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DEVELOPING LITERARY APPRECIATION

by Norine Odland, *University of Minnesota*

Efforts to deal with the topic "developing literary appreciation" seem to lead to glorious generalizations, trite expressions, boring uninteresting preachments, all of which could be a result of attempting to explain the obvious. Rather than pursue the generalizations about possible components of the appreciation process, it is more realistic, and more interesting, to deal with specifics from elementary school situations. Most persons agree that the development of appreciation is gradual, slow, unmeasurable, mysterious, private, and, in some ways, specific. Something happens during a day, in one half hour, or even less, so that individuals, boys and girls, recognize, accept, enjoy a piece of writing because they have come to appreciate it, to receive it, to feel the time spent for reading or listening is time well spent.

A pre-school four year old listens to *BRUNO MUNARI'S ABC* (World, 1960). The pictures are vivid, compelling, moving, imaginative. There is a perfect blend of the familiar and the strange and the new. The sound of the words make a poem. A fly begins to buzz through the book at letter "F" and continues to appear often enough to be the unity you don't often find in an alphabet book. The words make a strong impression – "V – a Vertical Violet Violin". Some days later the four year old was heard chanting "Vertical violet Violin. What is vertical?"

Twenty-six five year olds listen to Marie Hall Ets' *IN THE FOREST* (Viking, 1944). The story has a quick effective beginning which allows the listeners to know the story is make-believe.

"I had a new horn and a paper hat,
And I went for a walk in the forest.
A big wild lion was taking a nap
But he woke up when he heard my horn" ..

The expression on the children's faces will tell you they know when the climax is reached when *"Then I was It for hide and seek and everyone hid except the rabbit. He just stood still. 'Coming', I called. Then I opened my eyes. There wasn't an animal there at all. But there was Dad. He was hunting for me."* In three more short lines on three pages the story comes to a conclusive ending. The prose in rhythmic, so much so that many of the boys and girls will join in saying the parts they know will come next.

Six year old boys and girls, twenty seven of them, are ready to listen to a story. Before the teacher tells the title and author they have a chance

to see the cover and a sample of the pictures in Ezra Jack Keats' *JENNIE'S HAT* (Harper and Row, 1966). The direction for listening is simply, "If you could tell the man who made this book about it, what would you say?" The answers, after listening, were: "Jennie was gorgeous!" "My name is Jennie. How did the girl happen to be named Jennie in this book." "I liked the plain hat. Why did he decorate it?" "How do you get birds to be your friends? I'd like them to be mine." "I can see how birds could do most of that decorating but how could they get that whole nest on top of a hat without spilling it?" The children's comments are responses to character, to conflict, to action, responses which lead to appreciation. There is an acceptance and enjoyment of the imaginative in a real world.

One seven year old has discovered Virginia Lee Burton's *THE LITTLE HOUSE* (Houghton-Mifflin, 1942) in the library and has read it and wants to tell about it. Her reactions are obviously saying that there is beauty in pictures and words. The personification of the house allows the symbolism to develop and be understood. This is a book with a message, the idea of accepting change and adjusting to change. The words and pictures move gently and mediatatively. It is a quiet book. There is an appreciation of mood.

An eight year old boy is introduced to Farley Mowat's *OWLS IN THE FAMILY* (Little, Brown, 1962). He is one of those individuals who is not always easily reached with a story, a poem, or a book. He can read but doesn't choose to read it–there are other things to do. After reading ten pages of Mowat's book this boy is chuckling to himself. The humor is not raucous, in fact it is unusually subtle. It is humor enjoyed by children and adults for there is no condescending tone in the style of the author's writing. The characters in the book become so well drawn that there is no need to tell which person is talking. The reader *knows* the characters. There are details, plenty of them, but no unnecessary details. "I'd really read books if there were more like that," is the boy's appreciative comment.

A class of nine year olds has the opportunity to listen to poems written by Harry Behn in *WINDY MORNING* (Harcourt, Brace, 1953). After one reading, the teacher re-reads the poems. Listening is even more enjoyable the second time. Meanings are more vivid through the poet's use of figurative language. Words in the poems help you feel the wind, see the grass, and enter glorious worlds of the imagination. The poems inspire appreciation for rhythm, rhyme, ideas, and words.

Ten, eleven, and twelve year olds have a vast quantity of literature from which to select prose and poetry they will appreciate. These readers must be allowed to develop their own confidence in powers of judgment in the process of appreciation. William Pene du Bois' *THE TWENTY ONE BALLOONS* (Viking, 1947) is a powerful, exciting fantasy with a good

deal of humor. The characterizations are well done, the action is well paced. A boy who read it refused to report about it by saying, "I couldn't leave out a thing when I told about that story. Every bit is important. Anyone who wants to know about it just has to read it."

Eric Haugaard's *HAKON OF ROGEN'S SAGA* (Houghton-Mifflin, 1963) is a book with a strong theme. The meaning of freedom is not preached, it is demonstrated. The characters are vivid and believable. The action is down to earth, rough and rugged but not for the sake of being sensational. The structure of the language fits the subject and theme beautifully. Boys and girls who read the book will appreciate appropriate style.

If each of these specific situations can lead to any generalization it might be that appreciation develops, more or less, depending on what is being read or heard. Appreciation also depends on what the reader or listener brings to the piece of literature he reads or hears. If the reading is done in a school situation, appreciation will be influenced by the manner in which the teacher facilitates the process so that the reaction to literature is positive and appreciative. ■

SOME USES OF ORAL INTERPRETATION IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by Ailene Cole, *Augsburg College*

One early memory of my elementary education is that of a tall thin brown-haired woman in a brown dress reading to us each morning in a one-room grade school. Both my mother and father as parents and as teachers had read to me too; that this memory persists may suggest that it symbolizes the realization that others liked books, too.

Perhaps one important way we learn to like literature is through a process of osmosis, of absorption of the enthusiasm of those around us who show that they love literature; one important way of showing that enthusiasm, I am convinced, is through the oral reading of it. It is a method that influenced me early and one that I am certain worked for me in the high school classroom for twenty years. Therefore, I wish to discuss why oral reading of literature is important in teaching students to like literature, and to describe some oral interpretation activities for the English classroom.

First of all, why is the oral interpretation of literature important in selling literature? Let us consider some parallels. The game plan for a football team needs execution on the field if it is to be successful. A brownie recipe doesn't make the brownies even though it is a breakdown of all the ingredients. The score of a symphony isn't the glorious music. The box score of a basketball or baseball game doesn't provide the excitement of the game. The house plan isn't the home lived in. In what way are these parallels to reading literature aloud?

In order to answer that question, let us look at the principle of *ethos* as it may apply to the English teacher. *Ethos* is a Greek word which Aristotle, for example, used in *The Poetics* to denote moral and intellectual integrity. As applied to us interested in teaching literature, what does it imply? To answer that question, we need a job description of the teacher of literature. Without indulging in a detailed analysis, perhaps we can say that the literature teacher's job includes two steps: taking Humpty Dumpty apart and putting him back together again. Of course the teacher of literature teaches authors and titles, types, style, figures of speech and, most of all, ideas in literature. But the very nature of literature indicates that

we can't stop there – just as we can't stop with the brownie recipe or the score of the symphony. The next and more important step is putting Humpty Dumpty together again: i.e. re-creating, re-inventing, re-experiencing the literature itself in the power of its uniqueness which makes it literature. This is moving from intellectual to sensory experience; it is going from the ingredients that make the brownies to savoring every calorie-loaded bite. This is part of what Ernst Cassirer meant when he wrote,

> *Not even the spectator is left to a merely passive role. We cannot understand a work of art without, to a certain degree, repeating and reconstructing the creative process by which it has come into being.*
>
> *(An Essay on Man)*

The point is that the theme, the ingredients, the building blocks, the perspective of a work of literary art were an experience in the author's creation and are to be re-experienced by the consumer – in our case, our students.

Let us look at some simple examples to show how the author's unique way of expressing an idea make it an experience. Take the statement: "Women look terrible in slacks"; it's simply blunt, uninteresting, and annoying, even if true. Odgen Nash transforms a simple declarative statement to something delightful:

> *Sure, deck your lower limbs in pants;*
> *Yours are the limbs, my sweeting.*
> *You look divine as you advance.*
> *Have you seen yourself retreating?*

The dictionary definition of presentiment is that it is "a feeling of something, especially of an unfortunate or evil nature, about to happen." Emily Dickinson emotionalizes that intellectual idea in her poetic definition:

> *Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn,*
> *Indicative that suns go down;*
> *The notice to the startled grass*
> *That darkness is about to pass.*

"It's snowing quietly" is an elementary analysis of a weather condition. Robert Frost makes it an experience of beauty:

> *The only other sound's the sweep*
> *Of easy wind and downy flake.*

The contrasting quotations above seem to me to illustrate the point that it is not simply the form and the meaning of the literature but also the

wonderful way in which the author expresses it that makes it so necessary to follow taking Humpty Dumpty apart (analysis) with putting him back together again (experience of the poem). This is obviously my personal opinion. Are there sources beyond my experience and my opinion to support me? In pursuit of support for this belief, I consulted three years of *English Journals*, six textbooks, and several auxiliary books on teaching English. The search yielded only two feature articles, three "Poetry in the Classroom" articles, and about two pages in the texts to support it. Perhaps the assumption is that of course it is read. I have also used the occasion to ask a number of my students rather causually, "Did you learn to like literature in school?" Nearly every one of those who answered in the affirmative attributed it to a teacher who loved literature, showed it, and shared it orally. The students are the consumers. They know first hand.

My survey was not extensive enough to be statistically significant; however, the words of critics, especially the modern ones, are significant. John Crowe Ransom fears that we tend to teach too much *about* literature and not enough the *literature itself*. John Ciardi, whom you undoubtedly read in *The Saturday Review*, contends that a "poem does not talk *about* ideas; it enacts them." Several hundreds of years ago too, John Donne expressed the same idea of showing:

> *The eloquence of superiors is in action. When I see them actually, really, clearly, constantly do thus, this is a Demonstration to my soul and demonstration is the powerfullest proofe; . . . the eloquence of superiors is in action.*

Gerald Manley Hopkins wrote to a friend that his poetry was *"less to be read than heard"* and that poetry is *"speech framed for contemplation of the mind by the way of hearing"* ("Poetry and Verse," in *The Journals*) i.e. that the sound of the poem is its metaphorical meaning.

Trying to explain poetry Sandburg once contended, is *"like a man in a strange house trying to tell people outside who have never been in the house exactly how it feels to be there."* He quoted the father of an unaired great Irish poet who once remarked, *"What can be explained is not poetry"* and went on to say that *"poetry is not like an arithmetic book with the answers in the back of the book"* ("A Short Talk on Poetry"). And most succinctly of all, in "Ars Poetica" MacLeish wrote *"A poem should not mean/ But be."*

What I am trying to establish is that an important part of the English teacher's *ethos* is the promise and obligation and privilege of making literature come alive in the classroom just as the athletes must execute the

game plan into an exciting conflict, just as the cook makes the luscious brownies from the ingredients listed in the recipe, and just as the conductor and the musicians recreate the music into an aesthetic experience. The first step of taking Humpty Dumpty apart is essential; putting him back together again into a living experience is more essential. Walt Whitman expressed his need for that experience in his familiar poem "When I heard the learn't astronomer."

How can the English teacher make the literature he teaches become an experience? How can be put Humpty Dumpty back together again? In my classroom, I have found that various kinds of oral interpretation are vital in accomplishing this aspect of the responsibility. You are, of course, aware of recordings and tapes, so I would like to discuss other uses of oral interpretation.

One such method is choral reading which is simply a matter of reading aloud together. Sometimes the reading is in unison; sometimes it consists of individual and group reading; sometimes one group answers another antiphonally or adds to another cumulatively; sometimes light voices are assigned some lines, dark voices some lines, individuals some lines, and everyone some lines. There are no set rules; the teacher and the group can experiment and decide on what arrangement best interprets the selection; note that during such experimentation, the selection is being probed for its meaning and sound experience and is being read and reread aloud. Let me cite some examples. In Wordsworth's "We Are Seven" a girl with a very young-sounding voice could read the little girl and a boy with a mature voice the man; the rest of the class and the teacher read the descriptive passages. The poem comes alive much more as the oral dialogue reveals the child's inability to comprehend death. Ballads sometimes accomodate themselves to this question and answer arrangement, sometimes work well with solo voices for each stanza and the group for the refrain.

"The Creation" by James Weldon Johnson is an example of a complex poem that illustrates many phases of choral reading. A boy with a very deep voice would probably be assigned to read the words of God. The opening stanza, for example, might use the boys' dark voices for the lines describing the darkness as "blacker than a hundred midnights down in a cyprus swamp." Then for contrast, let the girls with their light voices read "Then God smiled and the light broke . . ." The progression of creation from stars and moon and sun to the world might be done in cumulative arrangement: i.e., starting with a small group, adding a few more for each larger creative effort, and culminating with the whole group in a vocal climax in "Then down between the darkness and the light He hurled the

world." Unison works well for such poems as Frost's "Fire and Ice" and "Stopping by Woods." The simple suggestion that on the line "I think I know enough of hate . . ." each should contract his muscles in a subtle drawing away from a thing disliked usually has a marked effect on the readers' feeling and hence on the metaphorical sound that results. My Interp classes enjoy doing Sandburg's "Fog" in whispered unison; the use of choral reading is limited only by our own imagination.

Another use of choral reading in very simple form is that of reading together several times certain lines you'd like the students to learn, e.g.,

Double, double, toil and trouble,
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.
– Macbeth, Act IV, Scene 1

or

Earth has not anything to show more fair
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty.
– Wordsworth

or

All ignorance toboggans into know
And trudges up to ignorance again.
– e. e. cummings

Two or three times through and the lines are learned without any drudgery. Starting the class with repetition of such lines occasionally aids retention and more important repeats the poetry itself.

Choral reading is an easy way for the English teacher to use oral interpretation. This is especially true if he doesn't feel very confident of his own reading ability, because it can aid him in developing that ability within the protection of group reading.

Another development in oral interpretation that aids in making literature come alive in the classroom is variously called Readers' Theatre, Interpreters' Theatre, Chamber Drama, Theatre of the Mind. The modern use of this technique was probably ignited by Charles Laughton's Drama Quartet consisting of Laughton, Charles Boyer, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, and Agnes Moorhead which toured the nation with a reading performance of *Don Juan in Hell* in 1951. They used scripts, stools, lecterns; each had one part; there was no movement; yet the experience of the literature was vivid. A bit later Charles Laughton, Raymond Massey, Judith Anderson, and Tyrone Power used the same technique on *John Brown's Body*. This time, because of the selection, each one read many parts; there was some move-

ment. Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* and the poetry of Sandburg and of Frost have been arranged for such presentation. This method can be used in the English classroom very easily. One could perhaps contend that it is the simplest way to present literature orally to anyone in any place.

There is not space to discuss Interpreters' Theatre in detail; however, basic procedures can be described simply. First of all, one decides what material is to be read. This selection can be done by the teacher or by the students. It is possible that the teacher would announce that at the present drama unit groups of perhaps three to six are each to present ten-minute scenes from the play or plays which are being studied. You might use the same procedure with essays, short stories, the novel, or poetry. Or you might preview the delight of an essay unit, for example, by having a group reading of Thurber's "The Unicorn in the Garden." Another possibility is that the teacher may arrange a number of selections for Interpreters' Theatre indicating what lines are said by the narrator and what lines by other members of a group.

There are some principles that can be followed in arranging the material for this kind of group reading. If the scene is from a play, the narrator gives necessary information about characters or subsequent action and sets the scene, probably by reading the stage directions. It is a good writing exercise to rewrite these stage directions; incidently James Barrie's stage directions are absolutely delightful. The play narrator also reads such directions from the author as the scene progresses; the audience needs to know who enters and exits, what action the author suggests, where the characters are, etc. Perhaps some footnotes might be incorporated in the narration. If some action is cut, the narrator summarizes. The members of the group are assigned to read one or more parts. If the selection is fiction, the narrator or narrators may read non-personal description and the others pick up those parts about characters including dialogue and description. For example, in "The Unicorn in the Garden":

Narrator: *Once upon a summy morning a man who sat in a breakfast nook looked up from his scrambled eggs to see*

Man: *a white unicorn with a gold horn quietly cropping the roses in the garden.*

Narrator: *The man went up to the bedroom where his wife was still sleeping*

Man: *and woke her. There's a unicorn in the garden, he said. Eating roses.*

Narrator: *She opened one unfriendly eye and looked at him.*

Poetry can be arranged for small groups in a way similar to the procedure for choral reading. It occurs to me that "Patterns" might be very exciting read by two girls, with one reading the lines about conforming to the pattern and the other the escape lines.

What are the mechanics of Interpreters' Theatre? What does each person do? Where does he stand? Does he move? The narrator comes on, faces the audience, perhaps in a down right position, and begins. The others may be offstage; they may all come on together with the narrator and take positions standing with their backs to the audience or facing the audience; they may be seated on chairs or stools with heads bowed or looking out at the audience or with backs turned toward the audience. As their turns come to read, they may look up or turn around or rise or even move. As implied above, there may be no movement; there may be some movement; there will not be as much as there is in a play, of course. The group should have decided on its eye contact practice. When they are in the scene, will they focus on the reader or on the audience? One answer here is that if the reading involves interaction between characters, the eye contact on those characters provides focus; if the selection is more subjective as in lyric poetry, the contact probably would be toward the audience. It is necessary for the group to practice two or three times so as to be familiar with the procedure.

How effective is Interpreters' Theatre? This is Raymond Massey's evaluation:

> Thirty years of stage work before audiences prepared me in no way for what happened out front with *John'Browns's Body* . . Nobody out there sees the same show . . . Steve Benet's words do indeed, cast a spell. Those people are enchanted . . . But the audience is not just sitting there, allowing itself to be entertained. We seem to have brought to them the key to that too-long locked room where they had put away their own ability to imagine – to see, to do, to share.

This challenge to imagine, to re-experience, to recreate the literature can be there in classroom use of Interpreters' Theatre both for the performing group and for the listeners.

If you wish to read more about this technique, you may be interested in a pamphlet entitled "Studies in Readers' Theatre" edited by Leslie Irene Goger and Melvin R. White and published by S & F Press, Box 8, Vanderveer Station, Brooklyn, New York.

A final use of oral interpretation in the English classroom brings us especially close to the *ethos* principle; I refer to oral reading by the teacher, the way he can best show and share his love for literature. Although most of us would hesitate to read a selection with which we are unfamiliar to a group, we too often ask students to do exactly that, as we approach the study of a new selection. Yet it is the teacher who knows the selection; it is he who can convey the tone the author intended, the building blocks of the selection, its climax, the shades of meaning, and the appreciation of the unique way in which the author has expressed his idea; i.e., the experience of the selection. It may be permissible here to rephrase T. S. Eliot's line, *"Human kind cannot bear very much reality" (Murder in the Cathedral)* to *"Students can stand only so much unfamiliarity."* It is highly possible that instead of the experience of the poem, the memory of the mispronounced words, the stumbling, the meaningless sound may remain as an embarrassing exposure before his peers; it is also very possible that after hearing the poem read well and participating in discussing it, that same student could read it well. Besides at least the initial reading of difficult selections and most poetry, the teacher can also read additional selections and passages not included in the text, can demonstrate, as Donne suggested, his involvement in the literature by quoting from other selections already studied or by the same author or by someone else who has expressed a related idea.

Reading by the teacher is especially effective in presenting selections that need considerable explanation because the teacher can interrupt himself smoothly whereas if he wants the student who is reading to stop so that he can comment, it becomes a jolting interruption to the student. Let me demonstrate this point by reading a passage from Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene from *Macbeth:*

> Lady Macbeth comes in with a candle, puts it down on a stand, and starts rubbing her hands. As the doctor and gentlewoman have pointed out, she is obviously asleep even though her eyes are open. She speaks: *'Yet here's a spot . . . Out, damned spot! out I say.'* What spot is she talking about? (Some students will undoubtedly know.) You remember that earlier when Macbeth came from killing Duncan, he looked at his bloody hands and said, *'This is a sorry sight'* and Lady Macbeth answered, *'A foolish thought to say a sorry sight.'* Then she noticed the daggers he had carried from the room where he had assassinated King Duncan. When he refused to take them back, she did and returned with her hands covered with blood, saying, *'My hands are of your colour, but I shame / To wear a heart so white . . . / A little water clears us of this deed. / How easy is it then?'* Here she is still washing that blood off her hands. Has it been easy? She continues: *'One; two. Why then 'tis time to do 't.'* The counting may refer to the two grooms lying in drunken and drug-induced sleep by their charge. Since they're not guarding Duncan, it is the time to kill him. *'Hell is murky';* she has reason to think of such a place, hasn't she? *'Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier and afeard? What need we fear who knows it when none can call our power to accompt?* Here they are obviously king and queen as indicated by *'Call our power to accompt.'* When as king did he show fear so that she chided him? At the banquet, of course, when he thought he saw Banquo's ghost sitting on his chair. You see, she's reliving their bloody deeds in her sleep. Macbeth, you'll recall, reported after killing Duncan in his sleep that he thought he heard a voice cry, *'Sleep no more.'* Lady Macbeth isn't sleeping very well either; furthermore note the irony: Macbeth killed Duncan in his sleep; now sleep is betraying them. (Act V, scene 1; Act II, scene 2)

Here the English teacher is demonstrating an understanding and a love of the literature, making it come alive in an expressive, felt, shared, re-experienced whole. *"Demonstration is the powerfullest proofe."*

If you read well, share it with your students. If you are hesitant, take your courage by the nape of the neck and try – pounding heart and all; practice with a tape recorder. Try all these methods – records, tapes, student reading, choral reading, interpreters' theatre, teacher reading – and other methods; invent your own. Let's put Humpty Dumpty together again into a rich experience of literature. *"Demonstration* (of a love of literature) *is the powerfullest proofe."* ■

THE TEACHING OF SPEECH IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

by Phyllis Kromer, *Robbinsdale Senior High School*

The business world of today seems to have something of a corner on the communication field. In the realms of commerce, advertising, and television there is a keen understanding of the psychology of communication. Perhaps we in the classroom can look to them for some ideas. J. Paul Austin, president of the Coca Cola Company, speaking on modern communication has said, "The progress of society is measured in terms of relationships and these in turn in quality of communications." We can make a comparison of communication in society and in the classroom. Mr. Austin goes on to explain that society is based on a complex network of relationships. Relationships involve communication of one person or group and another. The character of the communication determines whether the relationships will be productive or destructive. The character of the relationships is influenced by the attitude of the communicator who has been conditioned by previous communications. Let us look at this in terms of our classrooms. Our relationships involve the communication of teacher and students with students. The character of the communications (the subject matter background of both students and teacher) determines whether the relationships will be productive or destructive. Previous communications involve all the experiences of the teacher with other students and all the experiences of the students with former English teachers. (This comparison, of course, could be extended in even more depth.)

This leads us then to our thesis statement – again a quotation from J. Paul Austin: "Communication reaches its highest form in the idea-exchange of different minds focused on defining a problem and arriving at solutions through analysis and creative collaboration." Let us apply this to the teaching of speech in the English classroom. First of all, speech in this instance refers to speech integrated in all subject matter. It is not speech taught as an isolated unit.

Thus we are concerned with the activities of group discussion, small groups, panel discussions, individual reports, informal speaking, and informal conversation. In a recent study made by the National Council of Teachers of English and the English Department at the University of Illinois some statistics show the proportion of time spent in high school English classes on speech activities: recitation, 23%; lecture (also referred to as a running monologue by the teacher), 21%; discussion, 18%; student presentation, 15%; and group work, 1.9%. If we are to have effective communication in the classroom, we must do something about reversing some of these statistics.

One of the common terms in usage today is "gap" – we have cultural gaps, political paps, ethnic gaps, business gaps, educational gaps. I would like to suggest that we also have a communication gap. Robert Frost has said, "Half the world is composed of people who have something to say and can't, and the other half who have nothing to say and keep on saying it." There are four areas I would like to discuss: the choice of language gap, the attention-listening gap, the classroom behavior gap, and the fear gap.

Certainly in the field of language we are aware of all its imperfections, limitations, paradoxes, and contradictions. We try to make our students aware of the different levels of usage. In one day a teenager must adapt his language from the science classroom to the math classroom to the history and English classroom to the halls of the school. We cannot possibly foresee all the interpretations students will make of what we say or of what they say to one another. It is our responsibility to show them how to use language and how to some extent rise above its limitations.

Research experts could tell us the degree of time spent in listening and paying attention – and about our imperfect control over attention. Ralph Nichols, in his studies, lists the following as some of our bad listening habits: faking attention (and this includes teachers), avoiding difficult listening, rejecting a subject as uninteresting, and yielding to distractions. We must make our students aware of their bad listening habits. Good students are aware of their own state of mind and their degree of understanding. The poor student doesn't know whether he understands or not. Therefore, our problem is not to get students to ask us about what they don't know, but rather to make them aware of the differences between what they know and don't know – and the relationship of listening to this.

In the classroom behavior gap the "good" student is not to be prized. By "good" I mean the docile, suggestible individual, the one who does what he is told, or worse yet, does something without being told. At a recent PTA Back-to-School meeting I expressed regrets over the "deadly" quiet manner of one of my English classes. There was no conversation among the students; they responded meekly in class work – this in a group of average to above-average students. One of the mothers felt that such a situation should be accepted. I cannot agree! Our students *must* talk to one another. They must communicate with one another socially and intellectually. For it is in conversation, in discussion with the teacher and with one another that *real* learning takes place.

Finally – the fear gap. Our students have many fears – fear of the teacher and one another; fear of not doing what people want, of not pleasing, of making mistakes; fear of failing or of being wrong. Fear dictates self limitation, self defeat. Some of our students deliberately "go stupid" because they cannot cope with their fears. If they are considered stupid in the classroom, tension and pressure to perform are released. Real learning involves lack of tension and the feeling of freedom.

There are several things we can do to close the communication gap. First, the physical setting of our classrooms is of prime importance. There is a psychology of chairs – really quite a fascinating study. It is important for us to consider class arrangements – sitting in large circles, sitting in the round in small groups, having a few extra chairs and a table for panal discussions or other group reports, arranging in a two-rowed semicircle, or sitting all together as a "glob." Each of these exert a different kind of atmosphere and call forth various forms of communication.

We must also consider the communication of intelligence and unintelligence. John Holt, an elementary mathematics teacher, has written a book called *How Children Fail.* He has some profound insights into the learning process. He describes intelligence as a style of life, a way of behaving in various situations – especially new, perplexing ones. He feels that the true test of intelligence is not how much we know how to do but how we behave when we don't. Acting intelligently involves imagination, resourcefulness, and curiosity. The unintelligent person is not one of low ability. He is one with an entirely different style of behavior arising out of different sets of values or attitudes. He is far less curious, unresourceful; he is afraid of failure and lacks initiative. How many of our students fall into this latter category? Mr. Holt feels that a good teacher is one who puts himself "into contact with the intelligence of his students wherever and whatever they may be; and who has enough intuition and imagination to do it."

One of the chief methods of teaching which makes good use of the many facets of the communication process is the inductive method. Let us look at the possibilities here. Our chief concern cannot be *covering* a field of knowledge or body of material. Teacher and students must be able to relate, compare, fit together all items in a field of knowledge. Take a very basic example: a city map. If we "cover the field of knowledge" we would be able to name all the streets in the city. However, if we have really learned, we should be able to get from one place to another by any desired route.

A good teacher creates learning situations. He is less a giver of information, and more a careful guide and questioner. A student can attain understanding and intellectual growth by engaging in an activity through

which *he* discovers structures of knowledge. When a student participates in an activity which he structures, he gains valuable speech experiences. He learns to express himself, to defend a point of view, to participate in the give-and-take of class discussion, to listen in order to discuss well. He may even learn some speech techniques. In all of this, the teacher's function is one of artistic organization.

A teacher must ask critical questions. Some of these will be in his lesson plans; others will be spontaneous. Questions with many possible answers should be used. They must build appropriately. With good pacing a teacher can lead students to right perceptions and then can help them to communicate perceptions. The teacher is available to answer questions of fact, supply further information when necessary, rescue the tongue-tied and inept, and occasionally act as arbiter.

In the inductive process speech becomes an integral part of the curriculum, instead of something unrelated to "English" set aside for practice once a week. This process calls for the highest gifts of the teacher – creative interaction with students. A good teacher must be sensitively responsible to the moment, skillful and creative enough to shape the moment into a memorable instance of learning.

To return to the thesis statement: "Communication reaches its highest form in the idea-exchange of different minds focused on defining a problem and arriving at solutions through analysis and creative collaboration." Or to put this on a different level – in the words of Anne Morrow Lindbergh: "Good communication is stimulating as black coffee and just as hard to sleep after." ■

ENCOURAGING STUDENT RESPONSES IN LITERARY DISCUSSION

by David V. Harrington, *Gustavus Adolphus College*

Virtually every teacher likes to have interested responsive students always ready to contribute to class discussion. Lively debate in the classroom often seems to us proof of a good or successful class. Moreover, we even feel like congratulating ourselves following class meetings in which discussion is particularly exciting or passionate. Only on rare occasions do we become suspicious of the correlation between lively discussion and successful teaching, that occurring following the grading of a particularly dismal set of essays or examination papers. We seem to be vaguely aware, at any rate, that active student participation is generally desirable in class discussion, while, underneath it all, we wish that it could be coordinated more with the broad program of advancing the student's critical understanding.

The conscientious teacher realizes, of course, that he cannot always permit students to participate as vigorously as they might want to. The teacher on occasion needs to give a planned lecture designed to direct their thinking along new channels, the lecture possibly taking up the entire class period. The students cannot count on being able to respond at such times. There may be long stretches of consecutive class periods when the teacher feels obliged to lecture in this fashion. Ideally, any time the teacher opens up the class for debate, throwing out as bait an open-ended question or a problem calling for a broad opinion, he would like to have his students ready and willing to respond. But students are not always automatically prepared to speak up in class. The irregularity of such opportunities may discourage a few. Some of them, of course, prefer not to speak at all. There are people who prefer to save their precious jewels, to cash them in at test time or in assigned papers. Some fall behind in their reading and really can't say anything of value. Probably students exist who actually are inhibited, afraid to speak in class. At any rate, most experienced teachers know that a responsive class is not something to be taken for granted. The teacher is either lucky because of the students making up the class or else he has done something to encourage responsiveness in class.

The foregoing needs qualifying, of course, by the admission that, in literature courses, it is relatively easy to develop a responsive spirit in

class, if one will settle for very general, easy impressions. If the student is encouraged to think that his opinions will be gratefully received, perhaps even rewarded, he will give them willingly. If one asks such questions as: "Do you like this play?" "Do you find these characters convincing?" "Is this an effective passage?" chances are students will give answers. They may even very willingly argue with each other. The teacher may congratulate himself for having stimulated "intellectual excitement." But general impressions are of limited value. And one can notice that most general impressions, of plays particularly, are limited to judgements about characterization: "These characters don't seem genuine." "I thought Falstaff was funnier in this play than in the other one." "I still think Mark Antony is the hero." Unless students can explain the basis in the text of the plays for such statements as these, they are not contributing a great deal either to class discussion or to their own critical development.

An experiment – attempted first in a Milton Seminar with limited enrollment (eight students), all advanced undergraduate English majors; which was duplicated in a larger heterogeneous freshman course (twenty-five students) – has given me a few ideas about how to solve that problem. I have asked students to submit prior to class each day their impressions from reading the daily assignment. These impressions are written on 4" x 6" index cards which I read, evaluate and keep on file. The impressions on these cards are intended to duplicate the kind of statement that we would like to have in intelligent, searching class discussion. The students are not expected to spend much time writing these impressions. The impressions certainly do not take the place of term papers or critical essays usually associated with such courses. They do, however, force the student to keep up on his daily assignments, to write regularly about literary problems, and, with proper supervision, to develop an increasing sophistication in literary discussion. The degree to which they develop this sophistication, I believe, correlates rather strongly with the instructions given them for writing these cards. They are encouraged, of course, to limit their subject to either a limited aspect of the play or poem, or to a particular passage. Beyond that, when one has the leisure to look at cards – and one certainly does not have the same opportunity to evaluate responses in the rapid give-and-take of class discussion – one can observe recurrent deficient tendencies: the superficial generalization, highly subjective gushing, the regular falling back upon commonplace, self-evident facts, as well as a strong inclination to single out for analysis basically non-literary problems. This last tendency, perhaps, deserves more specific illustration than the other. For example, in study of *Taming of the Shrew*, it seems legitimate enough to try to define the common assumption about

marriage assumed by characters in that play, which is that the man should be the master in the household. Katherina's independent (i.e. shrewish) behavior has dramatic value only if we accept the assumption of male domination as the ideal form of marriage during the time we are enjoying the play. It seems to me extra-literary, indeed impossible, to answer a student's question, "What is Shakespeare's idea about marriage?" Possibly a little better than this is a student response to *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* in which the student observed that in view of Shakespeare's presenting the workmen, the "rude mechanicals," as buffoons, "the poet must have had contempt for that class of people." On the basis of an accumulation of statements about lower class people and dramatic representations of them in the complete works of Shakespeare, perhaps one could defend such an assertion. But the teacher can more immediately and more profitably respond to such a card by pointing out the greater value in analyzing the dramatic functions of these buffoons, as contrasted to the young nobility and the fairy society, as well as the fact that the clowning of Bottom and his fellows helps dramatize a major theme in the play, of the irrationality of love. It is very hard to parry or redirect distracting questions in the midst of discussion. The advantage of having them write out their impressions or questions, which in fact are very much like the statements they make in class discussion, is that characteristic failings or digressions can be identified and warned against.

An important gain in the practice students get in writing these impressions is their becoming more consciously critical of what is happening in the plays, as in this note:

> *Romeo and Juliet* is a genuine tragedy; that I can see. But I can't help wondering what Shakespeare intends with the scenes of comic relief that intersperse the tragic scenes. For instance, Act IV, scene iv, after the exit of the family mourning Juliet's "death," Peter and the musicians enter and wit flows freely. It should be relief, but I don't know if, seeing it, I would laugh.

Occasionally, their initial responses to a play are in the form of questions; some of them are not easy to answer:

> Fate seems to be a strong force in this play. It indeed is fate which causes Romeo and Juliet to be of the feuding houses of Montague and Capulet, respectively, thus putting a real damper over the natural expression of their love for one another. However, Rosaline, whom Romeo also loved for a bit, is also of the house of Capulet. How is it that Romeo never encountered any of the difficulties in seeking Rosaline that he later was to experience with Juliet?

Later impressions of the plays, in terms of expectations for the course, often reveal impressive depth of awareness from a combination of class discussion and reexamination of the plays:

> The discussion of variations on pretense and delusion in *Twelfth Night* was very helpful. The over-sentimentalism of the characters had bothered me. Now I think I can sympathize with Orsino's lack of self-knowledge in the early part, and maybe even with Malvolio's later on. Our awareness of dramatic irony resulting from pretense and delusion also explains why Viola is by far the most impressive, respected character. She is fully aware that she is pretending in her disguise, yet she also makes us aware through ambiguous(!) statements that her love for the Duke is genuine. It's rather fitting that she is the only one who marries her first choice.

The students know they have to think consciously about their impressions of what they have read. They can't really leaf through the pages without knowing what is happening.

The teacher can make use of these cards any way he likes. The more frequent and meaningful his references to them in class discussions, the more likelihood that students will prepare them carefully and thus improve them. My practice has been to grade them on a three-point scale, marking each as "1," "2," or "3," depending on its value as a critical statement. This takes very little time. The statements particularly useful for understanding the current play are referred to in the next class period. Certain kinds of deficient statements are summarized and explained as deficient in light of our purposes in literary study. Every three or four weeks it is possible to give a progress report, telling the student, for example, "On the basis of 10 cards your average is 2.2. I am especially impressed by your references to specific passages to exemplify your general observations," or "Your average is 1.3. Frequently your statements are too general, too subjective, or your questions are too sweeping to allow for profitable discussion, for example, 'Why is *Twelfth Night* a good play?' "

It is my intention to thin out the less useful cards, keeping the better ones on file for reference in subsequent years, partly for comparison with this class, partly for use in preparing lecture-discussion meetings, with the idea of anticipating student problems, student responses. Every bit of evidence about how students think is of value.

The exercise of preparing these written impressions each day has had various favorable effects upon both the students and the teachers. The original objective was accomplished, which was to keep the students up-to-date, actually thinking about their reading assignments. As a matter of fact, the exercise, the first two times I experimented with it, accomplish-

ed only that much. But when the teacher carries this experiment a step or two further by pointing out fairly widespread, general deficiencies in common types of impressionistic statements, when the teacher is able to distinguish for the student, literary from non-literary reactions or problems, he can observe remarkable development in critical sophistication. Furthermore, though this point cannot be measured as exactly, the teacher, by clarifying differences between cards, also directs the students' critical observations in oral discussion. The result is more meaningful debate in class, a more responsible, disciplined approach to literary problems, with encouragement of greater reliance upon the evidence of the poem or the play being studied. It seems to me that students respond more favorably to the criticism of their written work than they do to criticism of their voluntary oral contributions in class. My feeling is that the use of the cards permits instructions aimed at raising the level of discussion without hurting any one person's feelings, without inhibiting student oral responses.

It is impossible to evaluate absolutely any teaching techniques because of remarkable variations among students, because of intangible factors influencing the spirit of a class or group, because of the difficulty in comparing one's own teaching performance with past performances covering generally the same material. I do believe, however, that the technique described above contributed directly to a substantially better performance by students in the Shakespeare class than I had known in several previous years. I recommend the technique to other teachers on the basis of this experience with index cards. ■

EDITORIAL NOTE

All the credit for assembling the material in this year's second issue should be paid to the co-editors who presided over the first. Their successor as editor wishes to thank Duane Scribner for leaving her with little else to do than write an editorial note expressing her gratitude and her intention to continue in the pattern of responsible editorship.

We propose to arrange the contents of succeeding issues of the *Minnesota English Journal* around single specified subjects. Future issues will concentrate on the small school; on curriculum revision and experimental procedures; on recommendations of works of fiction, poetry, drama, etc., that might serve to lend variety to the standard literature curriculum.

We hope to draw some of the contents from papers presented at the MCTE Annual Conference in Rochester. We hope, as well, to draw contributions from the membership at large on the elementary, secondary, and college levels. We think we can offer a special service to our state membership by offering them a publication in which to test their own theories or to seek answers to questions that they might hesitate for various reasons to submit to the national journals. If there is some particular problem that you would like comment on from your colleagues, we hope you will tell us about it – and contribute a comment of your own to the forum. One of the subjects we are particularly interested in, and would like to have your opinions about, is how English teachers on all levels of instruction judge students' competence in written composition.