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Focus: The Writing Process

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Teaching Invention to the Perfectionist

By
David Harrington

With reference to perfectionists, listeners might assume a concern for a rather limited, elite group of students who have so few problems, especially in writing that they don't need much attention. My use of ths term perfectionist, however, is intended mostly to focus upon negative rather than positive intellectual attitudes, and upon attitudes that may be distributed much more widely than any of us dream. In fact, they may be prevalent among students who are as typically among our lowest achievers. On the other hand, some of the worst consequences from perfectionism tend to increase with more advanced academic experience. To clarify this, let me offer first a neutral definition and then suggest contrasting ways of interpreting it. A common desk dictionary defines the perfectionist as one who sets extremely high standards for himself and is displeased with anything less. We are accustomed to admiring the setting of high standards. The real problem comes from being "displeased with anything less." For those doggedly striving to excel, the attitude of being displeased with anything less than the highest standard must cause more frustration than success. As teachers, we need also be concerned that students, fearing they may fall short of supreme triumph, opt for an easier solution, instead; that is, they may avoid all challenges or complex problems that truly test their best abilities. My purpose here is to review ideas and practices from recent discussions of rhetorical invention with a claim that the greater flexibility and versatility in such practices will help reduce the common difficulties growing out of perfectionist attitudes.

David D. Burns, a psychologist, has shown that many of the people seemingly committed to perfectionist idealism not only never excel at anything; they show hardly any inclination to excel. In a popularized essay in *Psychology Today* (November 1980) entitled "The Perfectionist's Script for Self-Defeat," Burns provides a scale for measuring such attitudes, showing the different sides of such a personality. Many students of mine, of greatly varying abilities or achievements, have revealed attitudes much like these. And the attitudes affect their writing. For example, a perfectionist is one who feels that if she doesn't set the highest standards for herself, she will end up a second-rate person. She assumes that people will think less of her if she makes a mistake. Or a person thinks that if he cannot do something really well, he shouldn't do it at all. He should be upset if he makes a mistake and should never repeat errors. On the other hand, a perfectionist may feel that if she tries hard enough, she should excel at whatever she attempts. But failing at something

important means she is less of a person. A perfectionist probably believes that scolding himself for failing to meet his standard will help him do better in the future.

There are inconsistencies in these various tendencies, of course. But the person who both believes she can excel at anything and yet is afraid of mistakes and failure, with this inconsistency, is a very real and troubled person. Probably most people occasionally have some of these conflicting tendencies. In writing courses, we may have difficulty finding anyone who embodies in pure form all of these attitudes. And yet there are recognizable family relationships. For our purposes, we should consider it likely that one who believes she must always excel will suffer from writing anxiety or writer's block. Such a writer could become extremely cautious and inhibited or get bogged down in day-dreaming or procrastination. The person afraid of appearing foolish, if left to his own devices, is likely to shy away from experimentation. Further writing practice for a person dominated by perfectionist attitudes may well detract from rather than contribute to confidence, greater originality, or continuing growth.

And yet these perfectionist attitudes are not entirely negative. We should find a place for them in the writing process. Such lofty idealism is valuable, perhaps essential, for gathering data, editing, and some aspects of revising. But there are points at which we should counsel our students to hold their perfectionist impulses in abeyance, especially while concerned with invention. It is a moot question whether we should ever tell anybody to be satisfied with being second-rate. We might point out, however, that if one is always to do her best, she must consistently improve on her previous performances. This is not easy to do. We should also point out, and this is in harmony with many good inventive procedures, that second-rate, vague, or inferior ideas and statements are often useful temporary instruments for working towards more impressive and satisfying compositions. The solution to perfectionism in writing, I will suggest, need not depend upon psychological counseling, but could come from more practically creative writing methods.

At about the same time that Burns's essay appeared in *Psychology Today*, Mike Rose published an essay in CCC (December 1980), which related to these problems also, with the lengthy title, "Rigid Rules, Inflexible Plans, and the Stifling of Language: A Cognitivist Analysis of Writer's Block." He believes that writer's block is caused by faulty teaching of stultifying rules or at least by an oversimplified notion of what is needed for a creative composition. For example, one may have trouble trying to obey the rule: always grab your reader's attention immediately; or the old rule I grew up with: know exactly what you are going to say before starting to write. Rose does not use the term "perfectionism" in his essay, but while denouncing the overly disciplined approach to composition implicit in his title, he identifies goals and standards contributing to much the same sort of frustration, defeat, or mediocrity as was discovered by Burns in his study of perfectionist personalities. One might infer

that the perfectionist attitudes, as defined by Burns, constitute a mental "set" in Rose's terms, a cognitive habit that limits perception.

In his study, Rose reminds us of the contrast between two types of investigative rules: specific algorithmic rules, which lead to exact, definite solutions; and heuristics, or less definite methods of inquiry, that lead to probability rather than to certainty. The common distinction between algorithms and heuristics ties in importantly with the task of controlling perfectionist inclinations. Heuristics, practically by definition, encourage a more flexible, tentatively exploratory approach to problems; whereas the perfectionist, we might guess, will seize upon definite rules as instruments supposedly leading to air-tight, unchallengeable solutions. As Rose puts it: "Composing calls for open, even adventurous thinking, not for constrained, no exit cognition." (p. 399)

It undoubtedly would help students if they could distinguish between those times when it pays to be exact and when it is better to experiment with less definite hypotheses to see how well they hold up and what they can do. Two of the easiest inventive techniques encouraging more tentative and exploratory beginnings are free writing and brainstorming. These two techniques, in fact, are rapidly becoming two of the most old-fashioned. Free writing, as described by Peter Elbow in *Writing Without Teachers* (1973), is especially valuable for the person inclined to think that every sentence must be perfect. Elbow encourages us to write for the sake of discovery, to waste words as a necessary way to arrive at words worth keeping. He argues that one can write quite a bit rapidly, in one session, then throw it all away, and rewrite in a more clearly focused and relevant style. In fact, one can follow this procedure for several drafts. If one practices free writing, one is not likely to hold very long to perfectionist attitudes.

Brainstorming, as a private, individual activity, helps to bring to the surface of one's mind what one knows about a subject before starting to write. As one jots down the great variety of topics or facts related to the subject matter, there will necessarily be repetition and much irrelevancy. Ray Kytle's *Pre-writing: Strategies for Exploration and Discovery* (1970) may be the earliest writing text encouraging this approach. The writer jotting down notes in a personal brainstorming session, then selects those things which look most workable and valuable and show potential for a manageable focus. Brainstorming, like free writing, is a very inexact activity which enables somewhat unconscious or intuitive ideas, feelings, or attitudes to come to the surface. The writer practicing brainstorming sees enough options so that she is unlikely to think of any one way as absolutely correct.

But the heuristic attitude in itself is more important than any particular heuristics. Some of the older traditional techniques like taking more complete and elaborate notes or even the practice of outlining, if used with flexibility, can also break down a perfectionist inclination. It is possible, of course, for the perfectionist note-taker to ruin himself by continuing to gather data for the

sake of thoroughness. Such a person can accumulate impossible masses of notes, xeroxed pages, and additional bibliography which would necessitate never-ending inquiry, make focusing impossible, and encourage a rationale for indefinite postponement. But the truly inventive note-taker, besides recording data, must be just as attentive to discarding or filing away irrelevant, overspecialized, divergent, or digressive notes. For productive writing, one should be exact in taking notes, but might better be casual or almost indifferent about using them. The notes should practically prove themselves necessary to help explore, clarify, or resolve a well,defined problem before one includes them. In more sober terms, we can at least encourage students to think of the most important function of note taking as preparing one's mind for expression of one's own ideas. Occasionally the note itself must be included and perhaps quoted. But note taking should generate ideas, not merely provide substance for papers.

Much has been said against the practice of outlining in modern studies of the composing process. Janet Emig's *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (1971) has clearly influenced many teachers to wonder about the necessity of outlining. Yet outlining can also help as an inventive technique, either as a tentative arrangement of material already gathered and expected, or as an instrument for reviewing and looking critically at that which has been written so far. Outlines are most useful when they are simple, flexible, and changeable. They can help one see what one has to work with and suggest directions for development. But the words and ideas actually written down can lead writers in unpredictable ways. The *act* of outlining, of making new, revised outlines as one proceeds, rather than following a decisive outline, can aid importantly in avoiding a faulty direction or in recognizing the need to move into an important neglected area. Thus outlines, like note taking, have their heuristic functions, too.

The same habits of mind implicit in the use of heuristics can be carried over into revising, an aspect of writing that must be seen as more nearly a continuation of invention than related to final editing. To set the tone for teaching productive revision, it might help to show photo duplicates of the radical changes made by famous professional writers in subsequent drafts of important manuscripts, if you have them. But, if you are bold enough, you might show examples from your own work as well. It is good to show students evidence. Plenty of research studies attest to the recursive character of productive writing. Much of the best work is by Nancy Sommers. In a key essay of hers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," *CCC* (December, 1980),she argues that good writers go back sporadically and unpredictably to alter earlier sections of their compositions rather than pushing on systematically in a linear process.

The more able writers seem to do this easily and continue amending incredibly messy, unreadable pages. This recursive activity may relate to perfectionism in some respects in that such writers are dissatisfied with

inadequate statements and keep changing them. But the good writer seems willing to record tentative, definitely second-rate statements while *en route*, presumably only half-consciously telling himself that he must come back to improve such passages.

There are various ways to communicate this principle. I confess to my students two typical tendencies in my own writing that necessitate regular revision. I will always prepare too lengthy an introduction to any subject I write about. It seems as though the writing out of needless preliminary data (that is to say needless *for my intended audience*) is necessary *for me* in some unconscious way to focus on the more relevant material worth keeping and presenting to readers. At any rate, I keep doing it without thinking about it until a draft is finished. It is a very easy problem to deal with: just discard the excessive introductory material, though I often don't discard enough. My other tendency, which shows a different aspect of invention, is to write what later on strikes me as exceptionally vague generalities in the earliest draft of a composition. But I write them with a more explicit understanding, in each case, that those statements cannot stand as written. Whatever refinement or greater precision these statements acquire through revision depends upon what comes later, depending somewhat unpredictably upon how various parts of the essay interrelate, upon how accumulated evidence dictates a more exact generalization, and upon the generative potential of key statements, especially those at the beginnings of paragraphs. This last point needs special attention as a technique that has pitfalls, but can help avoid problems caused by a perfectionist set.

Mike Rose, in the essay referred to before, concedes the necessity of rules and plans for good writing, but warns against rigid rules and inflexible plans. It seems like a good rule to push oneself hurriedly through a crude draft of a composition to construct a series of underdeveloped paragraphs that are the equivalent of a sentence outline. Some parts of such an essay are easier to work with at first and practically write themselves. Other parts seem recalcitrant, probably because the lead statements at the beginnings of potential paragraphs do not lead the writer on to useful productive thought. We should emphasize as an important part of inventive strategy the need to remove or revise lead sentences that close off or frustrate further development. Each writer probably has her own inclinations. I find myself frequently stopped because I make extravagant claims, or promise to develop points I don't know much about; in other cases, I am disinclined to continue because my statements look like needless repetition or dreary truisms. Some statements of these types need instant removal; others need modification or time for reconsideration. The less experienced writer probably has difficulty seeing such errors. But, if one is taught to look for and admit the probability of such errors, she should learn to change such statements and avoid getting bogged down.

Students with perfectionist tendencies surely have the potential to be excellent writers and we should help fulfill a good bit of that potential, though

we probably will never know how many actually incline that way. It is necessary, however, to prepare such students for the complexity, unpredictableness, and imperfection in the writing process. Helping them realistically understand invention is an important first step. But attitudes need changing, too. We should openly and enthusiastically advocate an approach to writing characterized by flexibility, experimentation, candid admission of the probability of errors in early drafts, and abundant strategies for revision. Perhaps for those students sufficiently caught up in the spirit of such writing programs, many of the less desirable perfectionist inclinations may never surface in their minds.

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From Informal Talk to Academic Prose: What Lies Between:

By

Anne-Aronson

There is often a cultural and dialectal gap between teachers and students in the composition classroom. Students bring to class a culture based almost exclusively on oral language, while we as teachers are firmly embedded in an academic culture based on essayist prose. If this gap does indeed exist, then we should see evidence of it in the writing students do for class. Before exploring this oral influence on student writing, it's important to point out that this powerful oral culture may be a particularly American phenomenon. One of our colleagues in the composition program at the University of Minnesota is here from Britain, and she tells the story about her first bus ride to campus. When she entered the bus she was immediately astounded by how much noise students were making socializing in a public place. In England, apparently, the students just don't talk that much. The real pressure in our society to be extroverted may not exist in many other cultures. We must try to look at this extroversion as a rich resource for students who are learning to expand on their uses of language.

In the past few years, composition researchers and theorists have studied how children and adolescents negotiate the transition from speaking to writing. Barry Kroll (1981) has proposed a 4-stage scheme that traces the writer's development from the first scribbles to professional writing.

1) The first stage is the Preparation stage. At this time the child learns the mechanics of writing. Writing is closely associated with drawing, not with speaking. Speech may surround the writing activity, but the child is not directly writing down what is said.

2) In the Consolidation stage, the child realizes that writing encodes speech. This is the stage in which you see children uttering the words that they're writing down.

3) The third stage, which brings us up to high school and college writers, is the differentiation stage. At this point the student learns that speaking and writing are different. I would prefer to modify this somewhat and say that the student learns that speaking and writing can be different. In fact, speaking and writing *can* be very similar, depending on the speaking or writing task. A personal journal, for example, resembles a loosely structured

internal monologue, while these talks that we're giving now are spoken but do not fit the mold of a stereotypically oral style. It is only possible to talk intelligently about the differentiation stage if we limit the discussion to the difference between casual talk and formal, essayist writing.

4) The final stage is the Integration stage. In this stage, oral and written strategies are interwoven. The writer makes a choice as to when a colloquialism will create the right effect. When we reach the integration stage we become adept at style-shifting. We know, for example, when a polysyllabic Latinate word will stimulate the thinking of our students and when it will put them to sleep (more likely the latter).

The extroverted, orally competent freshman who has limited experience of reading or writing is probably finding her way through the differentiation stage when we meet her in our composition classes. She often experiences a period of liberation when, during the first week of class, we spend lots of time on free writing, a form which allows her to draw deeply on her oral linguistic resources. She may even begin to think she's going to like the academic scene. The honeymoon is over, or at least seriously threatened, however, when we ask her to write expository prose or what James Britton (1975) calls transactional writing. Here the differentation problem comes into play. The student simply does not want to give up those wonderful oral strategies that have kept her alive and connected to other people for more than 15 years.

We see evidence of this powerful oral culture in student writing to greater and lesser degrees. Some students, in an attempt to assimilate to the academic culture, will hypercorrect—they'll drop the first person entirely from their writing, or they'll saturate their texts with nominalizations and complex but inefficient syntactic structures. Others will rely heavily on oral strategies. The attached paper (which constitutes the three paragraphs of a completed assignment) is by a student who falls into this group. This assignment was for a "researched argument" paper. We'll see that the student wholeheartedly took on the difficult task of negotiating the gap between oral and academic cultures.

Five features of this text in particular show the strong influence of oral culture:

1) The influence of speech is apparent in certain writing problems we call errors. The second sentence, for example, is a fragment: "Especially doing something you like." Mina Shaughnessy (1977) suggests that sentence boundary errors are due to the fact that students are accustomed to the complex cues of speech—pauses, gestures, intonation—which indicate the shape of an utterance. The writer of this text probably hears sentences 1 and 2 as two separate units of meaning: the separateness of the two ideas is captured in visual form by the question followed by a fragment. It's not easy to do an essayist rewrite of these opening sentences; the following is at least an attempt: "Earning 7 million dollars over five years doing any job at all would certainly be gratifying for any of us, but earning that much doing a job we enjoyed would be remarkable." It took me 32 awkward, imprecise words to say what

the student said in 17 words. The freshman's version may be flawed by academic standards, but it is considerably more concise.

2) The second paragraph opens with a reference to "they" where we would expect a more explicit reference to first-year U.S.F.L. players. According to the rules of academic prose, this pronoun reference is inappropriate because it might lead to confusion; it demands that the reader do a little inference work to figure out whether "they" is the football players, or the league, or some as yet unmentioned entities. In speech, however, this reference to "they" would not cause a problem. Conversational cues like loudness, intonation, and gesture might preclude the possibility of a misunderstanding by making it clear that the football players are the most salient characters in the argument. Or, alternatively, it might simply be that listeners expect to do that kind of split-second inference work while readers of formal prose expect a more explicit text. Whichever is the case, writers and readers of essayist prose agree to a contract which states that pronominal reference should always be absolutely clear in the text. Speakers and listeners, on the other hand, agree to a different contract which allows for a greater degree of inexplicitness in the utterances themselves.

3) The writer occasionally repeats himself. Notice in the third paragraph: "But if the owner pays all that money for a multi-year contract and the player can't perform, then he just lost a lot of money" and then one sentence later, "If Flutie can't perform like the owner expected then that owner just lost a lot of money." Speech is by nature repetitive. We usually can't remember that we said the same thing in the same way a minute ago (much less that we told the same story to the same person last week). In writing, however, and this is true for any kind of writing, not just formal prose, we can go back to our texts and eliminate the repetition.

4) A fourth characteristic of this text that reflects oral influence is that it digresses. The second paragraph is an example. The writer starts out discussing the fact that football players earn more than what's in their contract, but ends up in the middle of the paragraph writing about the injustice of the system in light of world poverty. The phrase "it makes you think" suggests that the writer is reacting spontaneously to the preceding statement, as he would if he were talking. This digressiveness isn't a sign that the student is a disorganized thinker. The following paragraph is more tightly constructed, has a main point, and incorporates supporting evidence (the quotation from Flutie, for example, is very appropriate). The second paragraph is digressive because it relies on oral strategies for communication. Life would certainly be dull if all our conversations dealt with only one topic at a time.

5) The final example is the argument that nobody should get paid 7 million dollars for doing something fun. This is not the kind of logic we look for when we read argument papers. It is a heavily emotional appeal, and the writer states it boldly in the first paragraph without supporting it anywhere else in the paper. This kind of appeal, however, would be highly

appropriate in a conversation. When I read these sentences, I can hear the intonational patterns behind it. "*I* don't think *anybody* should get paid that much money for doing something they *liked* to do as a kid." The writer is asking the reader to identify with his outrage. A rough draft of this paper was discussed by three of the student's peers and myself in a conference group meeting. One student challenged the writer on the "why should you get paid to do something fun" argument, countering that there's nothing wrong with making a lot of money doing something you like. I also challenged this argument in a second draft that the student showed me the following week. He still included it, though, right up at the front of the paper. Why did he do this? The student is obviously writing from anger. There is a powerful emotional force behind this essay, and a great deal of commitment to the argument. Unlike much academic writing, there is little hedging or mitigation in this paper. This kind of visceral argument is not simply oral, but it reaches for the qualities of oratory. The writer attempts to persuade by aiming for the nerve endings of the reader. In doing so, it fails to be dispassionate, a quality which I think is expected of most transactional prose. The commitment in this paper, the "heat" as one researcher, William Smith, puts it, results from the fact that the topic emerges from the writer's own culture. The writer's love for football was apparent in the journal he kept for class where he would describe at length euphoric afternoons playing touch football with friends. In writing about this topic for an expository assignment, he takes a risk, because the language and feeling which surround football for him are embedded in an oral culture. (I should add that he also takes a risk because his teacher knows nothing about football and doesn't like it). The commitment which gives this writing purpose, direction, and voice is what seems to prevent the essay from being cool, logical—academic.

I'd like to draw three conclusions from this examination of the oral influence on one student's writing. The first is that the oral influence on student writing consists of real strategies that have worked well for the student in speaking situations. The speech-like qualities of undifferentiated writing derive from a different, not an inferior communicative system from the one we're accustomed to in our academic culture. The medieval romance was a genre in which extensive digression was expected rather than prohibited, because the romance was rooted in the oral culture of the period. Writers of Middle Ages were not disorganized thinkers because they wrote this way.

The second conclusion derives from my point above about the commitment factor in the paper we've been looking at. The essay on the U.S.F.L. may be overly emotional for transactional writing, but it also has a strong, distinctive voice. In attempting to negotiate the gap between oral and academic cultures, the writer has not given up his own linguistic rhythms. Although these are oral rhythms, they give the paper a richness it would not have if it were written obediently according to the conventions of academic writing. The writer may have failed to differentiate between formal prose and

informal speech, but that does not mean that his writing isn't effective.

I think this example shows that, as teachers, we need to value the oral quality in our students' writing and encourage them not to abandon it as they proceed in their development. This is especially important when students draw directly on their oral culture for topics that really matter to them. Our task is to show them that the oral style is not the only one, and that they will become more powerful writers when they are in a position to choose from among more than one style.

A third conclusion is that, as teachers, we must give students the opportunity to write expressively—that is, in a fashion that is close to speaking—and we must give them credit for doing so. We tend to think of expressive writing as a warm up exercise, a way to get them ready for the real stuff. Maybe we need to give more weight to this kind of writing and show students that it too can be improved—journals, for example, can get better. We need to convince our students that they own many voices and that the joy of language is in playing with those voices, exploring them, and testing them out on a variety of readers.

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Appendix—Student-Written Sample

Wouldn't it be nice to earn seven million dollars over five years? Especially doing something you like. Well that's how much Doug Flutie will be earning in his first year in the U.S.F.L. I don't think anybody should get paid that much money for doing something they liked to do as a kid. First year players in the U.S.F.L. are payed too much money. The league should put a range on how much each team can spend on its players.

The money that they earn in a contract is not all that they get. The money they make from commercials and investments has to be taken into account too. According to Bob Woolf, Flutie's attorney, Doug is on top of football, money wise. "I believe his contract is the highest in professional sports for any rookie and that he's the highest paid professional football player (Mihoce c1): It makes you think of all the poor and deprived people in the world when they can go make that much money doing something they like. Why should one person live a life of luxury when his career is playing a game like he did when he was a kid. A lot of these players do charity work on T.V. and other things but they still gain money from the publicity. This publicity brings in the crowds to games which helps the owners. No matter what they do on the side they always end up helping themselves anyway.

The publicity the player got during college is the main reason the owner picked him for his team, such as Flutie who won the Heisman trophy. But a football player should have to prove how good he is before they pay him that much money. I know he had to be pretty good in college to get that publicity but what's great in college isn't always good in the pro's (Wulf 22). What they should do is pay the player a little the first year and pay him more as he proves himself. Who knows how he's going to perform when you put him on a different team then he was on in college. Flutie felt the same way after he found that they traded the other quarterback so he could be the starter. "My initial reaction was that I was shocked, I didn't anticipate it. I would have like to have earned the position and have to beat someone out (Mihoce c2):. If they can't prove themselves then the owner doesn't lose any money. But if the owner pays all that money for a multi-year contract and the player can't perform then he just lost a lot of money. For example, the contract for Doug Flutie, of the New Jersey Generals, is worth seven million dollars over five years, whether he does good or bad. If Flutie can't perform like the owner expected then that owner just lost a lot of money.

Using Literature to Teach the "Process": Some Practical Applications of Heller's *Catch-22*

By
William Dyer

When I taught my first classes as a teaching assistant at the University of Massachusetts in 1971, I recall feeling guilty about dragging a piece of good literature into the classroom kicking and screaming in the service of freshman writing. Since most T.A.'s I worked with were not writing teachers, but literature enthusiasts, we were delighted to have something to talk about that would shift the emphasis away from our ignorance of the writing process.

Actually commentators like Hairston, Flower, Garrison, and D'Angelo have shown that teaching the writing process can be compatible with a fine poem, song lyric, or complex novel. The process approach presumes a problem-solving orientation: writing always begins with a question-mark and proceeds through several stages, each of which engages heuristics—successive stages of generating questions. The questions multiply in the course of each step, from the discovery and exploration of it through revision.

Good literature, the writing process, and life share one important trait—they don't render easy answers, certainly not simply right or wrong ones. They require our direct participation in order to arrive at even the most tentative solutions. And understanding literature, like life, demands that we *re-make* it, take it apart and put it together again within an ordered frame that reflects that understanding.

Over the past several years, I have had occasion (no, actually I have invented one) to use *Catch-22* in my composition classes. I first began to teach it because I simply love the book. But *Catch-22* also afforded me a chance to tie reading to writing, critical thinking to the composing process. *Catch-22*, as everyone knows, is a hallucinatory patchwork quilt of a book, apparently formless, portraying a world overrun by paranoiacs and overseen by an apparently lunatic-creator. But the confusion of Heller's novel provides a constructive learning environment to test and change writing and thinking habits. No magical lightning bolts of perception strike here—readers must earn their way to order and meaning and sanity. As in any realistic problem-solving activity, one wrings meaning from this novel by *doing*, participating in it, making it one's own.

Through the *Catch-22* experience, students learn (1) to equate the experience of reading the novel with the thinking process; (2) to use pre-writing heuristics to collect lists of data from the novel that support a focus; (3) to engage pre-organizational heuristics to collate the collected data; (4) to move from potential ordering principle to a way of thinking and writing about the focus—a purpose statement; (5) to practice "summary" skills that will help to re-order and re-see the experiences of the novel; (6) to teach inductively how to prepare for an essay exam. My paper will generally chart the methods I employ to subordinate *Catch-22* to the composing process.

I

When I assign *Catch-22* to my Composition II students on the first day of the quarter, I must establish groundrules. First, the *Catch-22* reading/writing "problem" will be the last one that we shall tackle. Because of its length, students need time to read it carefully. And, before I broach discussion on the book's characters and situations and issues, everyone concerned must have completed the entire text. Widespread "reading-with-training wheels" would seriously compromise the collaborative approach that I have developed. Instead, the group activities that assume a read-through should generate some focused re-reading and re-assessment. Also, since I intend our reading and writing about *Catch-22* to mirror the writing process, I will need ample time to walk students through several tasks that rehearse stages of composing.

Finally, all of us must accept the premise that opening the cover of this (or *perhaps any*) book resembles the process of blithely turning a corner and suddenly confronting an accident. It's an awfully large and messy accident, and nobody's saying who caused it or, in fact, whether it will or can be cleaned up. It disturbs us, maybe to the point of wanting to walk around and beyond it. However, it is not necessary for us to *like* what we see; rather, we must cognitively sort and file what is in front of us and reconcile it with the rest of our experience before going on. In other words, we shall approach the book as a model of reality.

Before I set up the sequence of activities for *Catch-22*, permit me to mention briefly a large assignment that directly precedes and facilitates the *Catch-22* process—the Interview Analysis. Whether the interview task has focused upon the world of work, differences between two generations, or a current issue, questions (and clear, open-ended, un-prejudiced ones) will have represented the core of this assignment. Before anything beyond topic selection could happen, students had to generate lists of questions, evaluate them, and sequence them according to purpose and focus. These same question-generating and ordering activities inform our very earliest efforts to discuss and discover *Catch-22*. Locating questions to ask the book and an effective sequence for asking them eclipses a reader's obsession for "right answers."

Besides providing practice in heuristics, the interview analysis offers one other indirect benefit. The interview serves as both research tool and source, but, unlike library sources, it possesses a radical instability. Depending upon the clarity and sensitivity of the questions, an interviewee will either respond or withdraw. While *Catch-22* is no less inert than other published materials, it does "react" to an open-minded, respectful reader who has temporarily suspended judgements about the book's materials and seeks an active dialogue with the text. Taking notes mindlessly from the book won't work here; however, carefully framed questions will "open up" the book to subsequent reshaping.

II

I introduce students to my heuristic emphasis very early by means of a Reaction-Research journal. As with other recording devices, this journal chronicles individual responses to the the *Catch-22* reading/writing/thinking experience. It contains summary material, a string of accumulating questions, observations, and lists and locations of quotes, paraphrases and situations.

However, the journal also serves two other vital functions. It documents the proceedings of group activities—the questions that direct collaborative "research" of the book or that result from evaluation of such research, and each group's conclusions. Also, it offers a medium for pursuing some essential "personal research." While the questions that direct this self-analysis are simply worded, they are not simple. Each week as students progress through the reading, I assign some of the following to energize the cognitive process:

(1) What do you believe in?
(2) What are you willing to fight over or for?
(3) Does *Catch-22* have any meaning in your life?
(4) Can you document a "*Catch-22*" experience?
(5) What is your idea of success or failure?
(6) To what degree are you or your teachers responsible for your education?
(7) Have you ever had to communicate with anyone without language? Explain.
(8) What constitutes cowardly behavior to you?
(9) What makes a good relationship?

These questions may expose prejudicial attitudes, as well as some unexamined assumptions that underlie them;. Students' responses provide an initial yardstick for assessing Milo Minderbinder's free enterprise, Appleby's patriotism, Captain Black's obsession with loyalty, Major Major Major's father's devotion to the work ethic, Nately's passion for democracy, Clevinger's dedication to education, and Scheisskopf's competitive drive to win marching medals.

Although I prepare background information for the first day of discussion to place *Catch-22* historically, politically, and culturally, except for orchestrating the written and group exercises that evolve from discussion and assigning the critical analysis paper, I scrupulously avoid talking *about* the book or telling students what I think it means. Because we intend to treat the novel as a problem-solving activity, I define myself as primary guide and resource person, I have read the book once a year since 1972 as an affirmation of life, sanity, and the criminally bizarre. Along the way, I have indexed virtually every character and situation, and I know their locations intuitively. In short, I can creatively mediate in the "re-creating" process. And, on the way to discovery, I clarify and urge re-formulation of students' questions, as tour guide and interpreter between their comfortable environment and the nightmarishly absurd world of the book.

With my role clearly defined, we spend the first day indiscriminately generating questions about the novel. Group activities and answers must wait upon a "damage estimate," an examination of the extent of the problem before us. In a discussion-oriented version of pre-writing, I attempt to record their questions on the board as they ask them, and I request that the class enter them in their Reaction-Research journals. Students' questions flow steadily because questions are endemic to the *Catch-22* environment. A partial listing of these questions reads as follows:

What war is being fought?
Who's in charge of the war?
What's the approximate time frame of the book?
What were people's attitudes about the war being fought?
What's an Anabaptist?
What the devil is a Snowden?
Could you define deja vu?
Why does that character Orr stuff chesnuts in his cheeks and pay the prostitute to beat him senseless with her spiked heel?
How can Milo buy his eggs for seven cents, sell them for five cents, and still make a profit?
Who or what is the Soldier in White?
Who are John Milton, Milton John, Washington Irving, and Irving Washington, and why are characters like Yossarian signing letters with these names?
Is there anyone who isn't insane in this book?
Why does Nately's whore expend so much energy trying to kill Yossarian?
What is a protective rationalization?
Who was the President of the United States at the time the book was written, and what significant political and social events occur during its creation?

Is Yossarian a coward for refusing to fly any more missions and running away to Sweden?
Why Sweden?
Who is the dead man in Yossarian's tent?
Does anyone believe in anything larger than self in this book, or is God the irresponsible, incompetent, deranged hayseed Yossarian claims he is?
Is Heller at all in control of what he has written?

Although our list is not exhaustive, this initial encounter parallels the normal routine of preparation and evaluation for every writing problem pursued during the term and can be extended to any writing-thinking problem. Despite the free-form aimlessness of the exercise, it accomplishes what successive rounds of pre-writing usually produce: a relatively clear view of the dimensions of the problem and some choices available for solving it.

From practice on previous assignments, students can anticipate the inevitable next step: consolidating our questions into categories that we can rank by degree of complexity. Although many groupings are possible, students have repeatedly identified six: (1) what elements define individual characters; (2) how characters relate (*are* these individuals simply random ping-pong balls ricocheting off one another?); (3) what beliefs, if any, various characters subscribe to; (4) how effectively characters communicate; (5) how words are defined, contextually and stipulatively; (6) and what ordering principles operate in the book.

On this first day, neither the specific questions nor categories for grouping them determine the success of the venture. We agree only that we must ask and then address them on the principle of the simplest questions first. Since the characters offer the easiest entry into the book, they will dominate the second day's in-class group activities.

But before I dismiss this first class, I want to claim the radical heuristic orientation of *Catch-22*. Yossarian is obsessed by questions from the first to last page. His conviction that all agencies in the war are plotting to kill him motivates him to make someone accountable for his embattled situation, and Yossarian's name, appearance, and behavior become nagging cyphers for all who encounter him (*i.e.*, the Chaplain's marvelous deja vu incident on page 210). In fact, the book becomes a seminar on what happens when educational institutions discourage and students stop asking questions. As an example of how we all must seize responsibility for the learning process, a truly educational environment materializes on page 35—a briefing session. As always, the "instructor" Clevinger and his aide deliver intentionally obscure statements and no information, but this time Yossarian and others persist to dissipate the verbal smokescreen:

'Who is Spain?'
'Why is Hitler?'

'When is right?'
'Where was that stooped and mealy-colored old man I used to call Poppa when the merry-go-round broke down?'
'How was trump at Munich?'
'Ho-ho beriberi.'
and
'Balls!'

all rang out in rapid succession, and then there was Yossarian with the question that had no answer:

'Where are the Snowdens of yesteryear?'

Significantly, these questions are incoherent. Most questions form and evolve in dialogue, but, without feedback from asking and responding, they become skewed and idiosyncratic. Like Yossarian's question in the briefing, ours constitute a first step—they can be re-framed, but we must first identify questions suitable for framing. If we do not, the book will remain as silent as Clevinger's future briefing sessions.

The process of group work and writing exercises that ensues from day two to the end of the experience imitates the shape of the composing process, from deconstruction through purposive re-construction. Discussion of the second day centers upon the examination of five characters (again, it matters not which ones), with particular emphasis on their physical attributes, family background, education, values, beliefs, and behavioral quirks. Yossarian can, but need not, be included as a candidate for individual discussion. Evaluation of Major Major, Aarfy, Doc Daneeka, Milo, Chaplain Tapman, Colonel Cathcart, Orr, and others cannot proceed without considering Yossarian's effect on them: Yossarian loves the Chaplain at first sight (7); Milo treats him as confessor and consultant (64-69); Aarfy cannot or will not hear his fearful screams when he is wounded during a mission (151-54, 297-98); Danneeka walks him through the intricate immoral logic of "*Catch-22*." Yossarian represents one of the few constants in the cognitive bombardment of disappearances, shifts in scene and temporal sequence and sensory detail. But, whatever the characters, each group will produce a series of specific textual references, most of which they will identify by page number.

This active collaboration fulfills three objectives: (1) a sharing of each group's findings with the rest of the class; (2) a short (ten-minute) summary by each group member that draws conclusions about his/her character and connects the character with the concept "*Catch-22*;" (3) a homework assignment that asks each group member to formulate a question linking his/her character to a larger issue in the book. For example, Milo's behavior in his contractual agreements with the Germans (238, 261-62), his bombing of the squadron (265-66), and his nutritional nightmare of the chocolate-covered cotton (269) seem to put our attitudes concerning capitalism, success, the American dream, patriotism, and the competitive work ethic to the test. Are all of these principles worthless, or does the book vindicate some of them?

This question-forging activity forms the basis for the next three days of group research. At the start of the next class, each group chooses one question from among the five to six generated by its members and begins compiling a list of textual situations relevant to the question. Again, the answers to these questions matter less than participation in the process of recreating the book around them. As I have indicated, students often compose questions relating to the following areas: problems of communication, the relation of *Catch-22*'s reality to ours, the issue of belief, and comparative definitions. Whatever the questions, the widening of focus from mere observations about characters that these more general questions effect helps each student carve out a more substantial island of meaning and to envision possibilities for writing the critical analysis paper.

As I discovered during this past winter quarter, this group experience can lead to more than just the summary-analysis statements that members write after sharing the results of their research. A group collecting textual examples of communication found three separate references to the Soldier in White (10, 173-75, 373). They noted the obvious elements of the soldier's body cast, his silent, motionless state, and the black space where the mouth should be that suggest no one may be inside. Indeed, the nurses' method of draining fluids into and out of the soldier with two reversible jars continues with no attempt to measure its effect. But when the group determined that the Soldier in White on page 373 might well be different from the earlier one and that no staff person had tried to confirm "its" identify, they had discovered a useful insight on the communication problem.

Beyond a simple researched response to their question, three members of this group isolated focuses for their critical analysis: the death-resurrection theme, as seen through Yossarian's "playing dead" for a family of Italian-American mourners (189-91) and his personal awareness of the sanctity of life through mourning Snowden's death (447-50); "the quality of care" issue, a distinction between mechanical, unconscious treatment of faceless "numbers" and self-sacrifice; and a comparison between traditional and often empty verbal communication and instinctual physical gesture, sign, and symbol that, like Orr's repetitive plane crashes and valve repair, may convey a simpler truth. Discovering the text in this way re-creates a pre-writing approach to narrowing and exploring a writing topic.

The final and fifth day for group activities extends the exploration of islands of meaning. On this occasion, the groups agree to synthesize independently and then share textual evidence of larger ordering principles that make this novel about anti-form cohere. This discussion of forms and patterns matters for two reasons: first, because it forces students to think about lines of connection between the individual islands of meaning they have been researching, and, second, because this search for an organizing principle within the book parallels the same sequential process of development that they are currently pursuing in their own papers. Form follows

content; pre-writing generates the material from which patterns emerge, and questions and statements that one can articulate about those lists of materials provide alternatives for selecting from, sequencing, and shaping those lists. Most importantly, this investigation of form demonstrates the identity and reciprocity of the thinking, reading, and composing processes.

During this activity, the groups often render tentative answers to questions posed on the very first "brain-storming" encounter with *Catch-22*. Our earliest queries concerning the operation of time, place, and situational sequences reveal that most of the book consists of interrupted fragments. These fragments are dream-like and surreal, obeying no logical chronology and occurring in such a wild and blurred variety of places as to suspend them above solid ground.

In addition to Heller's dislocation of temporal and situational sequence, most of the chapters in the book are insular units. Although they deal with similar subject matter, these chapters are as isolated as the characters are alienated. Furthermore, there is no underlying plot. In its place are excruciatingly vivid, occasionally sickening descriptions (*i.e.*, the graphic excursion into Snowden's internal geography and mutilation of Kid Sampson by McWatt's airplane propeller {348}), self-contained sequences that manifest a crazy dialectic (*i.e.*, the scatological trial of Clevinger for insubordination {77-81}, Nately's discussion of ethics and survival with the old whoremaster {249-53}, Yossarian's passive observation of the menagerie of violence in the darkened streets of Rome {421-28}, and, of course, the dissociative dialogue between Snowden and Yossarian), and a number of scenes that repeat and accrete (*i.e.*, the Soldier in White, the *deja vu* experiences of the Chaplain involving a naked Yossarian sitting in a "tree of life," and the eight scattered but successively more detailed Snowden references).

By this point in the process, the groups know their way reasonably well through the text, have established some key page references as sign-posts, and can identify some of these ordering principles. In their research journals, they write about how these repeated scenes, just like Orr's mimetic performances involving the valve and the whore's high heel, force Yossarian and *us* to re-perceive our experience of the book. And, as Webster's reminds us (along with Young, Becker, and Pike), perception means to understand by re-ordering what we see.

Regarding the formal writing assignments that evolve from such a use of *Catch-22*, I can comment only briefly. The actual form and assignment options for the critical analysis spring directly from the in-class discussion mode, short writing responses to the group activities, and two fifteen-minute individual conferences outside of class. The only point to make *in class* is that each student must settle upon, explicate, and evaluate the significance of a small part of the text and, by the end of the paper, relate that specific *part* to the whole. The paper invokes the steps of the writing process just as the thinking, reading, writing activities in-class have sought to rehearse by re-creating them.

As for the essay exam that punctuates the two and one-half week experience, the students are ready for it. Perhaps without being fully aware of it, they have contributed to the design and practice of a method of studying and re-seeing. Consistent with every other aspect of the *Catch-22* experience, questions represent the core of the essay exam—if one knows in advance by pre-writing what they will be, one can prepare responses to fit them. And not just any questions will do; they must be general yet significant enough to enable a synthesis of substantial portions of textual material.

Reproducing this process has justified using such a large text (a very short one unnaturally truncates the re-ordering experience). We discovered increasingly larger controlling questions to plumb the text, and built increasingly wider circles of meaning. Use of this heuristic device can transform anyone's preparation from an inefficiently linear to an organic one. And, unless the instructor creating the exam is an illegitimate offspring of Rasputin or some devious trickster, this device equips each student to anticipate several possible questions and to practice assembling concrete support and organizational options. Preparation for a practical task has occurred by activating the composing process, and this method should work equally well with any content-oriented course.

One final note: I am not proselytizing for *Catch-22*, nor am I implying that my method of presenting and using the book is the only one. One could well begin the course with reading and writing activities on the book, with other larger tasks like an historical analysis and an interview paper evolving from it. But, in recreating an overloaded individual thinking process that reflects confusion from sensory bombardment and only occasional ability to focus, filter, and shape that sensory data into a purposive choice, *Catch-22* provides an ideal environment to link the active focusing, filtering, and ordering processes of reading, writing, and thinking. I heartily recommend it.

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Integrating the Reading and Writing Processes: Considerations for Teachers

By

Suzanne L. Bunkers

In recent years, reading and composition theorists have begun to assess the interrelationships between the reading and writing processes, and classroom instructors have begun to develop strategies for integrating the teaching of reading and writing. For such an integrative program to succeed, we as teachers need to examine not only the ways in which the two processes are related but also our own and our students' attitudes toward reading and writing.

Moffett's assertion that most writing assignments tend to be evaluative checks on reading that students have supposedly done has wide-ranging implications for the teaching of reading and writing, particularly when examined in conjunction with Smith and Hansen's finding that elementary-level students generally enjoy reading a story more than they enjoy writing about it and that "the practice of assigning reading-related writing tasks may, in the long run, detract from the development of positive attitudes toward reading" (Moffett, 17-18; Smith and Hansen, 244). What all three theorists imply is that, when students who complete reading-related writing tasks perceive those tasks as work rather than as enjoyment, the students derive little pleasure from either the reading or writing process, with the result that they develop negative attitudes toward both reading and writing.

If more emphasis could be placed on making reading-related writing tasks both enjoyable and personalized, students might react more positively to teachers' attempts to integrate writing with reading. Singer and Donlan corroborate this view, noting that, because writing is often assigned but not taught, "student writing can result in bitter disappointment for teacher and student alike" (134). Singer and Donlan, who believe that students can learn to write clearly and effectively in response to text material, emphasize motivation as the crucial element in this learning process. They rightly conclude that students are more predisposed toward writing when their motivation comes from "a personal desire to communicate than from a determination to meet the demands of a teacher's assignment" (139).

An emphasis on the personal desire to communicate, therefore, may well be the touchstone for analyzing the interrelationships between reading and writing. Bazerman's "Conversational Model" provides an excellent theoretical perspective for such an analysis. He stresses that reading, lis-

tening, speaking, and writing can no longer be categorized as discrete learning skills. Teachers and students alike need to recognize the interplay among these communication processes. By considering each piece of text material as a contribution to a written dialogue, a reader builds an "independent, critical" framework for analyzing a written message and for viewing her or his own writing as a "powerful and appropriate contribution to an on-going conversation" (Bazerman, 60). At the heart of Bazerman's model is the concept of critical thinking.

Critical thinking incorporates what is commonly referred to as "skeptical thinking" as well as what is known as "creative thinking." A critical thinker is a person with an inquiring attitude, a person who differentiates between fact and opinion, who develops and applies standards for evaluation. Moreover, a critical thinker is a person who invents strategies appropriate for comprehending materials, who forms mental images, who responds sympathetically and empathetically, who engages in a continual process of decision-making, and who lets the material lead him or her on into a consideration of further implications of the material at hand.

Reading, like writing, is predicated on critical thinking and involves the interplay of several elements: message sender, message, message medium, message context, and message receiver. Wayne Booth's concept of the true rhetorical stance as "proper balance among three elements that are at work in a communicative effort: the available arguments about the subject itself, the interests and peculiarities of the audience, and the voice, the implied character of the speaker" is as applicable to reading as it is to writing (141). At the heart of the true rhetorical stance is the ability to think critically. Thus the more a reader develops a sense of a personal stake in the "on-going conversation," the more that reader develops the critical thinking ability requisite for integrating the reading and writing processes.

How, then, can we help our students to develop a sense of trust in the personal response as the basis for the critical? Pigott has found that teaching readers how to analyze an author's presuppositions and techniques enables them not only to comprehend and enjoy the text materials but also to respond thoughtfully and critically in writing. Summarizing her experience in helping students learn to think critically, Pigott stresses that " . . . if a student does not know the process of reading, he or she will not understand the process of writing, and will not be able to participate completely in the process of communication" (534-35).

Such a strategy for teaching reading in conjunction with writing emphasizes the teacher's role in helping students develop confidence in the validity of their personal responses. Thus, the focus of the students' reading-writing activity is shifted away from determining what answers will satisfy the instructor and toward determining what critical perspectives will satisfy themselves. This focus enables students to validate their personal responses by grounding the critical in the personal.

For many years composition theorists have asserted that the barrier between "personal" writing and "critical" writing is an artificial one which should be broken down because, in actuality, the personal *is* the critical. Irmscher, for instance, views writing as a means of self-realization and of self-knowledge for the writer. Irmscher refers to writing as a generative process of discovery; and, in discussing the relationship between writing and reading, he concludes, "Reading is ultimately the best teacher of writing" (23). If we are to integrate the teaching of reading and writing, then, we would do well to examine whether such an artificial barrier also exists in our own attitudes toward reading and, if so, how it can be broken down so that we as readers can ground our critical reading in personal response. [1]

Furthermore, before we can integrate reading and writing in the classroom, we need to do more extensive assessment of attitudes toward writing and toward the interrelationship of reading and writing. A variety of reading attitude inventories (e.g., Dulin Chester, Mikulecky) have proven effective in measuring readers' feelings and behaviors in regard to reading. A need remains, however, for similar devices to measure affective responses to writing. Rather than rely exclusively on diagnostic instruments that measure skills acquisition, we need to develop sound instruments for measuring students' attitudes and behaviors and for assessing our own attitudes not only toward the writing process but also toward the teaching of writing.

Once the validity and reliability of such instruments have been established, we will have the kinds of information we need concerning the affective domain of writing and the composing process. By evaluating this information and comparing it with that already obtained concerning the affective domain of reading, we can begin to develop a more comprehensive program for the effective integration of reading and writing in the classroom. [1]

Notes

[1] A good deal of work is being done concerning the teaching of reading and writing as an integrative process. Several fine text books have recently appeared which address this issue. In *Writing and Reading: The Vital Arts,* Dorothy Rubin presents a series of units designed to enable college freshmen to improve fundamental reading and writing skills. Similarly, in *In Print: Critical Reading and Writing,* Martin Stevens and Jeffrey Kluewer structure their text based on the assumption that "careful critical reading is integrally related to good writing" (xiv). Standard writing instruction is integrated with commentaries on selected readings, with the hope of helping students learn to analyze critically what they have read and to respond to it effectively in writing. These two texts are representative of continuing efforts by both theorists and teachers to come to terms with reading and writing as an integrative process.

In addition, the May 1985 issue of *College Composition and Communication* (Volume 36, No. 2) contains a number of thought-provoking articles on such aspects of this subject as writing across the curriculum, sequencing expository writing, and a student-based approach to writing assignments.

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Young Adult Literature: Scanning the Horizon for Readers

By
Richard Peck

A book that you hope young people will read had better not begin with these fatal words: "When I was Young...." No, in all the ways that count, you and I were never young, not as the young are in the 1980's. When we were twelve and sixteen and even twenty, we had not already won all the unearned freedoms of adulthood without any of the responsibilities. We did not enjoy a higher standard of living than our own parents. We could rarely elect a course, but we could flunk one and sometimes did. We still had mountains to climb and rites of passage. Some of us had draft cards and diagrammed sentences. We were not more powerful than we would be as adults, and so you and I were never young as the young now know it.

In the days since I grew up, adolescence has stretched far beyond its natural border into what used to be adulthood, now melding seamlessly with the lifestyle of the Yuppie, who is the child who refused to grow, still locked into conformity, consumerism, and his own sound system.

We Americans have a lot to answer for. We're the people who invented adolescence, and when we discovered that we'd devised the most troubled and troubling time of life, we invented graduate school to extend it.

But I can say to you, "When I was young, . . .," and so I will. As a high-school kid I played it cautious. As a result, I encountered a guidance counselor only once, and for a routine interview. I remember it well.

As I sat in his office, he said to me, "What do you want to do when you're grown?"

I was too cautious to tell the truth. Besides, the truth rarely occurs to a sophomore. I wouldn't spill my secret fantasy of becoming a writer. "I want to be a teacher," I said. Maybe I said it too fast.

The counselor said, "Let me give you some advice. Ninety-five percent of all people end up in careers they did not foresee. They even end up in careers that didn't exist when they were in school. Keep your options open."

What I remember best about that brief encounter is myself walking away from it. I was sixteen and shaking with rage. How dare an adult suggest to me that life is full of uncertainties, that you might need to innovate and change even in adulthood? What right did this so-called professional have to tell me there are no sure things?

And so perhaps I was young once after all.

Today I'm a writer and no longer a teacher, and I write chiefly in a field that didn't exist when I was in school, the field of Young Adult novels.

These are novels on the very American theme, coming-of-age. Their main message is that there are no sure things and that you'd better learn to innovate in the name of personal survival.

There was no Young Adult fiction as we know it now when I was coming of age. Instead, my generation was expected to make the imaginative leap from children's to adult literature on the first day of junior high in the dead center of the hormonal horrors of puberty.

Moreover, we were never introduced to contemporary literature or living authors. We were taught the literature of the past, presented as history: *Silas Marner, Ethan Frome, Evangeline, Julius Caesar, A Tale of Two Cities*. Our teachers taught from their college notes out of anthologies cheaply collected because the selections were in the public domain.

It was not a perfect system. American schools have never done very well in igniting young people to the possibilities of fiction. Most people slipped through without really understanding that literature is a necessary view of the world, even of their own lives.

But those were better days than these. Today the minority of youngsters who can read through the length of a book are increasingly in the "Gifted" program. Today a mounting majority of high-school graduates cannot read their own diplomas. Though graduation is their divine right, it prepares them neither for a world of work nor higher education.

But novels are never about well-fortified people living through easy times. Novels are always about the individual survivors of trying times.

And so our books burst into being, to give aid and comfort to the young in a trying time: in an era of schools flattened by liberal theory and political manipulation, in an era of families decimated by divorce and the welfare system and television.

Despite mounting illiteracy, we flourished. We flourished because we celebrate life whereas watching television is what you do with your life when you don't want to live it. These books arrived in the era that needed them, but where did they come from?

In the generation before us five landmark novels provided adult readers with a remarkably revised way of looking at the young coming of age. Those memorable novels were Betty Smith's *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, John Knowles' *A Separate Peace*, Carson McCullers' *The Member of the Wedding*, William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*, and the emblematic *The Catcher in the Rye* by Salinger.

They were of course not Young Adult novels. Though they later entered school curricula, they were addressed to adult readers, and so they were easier to write.

That generation of us who turned to the Young Adult field were conditioned by these novels. We read them when we were young and impressionable. Then one day a new world was born, brought into being by a young girl who was a high-school junior in a provincial city in 1967. She came home from school every day to write a novel, and it was published in distant New York on the day she graduated from high school. From that day until this she has been a best-selling author. She signed her name S. E. Hinton, and she called her book *The Outsiders*.

All novelists are outsiders, but S. E. Hinton had not tried to make literature of her private life. She, a girl, wrote about boys. She, a loner, wrote about boys in a bunch, a gang of them who form a surrogate, parentless family for one another. The author was a quiet girl living a quiet life, but her characters live high melodrama. Somehow she knew that books have to be better than real life or we would not need them.

S. E. Hinton had the amazing maturity to notice that her own school was divided rigidly into three groups. There were the children of the privileged, the socialites she called "Soc's." There was the underclass, black-jacketed and scorned and statusless, "Greasers," she called them. Then there was that third element, the unorganized fringe of solitary observers like herself.

Wisely she chose the Greasers. Somehow she knew that other young people will identify in a book with precisely the people they snub and punish in real life. She wrote a loving book about the kind of people you try not to notice around school.

We learn from our colleagues. From S. E. Hinton I learned a lesson that led me to the writing of four books: *The Ghost Belonged to Me, Ghosts I Have Been, The Dreadful Future of Blossom Culp* and *Blossom Culp and the Sleep of Death*.

My books are not about boys in a bunch. They center instead upon a solitary girl named Blossom Culp. But *The Outsiders* was my inspiration because it reminded me of the attractiveness of a character who, being an outcast, is free to invent her own life, free from the constraints of conformity.

But of course *The Outsiders* cannot save me every time. When I'm looking for a new book, I turn first to theme. After thirteen Young Adult novels, I find the themes recurring, two of them in particular. The themes come not from me but from young readers. A novel had better never be the autobiography of the author. It had far better be the biography of the person the reader would like to be.

The more I travel in search of ideas from the young, the more concerned I am in exploring the inner lives, the emotions of boys. It seems to me that the emotional frigidity of men and boys is a national calamity.

Fewer and fewer young people know their fathers. In the 1980's we live in the age of the vanished father, expunged from his children's lives by divorce and the long suburban commute and the welfare system that replaces him with

a government check. But the uncertain roles of male family members is an older problem.

American boys have been expected far too early in life to decide how they are to be team players, how they are to defend their country, how they are to be competitive breadwinners, all at the expense of their emotional lives. This has taken its toll on the men they become and on the women in their lives. How well the Harlequin romances express our priorities. The boys in these stories are always minor characters, leaving the girls free to bask in the full expression of their emotions. Life imitates art, especially bad art.

Because I've met so many boys struggling to grow up without the role-modeling of fathers, I've written a novel about such a boy. He's a seventeen-year-old who believes he's made a complete adjustment to a long-absent father. In fact, the boy plays a role of father to his little eight-year-old brother who doesn't need a father nearly as much as his older brother needs to play a defensive role of false maturity.

When these boys are reunited almost forcibly with their own father, the novel traces their troubles as the three of them try to form an all-male family. They must begin to move beyond macho role-playing to a shared sense of humanity. That book is called *Father Figure*.

I have another recurring theme, and it's clearly visible to anyone who was ever a teacher. In all my novels the chief stumbling block to maturity is the peer group. Though the young don't know it, nobody ever grows up in a group. The peer group, more powerful now than anything adults remember, is in the business of keeping its members in line and retarding their individual achievement.

Our novels champion the independant thinker, the rebel against conformity. We writers aren't interested in team players. We're interested in lonely, long-distance runners. And so I have the antic adventures of that spunky outcast, Blossom Culp, and Matt in *Close Enough to Touch* who must learn to do his own grieving and Barnie and Teresa in *Secrets of the Shopping Mall* who pit their true friendship against the conformity of the peer group.

The young need permission to be themselves and set their own standards, even if they have to take their lumps for it. I begin to think our books are the last encouragement to individuality still available.

Young people, worried young people have jogged me again, and the result is a new book called *Remembering the Good Times*. It has finally occurred to me that their favorite reading topic is not romance; it's not even science-fiction/fantasy. It's friendships. Young people are looking for companionship in books and just possibly better friends than they have.

And so my novel is about a very special friendship that is formed between a girl and two boys. We follow it from the end of childhood to the middle of adolescence when it is shattered by the suicide of one of its members. A Young Adult novel is always about a survivor, and while a suicide does not survive, his friends must. In the format of friendship, I wrote a novel trying to

point out the warning signs of suicide: that inevitable series of messages the troubled send out to their loved ones before the irretrievable act. I wrote it because young people across this country are worried and bewildered by the suicides of their schoolmates.

The great killers of the young in the 1980's are drunken driving, murder, and suicide. The suicide rate is out of control today, often among the affluent, mainly among boys.

I wrote the novel because the young are disturbed by this new epidemic and because I have yet to enter a school where the telephone number of the local suicide hot line is prominently displayed.

We live in an age still turning away from its problems rather than confronting them. The move to suburbs or to private schools is meant to be a blanket solution along with the "Gifted" program and its invariable grade-inflation. There are still a good many topics we dare not mention aloud, and the nearer those problems come to our lives and our children's lives, the more silent we grow.

In the 1980's we live in a new golden age of censorship, though no one has made much impact upon the false values, the sexism, the increasing nudity and crudity of television. But book censorship flourishes. In the year after its one-hundredth anniversary, the forefather of the American novel, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is being condemned for its racism and racist language when it continues to be the most clenching condemnation of racial prejudice ever written. It's a national treasure for another reason as well. It's the first novel about coming of age in America, about being young in a new world that looks old to you.

The motives behind the golden age of censorship in the 1980's are increasingly clear. Some sixty-million American people are illiterate. A new generation of immigrant peoples are often illiterate in two languages, and our extensive, expensive systems of public and private schooling have failed newcomers and native-born alike.

To those rendered illiterate by lack of schooling, by television, by the charisma of religious zealots who want an unthinking constituency—to all these non-readers books are a threat. No real reader wants a book banned.

The greatest fear is of the unknown, and our country is filling up with people for whom books are the great unknown. Do seven hours of television, the American family's daily fare, have something to do with it? Yes, and the content of television is less damaging than the passive experience of watching it. Television conditions us, young and old alike, to be consumers and critics and never creators. Watching television is the same demeaning, dead-end experience as sitting up in the bleachers, being expected to cheer a team you never made.

Television is a great weapon against us, but it isn't the enemy. The enemy is the home in which books and ideas are never discussed, in which human

values are not passed from one generation to the next, the home that reaches the young before school can.

In defense of television, Eric Severeid once said that in many American homes television is the only coherent voice ever heard.

We want so much for our young people: a better life, we always say, than we have had. Yet we want our young to make bricks without straw. We want them to create and innovate, to share and survive with the necessary personal disciplines. We want them to draw together as a generation without a familiarity with a common body of literature. We want them to speak for themselves without the communications skills to give shape to their ideas.

Writers and teachers believe that civilization survives through the word: written and spoken and read. Novelists believe passionately in fiction. We believe that fiction bends the truth into new shapes, the better to see it and ourselves. And all of us who teach and write would like to share that truth with a new generation.

Richard Peck

Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School

By

Theodore R. Sizer

Houghton Mifflin Company
(2 Park Street, Boston, MA 02108), 1984, 241 pp., $16.95.

Reviewed by Andrew Kantar, University of Minnesota.

Horace Smith is a twenty-eight-year veteran English teacher who moonlights at a liquor store and who, due to his 120-student load, must compromise on the amount of written work he assigns, reads, and critiques. As it is, with extracurricular activities, Horace ends up working a sixty-hour week. His daughter, a first year lawyer, is earning $32,000. Horace earns $27,300. He's a good teacher, a conscientious teacher, but bitter and frustrated. He represents a dedicated core of professionals. In Horace, a fictitious composite, we see flashes of ourselves and our colleagues.

The problems facing American teachers such as Horace are highly complex, multifaceted, and frequently ill-defined. Too often, however, television and print journalists feed the general public a pabulum of oversimplified, condensed, and sometimes sensationalized solutions. Though, for many, this mass-media approach makes for an entertaining evening of viewing or, as in the case of magazines, easy reading for the bus ride home, it lacks academic substance and documentation and does not contribute greatly to the layperson's understanding of the problem or appreciation of its complexity and magnitude. Thankfully, Theodore Sizer's *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*, written specifically for the lay reader, fills this need.

Sizer, a former Dean of the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University and former Headmaster at Phillips Academy (Andover), primarily bases his observations on a five-year-long study of adolescent education involving dozens of high schools, public and private, in fifteen states. The five-year inquiry, *A Study of High Schools*, was undertaken "in the late 1970s" and was sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Commission of Educational Issues of the National Association of Independant Schools.

Sizer's is one of several publications emerging from *A Study of High Schools*. In addition to the wonderfully descriptive observations of adolescent education found in *Horace's Compromise*, Sizer introduces his lay readers to the pertinent and important literature of such figures as John Dewey, B.F. Skinner, Michael Rutter (*Fifteen Thousand Hours*), Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, Charles Silberman, Jerome Bruner, Mortimer Adler, and others. This synthesis of classroom observations with the seminal literature results in a well-documented work of substance and merit. It is a happy amalgam of the practical and the theoretical, and while Sizer's highly descriptive and pleasing writing style is lay-reader oriented, it retains its literary integrity, never succumbing to sensationalism or superficiality.

In his Introduction, Sizer urges "renewed public attention to the importance of teaching in high schools and to the complexity and subtlety of that craft." Sizer's vision of a renaissance in American education would "restore to teachers and to their particular students the largest share of responsibility for the latter's education." Sizer's goals and his message possess far-reaching implications.

Sizer divides his discussion into its most obvious components: Students, Program, Teachers, and Structure. The majority of the text, however, examines the triangle of students, teachers, and subject. Though this organizational breakdown renders a large and potentially unwieldy topic manageable, the greatest strength of Sizer's presentation is his stylistic technique. His character portrayals unearth universal basics to the art of teaching as well as surprising parallels between subject specialties. Consider, for example, Charles Gross, an electricity teacher at a vocational-technical high school with a large minority student enrollment. Gross's students are interested in his class because they recognize its "applications within a world they (know)." As his students work on the wiring of buildings that are being renovated, Gross emphasizes precision and attention to detail.

Similarly, working with an entirely different group of students, Sister Michael, a seventy-two-year-old nun, emphasizes precision of language and the importance of attending to such details as word choice. Her seminar-type discussion of Graham Greene's "The Destructors" appears far removed from Mr. Gross's electricity classroom, yet, as Sizer notes, both are fine examples of the craft of teaching and both exhibit striking parallels despite widely differing subject matter. Mr. Gross and Sister Michael emphasize and value essentially the same concerns. Just as "there was no sloppy language in Sister Michaels' domain," so "precision, logic, hypothetical thinking, clarity of expression—all were staples of Gross's classroom." In both instances, learning is viewed as a process that requires active coaching: "Sister Michael made sure that each of her students knew that whatever was said in class was important and Mr. Gross, in his strikingly different milieu, did likewise."

The character portraits of teachers, students, and to a lesser extent, administrators, give Sizer's discussion a naturalistic quality, almost anecdotal. As a stylistic device and an evaluative tactic this approach is effective and quite illustrative. Sizer strives to give the reader "the essential 'feel' of the schools" and in this regard he excels. Classroom sights and sounds are described with humor and with an eye for detail. Little escapes Sizer's scrutiny. He takes his audience into a classroom of students moving "their chairs simply by using their feet as oars, clumsily duck-waddling themselves to and fro" and zooms in on the girl who during science class, "took out her compact, popped the mirror open, and went over her face in detail, squinting at each incipient blemish, poking here and rubbing there." Further, with regard to classroom distraction, Sizer issues the following humorous indictment: "Public address systems are the most malevolent intruder into the thinking taking place in public school classrooms since the invention of the flickering flourescent light."

As noted above, Sizer's identification of crucial issues confronting American high schools represents a skillful synthesis of his own empirical research and pertinent studies of other researchers of some repute and will undoubtedly prove to be palatable to most. His solutions, however, may be somewhat problematic in their simplicity and brevity. Many, like a colleague of mine, may simply write Sizer's recommendations off as "pie in the sky" and others might term "elitist" his proposed four-course curriculum of Inquiry and Expression, Mathematics and Science, Literature and the Arts, and Philosophy and History. The individualized attention and coaching that such a curriculum would demand could be perceived as idealistic or academically naive. Some teachers will be threatened when Sizer razes traditional walls of subject matter specialties in an effort to provide students with continuity in their daily learning. Too often, he notes, students perceive no relationship between the thinking done in different disciplines.

Sizer contends that three areas of mastery should prevail: literacy, numeracy, and civic understanding. In an allusion to decompulsorizing high school education, Sizer suggests that these three "chestnuts of American educational thought" could conceivably be mastered before high school. From this point forward, the high school could offer its four-course curriculum as "an opportunity, not an obligation," concentrating on the more sophisticated cognitive skills associated with critical thinking.

Nowhere does the author purport that his recommendations are a panacea. Rather, the thrust of Sizer's argument is that the public must be made aware of the problems confronting American high schools and, with a spirit of inquiry and trust in that "sizable core of fine teachers and administrators," examine solutions.

Horace's Compromise awakens our senses. In prose that is lucid, concise, and sensitive to the lay audience, Sizer articulates his findings and with reasonable objectivity, speculates on the implications. Acknowledging this, my greatest concern is whether this book will be read. Many may sample its

pages, but I fear few will read this critically and ruminate on it. In *Horace's Compromise* Sizer has published an important work. His message deserves the public's attention.

Notices

1. *MCTE Spring Conference Announcement.*

The MCTE Spring conference will be held April 18 and 19, 1986 at the Radisson (University) Hotel in Minneapolis. The theme will be the power and glory of language.

Spring Conference Call for Papers, Proposals, Workshops, Etc.
Deadline—December 1, 1985
Send proposals to the pertinent section chair.

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St. Louis Park, Minn. 55416

2. *The NCTE Teacher-Researcher Grants Program*

The Research Foundation of the National Council of Teachers of English invites K-12 classroom teachers to submit proposals for small grants (up to $1,000) for classroom-based research on the teaching of English and language arts. These grants are intended to support research questions teachers raise about classroom issues. They are not intended to support travel to professional meetings, to fund the purchase of permanent equipment or commercial teaching materials, to provide extended released time, or to underwrite research done as part of a graduate program. Address requests for information and for application guidelines to Teacher Researcher, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801.

3. *MCTE Award Program*

Cash prizes of $75.00 each will be awarded at the Annual Spring Conference to the authors of award winning articles in each of the following categories:

1. *Classroom Teaching*—a description, explanation, or evaluation of a successful method, assignment, or curriculum for teaching English language or literature.

2. *Theoretical or Critical*—a discussion that advances our understanding of the study of language arts (reading, writing, speaking, listening) or literature (or a particular work), or of the teaching of language and literature, or of the relationship of the study of language and literature to life and culture.

Authors should follow the standard *Minnesota English Journal* submission rules. The MCTE Publications Board will serve as judges. All articles published in *MEJ* will be considered eligible, although the Publications Board reserves the right not to grant an award if, in its judgment, none of the published articles meet the award's criteria or its standard of excellence.

Notes on Contributors

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Editorial Policy: *Minnesota English Journal*

The Minnesota English Journal is an official organ of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English. It ordinarily appears twice a year, fall and winter/spring. *The Minnesota English Journal* publishes articles of general interest to its membership, teachers K through college. Particularly sought are manuscripts which show how pedagogy implements theory and which describe or discuss current and real problems faced by some segment of the English profession in Minnesota. Manuscripts from Minnesota teachers are preferred. The *Journal* is distributed free-of-charge to the membership. Individual issues can be ordered for $3.50 a copy.

Manuscripts should be submitted to the editor. Please use an approved style sheet, either APA or MLA. Footnotes should be included in the text if possible. Manuscripts should be 7-18 pages, typed double-spaced.

Please consult the calls for papers that appear in each issue. At times, special issues will focus on specific themes announced in the journal and posted at the *Minnesota English Journal* booth during the annual MCTE spring convention. The editor will make every effort to acknowledge receipt of a manuscript within two weeks and to inform the contributor of its acceptance or rejection within 60 days. Include with the manuscript a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The editor reserves the right to accept or reject a manuscript. The editor may return a manuscript to request its revision, and the editor may make minor changes in the manuscript without consulting the contributor.