

in-service programs in which there is a genuine sharing between public school teachers and post-secondary school faculty?

If the language arts are to be rescued from the moribund condition in which they are said to be, if we are to claim that the report of their death has been greatly exaggerated, then we must join together.

Jean Stafford concluded her elegy over the English language by remarking that if H.W. Fowler, whose Modern English Usage is the most dazzling record of a temper tantrum ever written, were alive today, he would die.

Very well, then, let us acknowledge that the times are indeed out of joint. And then let us agree that it will be exhilarating to be amongst those who can try to set them right. I think none of us can be under any illusion about the difficulty that lies in wait for the high school teacher who receives students from the elementary school who have not got in the habit of careful expression, who have no zest for the creative use of language, who have not developed the attention span to sit through anything moving at a slower pace than Starsky and Hutch. To receive such students in classes of thirty or more is bound to cause a loss of teacherly joy. For college faculty to receive students whose impoverished vocabulary makes them painfully inarticulate, and whose syntactical insecurities render their inarticulacies obscure, is for those faculties to

round upon their colleagues in the secondary schools and accuse them of abdicating their responsibility to teach English in favor of teaching collage-making. Recriminations are bad for the spirit.

I turn now for my concluding epigraph from the world of ornithology to the world of botany. "Out of this nettle, recrimination, let us pluck this flower, cooperation." The happiest outcome of this Conference will be pledges made by us all, from college to elementary school, to join together to go forward to the Basics of our own educated choice.

#### DREAMS OF DUCKS

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I  
This dream recurs, ducks caught  
by an instant freeze  
webbed feet firm in the ice  
bodies twisted side to side  
heads jerking. The marsh grasses  
rice, cattails; cracks and echoes  
of shotguns far away  
hunters invisible in blinds  
drunks before sunrise, voices  
staggering across the still silver  
of Lake Mille Lacs. The dream  
tries to divert me  
from ducks twisting  
side to side, father and me  
stiff in our boats, decoys  
bobbing and nodding, alive  
in the quiet surface of Mille Lacs  
splinters of daylight  
coming through the blind  
our feet firm in the ice

2

I awake to water so clear  
 stones, twigs, grains of sand  
 the grasses and the water ferns  
 are focused by early light.  
 Smells at the ends  
 of deep breaths, snow  
 coming out way, and soon  
 melted, bubbling parafin  
 for dipping the birds.

Father posed me in front  
 birds on a stringer, him behind  
 holding the gun, smiling down  
 hand on my shoulder:  
 Step back so you get the birds  
 and Mother did, moving the Brownie  
 up and down; side to side  
 finding the heap of blue-wing teal  
 the canvasback shot by mistake  
 the mallards: a weight of ducks  
 hung on the stringer  
 bead-eyed birds, side to side  
 hanging from my belt.

3

We fly patterns like birdshot  
 spatters of us  
 v's and vague arrow heads  
 through the silver sky  
 patterns skewed to the sun  
 to the warmth in the East  
 handfuls of us  
 loose in the grey-silver dawn  
 beating our wings toward sloughs  
 lush with grass and seed  
 early birds flying south  
 running at life  
 to grass and to seed

the surprise weight  
 brushing through feathers  
 biting through skin  
 letting my warmth  
 leak into dawn  
 the weight eating  
 into my heart  
 breaking my beat

me caving in  
 legs pulled tight, wings  
 stretching out for air to hold  
 me folding, my whole self  
 tight for falling  
 for arcing down  
 away from friends  
 me pulled by the force  
 deeper than flight  
 my memory braces  
 to hit the water  
 ready now  
 the weight in my heart

## SUCCESS

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The re- re-  
 Vision thuds  
 Grandly on the desk,  
 Gleaming in its  
 Black and whiteness

He grins, pivots,  
 Struts six steps,  
 Pivots again and  
 Croaks gloriously,  
 I did it!

Determined to enroll their children in a new "back-to-basics" educational program recently adopted by their school district, several hundred parents spent a cold January night in sleeping bags outside the Diablo Vista Elementary School in Pleasant Hills, California. By the time registration was completed the next morning, 1056 students had signed up for 400 seats in what is to be called "Academics Plus," a program that will stress the "three R's" and include stricter discipline, frequent grading, more parental involvement, and a dress code. Council-Grants, May, 1977, p. 12