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Topics:
Reading Poems Out Loud
"*A White Heron*" As a Fairy Tale
OBE and Assessment
Tracking and Ability Grouping

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MINNESOTA ENGLISH JOURNAL

For the Fall 1993 and the Winter/Spring 1994 issues.

We encourage articles on wide variety of topics of interest to the English profession in Minnesota. Here are some suggested topics:

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*Reading - research and pedagogy
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*Review of current books
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Deadlines - Fall 1993 - October 15, 1993.
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TO OUR READERS:

Edina High School's *Image 1992*, the student literary magazine, achieved "Highest Award" status as recognition of excellence by the National Council of Teachers of English. "Highest Awards" were given to 37 schools nation wide out of 284 schools vying for the honor.

Charles Miller's "Outcome Based Education (OBE) and Performance Assessment in One School District" is the first article on OBE to appear in this journal. We hope that readers will submit more articles on this topic which affects so many of us.

Our apologies for the delay in publishing this issue of MEJ. We were waiting on two of the articles which appear within.

With this issue, we have completed our four-year term as editors of MEJ. Gayle Gaskill, an Associate Professor of English at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, has graciously offered to assume editorial responsibility, beginning with the Fall, 1993 issue. Our thanks to all of you who have been faithful readers, and especial thanks to those of you who have submitted articles for publication. We have enjoyed working with you, and with the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English Advisory Board.

Discovering A Voice:
Reading Poems Aloud

by

David Brunet

I have been doing a tutorial with Karen, a senior. We are reading poetry. Reading poems aloud, over and over, until they take on a vivid life as oral literature.

I did similar study with Alex, another senior, last semester, working much the same way. And several others have asked me to do the same next year.

It's remarkable what happens in these sessions. Karen chooses several poems that she finds interesting. One week she read Denise Levertov; the next week Elizabeth Bishop; another week Henry Taylor. (Last semester Alex began with Robert Frost, and then spent about eight weeks on Margaret Atwood.)

The day Karen began reading Bishop's poems, I let her get most of the way through "Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore" before I stopped her and began to ask questions. *Do you think she admires Marianne Moore? Where do you sense the admiration most strongly?* She considered before answering, then she picked out the obvious incantation, "Please come flying," and then noted that Bishop invites the approaching Moore to pass "the glittering grandstand of harbor-water;" even, she thought, the mention of Moore's "slight censorious frown" may be a sign of how highly Bishop regards her. Then I asked, *Do you think she feels herself as Moore's equal?* Perhaps, or nearly so, Karen responded; she had had to look up the meaning of "two rivers, gracefully bearing / countless little pellucid jellies / in cut-glass epergnes"—and sensed that Bishop was using a private shared vocabulary that bound her and Moore. *Okay, I said, what about the witch imagery in the third stanza? Should that seem dark and threatening? Can you find that tone of voice?* And so forth. Finally, after sampling several stanzas, she read the whole poem from start to finish.

Part of the process is that I don't know in advance what poems the student will read, so we both have the distinct experience of discovery. Sometimes the student will read a poem so convincingly that I don't know how to begin to ask questions. Sometimes only a question or two makes us both want to move on to another poem. But then, sometimes we will spend an hour or more on a single poem. We discover the poem together, learning what the poem contains by noticing what it does to the reader's voice.

Trusting one's own vocal cords to give weight and texture to the poem is disconcerting at first. I asked Karen to write a description of what happens, and she responded:

I am starting to have fun with what has always been a frightening thing to me: the irrevocability of the spoken word, the commitment to choices which must be made with the speaking of every word. I am gaining assurance in making these choices. It is good for the writer, too. The writer in me could use a little more courage and awareness about these kinds of choices.... Voice has always been presented to me as a written component of writing, though its name makes clear its origin in the spoken voice. How does a writer sound? In music, it is obvious that the marks on the page are only symbols and must be translated into the medium of air to be truly understood (though one can get good enough at reading music to hear it in one's head). Writing is more like this than I'd thought. It is important to remember that music and poetry used to be one thing, which split. Poetry still remembers, but do I? (Karen Anway, March 17, 1992)

One has to find a sense of the poet's voice much the way an actor finds the voice of a character he or she is to play. Usually, I ask the student to focus on what Constantin Stanislavski calls the "given circumstances." I ask the student to imagine the situation of the poem. Why is the person in the poem saying this?

It begins simply. In one session, after two other Bishop poems, Karen chose to read "Insomnia." I let her read the whole poem. Then I simply ask, *Do you like the way that sounded?* She looks quizzical, then says "No." I ask, *Where do you imagine the moon?* (reflected in the mirror, she says, pointing to an imaginary mirror), and *Where is the moon coming from?* (a window behind me, she says). Then, trusting that if the actor can find how the character moves, she will find the character, I ask Karen to take a second and more radical step. *Read the first stanza, and just let your hand gesture toward the moon. Think about the way you moved your hand: does it tell you anything about where you are?*

Then the remarkable begins. She says (imagining herself to be the woman speaking in the poem) I'm sitting up in bed in the middle of the night; I can't sleep; I'm staring at the moon, troubled because I think he doesn't love me. I ask: *Is he out late and you are waiting up for him?* "No," she says, turning slowly to her right and looking down, "he is asleep beside me." I ask: *As you say the first stanza, do you want him to hear you?* "No". *Show me.* She whispers the stanza, full of the knowledge that she is talking about the man sleeping next to her. As she whispers the simple words "The moon in the bureau mirror/ . . . never never smiles," she charges them with static electricity. My hair stands on end.

What happens in the second stanza? Is there a shift in attitude? "Yes," she says, "Bishop is imagining how the moon might respond to a cold lover;" there's an edge of anger in her voice that wasn't there in the first stanza. ("... deserted *she'd* tell it to go to hell") Karen reads the poem again, pushing right on into the third stanza. I ask, *why does the poem shift to a new stanza right in the middle of the sentence? What changes?*

This is a hard question. I ask her, *show me what she does in the middle of that sentence.* She looks at the man beside her in the second stanza, and then in the middle of the sentence, her voice catches, and as the third stanza begins, she turns again to look at the moon, speaking directly this time to "that world inverted."

It has become a beautiful poem.

The process helps the students to create a powerful sense of how a poem works. My assumption in working this way is that the voice and the body respond to the language patterns at a level that is sometimes unconscious. The tone of voice, the physical attitude, the gesture that precedes the word are all part of the body's attempt to come to terms with the language, yet I don't believe I have ever seen a critic pay attention to that part of the meaning-making process. Reading a poem aloud invites the reader to pay attention to many cues that are easily ignored.

Many of these cues are, I believe, connected to the poet's process. *Don't rush!* I say over and over. *If the line is hard to say, slow it down; the difficulty may be intentional — maybe the poet is trying to get you to separate the words, to try to get you to separate the words, to isolate them. If the shift in idea or tone sounds abrupt, try to imagine what must happen to you in order for you to make such a shift.*

* * *

A week later, Karen brings Sharon Olds' book *Satan Says*, and reads several poems. Then we turn to "Portrait of a Daughter."

PORTRAIT OF A DAUGHTER
by
Sharon Olds

You get so soft when you get sick.
Your cheeks glisten, the red tinfoil
they wrap poinsettia plants in.

Your body becomes white and limp as dough
that has not been cooked.
Your eyes get dark and bright
maple syrup boiled down.

When you get sick you become an edible thing.
Knocked out with fever as if with sex, you lie on the bed
shining like a long loaf stuck with glazed fruit.

The house seems
to circle around you slowly. I circle around you, a wild
animal near a fire. I remember

I would kill for you. I remind myself
it won't be necessary.

Karen admires this poem, remarking "I suddenly had a flash of insight, that I knew what time of year this poem was written. All the images are Christmas images. The girl is sick at Christmas time."

She reads the poem as though it were Christmas time, festive and sad. But no. Placing it in time is a start, but it is not enough to make the poem work . So we go back to the first stanzas. She notices two images: the color of red tinfoil, and the texture of unbaked bread. It is the bread she finds most immediate: the flaccid weight of it in the hand. *Do you think she is touching her daughter? I ask* . "Yes," she says. *What part of her would feel like bread?* "Her arm, probably."

I draw our attention back to the first stanza. *.She says her daughter is soft in the first line, yet in the second line she likens her daughter's face to tinfoil, not soft at all. How can she have both images? Show me how she knows these things.* Karen begins to reach out for the girl's face, but in the last instant holds back. "The heat," she says, the brittleness. So there is a tension between wanting to touch her face and holding back at the same time, a broken gesture.

But in the second stanza she is touching the girl, probably stroking her arm. The girl must open her eyes at the touch, Karen suggests, because it is only now that the mother notices her eyes. And maybe she leans over to kiss her, and the kiss leads to the idea that the sick girl is "edible." Then, inevitably, Karen comes to the line that she finds the most unsettling, "Knocked out with fever as if with sex, you lie on the bed."

Her voice is tentative: "This is a disturbing image to her. She is leaning over her daughter, and suddenly it brings back to her an image, maybe from her own childhood, of being molested." Karen shivers with the thought. She pauses for a moment. I let her think. Then I focus on the movements that are a part of the moment. *Do you think the child is in a crib or a bed?* Well, she uses the word "bed" in this line, so a bed, then. *So to lean over and kiss her does she sit on the bed?* Yes. *And what does she do when the sexual idea strikes her?* She straightens up, pulling back, and sees the full length of the girl's body. That's where the Christmas bread image comes in, long and thin and edible.

By now, Karen is clearly haunted by the tension between simultaneous opposing impulses. She reads the first three stanzas full of pity and sensuality and love. It is a more interesting poem now, and the girl becomes real for me as she reaches for the girl and touches her arm.

Now it is time for the last stanza. *What is the mother doing in the last stanza?* She's walking around the bed, closing the blinds, turning off the light, adjusting the covers. *Why is she a "wild animal"?* I can imagine a dog

standing by its sick master, ready to kill anything that threatens her. *But why a "wild animal"?* This gives her pause. Then she says, "because there is a danger. She is torn between protecting her and devouring her." It's a terrible moment. Luckily, the mother reminds herself that it won't be "necessary" to do either. But poet and reader both seem to be terrified by the moment. There is an awful tension in the poem that wasn't there before.

As we end the session, Karen volunteers that she would like to memorize the poem for next time, so she can concentrate on the physical relationship between mother and daughter without the interruption of the printed page.

* * *

Surely, I am including what Robert Frost called the "vocal gesture," but I am talking about the physical, muscular clues as well. When I ask the student to approach a poem physically, to re-live the poem in her muscles and her eyes and her skin, the poem becomes alive with tension. Donald Hall has said "a happy poem sleeps in the sun." (32) As we read the poems aloud over and over again, finding the deep sources of the voice in the poem, we wake up the poem. It does not sleep happily.

Although Karen is an exceptionally fine student, I am convinced that it is useful to teach careful oral reading to students of any ability. For example, I am using oral performance in my sophomore literature class now. In each of the last three semesters, I have asked them to prepare a poem for a class reading day. The class cannot read the poem while it is being presented, but must encounter it by listening. Several times in the class period I ask one of the students to read a poem again, first calling attention to some musicality I heard, and asking a question about a line or a phrase or an image. I don't give such an oral critique of all the readings (though I write a critique for each); but I always try to comment on several, so the students have a sense of what I want them to do. All of the readers are nervous, but afterwards I get comments that in doing the assignment they really learned what poetry is about. And in their papers they are talking with a new confidence and clarity about the poet's voice, about sound, and about rhythm.

Eventually it comes back to that, an attention to how the poem sounds. Karen said it best when she wrote that "beyond these things, and more simply than these things, we are learning about song. We are singing, that's all."

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Jewett's "A White Heron" As Fairy Tale

by

Robert Gardner

Fairy tales, based on the oral folk tale tradition, blend elements of fantasy, romance, and didacticism, among others. Interpretations of traditional fairy tales, most notably those gathered and revised by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in the first half of the 19th century, have labeled the stories at times nationalistic, sexist, and racist, and while suggestions of these may in fact be present, these interpretations prove the importance of the moral message of fairy tales. Fairy tales are recognized to be a powerful medium to influence readers. The amount of scholarship devoted to fairy tales illustrates their recognized impact on society. Fairy tales rooted in the oral tradition, which were passed from generation to generation and shared by an entire community, tend to reflect the standards of the community, but those tales individually composed for print often display more individualistic ideals. Recent fairy tale authors continue to employ conventions of the genre, often retelling classic tales from a different perspective; feminist fairy tales appear to be most prevalent. However, this reliance on fairy-tale conventions to emphasize morals and messages, including those of a feminist perspective, is not new in American literature: Sarah Orne Jewett adapts and alters conventional themes, most notably those of "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Sleeping Beauty," to create a 19th century feminist fairy tale in "A White Heron."

With traditional fairy tales, writes Marcia K. Lieberman, in addition to the surface-level plot, readers "learn behavioral and associational patterns, value systems, and how to predict the consequences of specific acts or circumstances" (187). More specifically, traditional fairy tales "present a picture of sex roles, behavior, and psychology, and a way of predicting outcome or fate according to sex" (187). What distinguishes women in traditional fairy tales is their complaisant fulfillment of domestic duties and eventual rescue by a prince or other male authority figure. (It must be noted that these characteristics fit only the heroine of a tale and not other women characters — i.e., the "wicked" stepmother, et. al. As Lieberman illustrates, "Those women who are either partially or thoroughly evil are generally shown as active, ambitious, strong-willed and, most often, ugly" [197].) "Cinderella" is the classic, most obvious fairy tale that illustrates both these factors: Cinderella accepts the abuse and demands of her stepmother and stepsisters without complaint, and Prince Charming is the one who rescues her from the situation — something even her fairy godmother did not do.

Another key characteristic of many traditional fairy tales builds upon the relationship between the heroine and her prince. The male often serves as both a source of financial wealth and sexual awakening for the

heroine:

> ... the fictional linkage of sexual awakening with the receipt of great wealth implies a more subtle causality. Because the heroine adopts conventional female virtues, that is patience, sacrifice, and dependency, and because she submits to patriarchal needs, she consequently receives both the prince and a guarantee of social and financial security through marriage. Status and fortune never result from the female's self-exertion but from passive assimilation into her husband's sphere. (Rowe 217)

As Rowe suggests, in a traditional fairy tale the heroine often must sacrifice her identity — and, more insidious, perhaps even her body — at the hands of a forceful, patriarchal society. "Passive assimilation" often is presented as the lesser of two evils; that is, the heroine would be better off if she assimilated into a male-dominated world than if she would continue to live as she has, usually in material poverty.

Sarah Orne Jewett, in "A White Heron," uses each of these fairy tale conventions — the domestic role, the expectation of rescue, sexual awakening, and material wealth — in unexpected and untraditional ways. In her fairy tale, Jewett adapts and intertwines the plot structures of "Little Red Riding Hood" and "Sleeping Beauty" to manipulate the readers' expectations; the use of these plot structures creates the expectation of similar plot resolutions — something Jewett will not deliver.

The Grimm Brothers' final version of "Little Red Cap" (published in 1857) opens with Little Red Cap's mother warning her to stay on the path in the woods. As Little Red Cap enters the woods she meets the wolf, but she "did not know what a wicked sort of an animal he was and was not afraid of him." (110) They talk, and the wolf convinces Little Red Cap to wander off the path to collect flowers, giving him extra time to get to grandmother's house before Little Red Cap (111). "A White Heron" (published in 1886) opens with Sylvia and her cow walking along a path into the woods; just as Little Red Cap's mother sends her on an errand, Sylvia's grandmother sends her each evening to bring the cow home (Jewett 112). Sylvia hears "a boy's whistle, determined, and somewhat aggressive" and tries to hide herself, but "the enemy" spots her and engages her in conversation (Jewett 113). Already the Grimms' wolf and Jewett's ornithologist have been labeled "wicked" and "the enemy"; each label belongs to both. In contrast, however, are the reactions of Little Red Cap and Sylvia: Little Red Cap is innocent of the wolf's nature, but Sylvia has had frightening experiences with a "great red-faced boy" in the city and thus is fearful of the ornithologist (Jewett 113). Jewett's boy" in the city and thus is fearful of the ornithologist (Jewett 113). Jewett's boy" treads cautiously near this threat. Another contrast in the two Sylvia treads cautiously near this threat. Another contrast in the two heroines' characterization falls under the domestic rubric: Little Red Cap readily accepts her duty to care for her grandmother, whereas Sylvia's primary task — to walk the cow home — is tied more closely to nature.

When the wolf reaches the unsuspecting grandmother's house, he tricks his way inside, promptly eats the grandmother, and then lays in wait for Little Red Cap (Grimm 112). Likewise, when the ornithologist reaches the grandmother's house in "A White Heron," a house Sarah Way Sherman suggests is similar to the one in "Little Red Riding Hood" (156), he readily takes advantage of her hospitality (Jewett 114). And just as the wolf disguised as the grandmother tries to convince Little Red Cap he truly is her grandmother so she would come nearer to him (Grimm 112), the ornithologist attempts to win Sylvia's confidence so she would show him where the heron nests (Jewett 115-16). Two of the primary characteristics of traditional fairy tales — sexual awakening and money — come into play here, and once again Jewett begins by employing these traditional expectations only to alter their traditional outcome. After learning of Sylvia's affinity with nature, the ornithologist says, "'I can't think of anything I should like so much as to find that heron's nest. . . . I would give ten dollars to anybody who could show it to me'" (Jewett 115). The ornithologist couples this reward offer with his attention toward Sylvia over the next day: he gives her a jack-knife and treats her kindly (Jewett 115). The jack-knife and offer of ten dollars represent a breaking with fairy tale tradition: Jewett makes the offers of material wealth overt, not tacit as in most fairy tales. Usually, the implication is that the male, invariably a prince, has money; he does not have to mention that fact to win the heroine's hand. However, the implication remains that the heroine must co-opt herself and her values to gain the money; the fact that Jewett makes the offer obvious serves to illustrate the crass expectations a woman must meet. (Critic George Held suggests the ornithologist — and, by extension, the wolf — is "a sort of blithe Satan" who tempts Eve/Sylvia with the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge/money; he also suggests that "the Maine woods parallels the Garden of Eden" [63].)

In the Grimm Brothers' "Brier Rose" (or "Sleeping Beauty"), the archetypal sexual awakening fairy tale, a spiteful wise woman casts a spell to make Brier Rose fall asleep for one-hundred years; after the time passes, a prince makes his way to the castle and kisses the sleeping Brier Rose. She awakens and looks at the prince "fondly"; they marry soon after (202-5). This fairy tale suggests a man's attention will awaken a woman's sexuality and that one look by a woman is enough for love. Sylvia follows the ornithologist around the day after they meet and "as the day waned, Sylvia still watched the young man with loving admiration. She had never seen anybody so charming and delightful; the woman's heart, asleep in the child, was vaguely thrilled by a dream of love" (Jewett 116). "The woman's heart," Jewett tells us, has been awakened, but Sylvia's acquiescence to its desires, in an untraditional development, does not immediately occur. She decides to climb the great pine to find the heron's nest, but a conflict remains: will her potential relationship with the ornithologist "sweep away the satisfactions of an existence heart to heart with nature" (Jewett 116)? Sylvia, the forest girl, would probably lose her nature identity if she pursued her blossoming feelings for the man. By acting on her new feelings and establishing a relationship with a man who kills birds, Sylvia would revert to the deteriorating life she had in the city.

Sylvia's moment of epiphany — an unheard of among fairy tale heroines — comes when she has scaled the towering pine and the heron soars near her (Jewett 117-18). Traditional fairy tale heroines do not have the opportunity to make the decision Sylvia makes; traditional heroines, once they have their sexual awakening, soon marry, thus melding the awakening with the acquisition of material wealth and the denial of independence. Sylvia cannot fall into this conventional trap, though she has one last temptation as she returns from her climb: she sees the ornithologist and knows that "he can make them rich with money; he has promised it, and they are poor now. He is so well worth making happy, and he waits to hear the story she can tell" (Jewett 118). But her moment of resolution had already come; even though he meets his fairy tale role by awakening Sylvia sexually, Jewett does not follow through with the conventions, thus emphasizing Sylvia's independence and distinct identity.

In "Little Red Cap," the wolf eats the girl and only a huntsman can rescue her and the grandmother from the wolf's stomach (Grimm 112-13). Little Red Cap, after the incident, thinks to herself, "Never again will you stray from the path by yourself and go into the forest . . ." (Grimm 113). In this standard fairy tale fare, Little Red Cap is rescued by a man. Sylvia does not need to be rescued. In a sense, however, she actually rescues herself: her epiphany helps her realize the mistake she would make by revealing the heron's location, by betraying her nature (pun intended). Not only does Sylvia go into the forest — the forest is where she is at her best.

The ornithologist, as both wolf and prince, does play a necessary part in Jewett's fairy tale: his presence awakens Sylvia to her true identity. As Sherman argues,

> Despite her ultimate rejection of him, not only is the hunter necessary to Sylvia's new consciousness but something of his presence is woven into its fabric. She takes his power and fuses it with her own feminine identity. . . . The prince wakens Sleeping Beauty to her sexuality . . . [and] through this experience our princess . . . returns to her kingdom as possessor and protector. (168)

Thus, not only does the ornithologist awaken Sylvia's sexuality, he also is the inciting factor in her ultimate identification with nature.

Traditional fairy tales, argues Lieberman, "serve to acculturate women to traditional social roles" (185). Jewett takes this concept and shatters it in "A White Heron." Using traditional fairy tale plot structures and conventions as a base — primarily the domestic role of women, the expectation of rescue, sexual awakening, and material wealth — Jewett molds her own feminist fairy tale. Sylvia crumbles in the domesticated city but thrives in the wilderness. Though the ornithologist promises Sylvia money and eventually brings about her sexual awakening, Jewett does not allow Sylvia to compromise herself because of these facts; instead, Jewett

uses these incidents to bring Sylvia fully attuned to her true nature. "A White Heron" creates an alternative for fairy tale readers and provides a model for the feminist fairy tale writers of our century.

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In a Larger Mirror: Another Look at the Teaching of English As a Language

by

John Schmidt

Introduction:

When we think of teaching English, we typically think of three things: the study of literature, the pedagogy of composition, and the teaching of grammar. The first of these gives little trouble to teachers, though if we are honest we must admit that we give it too large a place in our classrooms, perhaps because it is what we teachers like to do. The second of these concerns, teaching writing, typically works well until we attempt to split our focus into rhetorical considerations and matters of language orthodoxy. The first of these we typically do well; the second we do not. Beyond rhetoric, the teaching of writing too often becomes the teaching of standard English syntax, and a large and unrefuted body of evidence suggests that this model does nothing for the writing student.[1]

The third concern, the formal teaching of "school grammar," should not be a concern at all. As we attempt to dissect writing into its syntactic parts, we force language study into a channel far too narrow to carry it. As a discrete focus, the teaching of "grammar" neglects larger and far more important functions of language that are properly included under the heading of grammar: the attachment of language to personal identity, operations of discourse, the study of meaning, and the exploitation of language for power and prejudice, propaganda, deception, and control. To be blunt, the teaching of "school grammar" is pointless and should be discontinued.

Here in Minnesota our student population has changed radically in the past two decades, as it has elsewhere. For this reason I advocate a much broader consideration of language study, one that places more attention on language as a social activity and less attention on syntactic structure. I believe that this shift in focus is crucial if our students are to understand how to use language: where its power lies and how that power is tapped. Let me begin, then, with some challenges to our assumptions about the teaching of English.

The politics of English instruction:

I have known teachers to suggest that we structure our educational programs not so much to improve the abilities of our students as to make ourselves feel better about what we do. I would characterize this philosophy as "the pedagogy of despair." James Sledd, an infamous voice from the left, suggested years ago that "[t]he predictable response of the frightened white businessman's society was to go right on doing what it had done before—which had caused the crisis—but to do it harder and spend more money at

it" (1308), suggesting that it is not despair but fear that drives our curricula: an intense need to hold the center together with whatever glue might be at hand.

Today, the force of this fear has intensified in response to the assessment mania that pervades accreditation processes throughout the nation. The fear of being called to accountability—the need to demonstrate that our programs work—potentially produces an anxiety that causes us to latch on to concrete methods and subjects. The focus on "grammar" continues, even though years of research clearly indicate that the teaching of grammar—traditional, structural, or transformational—has negligible effect on writing improvement and may even cause a decrease in writing ability because it takes away from the time devoted to writing instruction.[2]

The first problem with "grammar" results from our definition of the term: not an exhaustive body of rules that governs discourse and conversation, but a small, codified set of arcane rules that separate the initiated from the ignorant. Especially in the teaching of writing, our conception of "grammar" too often centers on rules recorded in handbooks, but these unusably thin collections of generalizations offer help only to those who are already initiated and simply need clarification.

To teach syntax is to teach the rule, to have students understand the basic sentence structures of English. When I teach this small facet of grammar I am struck by the inadequacy of even the most fully expanded rules to explain the possibilities of sentence structure in English. At best We can draw an adequate map. We will never draw a landscape of the language.

To teach usage is to teach the exceptions. There is no way to do this systematically, so we should not hope that our students will remember more than a few "deadly sins," many of which have already gone the way of meat on Friday. And while there is a place for the teaching of usage rules, that place is the student paper and not the front of the classroom.

Still, we perceive that political pressures push us against the blackboard of school grammar, and for many, I realize, these pressures are real: talk of "literacy crisis," demands that we "do a better job," declining board scores in the state or district, or back-to-basics initiatives. We need, then, a clear change of agenda.

Finding a new focus:

My guess is that twenty years ago the people whom colleges attracted already felt a sense of ownership in "the system" before arriving at school, an ownership that perhaps came from belonging to the standard-speaking community. Today our student population is more diverse than it has ever been, with more students going to school to find and claim an ownership that they do not believe that they have yet. This diversity has increased the need for developmental writing courses in colleges, since the expectation here is that students will write in standard English. It certainly requires that we teach language from a broader perspective: language as the primary medium

of social transaction. We need to be teaching sociolinguistics, not school grammar, in support of writing.

As we delineate appropriate curricula of writing instruction we must consider the political and cultural ramifications of our changing demographics, and our pedagogy must reflect the changes that we now see in our schools. First among these is the need to teach language (and not just language skills) to a broader and more diverse student population without denigrating their culture or self-image.

To address this need, we first must decide how we will address the issue of community in our classrooms. Since dialect operates within communities, we must give full membership to all speakers and writers whom we wish to teach, regardless of the dialect they bring to school. This membership will require us to reexamine the power structure implicit in the teaching of writing. The requirement that students should forsake their language, values, ideas, and concerns and embrace ours can only undermine our instructional programs because it tells students that we do not value their mode of expression. Policies that denigrate students stand between their sense of themselves and the admission to participation that we say we want to give them.

Nor is the study of multicultural literature an answer in itself. While attention to the literature of other cultures gives those cultures a measure of legitimacy in the school setting, if we reject the language (in writing or in speech) of students from those cultures, then we deny the very legitimacy that we sought to assert by teaching the literature in the first place. Multicultural literature is only part of a program of acceptance of other cultures. Students without acceptable [read standard-speaking] voices are silent by definition.

My own experience has been that students become better writers only when they begin to feel that they have a stake. This requires them to believe that they are writing and learning to master their own language. Most of the time, when my students describe their writing to me in individual conferences, I hear them increasingly using standard English, probably without a conscious awareness that they are doing so. Certainly they know my language to be the language of classroom authority, but as long as standard English remains, in their minds, the language of the bosses, the language of the other, the language of unsympathetic teachers, the language of oppression (whether political or personal), they will not embrace it, and they will speak and write it with ambivalence.

This ambivalence is exacerbated by our insistence that their writing be formal. Formality, as a social function of speech, creates distance, and distance implies differences in power. Formality emphasizes for our students the feeling that they are writing our language, not theirs. This is not to say that difference in power in the classroom can or should be eliminated, but if awareness of power differences can be minimized in language

instruction, students will immediately feel more capable. They will make fewer of the "mistakes" that they commit when they are forced to write in a register that they never use on their own. Increasing the students' facility with formal register will be a result of writing instruction, but it should not be our primary goal or their only allowable voice.

As for teaching appropriate voice, which in some cases is formal and standard, we should remember that humans are remarkable mimics. Many of us know of a friend or relative who returned north with a southern accent after living in the south. Although we are often offended by this (because it suggests that they no longer see themselves as one of us), we should recognize that they have adopted these phonological characteristics of speech in order to be accepted into the community in which they are now living. We can expect students to do the same if they have a desire to belong to our speech community.

If we want students to invest in the community that the school represents rather than to mark time in a hostile setting from which they are anxious to take leave, we have to provide an offer of acceptance, and we must not use their language as a way of marking them as unwanted outsiders. If we can make them want to belong, and if we present ourselves as new language models for them, they will model their speech after ours. Of course, there will be pressure to return to the speech of the community outside the school when they leave, but a positive school environment will help them believe that they can be comfortable speaking the language of two places if they choose to do so.

The Question of Dialect:
For many, I realize, this is not even an issue, but since this discussion concerns the teaching of language, this seems an appropriate place to address briefly the issue of the students' right to their own language and the question of dialect in general. Standard English is our dialect, and the dialect of power, so it is the one that we teach. We can add to this pressure the facts that the NAACP for years has stood against the teaching of Black English in the classroom and that the English-only movement still has significant support. But at the same time we must recognize that we are a multilingual society, and we are likely to remain one.

As James Sledd once put it, "Making children who talk wrong get right with the world has traditionally been the work of English teachers" (1307). There is still truth, too, to his claim, now nearly twenty-five years old, that "coercive bidialectalism" is at the same time our primary desire and an impossible goal. I have no certain solution to this problem, but if multicultural literature is seen as an effective and desirable method for achieving better awareness of other cultures, then I suggest that a comparative study of English dialects is an even more effective method, since while not all of our students participate in literary writing or have an abiding interest in literature, they all speak, and they have an immense stake in the protection of their language.

Sledd's proposed solution to this problem was for the children of minorities to learn to read and for the majority to learn to understand the life and language of the oppressed (1315, 1329). While multicultural literature provides at least a start toward one of these goals, a program of social language study is needed to bring about an understanding of minority dialects. In order to establish community in the classroom, our students must learn about the languages and dialects of their classmates so that they can be rid of the misconception that language makes us better or worse than other people.

The English classroom is an appropriate forum for this discussion, and in this discussion teachers' and administrator's positions should be as accountable as those of their students. If students were introduced to questions of language from this social perspective rather than from the comparatively small perspective of syntax, we could teach them how one's language says who one is. We might also have to admit that we sometimes get away with manipulating students with the promise of success or the threat of failure based on the language that they speak.

Sledd remarked that while people use differences in speech to claim and proclaim identity, society uses these same differences to keep people under control. To be "one of us," they must submit to our conventions of language use, and if they refuse they will be met with suspicion and ridicule, and eventually they will be ostracized (1307). I suspect that in relegating the study of language to the study of school grammar, we perpetuate this trend without offering answers to questions of language and power.

Our vision becomes short-sighted when we suggest that teaching usage (if, indeed, it even follows the doctrine of usage at all) is enough. This path brings us close to that fearful point at which grammar becomes catechism. There is a question of value here as well: what value will students put on the lesson we present if the heart of the lesson is that we do not value their language when it is not ours?

Ultimately, to learn to speak and write like us they must <u>want</u> to talk like us, be a part of "us," despite the relative lack of time that we have to teach and the opposing pressures from home and peers. We can expect difficulties in his program, because by exposing the truth about language we will expose the biases that underlie all of our criteria for success in school and community, and most likely this will force us to review and revise these criteria.

A Proposed Program:
The goal of any program for teaching English ought to be just that: the teaching of our language and its many uses. This would suggest that when we teach literature we teach language as the medium and the material of our most cogent and most imaginative thoughts. When we teach writing we should focus on the most effective and appropriate use of language in a specified situation, and when we teach language, we should teach the *whole*

language.

The best view of a whole language is captured in the mirror of sociolinguistics: the study of the uses, not just the "usage," of language. Within this concentration, three primary areas of study seem to have significance for the student's understanding of literature and writing. They are the study of style, dialect and identity, and the relationship between language and the world.

The first of these has direct application to the teaching of writing and literature, since we speak of style as though it were synonymous with a writer's identity. *By* style here, *I* mean not just those features that can be quantified and compared, but also those that reflect attitude, self-concept, world view, and acculturation: the place of the writer. We can teach students not only about appropriateness of formality (that is, that English teachers expect it in major papers), but the effect of formality (that it creates and maintains distance, and that when distance is not expected, for example, it becomes a destructive force).[3] And what is voice if not the written embodiment of style?

The teaching of dialect establishes a context for discussions of language difference. The importance of this topic I take to be self evident, especially given our increased emphasis on multiculturalism, and even if this pedagogical trend does not continue under its present name, the demographics of the United States suggests that it is unlikely we will see a leveling of dialect any time soon. An understanding of dialect will allow students to know what we expect them to learn—to know what the outcome of education in the standard language is—whether we assert that it gives its users access to the marketplace, status or authority, an increased ability to communicate without ambiguity, or any other of the privileges or advantages of standard language use.

At the same time, I think we make a mistake when we assume that people want to be like us because we are educated and enjoy the prestige of standard-speaking people. Those who would join us often must pay a heavy price. I recall the story of a friend who left behind his West Texas accent in an attempt to fit in at Chapel Hill. A simple greeting on his first Sunday back in Texas brought an old neighbor to remark, "My, don't he talk pretty now!" (Translate as, "You uppity thing, you think you're better than us now, don't you?") Richard Rodriquez' <u>Hunger of Memory</u> tells a similar story. Is *our* language well-priced at the cost of their home, family, and friends? If that is that cost, perhaps it is not ours to demand.

The common counter to this argument is that by allowing non-standard speakers to remain so we consign them to poverty. Although I suspect that this is an exaggeration, and I am certain that standard language alone will not bring them wealth, especially if their skin is not white, we must offer but not demand conversion to the standard. Prescriptive, standard-only, handbook English is not an offer but a demand. I suspect that when teachers and

students sit down together to discuss this question from the broader point of view of sociolinguistics, workable and satisfactory answers will begin to come forward, right in the classroom, from those who have a stake in the answer.

Lastly, by looking in this social mirror we can teach our students how language represents the world. It is something of a primitive of language study that all languages embody the critical cultural concepts of their speech communities. To look at language then, is to look at cultural concepts, and to do this is to look at the speakers themselves—and, in the case of English, ourselves. Why, for example, does our language have so many words for promiscuous women and none for promiscuous men? Why do we have so many words for alcoholic intoxication? Why do we have insulting epithets for members of other races, other ethnic backgrounds, other religions, other sexual preferences? In the answers to all these questions we see reflections of who we are. What a difference in the answers to these and the answers to questions like, "What is a gerund?"

Conclusion:

By placing as much attention as we do on a single component of structural linguistics (syntax) we necessarily neglect to teach language as a reflection of our selves, our culture, our society, our intellects, our values, and our beliefs. Further, as in the most frequent case, we approach this topic from the limited perspective of traditional grammar: "school grammar," a model of language with little if any relevance beyond the classroom. And after years of such study, the best of my junior and senior college students cannot even parse sentences, not because they are unregenerate or unintelligent, but because through years of *successful* school work they have never had the need, and thus they have forgotten the entire lesson. When we view language as a part of our lives, however, maybe as the most frequent of all our activities, it is not so easy to forget. If we do this, the subject that we teach will be directly relevant for our students every time they open their mouths or begin to write.

Notes

[1] See especially Chapter 5, "The Manipulation of Syntax," in Hillocks' Research on Written Composition. Also see Hillocks' "Synthesis of Research on Teaching Writing."

[2] See Hillocks' Research on Composition. Chapter 5 provides a history of attempts to measure the impact of teaching grammar in the writing classroom.

[3] See H. Garfinkle's Studies in Ethnomethodology (1967), and Elaine Chaika's Language: The Social Mirror, 2nd ed.(1989)

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High School Student Newspapers As Modeled On General Circulation Newspapers Are Not Educationally Sound

by

Matthew Stark

ISSUE

What is the role of public high school student newspapers? Is the general circulation newspaper an appropriate model for public high school student newspaper?

DISCUSSION

For too long, civil libertarians and educators have relied on public high school student newspapers [1] to play a role in high school students' education using the general circulation newspaper (e.g., the Minneapolis Star and Tribune) as a model. The general circulation newspaper and the special interest newspaper (e.g., the Catholic Bulletin) as well as their counterpart magazines, newsletters, fliers, etc.) are a vital part of our democratic society when they are free, and their freedom is properly supported by all. Generally, we believe that the existence of many newspapers in a community with different ownerships, editors, and reporters is good for a community or a country, rather than having few newspapers. In an educational setting where there is generally only one school sponsored student newspaper, a different set of expectations should apply.

What publishers and editors of general circulation or special interest newspapers do in selecting or rejecting news stories and editorials is not a proper model for public school teachers (which is what a public high school journalism advisor is), who must obey state educational policies and "provide students with access to a broad range of ideas and view points." [2] This Minnesota Board of Education policy also states that, "Individuals or

groups outside the public schools should not be allowed to... determine which view points will be presented and/or avoided in public schools." Nor is it educationally sound for a teacher to indoctrinate students with his/her own personal views, or to provide students with access to only a particular idea or viewpoint. [3] Thus, it is not educationally proper for a journalism advisor (public school teacher) to function as a publisher, editor, or advisor who plays a part in selecting the news stories which are covered or not covered and the editorial positions which are presented or not presented. The assignment of which news stories to cover - rejecting some, accepting others— as well as rejecting or accepting the sides of issues to be presented in editorials, is not an appropriate role for educators.

We must conclude that a general circulation or special interest newspaper does not provide a model for schools since the role of the publisher or the editor in such newspapers is to select from all potential news which stories

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[1] Nothing in this document applies to non-school student publications such as underground newspapers and other forms of written communication between and among high school students. These are all protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and except for reasonable time, place, and manner standards may not be interfered with (i.e., censored) by public school staff. No permission is required for students in a high school to distribute underground newspapers or other written communication. Only the school sponsored student newspaper is referred to in this article.

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[2] Adopted by the Minnesota Board of Education March 12, 1985. A Policy on the Freedom to Teach, to Learn, and to Express Ideas in the Public Schools. "Public schools must promote an atmosphere of free inquiry and a view of subject matter reflecting a broad range of ideas so that students are prepared for responsible citizenship."

"Public school personnel should: provide students with access to a broad range of ideas and viewpoints... However, teachers should not be allowed to indoctrinate students with their own personal views...."

"Information power-guidelines for school library media programs, a.l.a: "to provide physical assess to information through... a carefully selected and systematically organized collection of diverse learning resources, representing a wide range of subjects, levels of difficulty, communication formats, and technological delivery systems.

"To provide resources and learning activities that represent a diversity of experiences, opinions, social and cultural perspectives, supporting the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are prerequisite to effective and responsible citizenship in a democracy."

[3] Intellectual Freedom Manual, Fourth Edition, a.l.a: "In Article 2 of the Library Bill of Rights: Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval."

National Council for the Social Studies, Academic Freedom and the Social Studies Teacher: "It is the responsibility of teachers... (t)o promote the fair representation of differing points of view on all issues studied."

Minneapolis Public School Policy Manual, No. 6250-A, "Teaching of Controversial Issues": "The classroom is to be regarded as a forum for exploring the multitude of points of views relating to controversial issues and is not to be used as a committee to produce resolutions or to produce final solutions for problems. The teacher has the responsibility to bring out all the facts known."

are to be covered, how each is to be presented, and which positions are to be espoused or rejected in editorials.

The U.S. Supreme Court was aware of this when it affirmed fairness standards for the government-licensed broadcast media to follow in order to have a better informed citizenry.[4] Similarly, public high school student newspapers need to follow fairness standards in order to be educationally sound. The flaw in using general circulation or special interest newspapers as models for public high school student newspapers cannot be — corrected within the context of school newspapers—as they are currently and generally structured.

Fairness in a High School Newspaper

General circulation and special interest newspapers are cherished because they are free of government censorship, not because they are fair. Freedom of the press is supported, not fairness. Securing fairness in general circulation and special interest newspapers would involve and require government censorship and control. To meet the "fairness doctrine" standard, general circulation and special interest newspapers would have to present all sides of all issues; present balanced presentations on controversial issues; and give equal coverage in editorials to all candidates for various public offices.[5] This is not the goal of general circulation or special interest newspapers. Thus, it is reasonable to question the educational role of a public high school student newspaper when it is modeled upon either a general circulation newspaper or a special interest newspaper.

In the educational setting the school newspaper should adhere to standards similar to the "fairness doctrine". [6]

Under this doctrine, issues presented must include a range of views on a topic, a reasonably equitable analysis of topics, timeliness in presenting

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[4] Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. F.C.C., 395 U.S. 367 (1969). In this case, the U.S. Supreme Court said, that the Fairness Doctrine and its specific manifestations in the personal attack and political editorial rules do not violate the First Amendment.

[5] See Red Lion, 395 U.S. 367 at 378

[6] See Red Lion 395 U.S. 367,377 (1969), The Fairness Doctrine states that broadcasters have an affirmative obligation to give adequate coverage to public issues, and that the coverage must accurately reflect opposing views. The opinion also discusses broadcasters' obligation under the Personal Attack Doctrine, which requires that persons personally attacked on the air are given an opportunity to respond. Also discussed by the Court, was the requirement that when one candidate is endorsed by a broadcaster, the other candidates must be offered the opportunity to reply.

different facets of issues, "fairness doctrine" standards of equal access for various perspectives, and opportunities for persons attacked to respond. The problem is, no newspaper, including school newspapers as currently modeled, can adhere to the fairness doctrine, and still look like a newspaper. Therefore, a new structure and method must be found to teach the skills which school newspapers have so far purported to teach.

Rationale for Employing the Fairness Doctrine in High Schools

In public education it is important to involve all students in learning about, writing about, discussing and expressing opinions about a wide range of issues, controversial and noncontroversial. The written and expressive aspects are particularly important to enable students to learn to communicate clearly and effectively. As a major component of a school's educational program, therefore, it would be productive to have more issues discussed, debated, researched, expressed, and written about. A variety of viewpoints on controversial issues needs to be presented and discussed if they are to be educational rather than doctrinaire. Special interest and general circulation newspapers do not have education as their goal, and this is reflected in their product. Consequently, public high school student newspapers modeled on general circulation and special interest newspapers fail to meet both fairness and educational standards.

Educators should not use public high school student newspapers modeled after general circulation newspapers to perform the educational task of presenting an equitable range of positions on issue.

First, one must accept the-fact that a public high school journalism advisor, and/or a student editor, or an editorial committee of selected students, cannot compensate for the inability of general circulation and special interest newspapers to serve as an effective educational tool. The standard newspaper model is too inadequate for the many, varying educational needs of students and teachers. Leaving aside the issue of whether or not the school board is properly the publisher of the high school newspaper [7] , the high school advisor and/or the student editor have nothing in common with

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[7] Hazelwood School District v. Cathy Kuhlmeier, 484 U.S. 260 (1988), "On January 13, 1988, the Supreme Court announced its decision. In a 5-3 ruling, the Court held that the First Amendment rights of the student journalists had not been violated. Justice Byron R. White, writing the opinion for the Supreme Court majority, ...also stated that Spectrum (the school newspaper) was not specifically established as a public forum. Rather it was a 'laboratory situation' for a journalism class. As part of the school's curriculum, Spectrum was not intended as an open publication for student expression. 'Accordingly,' he wrote, 'school officials were entitled to regulate the contents of Spectrum in any reasonable manner.' "

the publishers and editors of general circulation or special interest newspapers. These are not published in order to serve as educational models for high school students, but rather to inform some people of some issues and views, and/or to make money. The goal of the high school newspaper is, or should be, the education of all students in the school. Even if high school advisors and student editors were free of bias, the general circulation and/or special interest newspaper is by definition an inappropriate model for school newspapers since they cannot meet the educational standards required of public schools and still be true to their publishers' goals. Conversely, public school newspapers are not intended to compete in the marketplace and their publishers are interested in carrying out an educational purpose so they can be educational. And to be educational they must be fair, as described above.

Second, in a major U.S. Supreme Court case covering the not too-removed issue of a government licensed media, the Court, in 1969, made many comments which should apply to a government owned and controlled newspaper. [8] If the public high school student newspaper is an educational tool of the public school board (and the Hazelwood discussion makes that point clear) [9], then the spirit, if not the letter, of the Court's decision in the Red Lion case apply.[10]

If on the other hand, one believes that the public high school student newspaper is not an educational tool of the school board, then it is to be compared with either a general circulation or a special interest newspaper. In that case parents, taxpayers, and students may properly object to the use of their tax dollars and time for the propagation of unbalanced views with which they may not agree and which serve no demonstrable educational purpose. In that case, there should be no school-sponsored newspaper, and its non-educational role should be left to underground newspapers.

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[8] See Red Lion, 395 U.S. 367 (1969) said that 'The Fairness Doctrine and its specific manifestations in the personal attack and political editorial rules do not violate the First Amendment. "The right of free speech of a broadcaster, … does not embrace a right to snuff out the free speech rights of others." at 387. "It is the right of the viewers and listeners, not of the broadcasters, which is paramount." at 390. "It is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail, rather than to countenance monopolization of that market, whether it be by the Government itself or a private licensee." at 390. "Otherwise, station owners and a few networks would have unfettered power to make time available only to the highest bidders, to communicate only their own views on public issues, people and candidates, and to permit on the air only those with whom they agreed." at 392.

The objective in moving away from the current model of the public high school sponsored student newspaper which is published by the school board, is to have more analyses, more research more investigating, more creative and critical expressions, and more writing about more positions on more issues than is found by design in either the general circulation or the special interest newspapers upon which school newspapers are currently incorrectly modeled.

The general circulation and special interest newspapers do not have as a mandate the education of student writers and readers. Student readers in the school setting and in activities under the aegis of the school board must be presented with the range of views and news stories on an issue in an equitable, balanced, and instructive manner. The teachers should insure that resource material, produced by a class of students learning to investigate, research, analyze, and write about issues, covers the range of views and should supervise the duplication and distribution of such material to student peers for their reading, learning, and reacting.

General circulation and special interest newspapers have not been assigned, nor do they assume, this educational responsibility. Public school teachers (particularly journalism teachers) must play a new, different, and enhanced role: seeing to it that more students have access to a greatly increased educational opportunity of researching, analyzing, editing, expressing, and writing about a multiplicity of positions and viewpoints on an issue so that

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[9] See Hazelwood, 484 U.S. 260 (1988), "The latter question concerns educators' authority over school-sponsored publications, …that students, parents, and members of the public might reasonably perceive to bear the imprimatur of the school. These activities may fairly be characterized as part of the school curriculum, whether or not they occur in a traditional classroom setting, so long as they are supervised by faculty members and designed to impart particular knowledge or skills to student participants and audiences.

"Educators are entitled to exercise greater control over this second form of student expression to assure that participants learn whatever lessons the activity is designed to teach, that readers or listeners are not exposed to material that may be inappropriate for their level of maturity, and that the views of the individual speaker are not erroneously attributed to the school… A school must be able to set high standards for the student speech that is disseminated under its auspices standards that may be higher than those demanded by some newspaper publishers or theatrical producers in the "real" world - and may refuse to disseminate student speech that does not meet those standards."

[10] See Red Lion, 395 U.S. 367 (1969)

they, and their student readers prepare or receive an educationally sound publication. Public school teachers are encouraged to continue to teach the newspaper as a form of mass media.

New forms of communication and methods of duplication for school writing classes need to be adopted and used by educators to insure that such educational opportunities are readily and widely available to students. New technologies are now available which make feasible the production of multitudes of publications and presentations, offering more students more opportunities to learn more skills, vocational as well as analytical.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Educators, civil libertarians, and all others should:

1. Reaffirm their strong support for freedom of the press in regard to general circulation and special interest newspapers, recognizing that a free press is essential in a democracy and that government may not impose a fairness standard on these newspapers.

2. Vigorously protect public high school student underground and alternative newspapers, as well as other independently written forms of communication between and among students, against government censorship or restrictions except for reasonable time, place, and manner standards which shall be subject to civil court review.

3. Recommend that public school staffs encourage the development and expansion of independent student publications and/or productions, so that the school becomes user-friendly to student publishers of a wide variety of truly student publications.

4. Give students academic assistance in regard to learning how to investigate, research, analyze, write, and reproduce their own newspapers, memos, fliers, articles, other written communications, as well as, videos, electronic bulletin boards and other forms of creative and critical expression. Teachers should not intervene in the content of such student publications, communications or productions, nor would they be held responsible for the content.

5. Recommend that English teachers, social studies teachers, and journalism teachers cooperate to take on new and additional teaching responsibilities within the curriculum, to teach students how to investigate, research, analyze, express, write, and produce their ideas and views, and to learn how to duplicate them for others to read, review and react.

6. Recommend that teachers give classroom assignments to students to research, investigate, analyze, write and express a multiplicity of viewpoints about all aspects of a particular issue and then reproduce the total class product of many different essays about an issue. This presentation

should not be modeled upon the journalistic newspaper standard of editing-out less important positions, but rather should be based on the educational standard of having a broad range of views on a particular topic.

7. Recommend that students in a class be given assignments to write editorials about a variety of issues presented through a wide variety of formats or medias; for example, students should consider and write about all the candidates for a particular office, rather than producing one editorial supporting one candidate as is true in general circulation and special interest newspapers. These collections of student editorials should be duplicated and distributed for peer review and reaction.

8. Recommend that school library media specialists make available the widest possible range of materials so that students have the resources to examine, consider, and investigate a diversity of viewpoints and opinions, on various issues-and topics.

9. Recommend that school library media specialists working in concert with journalism teachers, provide a variety of appropriate technologies, and help students to acquire skills in using alternative communication formats and methods of duplication.

(The text printed above, "High School Student Newspapers As Modeled On General Circulation Newspapers Are Not Educationally Sound", is the Adopted Policy of the Minnesota Coalition Against Censorship. — Eds.)

Issues in Tracking and Ability Grouping Practices in English Language Arts Classrooms, K-12

by

Ann Buhman Renninger and Joan Naomi Steiner

The Issues

In 1977, the National Council of Teachers of English condemned the "transformation of the English language arts curriculum from a holistic concern for language development to sequenced but isolated and often unrelated sets of reading and writing skills"—practices that more frequently occur in lower-tracked classes—and urged "that NCTE actively campaign against testing practices and programs that, masquerading as improved education for all children, actually result in the segregation and tracking of students, thus denying them equal educational opportunity." Today the segregation of students, based upon perceived levels of ability in English language arts classrooms, continues to be a widespread practice in United States schools.

The assumption underlying the practice of tracking students based on perceived ability is that literacy is achieved through a hierarchical sequence of skills; whereas, the rapidly expanding body of research on language learning has repeatedly illustrated that language is learned holistically, not through isolated skill instruction. Research has also consistently suggested that lowered expectations for students (i.e., low-ability groups) result in lower student achievement. The segregation of students by perceived abilities denies students the opportunity to participate in the richest language/learning environment. Although tracking may benefit a possible small percentage of accelerated students (Slavin, 1991), there is no consistent evidence to support tracking and ability-grouping practices (Trimble and Sinclair, 1987). "What is clear," according to the Report of the NEA Executive Committee Subcommittee on Tracking (1990), "is that rigid academic tracking creates academic problems for many students from all socioeconomic and ethnic groups and also creates isolation by socioeconomic status and ethnicity" (p. 25).

NCTE's Strategic Plan's General Objective 7 states: "The Council promotes the institutional, instructional, and community conditions under which literacy best develops"; therefore, the Council must discourage tracking students in the language arts. NCTE's Resolution on Tracking (November, 1991) recognizes tracking as "a system which limits students' intellectual, linguistic, and/or social development" (NCTE, 1991).

The NCTE Resolution is grounded in overwhelming research that indicates that "even under unusual circumstances nearly all students can learn as well in heterogeneous groups as in tracked classrooms and that students identified as average or below average often do better in heterogeneous classes" (Oakes, 1987, p. 7). Moreover, studies reveal that in lower tracks, students who need the most supportive environment get the least. In lower-ability groups, students are more likely to receive less rigorous instruction from the least competent teachers who have lowered expectations for students (Murphy, 1988). Goodlad (1984) presents research that indicates significant losses for the slowest learners in homogeneous grouping.

Likewise, Gamoran's analyses (1990) show that "better instruction is an important part of the reason high-track students score higher, and less effective instruction explains, to an extent, why low-track students score lower" (p. 3).

Of particular interest are Goodlad's findings of untracked classes—those containing students of mixed ability and achievement. Rather than instruction failing to meet the needs of the lowest achievers, as conventional wisdom would predict, "most of the mixed classes resembled the high more than the low track classes in nearly all of the areas studied" (1984, p. 156).

A recent synthesis of tracking studies (Slavin 1990) concludes that there is no overall positive or negative effect of homogeneous grouping in secondary schools. Research indicates that tracking results in enrichment *only* for those identified as gifted, because conventional achievement measures are perceived as representing total school learning. Oakes's research indicates that higher-ability students did better in heterogeneous groups. What Oakes found was that when higher-ability students worked in cooperative groups, they learned more because they gave explanations. This helped them develop deeper understandings, which they did not develop when they worked only with other higher-ability students. Here they stopped talking as soon as they arrived at the "right" answer and were unlikely to develop more than superficial understandings (personal communication, February 13, 1992). In terms of membership in instructional groups, Oakes (1990) reports this often parallels race and social class differences.

A scan through current educational journals reveals that across the nation, schools are attempting to make changes that are consistent with the nearly unanimous recommendations of numerous professional organizations, such as NCTE, which endorse efforts to detrack. Among these organizations are:

The National Education Association
The International Reading Association
The Carnegie Commission (Turning *Points,* 1989)
The College Board (Equity 2000,1992)
The National Governor's Association
The National Association of State Boards of Education
The National Council of Mathematics

The National Science Teachers Association
Education Commission of the States
Committee on Policy for Racial Justice
National Coalition of Advocates for Students
Council for Basic Education
Massachusetts Department of Education *(Locked In/Locked Out,* 1990)

Recognizing the pervasiveness of tracking and ability grouping in the United States in English language arts classrooms, the National Council of Teachers of English has formed a committee to study issues related to tracking and ability-grouping practices in English language arts classrooms, K-12. Questions under study include:

- What are current tracking and grouping practices in K-12 English language arts classrooms?
- What are students' constitutional rights with regard to equal access to educational opportunities?
- What are the social implications of school tracking? How does school tracking promote cultural inequities?
- What are the results of tracking on the educational experiences of students?
- How does tracking promote overall educational inequity?
- How do instructional practices and curricular content differ between low-ability and high-ability classes?
- In what ways might magnet schools perpetuate racial, social, and economic discrimination?
- How does tracking affect teachers' expectations for students?
- What are successful alternatives to traditional tracking and ability-grouping practices?
- What are the consequences of academic and vocational tracking, in terms of limiting access to knowledge, inequitable instructional quality, inequitable student outcomes, and curricular inequality (Oakes, 1986a, 1986b)?

In Table 1, Murphy, Hallinger, and Lotto (1986) list inequities of instruction, time, and curriculum content:

Table 1
Treatment Differentials Among Instructional Groups and Curricular Tracks: Patterns of Discrimination in Lower-Ability Groups

INSTRUCTION
receive least prepared teachers
teachers feel less comfortable teaching
teachers are less knowledgeable about how to teach
teachers spend less time preparing
teachers hold lower performance expectations for selves
more likely to receive instruction from aides
negative and inappropriate performance expectations for students
objectives less likely to be explained
materials introduced less clearly

less time spent on introductory learning activities
less interactive teaching; more worksheets
less teacher clarity in presentations
more chaotic learning structure
greater confusion as to appropriate modes of participation
fewer work standards provided
students held less accountable for work
reduced quality of teacher-student interactions
less teacher enthusiasm and warmth

TIME
instruction begins later in the class period
more instructional time lost during transitions
more time spent with no work assignment
more time lost due to student interruptions
more time lost due to teacher interruptions
disproportionate amounts of instructional time spent in controlling and managing behavior
more class time devoted to homework
more off-task behavior
instruction ends earlier in the period

CURRICULUM CONTENT
content less academically oriented
personal and social goals more important than academic objectives
blurred academic content
use of "relevant" subject matter
lack of clear purpose and focus to classroom activities
emphasis on therapy rather than learning
fewer task-related interchanges between teachers and students
material covered at slower pace
lower-level objectives and functional skills emphasized
fewer academic courses completed
fewer academic standards specified
fewer reports and projects assigned
fewer homework assignments
less academic feedback
fewer tests given
little emphasis on skill progression
less sequenced and integrated work in individual classes
more half-year courses
fewer sequenced and integrated courses across years
strong behavioral aspect to academic functions
less counseling about appropriate course work to take

SUCCESS
more off-task behavior
less academic learning time
lower rates of success

Oakes illustrates the predictable consequences of academic tracking (with a trajectory graphic) in Slavin's (1989) *School and Classroom Organization (p.* 179). Students who are identified as high and low ability and are then tracked into high and low placements show, over time, wide discrepancies

in cognitive/affective outcomes. Low-track students suffer diminished outcomes while high-track students predictably show enhanced cognitive/affective outcomes.

Strategies for Action
Members of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) at their Annual Business Meeting November 24,1991, in Seattle, Washington, passed a resolution calling for efforts to continue their campaign against the tracking of students into ability groups, charging that this practice limits many students' intellectual development.

ON TRACKING
Members of the NCTE Committee on Tracking and Grouping Practices in English Language Arts (K-12), who proposed this resolution, urged that classrooms should be communities of learners in which collaboration occurs among students of many abilities. They warned that when students are placed into tracked/ability-grouped classes, this language collaboration that aids learning may not occur. The committee members pointed out that placing students in tracks or ability groups, especially those based on standardized test scores, can have a negative influence on teachers' expectations of students and students' expectations of themselves.

RESOLVED, that the National Council of Teachers of English support curricula, programs, and practices that avoid tracking, a system which limits students' intellectual, linguistic, and/or social development;

that NCTE urge educators and other policymakers to re-examine curricula, programs, and practices that require or encourage tracking of students in English language arts;

that NCTE support teachers in their efforts to retain students in or return students to heterogeneous English language arts placement; and

that NCTE expand its efforts to educate the public about the effects of tracking.

The National Council of Teachers of English recommends the following strategies for action to detrack English language arts classrooms, K-12, and to provide more equitable instructional equality, student outcomes, and curricula opportunities:

- Promote teacher inservice education to support detracking efforts and to explore tracking alternatives. Untracked classrooms look different than traditional ones. Integrated curriculum models, project-related activities, whole language philosophies, peer tutoring, portfolio assessment, to name a few, are efforts that support classrooms with more equitable opportunities. State affiliates should be contacted for staff development in these alternative teaching/learning situations.

- Distribute tracking-related materials to faculty, school boards, administrators, community, and parent groups to inform these groups of the effects of tracking and of alternative strategies. The NCTE publication *Off the Track* (in progress) aims at informing the public as well as the

local educational community. Included in this publication are sample letters to school boards and sample news releases discussing issues related to tracking.

- Promote convention and conference attendance where topics related to the issues of tracking and detracking are discussed. NCTE and its state affiliates as well as ASCD and its state affiliates sponsor individual sessions, informal study groups, and workshops on tracking. Contact these professional organizations for upcoming conferences and workshops.

- Promote the idea that teaching students in heterogeneous groups allows for excellence in teaching English language arts, K-12. NCTE recommends returning students to heterogeneous classrooms for the benefit of all students (1991 Resolution of tracking). On a local level, educators can share with colleagues, school boards, and the general public current language learning research that supports heterogeneous grouping in English language arts.

Resources
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 12450 N. Pitt Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wisconsin Center for Educational Research, 1025 W. Johnson Street, Madison, WI 53706.

Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 95 Berkeley Street, Boston, MA 021 16.

National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.

National Education Association Instruction and Professional Development, 1201 Sixteenth Street N.W., Washington, DC 22036.

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ALONE

by

Erin Hendel

A blanket of silence
Wraps itself around me
Softly, extravagant flakes
Settle on my shoulders
The cry of a late goose
Breaks the air
Stark, bare trees gather
A mantle of snow
To hide their nakedness
Footprints wander away
Headlights rumble toward me
Rush past
And leave me
Alone with the stillness

The OED And Other Dictionaries As A Source For Student Papers

by

Elmer Suderman

Looking back over forty plus years of teaching freshman composition in college one of the most successful courses was one called "Writing about Language." The purpose of the course was to teach the students something about the history and structure of language, to make them more conscious of how words work and to help them become more sensitive to the mystery of words. The primary texts were a dictionary and Thoreau's *Walden*. The twelve papers of three to five pages were about language, mostly about individual words.

I will describe four representative assignments and the responses of the students to these assignments.

Early in the class the students were given the following assignment:
> Some words you know and feel more intimately than others. You know their internal shape, the curve of their meaning, the limits of their usefulness. Some words are richer than others, or seem so. They serve more adequately than others to convey exact feelings. They have a more succulent taste, or a more fragrant smell, a sharper edge, a more distinct color, a clearer sound, perhaps because you have known them longer, or because they remind you of some instance in your past where they served you well, or because you remember fondly when you first met them and because they have never, even after long years, become trite, have instead acquired a richer, fuller meaning. Some words give you pleasure. They not only denote much but connote more.
>
> Choose a word that you know intimately, preferably one that captures your imagination as well as your mind, that embodies a significant part of your life, a word that interests you. Then explain how and why the word came to have its appeal, to carry its feeling and meaning. Recount your experiences with the word, particularly your first or a memorable contact with it. While you may need a dictionary, as much as possible rely on your own knowledge of and experience with the word. One final note: it is easier to write about a word rich with connotations than about one with few connotations.

Before they wrote the paper I lectured-on the larger rhetorical strategies using James Kinneavy's distinction between aims and modes of writing. I pointed out that any of Kinneavy's aims—self expression, persuasion, conveying information, explaining and proving, exploring and making poems or stories—could serve in writing the paper with the least likely being persuasion or making poems and stories. I reminded them that the aims are not mutually exclusive. In discussing mode I suggested that either narration

and description are more appropriate than evaluation or classification, though again all four will play a part, particularly a combination of description and narration.

The results were surprisingly good. Many of the papers were interesting to read. The words about which they wrote were varied: *behavior* (chosen by a foreign student because its wide use in a psychology class puzzled her, and she wanted to discover what it meant); *possibility* (chosen by a girl who argued that "anything is possible if a person sets her mind on goals and works her hardest to succeed," and illustrated her point by showing how she and her partner won a tennis match when the odds were definitely against them; she could not, however, overcome stubborn writing obstacles); *pride* (chosen by a person of color, who explained how pride motivated persons of color to achieve dignity and equality); *Armageddon* (which the student found spooky and ominous sounding, frightening because of its connections with the Apocalypse); *exotic* (the student played on its similarity to erotic as he described his visit to the Hawaiian Islands); *serene* (a description of fishing on a northern Minnesota lake at sunset); and *boy* (a narrative by a person of color about how a white teacher's use of the word to a person of color resulted in violence).

Concerned with revision, I had each student write the paper again, this time paying more attention to the precise situation in which they experienced the word. For example, in the first paper on *enigma*, the writer told in rather general terms how Lucy's line "What's an enigma?" in a high school musical about the Peanuts gang raised the question which no one seemed to be able to answer. The writer was fascinated by the sound of the word. In the revision she emphasized specific characteristics of the rehearsal in which the impact of the question forced her to consult the dictionary to discover, much to her delight, that the situation that gave rise to her search was an enigmatic situation itself. Somewhat gratuitously she brought in the similarity of the sounds of enema and enigma. In the conclusion she conveyed her growing delight in puzzling her friends by using a word not commonly used and thereby becoming, she hoped, somewhat enigmatic herself.

By relating the word to the experience which forced her to discover more fully the meaning of enigma and by seeing in that situation an example of the meaning of the word, this student learned how a word can unlock the significance of what would otherwise have remained an ordinary and unexamined experience.

This paper was followed by another which required greater use of the dictionary. Again the students wrote two papers. This time I assigned the word. Usually I assigned the word *economy*. We discussed the word for an hour. The principal meanings which emerged focused, as one would expect, on economy as a careful use of money and on the condition of the economy of the United States at the time.

By judicious, or perhaps by leading, questions, the students came to

understand that economy could have both a restricted meaning (i.e., a frugal management of money) and a more general meaning (i.e. a careful management of any resource—time, property, personal abilities, labor). This made it possible to illustrate how words generalize in meaning or become specialized, ameliorated and pejorated. The latter led to the sometimes pejorative use of economy to mean parsimony, niggardliness (two words not in most students' vocabulary), or stingy. We were now prepared for the writing assignment:

Look up economy in the *Oxford English Dictionary,* the *Dictionary of Americanisms*, both the second and third edition of *Webster's Unabridged*, one or more desk dictionaries, a dictionary of synonyms (a source often overlooked and extremely helpful in making fine distinctions in meanings), and, perhaps, an etymological dictionary. In addition check Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*, the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, and the *MacMillan Book of Proverbs, Maxims, and Famous Phrases* to see how the word has been used. Watch for the use of the word in lectures, over the radio and TV. See if you use the word, if your friends do and how and when. Look for meanings which are not are not yet recorded in the dictionary. Note past meanings which are no longer current. By now you may be overwhelmed. Do not despair. If you run out of time or space, focus on the dictionary definitions.

You will immediately perceive a difficulty. Everyone has the same, or almost the same, data. Invention seems to be dictated. Arrangement and the method of classification seems self-evident. There is little more to do than to begin where the OED does and show how the meanings have developed historically or to classify meaning by showing distinctions. About all that is left is style. Think again. There are other principles of division besides chronology; for example the movement from the specific (management of a household) to the general (management of any community).

It may be, indeed it is, possible to vary the mode. Instead of a classification a narrative may be possible. Perhaps the predominant meanings of economy can be recounted in a story. But whatever mode you use, one point is paramount: Be sure when you finish that you have discovered and that you have informed the reader in an interesting way what exactly the meanings of economy are. When you write the next paper you will discover how important it is to understand the discriminations among the meanings of economy.

Students responded to the challenge of this paper. On the surface it would seem to be a dull assignment. Only the most eccentric (or is it the most enigmatic?) people read dictionaries. Even fewer write papers about the words they look up. The dictionary is not usually a source for writers; it is a tool.

But, I repeat, some, indeed most, papers were interesting. For example, there was the student who "chugging along on the train from Wellsville to

Pittsburgh" was surprised to discover a town named Economy. Here she found an Economy Gas Station, the School of Economics and Home Economics, Economically Safe and Sound Banking, the Economizing Home Store, the Economical Heating Company and economy-sized items ranging from economy-sized peanut butter (which was smaller and less economical than the giant size) to economy-sized cars (which were larger and less economical than the compacts or subcompacts). The town, she wrote was founded by a Greek immigrant. She was right in her etymology but unaware that Economy, Pennsylvania was founded by the Utopian George Rapp who after moving from Harmony, Pennsylvania in 1815 to New Harmony, Indiana returned to Pennsylvania and founded Economy in 1825.

Economy, when my student visited the town in her imagination, was electing a mayor. Each of the candidates ran on a platform, the major plank of which was a major definition of economy. One was interested in improving "the art or science of managing a household, including especially its expenses, buying only what was necessary. Another promised to improve "the administration of the concerns and resources of the whole community, especially the expenditure of money," and pledged, as almost all candidates do, to reduce spending and make more prudent use of taxpayers' money. The third, a political economist, assured the voters that he would use his knowledge, as economists originally did, to increase the material resources of the town by the careful management of resources, including time, human resources and labor. The fourth candidate was concerned to help the citizens understand, as he did, "the method of divine government of the world, or of a specific department," in this case God's will for Economy. His favorite phrase was Economy needs the "economy of Truth."

In spite of the ingenious use of story to explain the meanings of *economy*, the paper was sometimes incoherent and lost sight of the goal of informing the reader what the word meant. But overall it was apparent that she not only understood the meanings of the word but that she knew something about point of view, that she was imaginative. Other papers used other techniques, but none quite as striking as this one.

Immediately after writing the paper on the meaning of economy, we read Thoreau's *Walden*, and you remember that the title of the first chapter is "Economy." The next assignment, then, was simple: "Keeping in mind the definitions of economy, write a paper showing how Thoreau explores the functions of economy in his life. Keep in mind that Thoreau implies rather than states the meanings of economy."

This was perhaps the most difficult of the four papers, for Thoreau uses the word economy only one or two times in the chapter. The students were on their own in exploring Thoreau's reason for the title and developing a rational to account for his title.

All of the students immediately saw the connection between economy and Thoreau's attempt to live a simple and frugal life, but again some students

were more imaginative. One examined three different definitions implied by Thoreau. The first point, and perhaps the most insightful, considered not Thoreau's direct application of economy in his life but with his use of economy in organizing the chapter. Citing the OED definition of economy as "the structure, arrangement of proportion of parts, or any product of human design," the student attempted to show Thoreau's "order or arrangement in general" in the first chapter of *Walden*.

His next point was to show how Thoreau exemplified "the efficient and sparing use of material and human resources" in his years at Walden pond. Here the student emphasized Thoreau's prudent use of resources which made possible an effective use of time and labor in order to "transact some private business with the fewest obstacles: to live wisely and simply."

Finally the student demonstrated how Thoreau's initial chapter exemplified his concern to manage his household and his finances as frugally as possible. The paper concluded with an attempt to show how all three of these definitions were related to each other and how all three could be subsumed under the rubric of economy as a choice of values, Thoreau preferring to get by on only the most essential and elemental material necessity—to maintain body heat—that he might be more free to live a humane and civilized life.

The assignments making use of dictionaries brought into play considerable numbers of techniques usually handled in a composition class: invention, arrangement, and style. The writing assignments allowed the class to consider the purposes of writing as well as the possible modes of writing. It is helpful but not necessary to understand Kinneavy's aims and modes, readily available in Kinneavy, McCleary and Nakadate, *Writing in the Liberal Arts Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990); indeed other classifications work just as well.

Writing about words taught the students a very practical use of the dictionary, particularly the OED-which too many students never use and often never know exists. Writing about words taught the students something about how meanings change and how words are related. Students seemed to get a better feel for the sense of words, for connotation as well as denotation. The assignments helped students to see how words can be precise yet imprecise, can reveal but also obscure ideas.

By writing about words the students saw that a careful examination of words helped their understanding of what they read. They came to realize that both writing and reading are explorations, are means of discovery, discovery of ideas and of others as well as of themselves. In short, students came to realize that writing and reading depend upon a love for and understanding of words, and that that love and understanding deepens and enriches our experience.

Outcome Based Education (OBE) And Performance Assessment In One School District

by

Charles Miller

INTRODUCTION

Recently we educators have directed much of our attention to OBE and performance assessments, and recently the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) has also been urging Minnesota school districts in this direction, charging each district in the near future to verify that each graduate has achieved the required graduation outcomes and to validate assessments at all performance levels, this instead of basing student success and graduation on the traditional Carnegie units.

In 1991 several administrators at the Cambridge-Isanti School District collaborated and wrote a grant to the MDE to obtain funding for writing authentic exhibition assessments at grade levels 4, 8, and 12 and then test them for their reliability and validity. The grant specifies writing assessments in the broad area of communications, concentrating on these four published MDE competencies: 1) Read using alternative strategies to comprehend a variety of written materials. 2) Listen to, comprehend, evaluate, and respond. 3) Write in an organized and clear manner. 4) Speak in an organized and clear manner.

This article will review our approach to accomplishing this assignment, relate how successful our performance assessments seemed to be, and disclose how valid and reliable our performance assessments really were.

The principal purpose of our grant was to write communications exhibition assessments at grade levels 4, 8, and 12, designing task ladders down from each grade level, select teachers to test the exhibition assessments, and then have EPM Associates of St. Cloud evaluate our assessments and tasks for reliability and validity. Since it was English language arts' turn to revise its outcomes and curriculum in our district—we have a five year cycle for curriculum revision—we decided to marry the two efforts, that is write the assessments and task ladders for the grant and use them as outcomes for our English/language arts' K - 12 curriculum.

Initially we attempted to compose valid exit outcomes. We started this by inviting a small number of community members in to essentially tell us what they believe students graduating from our high school ought to be able to do in the realm of communications, namely reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. We did get a fair cross section of people, representatives from businesses, the professions, skilled workers, even a writer, a minister, and

a college English professor. We also had representatives from our high school English teacher staff and administrators present at those meetings.

When told they were to list what they felt our graduates ought to be able to do instead of what they ought to know, the lay members of this group immediately started listing specific performances, such as graduates being able to: communicate to customers in person or via phone in a polite, businesslike manner; locate parts and product information using technology; read and interpret manuals for installing new equipment and technology; solve problems without assistance from supervisors; demonstrate initiative and leadership qualities and seek out tasks to perform; take pride in his/her appearance and dress appropriately for the occasion. The group initially brainstormed a list of about forty such items, and there was a considerable debate about the fact that vocational type performances appeared to dominate our list with little attention given to the appreciation of the arts and values and the great ideas of man found in literature, those things English teachers, ministers, and writers hold so dear. However, after I crossed referenced our list with the MDE's list of graduation requirements, reducing the list to 31 competencies, the competency "the student shall interpret and evaluate creative works of expressions" seemed to satisfy those concerned with our list appearing "too vocational."

WRITING THE OUTCOMES

Our plan at this point was to design down in OBE fashion. The high school English staff wrote exit outcomes that reflected our list of 31 competencies. Two teams of high school English and communications teachers wrote preliminary drafts of the level 12 exhibition performances, one a written performance, the second an oral presentation. So we were armed with exit outcomes, graduation competencies, and an idea as to what the exit performance at grade 12 would be like. Our curriculum director, who is also our assistant superintendent, the director of our district's communications leadership team, who is an elementary principal, and I then started meeting with representative teachers from the other grade levels, 4 and 8.

We started by meeting with two representatives from each grade level 5 through 8. These teachers met and first wrote the exit outcomes for grade level 8, those things they expected to be able to say that the teachers "designed down" from grade 8 exit outcomes when they wrote the task ladders or outcomes for the other three grade levels, but they did not choose to do so. I gave them the option of breaking off into groups by grade levels, working independently of the teachers of the other levels, or working together in one large group. They chose the latter. Armed with the exit outcomes at level 8, the teachers started by writing tasks (performance outcomes) and their assessments for grade 5 and designed up, and it worked fairly well, for they were then able to maintain an age-appropriate sequence of outcomes and assessments for each grade level as they worked towards each level 8 exit outcome.

For example, at grade 8 a student has to write an expository paragraph, but students in grade 5 also write paragraphs. So what is different? The fifth grade teachers decided their students ought to demonstrate the ability to write a descriptive paragraph. So, still, what is different? The sixth grade teachers opted for a persuasive paragraph for their students. And seventh grade teachers decided their students, like the eighth graders, ought to write an expository paragraph as well. And we know that English teachers at the high school also reteach how to write these different types of paragraphs, that many students typically have not yet mastered these tasks before they reach the high school. Where is meaningful sequence?

This issue was roundly discussed. The answers lay in the assessments and their standards. The eighth grade teachers expected more from their students than fifth grade teachers did and consequently wrote tougher standards. Here is how the assessments and standards differ:

Grade 5

The student will wtite a descriptive paragraph

STANDARDS (S = Satisfactory N = Needs Improvement)

The student will:

1 write either 4 sentences of 50 words (to be specified by your teacher,) — S N

2 introduce the topic clearly — S N

3 use sensory descriptive words — S N

4 remain focused on a single idea (unity) — S N

5 write in complete sentences — S N

6 meet the basic conventions of indenting, capitalization, punctuation, usage, and spelling (underline the item(s) *which the student needs to improve*). — S N

Grade 8

The student will write an expository paragraph

STANDARDS (S = Satisfasctory N = Needs Improvement)

The paragraph:

1 must have either 6 sentences or 100 words (to be specified by your teacher) — S N

2 starts with a unifying topic sentence. — S N

3 supports its topic sentence with adequate detail. — S N

4 makes an original idea clear to the reader (clarity). — S N

5 remains focused on a single idea (unity) — S N

6 is written in complete sentences — S N

7 meets the basic conventions of capitalization, punctuation, usage and spelling *(underline the item(s) which the student needs to improve)*. — S N

8 must have sentence variety

We concluded that it was desirable to have representatives from all our middle school grades meet as a group to determine the proper sequence of task difficulties for the assessments, even though they did not use a perfect OBE design down approach.

The writing team assembled for the elementary grades K- 4 used the same basic approach.

They, too, wrote the exit outcomes for grade 4 first, then working together in a group, designed outcomes and assessments from kindergarten to grade 4. This was their choice. They maintained and age-appropriate sequence K - 4 for each outcome.

WRITING THE EXHIBITION ASSESSMENTS

After we finished writing the outcomes and their assessments for all the grade levels, we tackled writing the exhibition exit assessments. We used the same writing teams as we used to write the outcomes. Instead of describing the process of writing the assessments, I will describe the nature of each assessment and our successes.

At the high school the class selected to do the exhibition assessment was a classical English class; consequently, according to the assessment, each student was required to select a classical work to read and researched the author and what critics have written. Each had to write a formal research paper and organize and give a six to twelve minute oral presentation on his or her topic. By the way, these high school students received no instruction on how to accomplish either of the assessments since their teacher interpreted this assessment as an indicator of whether each student could in fact satisfactorily perform this exit assessment. And this seems to be the distinct nature of an exit assessment.

The audience for these students comprised of peers (classmates and invited members of our school's National Honor Society), teachers, administrators, community members who served on the local curriculum advisory committee, and school board members. In addition to this, we video taped each student's presentation. Understandably we raised the anxiety level of the student presenters. And the students rose to the occasion splendidly.

For the most part, that is. We had scheduled the performances over two evenings in January. A severe ice storm prevented us meeting the second evening. So we were forced to have the students finish giving their presentations during school the following day, without adults and peers from the honor society in the audience. The students who performed under these less stressful conditions did not perform as well. They came dressed for a typical school day, not dressed in their Sunday best as did those students who presented in the evening performance. In spite of the fact their presentations counted as their semester final exam, the daytime presenters did not have the same pressure, were somewhat lackadaisical about the task, and clearly

did not perform as well as their counterparts who performed two evenings before.

All teachers evaluating students both occasions commented on this difference, which causes us to believe that students usually will rise to the occasion and will in fact perform to raised standards.

We observed the same phenomenon at the middle school level. The eighth grade English teacher who tested our communications exhibition assessment for level 8 decided to integrate it with social studies. Linked with social studies, each student was required to select a country, research it, write a letter to one of its embassies, write a report of the research activities, and give an oral presentation to the peers in his or her classroom.

There were some difficulties initially. With the assessment came OBE, and most students were not prepared for OBE standards, that is do all the required tasks, and do them satisfactorily according to clearly written standards. As is typical with a traditional grading system, a number of our middle school students become accustomed to selecting which assignments to do, which not to do, for it doesn't take students long to learn than one doesn't have to do many assignments to pass with a D minus. Consequently, about fifteen percent of the eight graders initially refused to write a business letter to an embassy of their chosen countries.

However, as time went on and they became more involved with stages of the assessment in both their English and social classes and as both teachers continued to prod them and they saw their classmates advance on with their projects, apparently most began to feel they were in jeopardy in both their English and social classes; most became ambitious and completed all the requirements for the assessment. Only two percent failed to complete them all.

Like the students at the high school, as they approached the days for the oral presentations, the anxiety level of the students rose to an unprecedented high, and when the students performed their oral exhibitions, they rose to the occasion and performed admirably well.

The exhibition assessment for grade 4 was likewise integrated. The teachers writing this assessment decided to use a science project they have used for years as a basis for a communications performance. For the science project each student was required to select a local animal, research it, create a poster-like display, and present it to the class. One research activity was traveling to a local nature area and listen to biologists discuss local animals and the life cycles of their chosen animals.

Again, the teacher and her principal report that the assessment was extremely successful, partly because it was integrated: the students researched topics they were interested in; there was a purpose for creating their displays and presenting them; the assessment was not done in

isolation.

That seems to be the common characteristic of each exhibition assessment; although the assessment at the high school was not integrated, the assessment was the culminating activity for a course, a final test, if you will, and not done in isolation. In each case the assessment was a culminating activity, and in each case the students' anxiety levels were heightened and they had vested interests in performing well, and they rose to the occasion, performing much better than what they typically do.

This fact is recognized by both staff and principals. In fact, while I was in the process of writing this report, the principal of the teacher who tested the eight grade assessment asked me to guide other English language arts teachers in his building writing performance exhibition assessments for grade levels 5 - 7. Teachers have come to him with ideas for integrated English/social or English/science performances that will prepare students for their eighth grade exhibition performance.

One last interesting aspect: the high school exhibition performances required an immense amount of staff members' time, namely assisting and assessing the student performances, so much time, in fact, that at an administrative meeting of the grant, I detailed the amount of work involved, only 10 performances in an evening, and said it would be extremely difficult convincing the staff to require all 300 plus students to deliver a performance next year. To my surprise, at an English department meeting later, this possibility was discussed, and the staff felt so good about the student performances they decided to attempt to create a logistical plan to accommodate all our students. When asked why they felt this way, one staff member said, "Look. Community members have told us what skills our graduate ought to have. We designed a performance assessment that tests these skills. When we evaluate a student's performance, we can accurately say whether the student can perform or not. Grades for courses don't do that."

I feel quite confident that exhibition performances can be authentic and actually measure what students are able to do, that they can improve the quality of education we give our students.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Simply stated, our exit assessments were quite valid, but we did not create a reliable method of rating student performances. We achieved valid assessments because of the wisdom of the grant's authors; they insisted that we meet with community members for their input as to what skills our graduates ought to have. We did not achieve a reliable rating scheme because of our desire to keep scoring simple and quick; we used S (satisfactory), E (excellent), N (needs improvement) to rate student performances instead of a comprehensive rubric. We will correct this deficiency immediately this summer.

Dr. Stan Knox of EPM Associates, an educational consulting service, evaluated our assessments. To determine validity, he sent questionnaires listing the items on which we rated level 12 performers on both their written and speaking performances to three groups: the community members who originally met with us to list graduation competencies, local employers, and college English faculty members of a local community college and an area state university. He concludes this about the level 12 writing assessment: "As an instrument, the items appear to be contributing significantly to the concept being measured, i.e., the importance of specific skills in writing. This supports the conclusion of acceptable validity based on the analysis of the responses."

Like the assessment items for the writing skills, most of the assessment items for the speaking skills appear to be basically on target. We discovered that we language arts teachers obviously place more importance on product form and organization (title page, word processor, outlines, a prescribed summary) and appearance (appearance, word processor, and visual aids) than the three groups of raters do. Nevertheless, we created a valid instrument to assess student speaking skills.

I am primarily responsible for us creating a unreliable rating method. We were not ignorant of elaborate scoring rubrics; and we did have our share of advocates for using such rubrics; but I urged simplicity, obviously sacrificing reliability in the process.

In many of our initial meetings with teachers, questions of work load and time to do the required additional tasks and selling all this to the other language arts teachers became serious concerns. At the same time, many of the OBE gurus, those we were consulting with and several making OBE presentations at the 1992 Practioners Paradise at Rochester, Minnesota, were addressing the same issues. Their advice was to make the rating schemes of course and unit assessments quick and simple; several advocated using the S, E, N method instead of taking time to work with numbers. Consequently, a majority of our teachers agreed to use this simple technique for our exit assessments at levels 4, 8, and 12, and to keep the number of items for evaluation at a minimum.

Below are the item lists for both the writing and speaking assessments. Dr. Knox concludes in his evaluation that in general, reliability will increase as the number of items increase." So he recommends to keep the number of items the same or increase them.

LEVEL 12 WRITTEN ASSESSMENT ITEMS

APPEARANCE
Title page	E	S	N
Outline	E	S	N
Works Cited	E	S	N
In-body citations	E	S	N
Written with word processor	E	S	N

CONTENT
Introduction with main idea clearly stated	E	S	N
Main points supported with evidence	E	S	N
Main points supported organized in a logical arrangement	E	S	N
Flowed smoothly from one point to the next	E	S	N
Conclusion that summarized major point(s)	E	S	N

MECHANICS
Correct use of the Engish language	E	S	N
Correct spelling	E	S	N
Correct punctuation	E	S	N

This speaker has fulfilled the requirements for the writing graduation assessment.	YES	NO

LEVEL 12 ORAL PRESENTATION ASSESSMENT ITEMS

INTRODUCTION
Catch Interest	E	S	N
Relate Purpose	E	S	N
Preview Main Points	E	S	N

BODY
Well-chosen Interesting Material	E	S	N
Statistical and Factual Information	E	S	N
Logical Arrangement of Ideas	E	S	N
Use of a Visual Aid	E	S	N

CONCLUSION
Summarized Main Points	E	S	N
Effective/Memorable	E	S	N

DELIVERY
Self Confident/Poised	E	S	N
Eye Contact	E	S	N
Adequate Volume	E	S	N
Appearance	E	S	N
Time (approximately 6 -12 minutes)	E	S	N

PREPARATIONS
Works Cited of Written Sources	E	S	N
Works Cited of Oral Sources	E	S	N
Interview Questions and Answers	E	S	N
Outline	E	S	N
Notecards	E	S	N

This speaker has fulfilled the requirements for the oral presentation for the communications graduation assessment.	YES	NO

He continues, "Scoring criteria need to be established for all the items on each test in order to assure that every student is being rated in the same manner." He recommends using "scoring rubrics which provide highly specific guidelines for the assessment of the students on all items," which in turn would "substantially improve all the technical aspects of these instruments."

CONCLUSION

When a school decides to create performance assessments to assess student progress or readiness for graduation, it must consult with community members to achieve validity and authenticity; without community input, we educators charged with preparing students for our dynamic and competitive decade are apt to miss the mark; we need the community's stamp of approval; we need to consult with the community frequently for possible changes.

There is no quick and simple method of reliably rating student performances. Needed is a comprehensive scoring rubric with clear, precise standards. And all the raters must be trained on how to rate and score items evaluated. Reliability is achieved only when all raters can consistently agree on how to rate all items of all performances.

From Our Past

During the year 1974-1975, MCTE continued to offer opportunities to Minnesota teachers for professional development through workshops, committee work, and projects. Workshops branched out to include other professional organizations. MCTE and the Minnesota Reading Association (MRA) co-sponsored regional workshops on reading and other aspects of language arts in Bemidji, Moorhead, Rochester, and St. Cloud. This also was the year a handbook was printed listing the duties of all officers and citing constitutional authority.

With the authorization of MCTE, President Don Otto, along with statewide groups of history and foreign language teachers, was involved in a Minnesota Humanities Commission grant entitled " The Humanities As Education for Living." This project reached out to communities through trained representatives and via radio, television and available tapes to stress the importance of humanities in the curriculum at all levels.

Duluth was the site of the Sixteenth Annual Spring Conference May 2-3, 1975. "Up, Down and All Around" was the theme emphasizing articulation of language arts curriculum within and between school levels. Margaret Early, NCTE President, delivered the banquet speech, "We Look Before and After." Roger Oneck, member of the NCTE commission on English Curriculum and the Committee on Creative Strategies for Teaching English in Secondary School, opened the conference with his speech "What Is Meant by Articulation of the Language Arts Program?"

Resolutions emphasized MCTE's leadership in the following ways:

1. By requesting the State Department of Eduction to consult professional organizations of English teachers before formulating guidelines that would affect the status of the profession.

2. By requesting MEA and MFT to notify the MCTE Executive Committee of any pending legislation and hearings that would affect directly or indirectly the status of the English teaching profession in Minnesota.

3. By setting up a network of legislative liaison people in each Minnesota House and Senate district to communicate and/or inform the legislators of MCTE's concerns.

4. By asking the State Department of Education and the State Legislature to investigate the findings under the Fair Fee Bill so that a portion of the funds could be allocated for enrichment experiences.

5. By urging the Minnesota School Board Association and boards of education to consult with subject matter teachers before effecting curricular changes.

At the Business meeting, MCTE commissioned MCEE to undertake a statewide program during the next year to examine the problem of teacher preparation and to make recommendations for certification.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Midwest Writing Centers Association will hold its 12th annual conference October 1-2, 1993, in St. Louis, Mo. The conference theme is "Revising the Word, Revising the World: Writing Centers Effecting Change." Lil Brannon of SUNY-Albany will be the keynote speaker. For more information contact: Susan Sanders, Dept. of Humanities, Michigan Technological University, 1400 Townsend Dr., Houghton, MI 49931.

THE POTENTIAL OF WHOLE LANGUAGE FOR *ALL* LEARNERS, a workshop sponsored by the Illinois Council of Teachers of English and the National Council of Teachers of English will be presented at Illinois State University, Normal IL, July 8-9, 1993. Teachers, teacher educators and administrators interested in learning more about whole language theory and practice are invited to attend. Diane DeFord is the featured speaker. She is a widely recognized authority in the field of reading recovery, early literacy, evaluation, and teacher beliefs and practices. She will discuss how the whole language curriculum fosters an environment in which all students and teachers can work together to create learning. Each participant will receive a copy of the new book, *Learning Denied*, by Kenny Taylor. For further information, call NCTE's Education Services at 217-328-3870, ext. 282.

Teacher-Researcher Grants Available from NCTE

Teacher-Researcher Grants are awarded to Pre-K-14 teachers for classroom-based research on the teaching of English/Language Arts. These grants, which have a limit of $1,500, are intended to support investigation of research questions that grow out of teachers' classroom experiences and concerns and that are directly relevant to the work of the applicant. They are not intended to support travel to professional meetings, purchase permanent equipment or commercial teaching materials, provide release time, or conduct research done as part of a graduate degree program. Examples of funded studies include the following:

* The Uses of Story Time in a First Grade Classroom
* Teacher-to-Student Writing Conferencing in the Secondary Classroom
* High School Students and the Nation's Literary Magazines: Is There a Meaningful Connection?
* Better than Basals: A Teacher-Developed Literature Program
* Children's Use of Punctuation: A Follow-up Study
* Finding the Writer in a Learning Disabled Student Communication and Socialization
* Teacher-Researchers: How Do They Grow?

Further information and application forms are available from Project Assistant, NCTE Research Foundation, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801, (217) 328-3870.

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David Brunet is a faculty member at St. Olaf College in Northfield.

Robert Gardner was a senior at St. Cloud State University, majoring in English and secondary education when he submitted his article.

John Schmidt is a faculty member in the English Department at Augsburg College in Minneapolis.

Matthew Stark is the president of the Minnesota Civil Liberties Union.

Ann Buhman Renninger and Joan Naomi Steiner's article was published as the January, 1993, *SLATE* Starter Sheet.

Erin Hendel was in 9th grade in the Fergus Falls Senior High School when his poem was submitted.

Elmer Suderman is an Emeritus Professor at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter. He has been active in MCTE since it was founded in 1959 and was MEJ editor from 1974-1978.

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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 and poetry of general interest to its membership, teachers K through college.

Manuscripts from Minnesota teachers are preferred. The *MEJ* is distributed free of charge to the membership. Individual issues can be ordered for $3.50 a copy. Manuscripts should be submitted to the editors. If possible, also send your text on an IBM compatible 5 1/4" floppy diskette in Word Perfect 4.2 or 5.1 format. Please use an approved style sheet, either APA or MLA. Internal documentation and a works cited list are preferred. Manuscripts should be 5-18 pages, typed double-spaced. Please consult the call for papers that appear in each issue. At times, special issues will focus on specific themes announced in the *MEJ* .

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