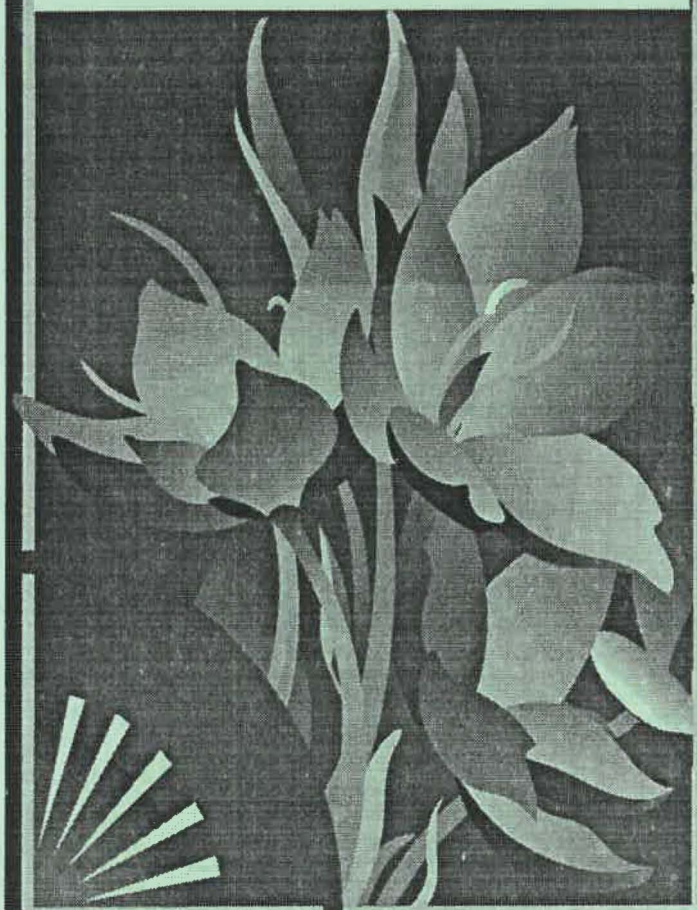
MINNESOTA ENGLISH JOURNAL



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Minnesota English Journal

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Call for Papers for the Minnesota English Journal

For the Spring 1994 and the Fall 1994 issues

Here are some suggested topics:

- "Best Brief Strategies" (50-200 word descriptions of successful teaching techniques)
- Original poetry: your own or that of your students
- Full length essays on teaching strategies/classroom activities
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- Composition research
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- Teaching critical thinking
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- Children's literature
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- Literature for young adults
- "To Air is Human" humorous or thought-provoking examples of misspellings or unexpected language use from student and faculty papers

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To Our Readers:

It's a challenge and a pleasure to begin my assignment as editor of the Minnesota English Journal. Thanks to the help of John Schifsky, the outgoing editor, I have much useful advice, several hefty boxes of files, and the steady encouragement of the advisory board.

This issue has seven stimulating articles, all focused on the ways we and our students use language—as writers of journals and essays, as poets and readers of poetry, as job seekers and employees, and even as identifiable members of a cultural group.

For future issues of the MEJ, I hope to find two additional kinds of contributions:

- Best Brief Strategies: Quick descriptions of specific teaching techniques or tricks that have succeeded in stimulating your students' enthusiasm and excellence in language and literature. What's that scheme you've worked out with note cards, desktop publishing, or Tootsie Rolls? What concrete teaching advice would you offer to a brand new teacher as she or he moves into the classroom next to yours?

  Mail me a 50 to 200-word description of a technique that works, and include the grade level, the nature of the class or teaching unit, and your own name and telephone number. *Or* fax it, *or* e-mail it to me. *Or* just call me up and describe it, *or* leave a message on my voice mail. I hope to make space in the MEJ for a network of practical teaching suggestions.

- To Air is Human: Humorous or thought-provoking examples of misspellings or unexpected language use from student and faculty papers—perhaps including your own. Alan Powers, whose comic editorial concludes this issue, writes elsewhere of one student who earnestly wrote "Eliza Doolittle goes to the garden party disgusting as a duchess" and another who insisted "Lady Chatterley listens to her unconscience." We all enjoy sharing innocent linguistic slips and unintended puns. Send them to me with the grade level and anything else I need to create a context.

Of course, I hope to continue the MEJ's tradition of publishing excellent, thought-provoking articles of conventional length—10 to 25 pages in typescript.

Authorizing the Individual Voice, Becoming a Citizen: Dialogue Journals as Transitional Sites

by
Suzanne Ross and Chris Gordon

Dialogue journals have recently piqued the interest of teachers in many fields. Teacher education programs have implemented dialogue journals that help to develop thoughtful, reflective, questioning professionals (e.g., Copeland, 1986, Korthagen, 1985; Schon, 1990; Weade, Shea, and Seraphin, 1988; Zeichner, 1987). English teachers have used dialogue journals as a place for responding to literature (Atwell, 1987) and as a place to encourage their students to mutually construct meaning through written conversation (Staton, et al., 1985). Whatever the initial intent, dialogue journals serve many purposes. Our interest here is to describe their use in advanced expository writing courses as they function as a transition site where students begin the work of authorizing their individual voices and in so doing engage in the critical and reflective conversation requisite of responsible citizenship.

In introductory college composition courses, a central assumption is that students enter as novice participants into unfamiliar literary discourses. In these courses the students are about the business of learning the conventions and expectations of those discourses. For students at this stage, writing may most frequently be bounded by this situation (the particularities of the composition classroom or the assignment), by this reader (the professor or perhaps a peer), by this writing self. Other situations, other readers, other writing selves may not be imaginable. Indeed students are perhaps becoming aware for the first time that multiple literate discourses exist, even contend with one another. Nonetheless, for them, Authority (or authorities) and the Answer (or answers) are typically "out there" in the world. As writers they are not agents freely acting in that world of multiple discourses, "correctly" speaking the language (or languages) of that world—yet.

In the advanced expository writing courses we are describing, many of our students experience for the first time a situation in which they are not, to paraphrase Louise Weatherbee Phelps, the objects of the application of these multiple universes of literate discourse (75). Rather, as writers—and as thinkers—they are experiencing a growing sense instead of their own agency. But the questions inevitably arise: agents for what? by what means? on what terms? at what consequences? As writers, as thinkers, many encounter in a personal and intellectual sense something akin to what William Perry describes as Relativism in his scheme of cognitive and ethical development (79). They find that where discourses contend or, as Perry phrases it, "Where Authorities don't know the Right Answers, everyone has a right to his own opinion; no one is wrong" (79). This response to contingency may at first (or for some time) seem to be a possible resting place, comfortable in its way, but in the end it is an unsatisfactory, in fact impossible, ethical ground from which to embark upon the dual role of the citizen as she or he pursues free yet responsible engagement in the world. As teachers we know that we must assist our students as they move on to a dynamic stance that embraces contingency, makes commitments and accepts responsibilities, a stance which is, in Perry's words, "wholehearted while tentative" (79). Thus, as college students are about to enter the larger community, they face the dual concerns of the citizen: What is it to be free? What is it to be responsible?

In the advanced expository writing classes we teach, our chief aim is to create a context—through reading, through discussion and, crucially, through writing, a context in which an exploration both of this fact of contingency or indeterminacy and of the necessity for freely-embraced commitment and responsible action may be undertaken. As writers, as thinkers, as citizens our students must, as a first step, create or authorize their own voices. For this to occur, it is essential that some "space" be cleared within the classroom where the teacher's role is restricted and where expectations regarding the teacher's status as authority are undermined.

Dialogue journals serve as a site where this authorization can be enacted. Within the context of the dialogue journal, roles and role relationships are negotiated. The classroom community is decentralized, traditional authority relationships destabilized. In enabling diverse voices to be heard, the dialogue

journal is a site where an increasingly mature writing and thinking identity may emerge, a site where a surer bond between a free and responsible voice may be developed. These developments occur as the unfolding and dynamic nature of the dialogue journal as conversation asserts itself. In reading and responding to the entries of other participants, in negotiating the purposes of this conversation, journal writers experience a growing sense of community and mutual responsibility.

This social and communal nature of communication, especially of writing, is in the forefront of composition theory and practice. In Democracy and Education, John Dewey states, "Not only is social life identical with communication, but all communication is educative....One shares in what another has thought and felt and insofar, meagerly or amply, has his own attitude modified.... It may fairly be said, therefore, that any social arrangement that remains vitally social, or vitally shared, is educative to those who participate in it" (4-5).

In a past issue of the Minnesota English Journal (Winter/Spring 1991), Anne O'Meara focuses on the current "emphasis on writing as a social act, an emphasis which values audience awareness and 'contextual flexibility'" (33). To envision writing in this way as a social act rather than as a process requires a rethinking of concepts such as purpose, audience, and context. In an effort to engage university students from a variety of disciplines in an independent activity embedded in this understanding of the social nature of writing, we asked students in our upper level expository writing courses to keep dialogue journals that walked among three or four students and the teacher.

We hoped that these journals would serve as transitional sites, providing a space where students might begin the move away from a reliance on their voices as students to the adoption of the more mature voices of citizens within a larger community. In the dialogue journal, students explored course topics and opinions, and communicated with one another in "a more informal, tentative, and exploratory manner" (Beach & Anson, 1993) than they did in expository essays. This informality allowed students the opportunity to test opinions, to respond to opinions of others, and to experience the teacher as a participant in — but not the arbiter of — the dialogue. We believe that such a dialogue

encourages a sense of classroom community and serves to promote a dynamic conversation as the students move into the community beyond the classroom, toward increased autonomy but also increased responsibility. And so, as the individual voices within the dialogue journal assume more responsibility for the maintenance of collegial inquiry, a self authorized voice emerges — a voice offering and defending an opinion, but also a voice open to considering other opinions — the voice of a citizen.

Voices and purposes in action

Each of our advanced expository writing classes was distinct. In one class, the teacher prepared an anthology of thematically organized readings; in the other class, students selected and provided to class members articles germane to their intended profession. Our purpose in this paper is not to discuss course content. Rather, it is to focus on the transitional role the dialogue journal can play in any advanced expository writing class, no matter how a course is otherwise structured.

In our classes, dialogue journals were shared by groups of three or four students, each of whom wrote entries on the average of once per week. When one participant completed an entry, the journal was then passed on to the next participant who had several days to read over the preceding entries and write a response. Topics were never assigned. We, as teachers, also participated in the dialogue, but tried to restrict our role to that of co-participant. In one class the teacher wrote as frequently as the students; in the other class, the teacher contributed an entry twice during the quarter.

When analyzing these dialogue journals, we were interested in the processes by which journal participants developed or authorized their voices and the manner in which they engaged in the conversation the journal represented. We will describe our findings in two overlapping areas: 1) the voices student journal participants assigned themselves, 2) the purposes and meanings these participants construed for the journal. Commentary on one of these areas will inevitably lead into commentary pertinent in the other area; we do not, therefore, try to maintain a separation.

The journal participants whose task it was to write the first entry had not only to initiate this joint-project but to establish an individual voice as well. The following entry, made by a young woman (we'll call her Mary), states the problem:

> Being the first group member to write in this journal, I feel quite uncomfortable. At this point I do not know its use and I do not know how to interpret its usefulness. Being the leader, I know I should have asked more questions regarding how the journal should be conducted. Alas, class is over and done with and my opportunity to ask my question is past. So, I wing this journal entry and hope for the best. Here goes...

In this opening paragraph, Mary is grappling simultaneously with the dual problem the journal immediately poses. The implicit questions are: What purpose does this journal serve? By what authority do I write in order to advance that purpose? Mary does not answer these questions nor speculate directly. Nevertheless, she initiates a conversation in which the questions can be explored. She is "the first group member" writing, "the leader" by chance. As leader she accedes that it is her responsibility to learn more about the purpose of the journal, but the opportunity to do that, to query the teacher for specific instructions, is past. Yet, in her role as group member, Mary enlists the fellow-feeling of the other participants in the journal who could have easily been in the same predicament as she finds herself in now. Mary at once establishes herself as both a participant in a group project and as an individual with responsibilities to the project as a mutual effort.

Another journal participant (we'll call him Ted) states the problem he is facing in a similar manner. He says: "Since I have the unenviable task of beginning this journal, I feel I have the right to begin this in a very simple way with a simple entry." Ted, like Mary, is sure neither of the purpose of the journal nor of his role in advancing that purpose. He reasons, however, that as it is his "unenviable task" to begin, he has a certain latitude, a certain authority, regarding the manner in which he shoulders that responsibility.

Both Mary's and Ted's entries continue with a reprise of the discussion that had occurred in class that day. They each make reference to the essay that everyone in the class had read, the ideas the writer had raised that interested them particularly, and the train of thought that the reading as well as the discussion had initiated in their own minds. Mary closes by stating a question and then saying, "(t) his question has been at the back of my mind since Thursday and I still have not found a satisfiable (sic) answer." In a sense, she is establishing a point of reference or making a conversational gambit for the next participant to ponder and perhaps respond to. Similarly, Ted poses several questions, perhaps rhetorically or perhaps as conversational gambits to be taken up by other journal participants. However, unlike Mary, Ted seems to close his journal entry with a disclaimer regarding the path he has chosen to take. He says,

> It would be a lot easier to write if I had more material to draw from, but I had to be the one that started the journal, so I really don't know what else to write about.

Perhaps in this final comment, Ted, too, is invoking a sense of fellow-feeling on the part of his co-participants in this journal project. They could easily have been in the position in which he found himself.

These two journal writers have chosen to authorize their personal voices in order to speak directly to their fellow writers as individuals faced with a dilemma but also as participants in a joint project. However, very few of those who wrote initial entries used this strategy.

Other journal writers begin by speaking in a voice more familiar, one mindful of the presence of the teacher. They speak as students. For example, typical entries of this nature begin in this way:

> Zinsser's comments on clutter call for some observation or thoughts. His idea of ridding all writing of clutter is a good one, but it also may make the world more interesting. A world without useless words would be like a salesman without a good

> line. The world's politicians and their speech writers would surely be out of work and in need of new schooling.

In this entry, Carol knows her role and her voice. As a person, she stands in the shadow of the claims she makes. She is the student, and, traditionally, it is the student's job to summarize or respond to material or events which were shaped by the teacher. It appears that she, as a student, does not feel authorized to question or explore, nor is she allowed the collaboration of her peers. Carol seems sure of her purpose and does not address her co-writers or provide a conversational gambit. Her entry suggests that she does not yet envision the social purpose of the journal and her role in it, but instead assumes what Beach and Anson call "a pose of definitiveness or feigned authority" (192).

Likewise, Jean's initial entry reflects the typical student voice even though it has a more personalized overtone.

> I have to write about Gibbon's article, "In Search of Heroes." I liked it a lot. I almost feel like I know the man, just because the article is so personal. I'm also a sucker for examples that are entertaining, and he used a fair number. His argument is unclear to me, but that doesn't really matter because I just want to talk about heroes.

Her comment, "have to write," seems to imply an assigned topic and to negate her own responsibility for the topic. Just as Jean does not appear to see herself as a free agent taking control, neither does she invite others to share in her discussion of heroes. In a sense, both Carol and Jean appear to know the purpose of the journal; it is to summarize and react to readings, essentially maintaining the student role of object of the teacher's action. Perhaps they are not asserting themselves because the teacher is seen as the authority. They see no need to assert a doubting or uncomfortable self; their position is sure; the role relationships in the classroom are stable.

Ted and Mary on the other hand, by voicing uncertainty and doubt, recognize immediately that the relationship between student and teacher is not

in the proper order. They allow for the journal to be or to become more than just another class activity.

As the dialogue journal continues to circulate during the quarter, the self-authorized voice becomes more evident, as shown through Jane's entry. Personal thoughts emerge as she assumes authority by engaging others with a request for help.

> I'm working on my second paper right now. I intend for it to become a memoir of growing up with two of my brothers, but more than that I want to explore the difficulty people have communicating how they feel about each other, or what they simply think about one another. My family is not a close one at all. And we certainly are not a demonstrative family. As a result I believe many of us have trouble with relationships of every kind outside the family.
>
> I realize that I'm getting a little personal and I think I'm starting to ramble. It's just that I've been thinking of this quite a lot lately....Some of the essays we've read for class such as Jane Smiley's "Long Distance" kind of reminds me of my family. Kirby's family has a hard time communicating, just like mine, and it obviously affects other relationships. Like I said, this subject has been on my mind a lot and I want to write a paper about, or rather, I've started a paper about it, but I'm having trouble and I'm not sure why. If either of you have any ideas about anything I've written, I'd welcome them.

In this entry by writing, thinking, pondering, and requesting assistance, Jane seems to realize the importance of collegial inquiry. She has authorized her individual voice; it is not the disengaged student voice "parroting back" to the teacher, but rather a public voice inviting the opinions of others.

Eventually, every participant establishes a voice in the journal. For many participants this involves self-revelation as well as a direct and honest

engagement in dialogue with another journal participant. Their understanding of the purpose of the journal evolves within this context. Aiki, a Japanese student, speaks with an honest and self revelatory voice in her entry:

> I think I am going to kind of answer about the question posed by Ted in the very first entry, which is, "Can a word like peace have a definition? And if so, whose definition should the word be defined?" My response is that meaning of words are decided by context or cultures, so roughly speaking, everyone can have a different meaning for the same word. It's not quite answering the question, since it's not about definition of a word, but it's my opinion.
>
> ... I think it is true that language shapes people to some extent. I've been living here for only seven months, but my behavior is different when I am speaking in Japanese and in English. For example, I do not talk to strangers in Japanese, but I do say "Hi!" to the people whom I'm not familiar with in English. So I suppose language affects our behavior.

Aiki not only recognizes that she is free to offer her own individual experiences to the conversation, but also that she must assume the responsibility that her contributions as a participant in an on-going dialogue be relevant. She seems to do so willingly.

However, not all participants establish a voice which supports dialogue or shoulders responsibility for the continuation of the conversation. For example, John, throughout the journal, begins his entries with a formalized thesis statement, making a claim about an aspect of the essay the class had read. Throughout the term he maintains the voice of the student, neither addressing his co-participants by name nor referring to their entries. At the other extreme is Amy who, while she establishes an individual voice, seems to deny both her responsibility for and her knowledge of the implicit purpose of the shared journal:

> Oh, smile... spring has begun. Nolan Ryan is still pitching (year 27) and John Cougar Mellencamp has an album due in the summer. So keep your heads up — school will be over in a couple of weeks.

Amy's entry stands in contrast to that of Aiki discussed above. While Amy recognizes her freedom to assume an individual voice, she denies her responsibility to contribute relevantly to the conversation already initiated. She also seems to misconstrue the purpose other participants had established for the journal conversation, which is to explore, to respond relevantly to, and to elaborate and comment upon ideas offered by other participants.

Frequently, such a conversation challenges comfortable or long held positions. Kari's entry is a good example of how this may be handled. Her entry follows a class discussion on the ethics of fetal tissue use and responds to Brad's previous entry stating his position on the issue.

> As far as the fetal tissue issue is concerned, I am having a difficult time deciding how I feel. You see, I am a part of the "Catholic category" Thomas [another journal participant] mentioned. Although I do not agree with everything my church says, abortion is one issue that I do side with my church on. I believe life begins at conception, and therefore, abortion is murder. I realize others feel differently, and although pro-lifers and pro-choicers may never understand each other, as Americans we all have the right to our opinions. So, because of my belief concerning abortion, it would be a contradiction to support fetal tissue experimentation. Unfortunately, because abortion is legal, I have to consider Brad's point of view. As long as abortion does exist, why not make a positive thing come from it?

Here Kari examines her views within the larger social context of the contending claims of church and society. She recognizes the complexities within which she holds her position. At the same time, while she disagrees with Brad,

she does so in a manner which supports the continuation of the dialogue. Tolerance of Brad's views, in this case, doesn't mean accepting them, nor does it mean abandoning her own. Instead, Kari recognizes that tolerance for alternative views creates a space within which genuinely meaningful conversation can take place.

In conclusion, we have found that the dialogue journal serves well as a site where our students can explore and nurture their growing awareness of both their own agency and their increasingly complex understanding of the community they will join. It is a site where they may consider, in dialogue with one another, how they are situated in such a community, the freedoms it provides them as well as the obligations it requires of them.

In authorizing their individual voices, their first step is to move beyond the role of the student. In initiating the conversation, some participants are put in the position of assuming a leadership role. Those who accept this role squarely recognize that it requires of them that they not only make decisions about the nature of the journal and offer a possible vision of its purpose but also that they invite the comment and response of other participants in their joint pursuit of that purpose. These participants recognize that for the journal to be really vital, they must contribute to it in a manner which is cognizant of the community nature of the project. The conversation requires that they make relevant contributions and supportive responses. The individual voice speaking in isolation undermines, even denies the purpose of the dialogue journal.

The dialogue journal opens up a space where authentic conversation can take place. The participants in the dialogue journal give voice to the commitments and responsibilities that they must accept as individuals and as members of multiple communities, the commitments and responsibilities that are the partners of individual freedom and autonomous action in a democracy.

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Portfolios for New (and Experienced) Teachers of Writing

by
Donna Gorrell

Portfolios in classroom practice are a representative collection of student writing over a period of time. As such, they are evidence of the evolution and improvement that each student's writing has undergone from beginning to end. They represent all the instruction, collaboration, vexations, and emergent insights that each writer has experienced. Moreover, they reflect writing as many people do it outside of school: getting an idea, exploring it, discussing it with others, writing it down and developing it, discussing it with others, revising it, having it reviewed by peers, revising it, and finally, perhaps, publishing it to a broader audience. A student portfolio usually contains several pieces of finished writing along with drafts, responses from peers and teacher, and perhaps acknowledgment of assistance and a table of contents.

For the writing classroom, portfolios are a natural—so logical that we wonder what took us so long to borrow the idea from art, photography, creative writing, and other disciplines where portfolios have long been the means for representing one's work. The ways portfolios benefit students and programs have been discussed at length by Elbow, Belanoff, Dickson, Yancey and others. What I propose to do here is propose some advantages of portfolio grading for teachers—new composition teachers as well as the experienced.

To provide a context for my ideas, as well as a demonstration of the flexibility of what we loosely refer to as "the portfolio system," I first describe my use of portfolios in three different courses. In all three courses—first-year college composition, upper-division writing, and graduate writing—the teacher is the evaluator as well as the responder.

In the freshman course, I collect portfolios twice, once at midterm and again at the end of the term. Each portfolio contains the usual: revised papers,

drafts, prewritings, peer responses, teacher responses, conference notes and scribblings, and a cover memo stating the contents and reflecting on the portfolio preparation process. Each revised paper has been reviewed by peers, submitted once for teacher response (but not graded), and considered at an individual conference with the teacher. The papers in the portfolio are then graded according to how well they meet departmental standards.

I continue to use third person in describing this course because this is the plan I advise teaching assistants to use. Despite Yancey's advice in Portfolios in the Writing Classroom that a teacher's decision to use writing portfolios be voluntary, I see some benefit (as I will explain later) in strongly suggesting—if not requiring—that beginning teaching assistants organize their courses around the portfolio system. This is the plan for which I give them a sample syllabus. This is the plan we discuss on assignments and evaluation. It's the one I recommend in the Handbook for Teaching Assistants and Faculty that I prepare each year. But I am open; TAs can organize their courses differently if they want to. And after their first term of teaching, some do adopt other systems of grading that allow for revision after teacher response.

My upper-division writing course is organized a little differently, though I still utilize portfolios. Here I take up portfolios only once—at the end of the term, when I require three finished papers together with all earlier drafts. This course is patterned more like the one Kathy McClelland describes in "Portfolios: Solution to a Problem." There are no assignments. The main goal is to produce mature writers. So students struggle for a while with subjects, purposes, and occasions for writing. When a student continues to hopelessly cast around for an idea, I might hold an impromptu mini-conference about the student's interests. In one such conference that took place the last time I taught the course, one young man suddenly realized he had a great deal to say about the theater. That was after talking repeatedly about his experiences as stage manager for the campus theater—but still thinking he didn't have anything to write about. The same student later wrote a powerful essay about facing his homosexuality. In this course, students need to learn that they have something to say. Throughout the quarter, I respond to drafts whenever students submit them, writing on my computer and keeping a running copy of my responses. To forestall the inevitable procrastination, I also require weekly memos to update me on progress. Surprisingly, these students don't get too nervous about having grades delayed. And not surprisingly, the reading load is manageable because, except at the end of the term, I never have a class-size stack of papers. Even at the end of the term, the load is manageable because of the finished quality of most of the papers.

Finally, I use portfolios in my graduate writing course. The students in this course are cross-disciplinary—completing masters' theses or papers or preparing papers for journal publication. In addition to regular graduate students, I sometimes have faculty and administrators in the course, usually working toward publication. Here, each student writes his or her own syllabus—or contract—detailing what work will be completed and at what stages feedback from me or the class will be requested. Throughout the term, students read their work in class—usually to the entire class (they become a genuine discourse community, dependent upon and respectful of one another). As in the upper-division course, I respond to drafts on a computer printout and keep a running copy. The portfolio at the end of the course contains the work we agreed upon in the contract, and the grade depends on the quality of the work and the degree to which the student has met the contract.

In no class do I find the grading burdensome—a sometimes expressed complaint about portfolios. In fact, for me it's uplifting to respond to what a student has written without having to evaluate it. I see this as one of the primary benefits of portfolios—one often cited. Separating the formative response from the summative, the gatekeeper role from that of coach, the teacher from the evaluator all together make the reading much easier. Portfolios enable teachers to be teachers, not just evaluators. And this is a heady experience—why we're in the business of teaching writing—to use what we know about writing to enable others to become better at it, not just to tell them how well they measure up. That's the main reason I recommend portfolios to new teachers. They learn from the beginning that teaching writing is a type of coaching, a type of advising, a conversation, a journey together—and not a power trip of assigning work and handing down grades. By delaying evaluation, new teachers learn first to be teachers.

But there are other reasons for new and experienced teachers to use portfolios. Let me talk around one. My ideas are still tentative, hypothetical, but they're based on one of the main reasons we are so excited about using portfolios. I'm not expressing a new idea when I say that the biggest advantage of using portfolios for teaching and evaluating student writing may be that the processes of writing are made more evident. Not only do portfolios fit most comfortably into those processes; portfolios also bring them out into the open. For new teachers who may be thinking in terms of products—how to get them and how to respond to them—the demonstration of writing process is a revelation. I'm building on Burnham's statement that "Portfolio evaluation reinforces a program's commitment to the teaching of writing as a process involving multiple drafting, and emphasizes the need for revision" (136). Especially in the course where no assignments are made, the kind of revision that is characteristic of experienced writers—the kind that occurs during planning and drafting, the kind that is so difficult to teach—is more likely to occur as students bring in tentative beginnings of drafts, drafts up to the point where the muse dried up, or just ideas for drafts. Here they discuss what they are trying to do, what problems they are having, what kind of feedback they need. And they take the drafts away, work on them some more, and bring them back. Revising is part of the composing process, not an activity imposed at the end. The "atonceness" (Ann Berthoff's term) of composing is nowhere more evident.

In addition to foregrounding revision as part of writing, the whole act of preparing portfolios reveals other essential parts of the process: the relationship between assignments and revisions, the influence of readers on what is written, the elements of helpful criticism, and the struggle to conceptualize aspects of the occasion for writing. New writing teachers need this evidence.

Moreover, new teachers who may have observed no other writing than their own can observe first-hand how varied are the processes of writing—varied by individual, rhetorical context, and requirements of the assignment. Because of the built-in, foregrounded revision, teachers discover the differences in how writers revise. Narratives, for example, may be revised differently from exposition. Perhaps they are revised differently, as Arthur Applebee speculates in his RTE article "Musings," because the form of the narrative is relatively routine but

content needs adjustment whereas in exposition the form may be a challenge but the content is relatively fixed. Teachers may even question whether there is always a need for revision. If we ask students to perform familiar tasks, do they need to revise? Or do they perceive the task as familiar and therefore can think of no way to make it better?

When we assign writing of a type that is relatively familiar in format or content, perhaps there isn't much to revise. Ask yourself how much you revise memos, personal letters, responses to student writing. Do you correct your typos? adjust your format? revise a phrase or two? Maybe you adjust the content a little—add something, delete something—but you probably don't do much of that when you know both the form and content well. What would you do with a report or proposal if your department chair sent it back telling you to "add more details"? Or to make your introduction more interesting? Or to rearrange your major points? I can just imagine what you would do with such suggestions; you were convinced on completing the routine report that it was already as complete and coherent as it was ever going to be. On the other hand, when you write something speculative, reflective, or exploratory, you probably find it helpful to have someone respond with "Have you considered X?" Or "Why not start out with Y?" We welcome such help—we seek it out— because we don't know for sure what we want to say anyway.

Isn't this true of school writing assignments? If students don't know how to revise, it may help if we analyze the task—something new teachers (and any of us) may forget to do. If the content and form are relatively fixed, and the writer has covered the subject rather completely, suggestions for revision might draw attention to form and style—perhaps also with the way the writer handles the facts and reactions to them. But if the essay is exploratory, the writer will probably welcome ideas and new avenues of exploration. If the essay is reflective, it may yet be mainly writer-based and need some reader-based revisions. All these aspects of writing might be overlooked by the teacher and be disregarded by the student when we respond and grade essay by essay. Our comments on the shortcomings of a reflective essay may not apply to the drafting of the expository essay. And if the reflective essay has already been graded—completed—there is no reason to apply the comments to it either.

Usually peer review is included in the portfolio process. It's used in other methods of organizing the classroom too, but with the portfolio the circle is more complete—because it includes the teacher too. Peers and teacher alike are part of an audience that responds to essays in process. Because the grading is not immediate, students, it seems, are more ready to become real readers rather than spell-checkers helping a peer to get a better grade on a paper. Teachers usually find themselves in the position of agreeing with student readers and thus as part of the process become more sensitive to the needs of both readers and writers. Because grading is delayed, teachers can respond as informed readers—much as your colleagues might review your manuscripts. New teachers learn how to read—learning what to look for, discovering what is missing, becoming sensitive to uncalled for shifts in tone, training themselves to recognize and acknowledge their own unanswered questions.

And how comforting to learn all this when we don't have to justify a grade. Let's face it, when any of us evaluate an essay—telling a student it's worth an A, a B, a C, or whatever—our comments justify (explain) that grade. This is the nature of summative comments: telling the writer how the writing measures up to expectations. But teachers need to learn the formative response first—because we are teachers. It's our job to make better writers—to assist them in the formative stages of becoming better writers. And that requires that we become expert readers.

As we become expert, we learn what kind of criticism to give. As a writer, I have received a great deal of criticism. That's OK. I ask for it. I need it. It tells me where my writing hits the mark and where it doesn't, where it's especially insightful and where it borders on banal. Criticism is helpful, because it puts me in touch with my readers. But criticism that is totally negative, that tries to make my writing into something I never intended, is detrimental. It's counterproductive, because it gives me no direction except to toss out what I've written and start over on someone else's idea. Totally negative, make-it over criticism gives a writer no place to go.

Teacher-readers, too, need to allow the writer his or her donnee, or given, and try to avoid appropriating the writing. Revision, after all, can be done

only by the writer, because only the writer knows what he or she meant to say. The rest of us can only make suggestions based on our reading (or misreading) of the text. Of course, students—and all writers— don't always have their own choice of genre, purpose, subject, or audience—the whole rhetorical situation. So teachers learn to respond not only to the writer's premise but to the exigencies of the situation as well—exigencies that may require reflective essays to remain fundamentally reflective even though they may take a persuasive turn, or persuasion to be supported by evidence. Evidence itself has certain exigencies; it must be compelling and based on an authority that readers will accept. Again, the absence of the pressure of evaluation and justifying a grade allows a new teacher to consider what might be needed and how those needs might be achieved.

Students—and teachers as well—are not always able to conceptualize aspects of the occasion for writing: what readers might know or expect, what tone is appropriate, how the writer can build credibility, and so on. But in the preparation of portfolios—including peer input, workshopping conferences, and teacher response—talk becomes part of the writing process. In this period of incubation (borrowing James Britton's term), talk brings to the foreground exploration, clarification, interpretation, differences of opinion, explanation, and more. Students wanting to "get it right" (borrowing from Britton again) relate to their audience. They learn to "satisfy the reader" as well as satisfying themselves (47). Teachers too, perhaps using an assignment for the first time, can't anticipate what skills and tasks the assignment requires, what problems might occur. But by spreading out the process, providing for peer exploration and questioning as well as revision before grading, they can often discover the limitations—plus, perhaps, serendipitous achievements—of their assignments.

The portfolio approach to teaching writing, as has been said by many of us who use it, brings the writing process into the classroom. By doing so, it enables the new teacher—and all teachers—to see writing from a new perspective, to truly be collaborators and coaches with our students. That's reason enough to recommend it.

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Introduction to Career Development

by
Joan O'Connell

My passion for career development started soon after I took my B. A. from Carleton College. A typical traditional-aged student, I had changed my major three times during the course of my education, finally settling on art history. I learned about art, history, architecture, sociology, psychology and religion all by studying beautiful works of art. What could be better? I graduated with honors, sent my meager belongings home to New Hampshire and took some time off.

That next fall, when I decided to job hunt on the east coast, I had no idea what I wanted to do or what I could do. I hadn't a clue how to look for work. I figured surely someone would see my great potential and hire me to do something.

That bubble burst when one interviewer said, "Oh yeah, sure I've heard of Minnesota. That's the capital of Wisconsin, right?" Another recruiter snarled, "Art History, huh? Isn't that like majoring in baton twirling?" I was devastated. How could anyone say such a thing—and what if it were true?

I had it in my head that you weren't supposed to say much in a job interview. The purpose was really for them to tell you about the job and for you to nod politely in return. When the employer checked my faculty references he asked them if I ever spoke, to which they replied, "Do you have the right person?" Demoralized by now, I took the first job I was offered and felt grateful.

The only problem was I hated it. I lasted nine months at that, moved, found another job and hated that one even more. These were perfectly acceptable entry level professional jobs. What was the matter with me? If I kept this up I could become a thirty-year-old with an eighty-page resume.

I soon learned there is a better way, and it is called career development. I read everything I could get, I learned how to job hunt, and I went to graduate school. Now I have fourteen years of experience helping students and alumnae to plan their futures. Career Development is only partly about "Get a job"— it is mostly about "Get a life." My passion is about helping students to discover the spot for themselves in the world that will give them the most satisfaction, and coincidentally, that spot is also the place where they will contribute the most to the world. "Work" is something I define as purposeful energy. It might not be a job in the traditional sense. It might be raising children, writing a novel or creating a work of art. What we teach students in the career development office is a thought process — a way of looking at information and making decisions that will help them to find that spot for themselves.

Self Assessment

The career development process has three major parts. The first part asks an individual, "Who are you? What do you know about yourself so far?" A student would ask herself or himself:

- What does work mean to me? (Different cultures will have different answers to that question.)
- What is important to me? What is worth my time and energy?
- What motivates me to do a good job?
- What am I interested in?
- What do I need from my next step?

A student also needs to look at her career decisions in the context of other areas of her life and ask further questions:

- What family responsibilities do I have? (For some of our multicultural students the extended family plays a large role in career decisions.)
- What is my financial status?
- Where do I want to live?
- What are some of my life goals and priorities?
- Do I have a "calling"?
- Where can I really contribute?
- How do I want to contribute as an active citizen?

Occupational assessment

Once some personal priorities have been set, a student can move onto the second part of the process, which is occupational assessment. This process asks the question, "Where are the people like me and what are they doing?" Typically, students have a very limited and often stereotypical view of occupations. We teach them how to find out about possibilities by asking:

- What is required for entry into a particular profession?
- How do you work with people in a particular setting?
- What rewards can be expected?
- What is frustrating? Satisfying?
- Could this profession fit for me?
- What is the work environment like?

Then a student will make some decisions about professional goals.

Career implementation

The last part of the career development process is called career implementation, job hunting. This part of the process includes resume writing, job interviewing and job hunting skills, all historically associated with a career development office.

What students need to know to find a job is important, but it is not hard to grasp. Students master far more complicated concepts in your classrooms. What is so hard is the anxiety students feel when they job hunt. It can be especially difficult for students who are not of the majority culture. For instance, a student whose culture teaches her or him that it is disrespectful to look someone in the eye will have difficulty with most western job interviewing. For most new graduates, the job hunt is discouraging, frustrating and downright unpleasant most of the time. Even the strongest self esteem can take a shellacking.

Try, for a minute, to put yourselves in their shoes. Let's say a tornado flattened your school and there was not a stick standing. Let's say that the Board decided to shut down the school for good. How well prepared would any of us be to make a transition to another line of work or to find another teaching position? When was the last time you went on a job interview and had to say why you were better than any of the other candidates? How long could you survive financially over a long job hunt?

At graduation, basically, a school lays students off. We deliberately downsize. We tell the students that they can't work here anymore. Admittedly, some are delighted and can't wait to be done. But some were very happy in school. They knew what was expected, they liked their co-workers, and they found the work to be satisfying, interesting and enjoyable. All of them wonder what they will do next, will they be good at something else and will someone hire them to do something other than school work.

The career development process is one that continues throughout a lifetime. The only thing that is guaranteed is change. Sometimes that change is initiated by the employee; for instance, someone who has been in the same job for ten years may be bored and want new challenges. Other times change is out of the employee's control. An alumna I saw this summer had been at her job for thirteen years and had enjoyed it very much until she was told on a Friday that her entire job description would be changing and she had until the following Monday to decide whether she would accept the new job or take a severance package. In order to deal with this kind of situation, I hope students will learn the job search process while they are in school so they can use it when they need it for the rest of their lives.

When I first used this process in my own career, it was because I wanted work that challenged me and that I would enjoy. In the 1970's, there were jobs out there for Carleton graduates no matter how poorly we interviewed. Since then, the job market has changed forever. The workplace is also far more diverse. Job security is a thing of the past. We are all literally free agents.

The College Placement Council says the chance that a professional will be terminated sometime during a career has risen from 25% to 33% over the past five years. It is essential that our students learn to make career decisions and understand what they need to do to implement those decisions simply to stay employed over a worklife.

The average student loan debt in a private college in 1992 was $11,333 or close to $200 per month for ten years. Almost all students, traditional and non-traditional aged, are working while they are going to school, and they are

working more hours per week; they have less time to spend on their career development and tend to be last minute in their approach to their decisions. Some students are more savvy than others about their career development; for some the process is culturally unfamiliar. Savvy or not, they all need help with their career plans.

Students often have complicated life situations. A sampling of students with whom I have worked include:

- A traditional-aged student who is a single parent of a five year old, who lives with her parents and is desperate for health insurance.
- A divorced mother of six who has the house and spousal support until she finishes her B.A. degree and who has not worked a day outside the home.
- The student who is here on his company's tuition reimbursement plan, which is suddenly canceled.
- The battered wife who has fled half way across the country from her abusive husband and whose first stop after safely depositing her two children at her best friend's house is the college career development office.

It can be overwhelming to all of us at times.

By the year 2000, 90% of the jobs in this country will require more than a high school education. Half of all new jobs created by the year 2000 will require a college degree. The students who learn the career development process and put in the energy and effort are successful even in this job market. We definitely can make a difference to students who are willing to help themselves.

There are some obvious, practical reasons for faculty involvement in the career development process. Every study you read these days reports that students are worried about career options, and to further their career prospects is the top reason they attend college. To recruit and retain students, we need to be concerned about this. Career development needs to be a community involvement.

The most important thing faculty can do to contribute to students' career development is to truly educate them. Doing high quality academic work is the best way students can prepare for their futures. Basic skills in writing and communication, quantitative skills, and computer literacy are essential. And we need to tell students that over and over again. Every time you intervene with a student who doesn't write well, encourage a student to develop quantitative skills, or assign work on the computer, you are contributing to a student's future.

Departmental career days and departments tracking graduates to make alumni information available to current students are invaluable services. Classes offer experiential learning opportunities, and faculty members bend over backwards to help their majors with advice, referrals and leads. Faculty serving as mentors are in a unique position to encourage and nurture talent and to build confidence. All of you can think of some student you have taken under your wing.

How can faculty help?

Though faculty already do a great deal related to career development, we need to be more deliberate, more direct and more explicit about the career preparation we offer. First of all, we need to name what we do here. We need to help students articulate what they are learning. That interviewer who asked me about art history and baton twirling really wanted me to articulate what I had gained from that choice of major. To do this students need to know about professional skills.

Content skills

Content skills are what you get across in the classroom. A nursing student learns anatomy, an English student learns to analyze great literature, and an art history student learns to identify major creative periods. Content skills sometimes are directly connected to a student's job after graduation, but sometimes they are not. What is critical is that students learn to learn, no matter which content area they choose. They need to learn to figure out what is critical, to ask questions and to find information.

There are a couple of problems, however, if students rely solely on content skills. For one thing, knowledge becomes obsolete at an alarming rate. The half life of an engineering degree, for example, is now about five years. We need to be sure our students can keep current. Furthermore, just because you know something doesn't mean you will be good at a particular job.

Personal skills

Are you prompt, reliable, honest, motivated, enthusiastic, tactful? And do any of those qualities matter to a particular profession? Employers look for and pay for the personality traits they need in their employees.

Transferable or functional skills

What can an individual do with people, things, information and data using interpersonal skills, organizational skills and leadership skills? Can you make an educated guess? Can you work without all the pieces? Can you adapt to change? That is what most of us do most of the time in our jobs. Our students need to know this in no uncertain terms so they are not tongue-tied when asked why they are here.

Make career information available

Information on alumni, professional associations, fields of study or work, graduate school, and internships should be accessible to students in your school and department. Use your academic advising role to bring up a student's career plans and help him or her begin to sort through those questions. Encourage students to explore and to take risks. Reward risks, help students to try new things and suggest that they get involved. Talk about their co-curricular activities as career related, and encourage them to start their involvement early.

I am not asking you to be a career counselor. That takes years of training. I am asking you to be familiar with the concept of skills and this model of career development. Make it your business to know what the Career Development office does.

Professional departments

Students who say, "I have chosen nursing (social work, education), so I have made my career choice and I don't really need to do anything else but do

well in my classes" tend to put all their eggs in that knowledge skill basket. It may be true that students from the professional programs have an easier time landing a job at graduation depending on the job market, but you know as well as I do that it is not the end of career decisions.

What about the occupational therapist who hurts her back in a car accident and is no longer able to do the work? Or what of the nurse, teacher, accountant who has been in the field for 5, 10, 15 years and wants to make a change. Or what if the job market changes in the four to five years it takes to get a social work degree? These students come into my office terrified that they cannot do anything else. About 25% of our client load annually is alumni. And what about the student who doesn't get into the professional major, doesn't succeed in the major or decides she doesn't like the major?

In the professional programs, we need to help the student see the broader view of her education, including those personal and transferable skills. The American Institute of Certified Public Accountants advocates a broader education for those who sit for the CPA exams. "These people need to function in the business world and they need to know more than accounting." These people need to function in the health care arena or the classroom. We need to be sure our professional students know about career development as a lifelong process so they can handle future change.

Better intervention and follow-up with the students who are not admitted or who do not succeed in the professional majors are also necessary. Failing in this way can be very traumatic and these students need help in redirecting themselves. In the professional programs, we need to help prepare our graduates for advancement in their professions so the social worker can go on to become the executive director of a non-profit and the nurse can turn her interests to lobbying for health care reform.

Liberal arts departments

Students very unfortunately assume that all you can do is teach with a liberal arts degree and that only if you are lucky. I can't tell you how many times I have heard, "I would love to major in history (English, theology, sociology,

art), but you can't do anything with that. I need something practical, I need a job." I have also heard complaints about the liberal arts core courses because they "don't get me anywhere."

One of the most interesting clients I have had was a sophomore who was initially in tears in my office. She loved college and wanted to stay here. She was in a professional major where she was actually doing quite well but did not enjoy the work. She wanted to change her major to English, but her father had threatened to stop supporting her financially if she did. I calmed her down, offered her some Kleenex and coached her on the career development process. I told her what I tell all liberal arts majors. You develop many skills from a liberal arts major and the most important thing is that you choose a major that you will do well in and enjoy. You cannot, however, these days, keep your head in the sand. You will need to do some volunteer work, get some paid work experience, talk to school alumni who have majored in English, do one or more internships, and you must absolutely learn to job hunt. She changed her major, did three internships and had a great job the April before she graduated. By the way, her dad did continue to pay for her education.

Obviously, that was a success story. On the other extreme, there was the student who arrived in my office and said, "I will be graduating next weekend, I will be getting married the next weekend, I am a liberal arts major and I would like to have something lined up for after the honeymoon." No student should be that naive a week before he or she is to graduate!

In the liberal arts departments we need to quit apologizing for not being practical. Tell students about the personal and transferable skills they will develop in your major. Help them to name what they will gain. Have information on your graduates available: where they have gone, what they are doing. Encourage students to think about their career plans and possible work experiences they would like to try. Encourage co-curricular activities and volunteer experiences either on campus or in the community at large. Internships are essential and are an absolute "must" for the liberal arts major. As faculty you need to be knowledgeable about internships and willing to supervise them.

With our multicultural students, we in the career development office are still learning how to best serve their needs. They need coaching in dealing with a process that is culturally unfamiliar. All of our students will go into a workforce that is far more diverse and where an understanding of and an appreciation for cultural differences will be expected.

Before I get off my soap box, let me emphasize a couple of points. I believe that all of our students will need to know and use this career development process to live full and meaningful work lives. I see this as being nothing less than an adult survival skill for the next century. I also believe that it is our responsibility to expose our students to this information and to assist them in appreciating its importance.

Sometimes it is easier to help a student than you expect it will be. For example, a student I saw just last week said to me, "All I really needed was someone to say it was O.K. to try," and she is off to graduate school this fall.

Language and Identity

by
Neda Miranda Blazevic

I was ten when my German teacher Margite Schwab wrote in my signature album the inscription by the renowned classical German poet J. W. Goethe: "The more languages you speak, the more people you are worth." I wondered whether Goethe had spoken in my native Croatian, but I did not dare to ask my teacher.

As I grew up, I came to understand that Goethe's "more people" in one person, including me, were to be "invented" by learning not only foreign languages, but also their own cultural background and history. The teacher of my native Croatian, Marija Marusic, wrote in my signature album another simple but crucial sentence: "Remember, only the perfect knowledge of your native language and culture will form up your identity."

However, when I was ten I still did not know the meaning of many words and I was much more impressed by opening my signature album where relief leaves and flowers decorated the light brown leather cover page. Still, the small secure letters of my teachers and parents, put down on white thick paper with a dark blue Leonardo ink, and collected in strong words that ran within perfect smooth strings, gave me the first visual image of language's riches. The seed of future experiences had already taken root in my signature album. I thought of that some years later, admiring handwriting, drawings and manuscripts written by such greats as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Machiavelli, Blake, Goethe, and others.

But what is language? What is identity?

According to the Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1966):

. . . language is the body of words and systems for their use common to a people who are of the same community or nation, or the same cultural tradition. Language is any system of formalized symbols, signs, gestures, or the like, used or conceived as a means of communicating thought, emotions, etc."

The definition of identity states that ". . . identity is the condition of being oneself or itself, and not another." The two key words in these definitions might be communication and oneself. The triangle of language, communication and oneself has forever enclosed the identity of human beings.

Who are we?

Goethe thought that a knowledge of many languages would make the question easier, or at least, would widen one's identity by multiplying his or her possibility to communicate with people from different nations and cultures.

I was eleven when I wrote my first letter in German to my Austrian friend Sieglinde. I was more proud of having "an adult friend in the foreign language" than of my letter which described my room, my sister Olga, my parents, my signature album, and the concern for my still limited German. Sieglinde was writing about her job as a secretary, her twin sister, big Christmas trees in the city of Innsbruck, and her fiance Adi. Our long term correspondence helped me to develop through love, respect, and childish curiosity toward Sieglinde, the same qualities toward her country, her language, the Viennese Sacher cake, and especially the letters. The epistles will become an important part in my later creative writing even though I think there is no qualitative difference between these two things.

I was fifteen when I started to learn French by developing friendly correspondence with a girl, Francoise, in Lyon. I was nineteen when I started to learn Italian at the university by developing an epistolary friendship with the young man, Gian-Carlo, in Naples. And English was around all the time, rolling in our ears and dancing from the British and American music, films, and TV shows.

However, none of my foreign friends knew any Croatian. The reality that my native language does not belong to the great, powerful branches of the world's leading languages did- not discourage me. I rather felt a kind of ambiguous satisfaction that I possessed a special secret. But this special secret was also my subconscious defense against the colonial arrogance of so called "big nations" and "leading languages." While these "great nations" dominated the history, politics, and culture of the smaller nations, they discounted the value of "the rest of the world," and also their own heritage, history, power and "passion to know."

I was sixteen when I started to travel through Europe with my sister Olga. Encouraged by our parents, we were roaming around discovering that our images of the foreign places were often more a mirror of our enthusiasm for life abroad than an image of its real shape. But what is real, what unreal in expectations, dreams, recognitions and pleasures of youth?

A division of identity was already celebrating its victory. I experienced it another way in Paris in 1974 while celebrating the New Year with a group of friends. A few Italians joined us after midnight, and one of them asked me after a short conversation which part of the city of Turin I lived in. I said that I had never been in Turin, and that I was not even Italian. He just laughed and said that I could not cheat him. I said that he would very soon see through my still limited Italian that I was someone else. He then laughed louder, adding that this was just a cliche used by people who would like to cover their real identity and to be someone else.

Cases like that one are still confirming my certainty within my uncertainty that understanding of language and identity is a complex mask, an endless travesty of the self. The more I try to serve Goethe's "more different people," the more I am aware how their demands are growing and putting in question complexity of the real self. But who, again, is the real self? How to recognize the stability of one's identity?

While talking or writing, for example, in English, I am still aware how the action of my thinking passes through the struggle of the choice of words and meaning, forming or not forming within a specific chemical process a syntactic,

grammatical, idiomatic, metric, rhythmical, and meaningful sense: a new language. However, the same thing might be considered while writing in my native Croatian as well. But there is one principal difference: in the complicated process of writing, the native language behaves in a totality of one's life experiences, and a foreign language behaves as a fragment in the totality of one's experiences. That means that I examine my native language within all possible dimensions given to me by my background as well, and I examine a foreign language within the limited part of all these dimensions. This is like suddenly stepping out from the sunny day into a cloudy evening. Outlines of the words and meanings become thick and distant. Most parts of this foreign landscape are still recognizable, but there are no words to name them.

The challenge of trying a foreign language produces at the same time a lot of frustrations and a lot of fun. As children we used to play the game "Spoiled Telephone." Around ten of us would sit down one next to another, and the first child in a row would whisper very quietly one word to his or her neighbor. This one would do the same to his or her neighbor, and the intention was to spoil the word, or even the world, to play to it, to make the neighbor think about the word. Of course, a transformation between the first and the last word and world in the spoiled telephone line was much more important than the final result which always got a lot of laughs. For example, the first child quietly mumbled the word chair, and within the transformation process the chair became fair-beer-bear-dear-clear-beard-grid-frigid-puckish and finally, the last child in the row would exclaim: the factory! And we all would laugh knowing that one of the words in a chain was a part of the word factory we had made. The "Spoiled Telephone" game helped me to associate the meaning of one word within another, crystallizing metaphor and playfulness as vital parts of my writing. There is nothing what better describes the nature of identity than metaphor. Metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is spoken of as it were another. Oneself in another. While having difficulties in writing, talking or even understanding some words and meanings in foreign languages, I keep thinking of the "Spoiled Telephone" game as of a metaphoric help providing the parallel meaning and alternative ways of understanding. This is not a poetic recipe to translate a word with a feeling rather than with a dictionary, however,

but a reminder that the power of every language at first gives in its polyphonic meaning the nature of its cultural environment.

Once, while talking with a friend about language and identity, I pointed out that my intention in all my work is to put together the divided person from the languages, events, countries I've been in. "But then, who really are you?" asked the amazed friend.

We all are examining the many different disintegrations of our identity and trying somehow to translate our imaginative life into the real one. But the real problem appears when a people try to translate their real life into the imaginative one. This case is indicative for totalitarian systems which have produced in their anti-cultures and anti-politics a destructive, lying, cynical and brutal surrogate of the public language. A censorship of the public language is at the same time the censorship of the personal and collective identity.

The usual disintegration of identity is caused rather by some positive factors, among which I would give a priority to the passion to know. In this passion to know one willingly adopts the particles from the foreign cultures and languages, mixing them with one's native background, and producing a new cultural integration which I call "the world in between." In the early twentieth century, the philosopher Edmund Husserl considered the passion to know as the essence of spirituality which we might see at the end of the twentieth century as a still crucial call for a re-thinking and re-arrangement of the individual's human rights, thoughts, and needs in spiritless societies.

A matter of language and identity is an old cultural chess game in which combinations of language and identity, language of identity, identity of language, language within identity, identity within language, and so forth, are not only the linguistic, philosophical, metaphorical, and historic black and white LANGTITY game, but also the creative energy that again and again opens the borders of different human experiences placed in exciting and sometimes dangerous events.

Actions Speak Loudly as Words
or
What do the Verbs in OBE Literature imply?

by
Judith E. Landrum

Outcome-Based Education: Where did it come from and what does it mean?

In Minnesota, the State Department of Education and the State Legislature have embraced Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and are in the process of overseeing its implementation in the public schools (S. Eyestone, personal communication). The Minnesota State Department of Education appears to view OBE as "a true revolution in schooling" that "marks the most important change in public education since the advent of the comprehensive high school nearly a century ago" (Schleisman and King, 1990). Once the OBE philosophy becomes adopted throughout the state, which has been mandated by the state legislature, the Minnesota Board of Education plans to establish statewide graduation requirements which must be met by every high school senior in Minnesota in order to graduate. Then, the Minnesota House and Senate Education Committees plan to validate and/or edit these requirements.

Unfortunately, many of us in the classroom have only a vague notion of what exactly Outcome-Based Education is and how it evolved. Although generalized overviews can be reductionist, few of us have the luxury to study a philosophy of teaching—like OBE—in great depth. With that in mind, the purpose of this article is to briefly introduce teachers to the background of OBE and some of the principles which help define it: purpose, criterion for measurement, assessment, accountability and learning objectives.

Historically, the concept of using objectives to plan curriculum has been around for about the past 45 years. It was first developed by Ralph Tyler in his text, Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction (1949). During the next forty years, and still today, educators develop curriculum according to the specific behavioral objectives they wish to teach, model, and finally, incorporate

into their students' knowledge or ability base. OBE adds to this theory by including a new dimension—assessment or outcomes. Rather than the process of learning, OBE focuses on the product(s) of learning. The three classifications of objectives and goals (outcomes) are knowledge, skills, and attitude (Schleisman & King, 1990).

Since the 1970s, taxpayers, parents, legislators, and business leaders have been concerned that students are graduating without the academic skills (especially reading, writing, and math) necessary to function successfully in society, let alone lead society internationally. This concern led to the Competency-Based Education (CBE) movement, whose philosophy was to make sure students were adequately prepared for life roles such as holding a job, paying taxes, voting, and parenting. Frequently, however, CBE became more of a remediation effort, rather than a challenge to sharpen the skills of all students, especially high achievers. Therefore, while incorporating the principles behind CBE, OBE tried to target maximum rather than minimum competency (Evans, 1992).

There are two primary methods of evaluating competency: by criterion or by norms (average). Norm-referenced outcomes determine success as it relates to everyone else—like grading on a curve. With this type of a model, some students will excel, some students will pass, and some students will fail. The expression criterion-referenced outcomes refers to achieving a specific skill, knowledge base or attitude in order to succeed. Although everyone may perform at various levels, everyone still has the opportunity to pass or succeed. Furthermore, with criterion-referenced outcomes, students don't "pass" or "go on" until they have achieved the designated outcome. For example, most children aren't taught the crawl stroke until they have mastered the skill of floating on their stomachs.

Outcome-Based Education, sometimes referred to as Results-Based Education, adopts the criterion referenced method, which illustrates the underlying philosophy that all children can succeed. The criterion is set so that each student can meet it, rather than some being penalized because they didn't meet the criteria as well or as quickly as their peers. Since success is not based on the performance of others, every student, in theory, can succeed.

The literature available from the Minnesota State Department of Education (1990; 1991a; & 1991b) and the literature written by William Spady, considered the primary developer of OBE (Spady, 1982; Schleisman and King, 1990) clearly state the philosophy and purpose of OBE. Similar to Mastery Learning (ML), OBE was developed by the same group of educational philosophers—Spady, Rubin, Mitchell, Bloome, and others (Spady, 1982; Schleisman and King, 1990). The seeds planted in ML appear to come to fruition in OBE. Like ML, "the fundamental purpose of OBE is to equip all students with the competency, knowledge and orientations that enable them to lead successful lives following their schooling experience" (Spady, 1987). Both philosophies profess that all students can learn all things if given the right amount of time. The only reason some students don't master a skill is that they were not given adequate time; aptitude denotes rate of learning, not ability to learn (Rubin and Spady, 1984). In both OBE and ML, learning appears to be a linear process; students may not move to another level until they master the skills or concepts at one given level (Rubin and Spady, 1984).

The key difference between the two philosophies seems to be that Mastery Learning was designed for students K-6 and Outcome-Based Education was expanded to include junior and senior high school students (Spady, 1982). The underlying philosophy, or three key premises of OBE, are listed below as they are outlined in the OBE literature:

1) All students can learn and succeed.
2) Success breeds success.
3) Schools control the conditions of success.
(Spady, 1988).

It is important to note that specific learning objectives and their criterion-defined outcomes (i.e., each student will be able to recognize all the consonant letters and sounds) are not defined by the OBE philosophy. Outcomes are defined within each school district, school and classroom; then, they are negotiated through government agencies. (In Minnesota, for example, it is the Board of Education.) Many people who oppose OBE do it on the basis of the specified outcomes—however, the philosophy does not establish outcomes; individuals within specific districts do that. OBE is merely the philosophy giving them a

structure for establishing outcomes. The responsibility and accountability for students meeting these criteria rest in the teachers. "Teachers must exhibit some standard of competency or performance and schools must devise methods of relating expenditures to outcomes" (Ornstein and Levine, 1989). Although teachers usually draft the objectives and outcomes, in some states which have adopted the OBE philosophy, including Minnesota, the state legislature ultimately defines specific learning outcomes.

In conclusion, it appears that OBE is an integral part of our current educational philosophy in Minnesota and may be in the future. Therefore, it is critical that we understand some of its basic principles. First, it goes beyond basing curriculum on objectives into focusing more heavily on the outcomes of those objectives. Second, the outcomes are designed to encompass the knowledge, skills and attitudes students need to be adequately prepared for their life roles as parents, voters, and taxpayers. Third, the level of the outcomes should presume a high standard of expectation rather than a minimal or remedial level of competency for all students. Fourth, like Mastery Learning and Competency-Based Education, students must meet the established criteria for one level or skill before they move on to the next one. Fifth, mastery of a given outcome is based on an individual's performance rather than the group or the norm. Finally, the foundational principle of OBE is that all students can learn and can succeed.

Verbs and other Modalities in OBE Literature: What Stance do They Express toward Literacy?

As teachers, we must first be aware of our personal biases and prejudices toward the subjects we analyze. Therefore, I must admit that the seed of this research comes from my skepticism of OBE. This skepticism—and at moments, fear—arises from two things. First, after attending an informative conference presented by the Minnesota State Department of Education on OBE, (and they couldn't define it) I became suspicious. Second, whenever politicians mandate rigid learning outcomes, as they are planning to in Minnesota via OBE, the implications for learning and literacy in general scare me. This dilemma sparked my research and this paper on OBE.

Often, literacy is expressed as something fixed and static—like the contents of a box. On the other hand, literacy is also expressed as something moving, evolving, and dynamic—continually being constructed and reconstructed like the waves of an ocean. In this study, I focus on OBE at the implied level in order to determine the disposition this philosophy of education takes toward learning and literacy. Specifically, I'm analyzing verbs and their tone (modalities) in samples of OBE literature to determine its underlying position toward literacy.

Before looking at the analysis, the tools need to be defined. Modalities are a universal mode of behavior like a tone or an attitude toward something. Verb modalities usually refer to verbs, helping verbs or adverbs, words which better clarify the verbs' tone or meaning. Epistemic describes the degree of force or certainty of an informative proposition. For example, a high epistemic modality might be a statement like "It is certain that. . . ." A low epistemic modality might be a statement like "It is possible that. . . ." Deontic describes the degree of obligation or inclination in an imperative statement—like the difference between a command or a suggestion. For example, a high deontic modality (obligation) might be "You are required to. . . ." A low deontic modality (obligation) might be a statement like "If you like, you may. . . ." An example of a high deontic modality (inclination) might be a statement like "I'm determined to . . . ." An example of a low deontic modality (inclination) might be a statement like "I'm willing to. . . ." (For a more thorough chart, see Appendix A.)

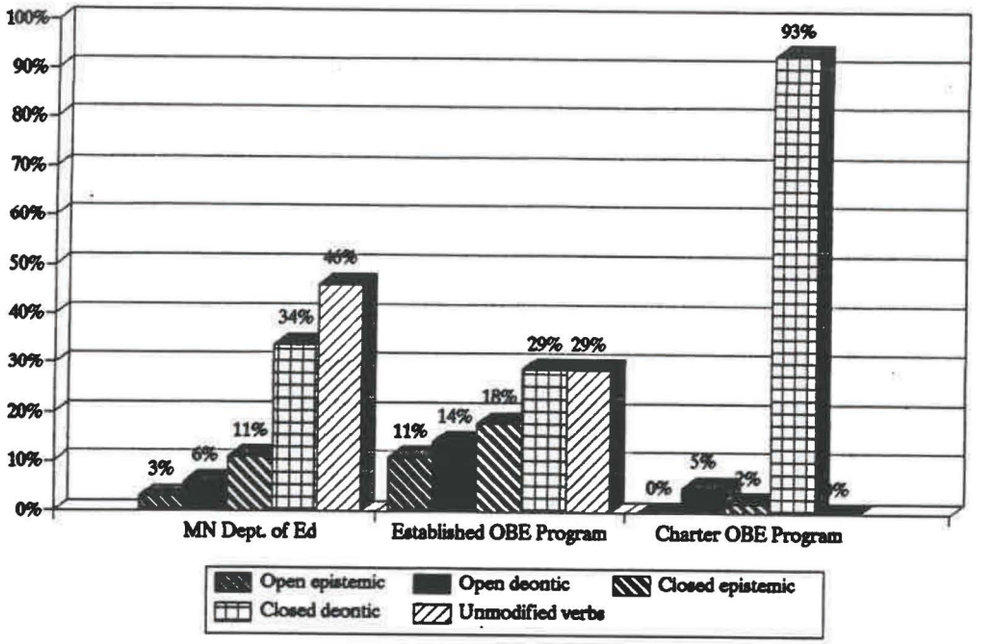
Sample texts chosen were explanatory handouts or a handbook written to explain the philosophy and intent of OBE for its end users—teachers. The sample texts were taken from three groups. The first was the Minnesota State Department of Education; the texts used were three handouts (1-2 pages each). The second group selected was a school district which is said to have one of the most well-established OBE programs in Minnesota. The text analyzed describes the approach to learning through OBE in that specific school district. Finally, a "charter" school district in the process of establishing an OBE approach was used. Since they are currently incorporating the OBE approach, I used the few handouts they had available.

For the analysis, each verb modality which expressed either an epistemic or deontic stance toward learning and literacy was marked and coded. For example, a sentence from one state department handout reads "These teachers believe that if they carry out the five practices (defining outcomes, designing curriculum, delivering instruction, documenting results and determining advancement) then 'All students can succeed'" (Italics mine). Both the verbs believe and determining seem to imply a closed epistemic stance; the statements are indubitably "truth." Can, on the other hand, implies an open deontic stance; the participants (students, in this case) have a choice regarding their actions.

In doing this textual analysis on OBE literature samples, some surprises occurred. First, a sizable portion of each text, especially the Minnesota State Department texts, is written in incomplete sentences. Usually, the missing element in the fragments is a verb which decreased the number of verbs and modalities within the text. So, when a conditional word such as apparently, probably, absolutely, or always appeared in a fragment, it was ignored since the sentence did not contain a verb.

Second, a sizable number of "to be" verbs appeared in the literature with no conditionals whatsoever. The presence of modalities without an adverb to soften verbs such as am, are, and is, comprises a sizable portion of the literature, and weighs heavily on the results. Initially, the unmodified "to be" verbs are listed in a separate category so the reader can see their individual contribution to the final analysis.

Percentages of Verb Modals in OBE Literature Samples



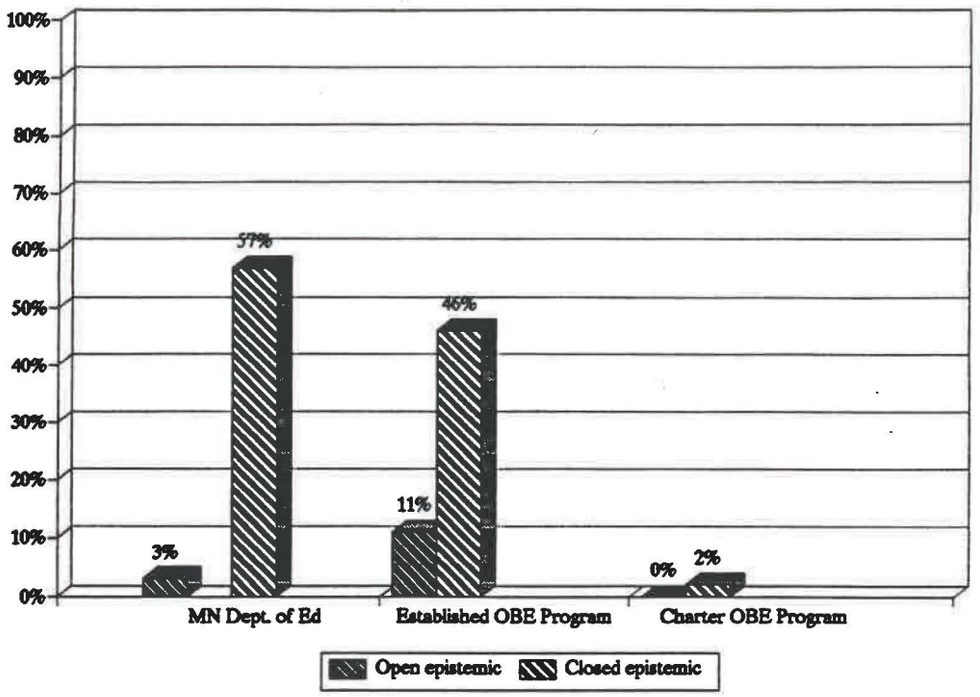
Although the extensive use of the "to be" verbs in the OBE samples was a surprise, it should not have been. According to Biber and Finnegan (1988), this use of unmodified "to be" verbs is "faceless" and typical of both academic and media prose styles (23). In media prose the discourse is faceless because it is understood by the audience that all the given information is "presented as 'reality.'" (Biber and Finnegan, 1988). In academic prose, the text is "expected to present findings and conclusions that are supported" enough to be facts (Biber and Finnegan, 1988; Chafe, 1986). An example drawn from the charter school reads, "The Whole Language philosophy will be present throughout the program. . . ." The unmodified "to be" verb here is "faceless"; there is no voice or personality present. Since the very nature of faceless discourse is to "present reality" and defined conclusions, this voice, or lack of it, clearly portrays the view of OBE toward literacy as being fixed and static.

Conversely, it is interesting that the charter OBE school district lacks almost any epistemic verbs whatsoever (i.e. "we know that" or "it is true that"). As shown in the "Percentages of Verb Modals in OBE Literature Samples" chart, and more clearly in the "Open vs. Closed Epistemic Modals" chart J, only two percent of the total number of verbs are epistemic and those are closed. This is significant in that the stance of the charter school seems to ignore a position on information. Rather, their focus resides completely in the actions expected from the teachers. This suggests a stance toward literacy in which all the responsibility for learning and literacy lies within the teacher rather than any collaboration between students or any negotiation between students and teachers. Although the extensive use of deontic modals such as "teachers and parents will be acknowledged as" or "Measurement and assessment will be a partnership decision between parents and teacher(s)" does not imply a fixed and static view of information, it does imply a static learning model that appears to be teacher-centered.

Furthermore, it implies a top-down type of decision making in which the educators are told what and how to teach. Since all the responsibility for learning is placed upon the teacher, a student-centered classroom seems unlikely. Furthermore, this static learning model denies the emerging evidence in educational studies that shows the social nature of learning and the importance of capitalizing upon it.

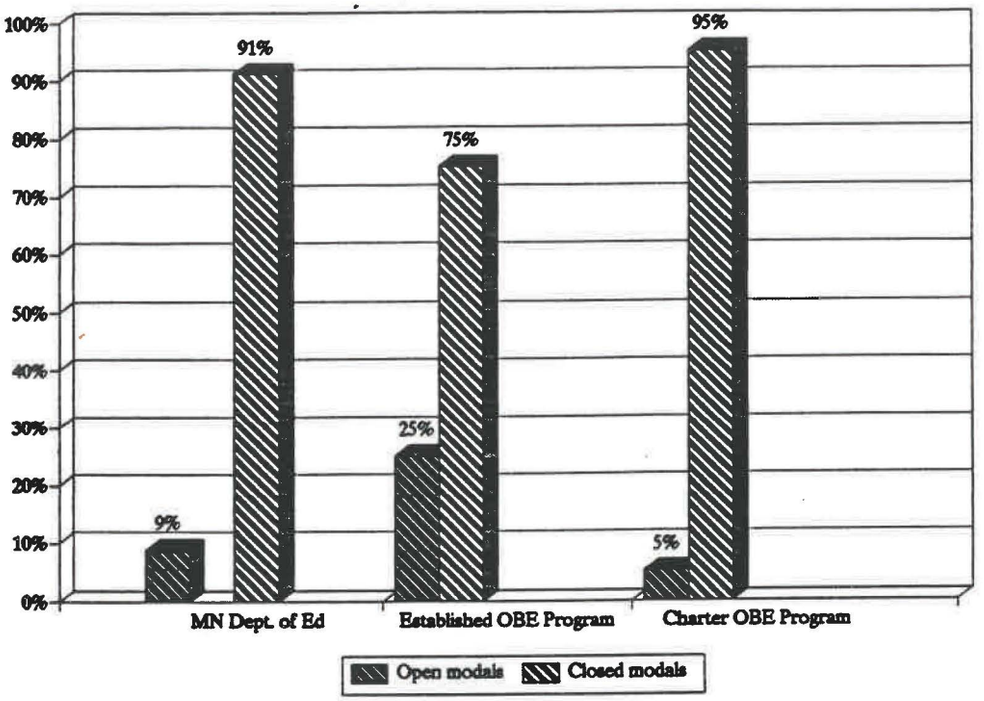
Although not frequent in the charter district, the closed deontic (obligation) stance is the second highest category in the Minnesota State Department literature (34%), and is tied for the highest category in the established OBE district (29%), comprising approximately one third of the verb modalities. As stated earlier, this does not necessarily portray a static stance toward what is learned, but it does portray a static stance toward how learning takes place.

Open vs. Closed Epistemic Modals



As portrayed in the "Open vs. Closed Epistemic Modals" chart (Appendix A), the significant element is the difference in usage between the closed epistemic modalities and the open epistemic modalities. In this chart, the unmodified "to be" verbs were incorporated into the closed epistemic modalities, which is typical in this type of textual analysis. This addition underlines the frequency of closed epistemic modalities vs. open ones (57% vs. 3%; 46% vs. 11%; and 2% vs. 0%). This assumption, again, denies the possibility of any socially constructed reality in language, learning and literacy. The vast difference between the closed and open stances implies a view that information, the basis of learning and literacy, is fixed or static.

Open vs. Closed Modals



As shown in Appendix A, the modalities used to describe information are words like absolutely, factually, always, and without exception. The modalities used to describe obligation are verbs like must, shall, will should, etc. By collapsing the various categories of open and closed modalities, the "Open vs. Closed Modals" chart portrays the overall marked discrepancy between the use of closed vs. open modalities in each of the three groups examined (91% vs. 9%; 75% vs. 25%; and 95% vs. 5%). The conclusion these percentages implies is that the promoters of OBE, in the three sample groups examined, take a closed stance toward both the information gleaned in the classroom and the obligation for the classroom teacher's strategy to present information. Again, this implies a static stance toward learning and literacy.

Having considered the static nature of OBE and its implications, I find this philosophy needs analysis. First, literacy is not a classroom commodity doled out by a teacher. Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz (1992) state that the bulk of learning takes place in the home and only a minimal amount takes place in the classroom, a point further supported by Taylor (1991). Cook-Gumperz and Gumperz go on to say that the notions that "learning was basically accomplished through classroom instruction" and "what counted was the curriculum and how it was presented," the basic premise of OBE, ignores cultural diversity in learning styles and the affect of experiences outside of class on the experiences inside of class (1992).

Second, information and meaning making are negotiated and socially discovered rather than static facts to be passed out by a teacher. The social aspect of learning plays a key role in the depth of understanding that a student achieves (Beach, 1992; Porter, 1992). Part of this, according to Brooke (1991), is the development of self identity. A person takes on a particular role during a literacy event; this role shapes the meaning making and information the participant experiences. Therefore, information cannot be something fixed and static, which is distributed by a teacher rather than discovered personally. It is constantly being re-evaluated and constructed socially.

Finally, most information and "meaning making" is negotiated and dynamic. As Bruner says, "The reality is not the thing, not in the head, but in the act of arguing and negotiation about the meaning of such concepts" (1986, p. 122). Heath (1992) further supports this dynamic view of learning in that rather than defining learning and what we learn, educators, parents, and taxpayers should "locate" literacy. She warns against the "decorative" function of literacy in which the emphasis is on totaling fixed products of information as well as on the memory function or residue of specific information. Rather, Heath (1991) suggests emphasis should be placed on furthering literacy as part of a person's personal awareness of the self and the community and the world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, much contemporary scholarship on learning and literacy portrays the process of learning as well as its constantly evolving product as dynamic. In contrast, on the implied level, OBE appears to express a static as opposed to a dynamic stance toward learning and literacy. This comes forth in three clear patterns implied in the OBE samples analyzed.

1)The dominance of closed deontic modals suggests an emphasis on the teacher's obligations in the learning process rather than on the process itself or on what is learned in the process.

2)The dominance of closed deontic modals also assumes that education is the responsibility of the classroom teacher, not a collaboration between teacher and students or students and students.

3)By its very definition, the "faceless" discourse style shown by the dominance of unmodified "to be" verbs in OBE literature portrays information as static and fixed.

Although at the beginning of this proposal a concern was expressed regarding my prejudice toward OBE, it should not have affected my results. The verbs and other modalities in the literature written on OBE cannot be rewritten or fabricated. My bias directed the invention of this research, but, given the material, it should not have tainted my conclusion—through its verb modalities, Outcome Based Education clearly implies a static rather than dynamic stance toward learning and literacy.

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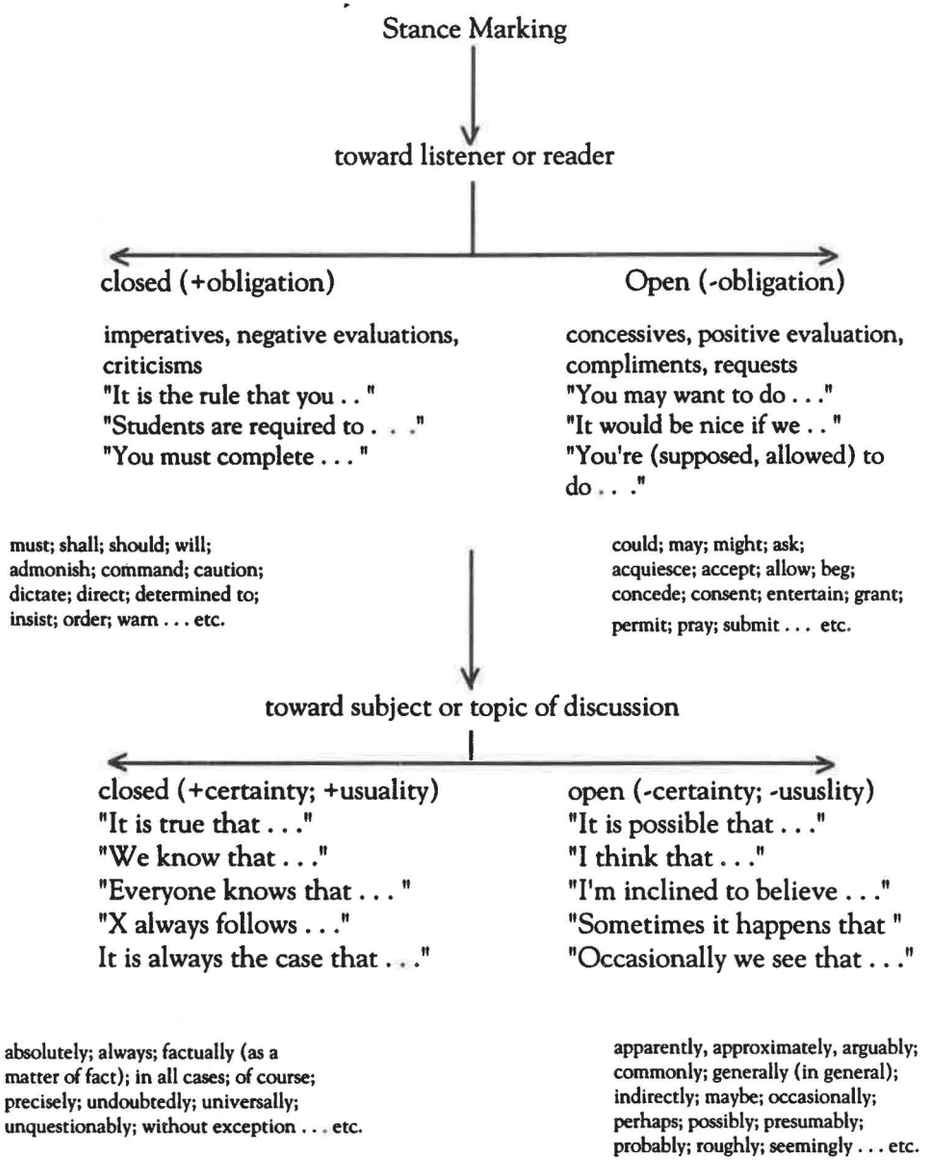
Appendix A



A "Total Immersion" Into Poetry

by
Anne Slauson

Many teachers face teaching the poetry unit with dread or apprehension because they anticipate the reluctance often felt by their students. Many young readers don't want to "tackle" poetry or "wrestle" with it, expressing the encounter in physical terms because they feel it is too hard to understand. They don't identify with it, or it doesn't make any sense to them. Janet Tilley, a ninth-grade English teacher, solved this problem with the "story poem," a poem about which a story could be written. She used Ted Kooser's "Abandoned Farmhouse" as an example of how story poems can foster community story telling. Students progress by first reading the poem, discussing the setting, and then writing a "what happened next" story about the characters and what might have happened to them. This poem lends itself perfectly to that technique because it ends with the line, "Something went wrong, they say." The teacher felt that writing responses to poems helped her students understand possible underlying themes and subtleties of meaning. She stated that, "Poems can quickly introduce characters, scenes, and plots that serve as storytelling experiences. Using poems in-and-around other curriculum guarantees a wealth of stories" (Vogel and Tilley 88).

Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology is a collection of poems that lend themselves to the "story" theme idea. I think teachers can go even farther with this material and have students experience a "total immersion" into the life and times of Spoon River characters. They can investigate and explore the setting, the time frame, the social mores, the beliefs and customs—the whole lifestyle of the people who lived there. This will enable them to "experience" the poetry and gain a fuller appreciation of it, and they will learn about the history of our country in the process.

Spoon River itself is a mythical town, but it is probably based in part on Lewistown, Illinois, in the heart of the Midwest, a town described as typically

small-town America. People there were not special in the achievement of fame and fortune, although some had achieved a certain notoriety. They could have come from almost anywhere in the country. They lived, for the most part, typical everyday lives. They interacted with one another according to the roles society provided them, and they played their roles in various ways, some accepting, some rejecting their parts in life. There were some who had happy lives and were simple, honest people who did the best they could. Now they speak to the reader from their graves, reflecting on those "roles," and the parts they played.

Mrs. George Reece

To this generation I would say:
Memorize some bit of verse of truth or beauty.
It may serve a turn in your life.
My husband had nothing to do
With the fall of the bank — he was only cashier.
The wreck was due to the president, Thomas Rhodes,
And his vain, unscrupulous son.
Yet my husband was sent to prison.
And I was left with the children,
To feed and clothe and school them.
And I did it, and sent them forth
Into the world all clean and strong,
And all through the wisdom of Pope, the poet:
"Act well your part, and there all the honor lies."

There were others who faced eternity with bitterness for the part life had doled out to them, often describing the ironies of fate or the rules of society that affected the way they ended.

The Circuit Judge

Take not, passers-by, of the sharp erosions
Eaten in my head-stone by the wind and rain—
Almost as if an intangible Nemesis or hatred
Were marking scores against me,
But to destroy, and not preserve, my memory.

I in life was the Circuit Judge, a maker of notches,
Deciding cases on the points the lawyers scored,
Not on the right of the matter.
O wind and rain, leave my head-stone alone!
For worse than the anger of the wronged,
The curses of the poor,
Was to lie speechless, yet with vision clear,
Seeing that even Hod Putt, the murderer,
Hanged by my sentence,
Was innocent in soul compared with me.

All the elements of life are depicted in Masters' work: hope, love, disappointment, despair, anger, and hate—universal themes for readers of all ages.

To better understand these themes, teachers can use a variety of activities and projects to make these characters come "alive" and become real, believable people that could have lived in a town called Spoon River. It can also lead to their own sense of "place" in the history of mankind and the role they are playing in it.

The first activity is to compile a family history. This can be accomplished by several methods such as interviewing family members, particularly grandparents and other older relatives, having previously written the questions for their letters or oral interviews. Sample questions might be "What was school like?" and "How did you or our ancestors get to America?" "Where were our ancestors born, and what did they do for a living in their mother country and after they arrived here?" These questions will lead to a discussion about the students' own unique places in history, and they will be able to better understand their places in it. A thought should be given to those students who might be adopted, or who, for another reason, might not have access to family information. Teachers need to be sensitive to those problems and seek opportunities for having students "share" a family study, or having an alternate activity for them to do.

A second related suggestion would be to have students make a family tree or a genealogical chart. Many families have explored their roots and have papers or books written about them. These could be shared with the class, as well as other primary information—letters, journals, scrapbooks, school yearbooks and other memorabilia. Students enjoy talking about their families and experiences, and providing this opportunity will "set the stage" for further investigation into the time frame of a midwest town around the turn of the 20th century.

A field trip to a cemetery can provide a wealth of information that's valuable from a historical standpoint. Looking at the names on the tombstones, noting children and other relatives, dates of when and sometimes how the people died, their ages at death, and the epitaphs that were written about them can all be used to surmise the "history" of individuals and sometimes large families. Comparing this information to the poetic epitaphs of the people living in Spoon River could prompt a discussion regarding the differences and similarities of what actually occurred in the fictional town and what was remembered. Then students can write their own epitaphs, attempting both humorous and serious versions. A title for the latter version could be, "How I Would Like To Be Remembered."

Other field trips might be undertaken to a museum, a library, or a newspaper office to investigate other information to reconstruct the community of that place and time. Photographs and newspaper clippings provide much information of interest, which again can provoke discussions about what life would have been like back then. Advertisements show inventions that made life easier, improved health, provided entertainment, and made people more attractive and fashionable just as they do today. Pointing out the differences can lead to a discussion of those things that were valued then compared to those things that are valued today. How are they different and why? How can we see the changed status of women and children reflected in the stories, photographs, and advertisements then and now? How do these things relate to the characters in Spoon River? What message does Masters relate about lifestyles back then through his characters, or is there a message at all? This might simply be the poet's portrayal of "a slice of life." Either way it is worthy of our investigation.

As part of the "total immersion" into a midwest town and its setting in history, there are many resources that teachers can bring into the classroom to share. A few suggestions are as follows:

Hechtlinger, Adelaide. The Seasonal Hearth: The Woman At Home in Early America. Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1986.

Mead, Howard, Dean, Jill, and Smith, Susan. Portrait of the Past - A Photographic Journey Through Wisconsin. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Tales and Trails, 1981.

Meier, Peg. Coffee Made Her Insane & Other Nuggets From Old Minnesota Newspapers. Minneapolis, MN: Neighbors' Publishing, 1988.

___. Bring Warm Clothes: Letters and Photos From Minnesota's Past. Minneapolis, MN: Neighbors Publishing, 1981.

Provenzo, Eugene F., Jr., Asterie Baker Provenzo, and Peter A. Zorn, Jr. Pursuing the Past: Oral History, Photographs, Family History, Cemeteries. Menlo Park, CA.: Addison-Wesley. 1984.

Reader's Digest Books. Back to Basics. New York: Reader's Digest. 1981.

Seymour, John. Forgotten Household Crafts: A Portrait of the Way We Once Lived. New York: Knopf, 1987.

Smithsonian Books. Images of America - A Panorama of History in Photographs. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian, 1989.

These books are rich in material depicting early America, and there are others similar in nature. Using them and having students participate in projects and activities will make history become more real and therefore more meaningful to them. They will be prepared to read the poems from a basis of understanding of the setting, the social mores, lifestyles, and the values of the people who could have lived in a town like Spoon River. They will read with greater empathy and understanding for those who played a part in our country's history. They will extend this to a greater understanding of and appreciation for their own roles in life, and they will get a sense of who they are in the historical context of the here and now.

Works Cited

Vogel, Mark with Tilley, Janet. "Story Poems and the Stories We've Been Waiting to Tell." English Journal 82 (1993): 86-89.

Just Above Absolute Zero

by
Alan Powers

When slack-jawed from reading freshman compositions, my reading speed drops to some minimum beneath which only television beckons. Now is the optimum time to choose texts for next semester. At a reading speed slightly above the motion of molecules nearing absolute zero, only great books hold me. The slower the reader, the greater every word counts.

I pity the alert, spaniel-minded professor who picks books like The Name of the Rose for his students to read. Anybody can see that book's too thick. Even Dickens had the charity to spell the reader of his long novels, publishing them in monthly segments. When a slow reader like me opens Umberto Eco's novel, he gets lost in the plot within the first twenty-five pages, or three hours' reading.

Choosing texts for classes, I have another advantage over the brilliant speed reader. Besides sharing my students' concern for brevity, I still can't keep a simple story straight. In Much Ado About Nothing, for instance, who the heck is Beatrice's father, and why does Hero marry that clod Claudio? Or in Tom Sawyer, are we really supposed to think Tom's transformation from trickster-hero to capitalist a happy ending? What would Bugs Bunny be with money in the bank? Money Bunny?

Slower readers make better teachers because if a book appeals to them, it will to their classes. At my school, and I suspect at more schools than will admit it, students are largely innocent of literature. They live in a prelapsarian, bookless world, before the knowledge of evil, or of anything much. When we slowly read aloud V.S. Naipaul's Miguel Street, or Twain's Tom Sawyer, it is often a revelation to them. Reading is such a simple pleasure and one of the cheapest. Book prices often vary inversely with the literary value of the book. Most Shakespeare plays can be picked up for a nickel to a quarter at church bazaars and garage sales. The most expensive books are newly published science

texts and even social-science texts. For a slow reader like me, these are largely unreadable. And out of date within three years.

I suspect that the majority of reading done by prospective teachers in all disciplines, and not just in the sciences where we might expect a recent focus, concentrates exclusively on twentieth-century authors. Because of internal pressures in the learned professions, the scholarly equivalent of fads, graduate students can spend all of their time reading the latest books by their own teachers and their teachers' friends.

Gibbon's friends are mostly dead, so the pressure to read Gibbon is reduced. His resounding prose, modeled on Tacitus and Montesquieu, if read at all now, merely examples ideological bias. He is read historiographically, with eyebrow raised, to catch him napping.

Gibbon is not the only one who can be caught napping. We teachers can expect to become more and more the subject of testing and assessment. Frankly, I am worried. What if they test my reading speed and find it is the same as that of my students? What if they find out I refuse to read books I can't enjoy? What if they see me with a copy of Mark Twain rather than Derrida or Lacan? Twain used to be considered ninth-grade reading, but I believe that was typical British condescension in regard to American authors. Or maybe because it's a pleasure to read. Anything pleasurable can't be very advanced.

In that case, the prose of specialists is very advanced. Everything about American learning is advanced, but what I look for is not advanced readings, but readings in retreat.

Slower readers make better teachers. We read at the same rate as our students, so we can pick texts they can stand. Of course, we have different aims. I read so slowly that I ignore plot; if I didn't, I'd go crazy with anticipation. I suspect many of my students do.

I read so slowly that if my class and I begin a book at the same time, I have to shut them up about how it ends. This year we did Tom Sawyer, and

they were racing through after the first dozen chapters. I hate books like that. Three students did not attend classes for the last month. With these three, I wasn't sure who was who because they always cut as a threesome, the Musketeers. Yet Tom Sawyer they read completely. In fact, they had great insight into Tom's skipping school and his faking Bible learning.

Announcements

MCTE SPRING CONFERENCE IN ST. PAUL APRIL 21-23

The MCTE Spring Conference takes place April 21-23 in the St. Paul Hotel in downtown St. Paul. Featured events include a performance of Zora Neal Hurston: A Theatrical Biography on the opening evening followed by a panel presentation of Minnesota Writers the following afternoon and a Friday evening "salon and dinner" evoking the atmosphere of the Harlem Renaissance. "Listen in on a conversation between Langston Hughes and Zora Neale Hurston, reconstructed from their writing," urges Elizabeth Nist, MCTE President Elect. "The conversation continues as the artists join us for dinner in the hotel's elegant ballroom. The evening's activities include the 'stride piano' entertainment of the 1920's musician James P. Johnson, in addition to dramatic historical interpretation and audience interaction."

Costumes from the 1920s are optional.

Panel presentations on issues of teaching literature, writing, and language arts will take place throughout the conference.

For registration materials write to MCTE Registration Chair Catherine McIntire, 625 Turnpike Road, Golden Valley MN 55416.

REVIEWERS WANTED

The summer issue of the Minnesota English Journal needs reviewers for

- American Street: A Multicultural Anthology of Stories (ed. Anne Mazer), a promising collection suitable for 10 to 14 year-olds and their teachers

- Evaluating Teachers of Writing (ed. Christine A. Hult), a comprehensive selection of essays addressing the theory and practice of teaching evaluations, suitable for college and community college instructors.

If you are willing to write a 500-word review of either book, notify the editor by March 30. You'll receive a copy of the book and the thanks of your readers. Write or call Gayle Gaskill, Mail #4139, College of St. Catherine, 2004 Randolph, St. Paul MN 55105. Tel. (612) 690-6857.

Notes on Contributors

Neda Miranda Blazevic is the author of The Zebra Crosses Hand Street, The Garden of Good Hope, Infinitude, Janus, Postcard, Chagall's Birthday, American Prelude, Dancing on Ashes, The King, Take Off, and Come On, Alice. She is a Croatian poet, fiction writer, playwright, translator and artist. She has published 11 books and has shown her visual art in galleries abroad and in the United States. In 1980 she won the Yugoslav National Award for Best Book of Short Stories. She teaches at the University of Minnesota and the College of St. Catherine. Her article is derived from a speech she presented at the Associated Colleges English Majors Conference at Hamline University in April, 1993.

Donna Gorrell is professor of English at St. Cloud State University where, in addition to teaching rhetoric and a wide range of writing courses, she occasionally teaches a course in evaluating student writing. For six years as composition director she supervised the English teaching assistants at St. Cloud State.

Judith E. Landrum has taught both at the high school and university levels and is currently a teaching assistant at the University of Minnesota while completing her doctorate in Literacy Education.

Joan O'Connell holds an undergraduate degree in art history from Carleton College and a Master's degree in counseling from the University of New Hampshire. She has fifteen years of experience in college career counseling with a special interest in helping women determine their future directions. Her article is derived from an opening workshop presentation to her colleagues in September, 1993.

Alan Powers studied at Amherst College and the University of Minnesota. A professor at Bristol Community College in Massachusetts, he has published his opinions in the NYT Magazine and NYT Education Week and his scholarship in Acting Funny in Shakespeare (Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1994).

Suzanne Ross, Ph.D. and *Chris Gordon*, Ph.D. teach composition, as well a literature classes, in the English Department at St. Cloud State University.

Anne Slauson is a doctoral candidate and graduate assistant in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Tennessee. She is interested in teaching teachers how to use creative methods particularly with at-risk and disadvantaged students.