contexts and new perceptions beyond what is required of a set of skills. Students of society like Alvin Toffler have offered examples of how society is now changing so rapidly that the challenge of education must not merely be to turn out someone who has technical skills (even language skills) but also to nurture the development of the imagination and the ability to adapt. These studies imply at least and often directly suggest (Rogers especially) a classroom relationship in which students’ rights and abilities are respected and in which students are encouraged to imaginatively respond instead of memorizing data or performing by rote.

In the area of language learning more directly, Postman and Weingartner have been joined by writers like John Holt and James Moffett in demonstrating how language is learned in the context of communication experiences from childhood through adulthood. They demonstrate further how language skills can be taught in the classroom by treating language seriously as communication, and how writing and speaking usually become interesting to students when they are encouraged to pursue meaningful and exploratory communication and when this goal is respected in discussions of the writing which results. Moffett is particularly concerned to distinguish between studying rhetorical theory and teaching communication skills. He suggests that for writing classes rhetorical principles become important not when reviewed as a body of knowledge to be learned but when they provide tactics for improving a student’s efforts at communication.

This background of study beyond and within the field of English suggests several important conclusions. First, it is appropriate for the profession of English to continue to present the writing class as a valuable and even central experience in the preparation of students to meet public and personal challenges. Second, it is important to approve of the use of language to achieve communication tasks that students
believe are worthwhile and which constitute an imaginative groping with language and with the world. Third, it is important to help students as they write, rather than present a body of knowledge. Fourth, it is necessary to respect the class as an audience since they more broadly represent a real audience than any one person could (and since it is not likely that a person communicating seriously would wish to communicate only with English teachers). And, finally, it is important for the teacher to see, and to help students to see, that although language is indeed a tool, it is not merely a tool. Language and conception, or language and perception, are very closely related; language is so closely related to the individual and to the imagination that it is essential as we probe for solutions to the serious problems of modern society.

But even people who accept this research in general and these basic assumptions have had much difficulty in working from these ideas toward practical notions about how to teach. There are, however, two narrower conclusions that can be drawn about learning language skills that help us face this problem. The first conclusion suggests that the learning of communication skills takes place almost exclusively in communications contexts. This is not just the way it can be done; it is pretty much the way that language learning is done. We learn to talk, and write, and read as we talk, and write, and read as we get responses from others. We adapt as we get feedback and as we observe those with whom we are communicating.

The second conclusion, supported especially by research in the teaching of writing and reading, is that no connection necessarily exists between knowledge of facts about language and a person's ability to read or write. Ken Goodman and others have stated, in Choosing Materials to Teach Reading, that "a large body of research can be cited which shows that there is no significant relationship between language information and reading ability" (p. 96). Goodman suggests that time spent on learning language information or in practicing non-communication language skills should not be done as a way to teach people to read or write because the assumption that transfer of training will take place is false (p. 98). For example, although students are perfectly capable of learning even quite long lists of "vocabulary" words for short term testing purposes, research shows that they retain and use only those words which they can see apply to authentic communications contexts in which they are involved.

There is public and legislative pressure, however, to be as clear as we can be about our goals, and to be as practical as we can be in choosing our goals. Under this pressure there has developed a fairly wide trend stressing the handiness of breaking language learning into small units. This used to be in evidence in the memorization approach to learning grammar, but now it can be more widely observed in limited behavioral objectives like "student can recognize and label the three different paragraph structures," or "student can produce the five rhetorical types of theme patterns." Research has failed to establish a connection between these types of objectives and the actual development of students' communication skills. I believe this is the type of "language information" that Goodman and others agree is not directly relevant to developing students as communicators.

One implication of this is that goals must be thought of in terms of whole effective communications. More limited objectives also must have a clear relationship to such contexts. A student who has particular problems with getting his focus narrow enough early in his papers might very well benefit from practicing "introductions" to several papers. But if the student has no such difficulty or if the practice is isolated and not a clear step toward real communication then the writer can be expected to lose the ability to transfer what he is learning. And should short term objectives become dominant, a breakdown in the learning of communication skills will take place.

My main conclusion, then, is what we should already know: the experience-centered approach to teaching English, and especially to teaching writing, is not a sensitivity group approach or a "do-gooders" approach which would substitute therapy or being kind for teaching and learning. Both the sensitivity group approach and the do-gooder approach existed in the sixties, but they are not to be equated with experience-centered attitudes to the classroom, which result from the strongest threads of modern research in our profession, and in several other fields as well.

It is the experience-centered approach which provides the ground on which communication skills, development of the imagination, and personal growth of students can be united. And this is the only way that applicable skills can be taught. This type of teaching is the only way we can meet our responsibility to assist in world survival.

Perhaps it seems ironic that moving in this controversial direction is also the best way to guarantee the survival of our profession. It does not involve resorting to a purely technical perspective on what we are doing. And it does not involve returning to the "drill and test" approach over new or old material. But in anything but the shortest of the short runs this is the direction that will make our profession more clearly useful and defensible. Over the next ten years it is the intelligent extending and adapting of experience-centered approaches which can keep English teachers from becoming extinct. Self-service and service to society are linked for our profession in the wise application of these frameworks in our classrooms. It is also up to English teachers to assert this truth wherever and whenever possible in the public dialogue on education.

We are facing a more fundamental test as a profession than perhaps we like to admit. It is not impossible to imagine that English departments might go the way of the disappearing foreign language departments. However, given the magnitude of this threat, our direction is clearer than it might be. But it will take courage for teachers to move in this direction.

WRITING OFF OBJECTIVE TESTS FOR MEASURING WRITING ABILITY

Robert L. Wilson
University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff

Too many students have grown up preferring objective tests, and, for some fairly obvious reasons, many teachers attempt to evaluate students' performances in strictly objective terms. Yet the true test of students' understanding of a subject is their ability to apply what they have learned. That is, knowledge, understanding, and application are simply dimensions of each other. The home economics student should be able to prepare a meal, the woodworking student should be able to build a piece of furniture, and the composition student should be able to write an intelligible paper.

Often, however, the test of students' abilities to write is whether or not they can identify the parts of speech, types of sentences, and the rules of punctuation. True-false, fill-in-the-blank, and "multiple guess" items are used by many teachers to measure a student's ability to write. Yet writing is more than individual words or words strung together or marks of punctuation that separate the strings of words. Writing is best defined in terms of relationships—between words, between sentences; and between paragraphs. Relationships are not visible on the page, only in the mind of the reader, and the most evident way of measuring students' understandings is for them to either analyze or synthesize a piece of writing. So, in a writing course, students need to learn both the art of synthesizing and the art of analyzing their own products, be they paragraphs, essays, or research papers.
As students must learn to analyze the purpose and the language in a work of literature, so must they learn to devise plans for their own writing. Specifically, they need to be more conscious of their writing — more aware of what they are doing with language. Before blindly blundering into a writing assignment, they should be able to articulate clearly a number of things: their attitude toward their subject, their relationship with their audience, the types of materials they will use to structure their papers, etc. These, of course, are prewriting decisions, decisions that must be made before the first word of the rough draft is recorded on paper. The answers to these questions are not merely discovered after the writing has been completed. For there to be any consistency in their writing, writers must perceive clearly their topic beforehand.

In the Buxton study, conducted at the University of Alberta, Canada, during the 1956-57 school year, students in the two experimental groups and the control group were administered two objective tests and an essay test both at the beginning and at the end of the study. In his analysis of the data, Buxton concluded that

students in the three groups did not differ significantly in their gain on the two objective post-tests [Mechanics of Expression and Effectiveness of Expression] but did differ significantly in their gain on the post-test essay examination.¹

Among other things, Buxton concluded that essay examinations, in fact, measure kinds of changes that cannot be measured by objective tests.

Similarly, Charles Cooper observed in a recent article in the English Journal that

a pen and paper standardized test on usage rules, spelling, vocabulary, and syntactic appropriateness would not be a valid measure of writing ability, even though it might predict grades in a writing course with fair accuracy.²

In a writing course, a teacher should be especially concerned with the separate writing performances of the students and the amount of growth in writing that takes place over a semester or longer. The teacher of composition is more concerned with evaluating than predicting performance. For that reason, the teacher of composition must assess the quality of writing performance and nothing else.

For writing to remain a valuable course in the curriculum and for teachers of writing to retain their credibility with their students, students must write. They must not merely write, but the writing assignments must be meaningful and carefully-planned. There must be relevance to those topics assigned the students.

In summary, students must stop kidding students. Teachers must stop kidding teachers. And each must stop deceiving the other. To learn to write, there is not easy "out," no shortcut, and no substitute for writing. To learn to write a student must write, and to evaluate a student's writing, a teacher must put that writing to test.

NOTES
