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Going with Growth: Fitting Schools to the Facts of Language Life

Background

This talk sketches some connections among cognitive growth, holistic learning, and vocal interaction. It has never been easy for me to explain how peer talk can further the most serious kinds of mental and verbal development. Few people believe it, even some who profess to, because very rarely, if ever, has a wave of students had a chance to benefit from even a whole year, much less several years' running, of good, sustained small-group vocal interaction in school. Most teachers who try it are quickly put off by such initial problems as kids fooling around and are discouraged from developing it by district insistence on teaching to tests on other things (usually language particles). So the evidence to convince is scarce. Without evidence, no conviction; without conviction, no evidence. This vicious circle makes it necessary, I feel, to combine any discussion of actual growth processes and suitable methods with remarks that bring out into the open this conflict between the political facts of life and the learning facts of life.

I doubt that I succeeded any more on this occasion than on others, but I was provided an excellent setting by another high-quality gathering, the Third Annual Conference on Language Arts Education, sponsored by the Department of Elementary and Remedial Education of the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1977. The topic helped—*Facilitating Language Development, Preschool through Adolescence*—and the emphasis that many of the following speakers gave to the *learner's* production of language, oral and written, supported well what I had to say. In 1978, the University published a report of the conference (bearing the title above and edited by Patrick Finn and Walter Petty) that produced the talks, including a transcription of mine with some following questions and answers. I was speaking from a brief outline.

A word about what is not in this talk but perhaps should be, at least in the future. In it I refer tangentially to Rudolph Steiner while mentioning developmentalists Piaget, Werner, and Erickson. Though the founder of a still-thriving international chain of Waldorf Schools, Steiner is virtually unknown among U.S. educators, most of whom would probably be

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astonished to read some of his statements on human growth. (See Steiner's *The Kingdom of Childhood,* Rudolph Steiner Press, London, 1974, and *The Recovery of Man in Childhood,* A.C. Harwood, Hodder and Stoughton, London and Toronto, 1958.) Though not necessarily an advocate of what Waldorf Schools do, I feel almost guilty to speak, as I did here, as if I think human growth comprises only what these excellent material scientists describe. My English comperes often say that I base my work on Piaget, whereas I have always worked much more intuitively than that. As with notions of inner speech, which came to me before reading Piaget or Vygotsky or Mead, I cite these figures to gain credibility with a society that believes only authorities in white lab jackets. Piaget was the most useful for getting a curriculum across because his concepts of egocentricity, logical development, and inner speech all certified, and extended, perceptions I was operating on but needed sanctioning of.

Steiner's ideas do not so much conflict with the developmental models of Piaget, Werner, Bruner, and Erickson as they subsume them. It is, in fact, fascinating to see how, although he died in 1925, he had already described mental growth very much as they did later (and also very much as Whitehead did in *The Aims of Education*):

> . . . the child up to its ninth or tenth year is really demanding that the whole world of external nature shall be made alive, because he does not yet see himself as separate from this external nature; therefore we shall tell the child fairy tales, myths, and legends.
>
> . . .
>
> It is only toward the twelfth year that the child is ready to hear causes and effects spoken of.
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> —pp. 63 and 65, *The Kingdom of Childhood*

Fine, that won't jar anyone today, but look further into *The Kingdom of Childhood* for a perspective far broader than that of contemporary psychology. In addition to having a strong scientific and mathematical bent and demonstrating a very accomplished intellectual scholarship (he was entrusted as a young man with the editing of Goethe's scientific writings), he was also spiritually gifted and employed these gifts in his researches. This extraordinary combination of faculties places his work, in my mind, above that of Piaget, Bruner, and Werner, who are indeed perceptive themselves but whose professional framework and affiliations would prevent them from saying what Steiner said even if they were seeing as he did (a problem of staying respectable that I think Jung and even Freud had, Freud having said in a letter that if he had it all to do over, he would go into parapsychology, and Jung having openly gone into it as well as having described an "out-of-body" experience in his autobiography).

I believe we'll soon have to expand our ideas of human growth beyond the ordinarily visible world until they embrace the full evolution of consciousness that we're really involved in. But so far I haven't felt free in such talks to do more than hint at spiritual growth, because many people turn off at what seems to them spooky or religious, especially when earning their daily bread means getting kids to score well on tests of meaningless fragments. I have tried to keep credibility so that an already difficult job of convincing will not become hopeless, while at the same time testing the upper edges of the audience to keep my own sense of integrity.

The title of my presentation, "Going with Growth: Fitting Schools to the Facts of Language Life," does imply a discrepancy. That is, learning goes one way—the real authentic organic facts of learning—and institutionalism has a way of going its own way; so it's a perennial problem to get the two matched up and to *keep* the two matched up. I think we are in an era where they are particularly divergent, for a number of reasons.

We don't have a lot of time and I want to leave some time for questioning because this is a very mixed audience with different backgrounds and different concerns—I guess you go from nursery to college—so what I will say will be very sketchy and very suggestive and not very detailed or documented. I'll leave some of that to questioning.

Let me try to describe the growth of thought and speech in a general way as I see it. I think what can depict growth of thought and speech rather effectively is the series of pictures or photos that depict stages of growth of the embryo (or the human fetus). They used to draw these; now they have actual photographs of the embryo in different stages at several weeks, several months, and so on, *in utero.* What you see in these depictions is a whole. This whole begins with a very simple single cell that begins to divide and to differentiate into parts within itself. So if you look at depictions of the embryo at different stages you will see this whole becomes complicated within and yet—and this is my main point—it never ceases being a whole no matter what stage of development it is at. You will see the development of a cardiovascular system and a network of veins, of nerves, of various organs forming, and the limbs, but at no point is any of this separated. It is always a whole. In other words, it does not follow the industrial model of the assembly line, where the carburetor is sent in from Toledo to Detroit, and this sub-assembly is attached to other assemblies, and finally something plops off the end of the assembly line. This kind of model has been brought into education, rather

inappropriately, and I think it misleads us in many ways. The growth of thought and speech does not proceed by the assembling of sub-assemblies. The teaching of tiny parts in the hopes that some day these will all get put together in the mind of a learner doesn't work. What happens is students go out of school and somehow the parts—isolated phonemes, isolated words, isolated sentences and isolated paragraphs—never get put together.

The main movement of growth is differentiation within an integrated whole. The whole is always there. Humpty Dumpty was an egg, you know, and he fell down and broke himself up, which is a kind of metaphor for the differentiating process that goes on in growth. The reason all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put him back together is that they couldn't put him back together as an *egg*. He is going to be something else after that, something more complex. You don't go back to being simple. There is a double process then of differentiation within a constant reintegrating. You have to keep both of those to maintain balance, and if we go too far one way or the other, growth is going to go very badly. These processes correspond to analysis and synthesis. To break the wholes down into parts corresponds to what was just described in the biological levels—differentiating the organs and the limbs, etc. within the embryo. Putting parts back into a whole corresponds to the biological integrating. As we become more complex within, the pulmonary, cardiac, intestinal systems, and so on have to be integrated. This corresponds to synthesis in the mental life.

You are probably familiar now with the research of the two hemispheres of the brain, which was actually done in the '60s but is only now being disseminated to the public and to education. The right and left hemispheres of the brain, it is now known, specialize, at least after a certain age. One half specializes in what we can call the intellectual, the verbal, the linear, the seriating part, the analytical; and the other in the intuitive, the holistic, the global, the synthesizing, the metaphoric. So this kind of double growth that characterizes the whole of human growth also characterizes the mental life very specifically, very concretely, with the two hemispheres of the brain.

Some critics of our education today in this culture say that we are emphasizing far too much one half, that we have a verbal/analytic or left-hemisphere education, a left-hemisphere culture, and this is one reason we are spinning very drastically out of balance. This is a point certainly, I think, to keep in mind. Reading is usually associated with the left half, but I think that is not the whole story. I think reading cannot get along very well, nor can any language growth, without the collaboration of the two hemispheres, of the metaphoric, holistic, spatially oriented right hemisphere, which incidentally is associated with the arts, sports, crafts.

So this dual aspect of growth is very graphically presented, if you want to think of it that way, dramatized by the physical separation of the brain into two specializing halves.

I think you can characterize the growth of thought and speech partly as a movement toward elaboration—that is, away from lumping things together globally, and toward separating things out, distinguishing, discriminating, differentiating, refining. This is a very, very general movement of growth which has been described not only by Piaget and Inhelder but very well by Heinz Werner and others. You can see it for yourself. For example, a small child will say in one word what really is a whole sentence, but he is not able yet to parcel out his thought, for one thing, to break it down into pieces and to assign to those pieces parts of speech. So this parceling-out process is precisely the direction in which he is going to grow. A very small child might say one word. He might say "coat." What he means is a sentence, but it is globally lumped together into one word. What he really means is, "I see my coat over there," or "I want my coat," or "What has happened to my coat?" But he says the one word "coat," and that *stands* for the whole sentence. So the direction of growth will be toward breaking his own thought down to fit the way in which his material and social world breaks things down.

Being incarnated on this material plane means we have to learn the laws by which the material plane is being run. Things are broken down; you have to know the difference between one thing and another, or one person and another, or else you get into trouble. You have to learn what the differences are, and in a sense this direction of growth is divisive and perhaps in some ways negative. It's a growth toward the natural, material breakdown of the physical and social world. In the beginning the child does not distinguish himself from the things around him but finally he must. In this first separation of self from world, his first breakdown, first analysis, is the model for all the breakdown analysis that is to follow. He learns that the ongoing panorama around him breaks down into pieces, and he has to know one piece from another and the names of the pieces, and so on.

Elaboration literally means, "working out," so one direction of growth is from the inside out. Since everything is already inside, latently—like genetic coding—it's just a matter of how it's going to be worked out, well or badly, and this depends on the other half of growth, the interaction of the organism and the environment.

Elaboration in language terms works out in vocabulary, in sentence structure, in composition and comprehension in very, very specific, concrete ways that teachers deal with all the time. The growth of vocabulary again is from the global to the finely differentiated. A child will at first use the word "boat" for every water-plying vessel, whether it goes on

oceans or rivers, whether it is sail- or motor-powered, whether it is passenger or freight. You see what I mean. And these break down more and more finely, as sailors all know, into catamarans and schooners and all sorts of things that I don't know much about. It is a very, very fine breakdown, and the vocabulary follows the breakdown of reality, of boats into superordinate and subordinate classes, and subordinate classes ramify in turn on down into a million kinds of sailing vessels. So the process of growth is getting into these systems of superordinate/subordinate classes. But in the beginning, *boat* does for all. It's global.

The same thing happens with sentence structure. Sentences at first are called kernel sentences, and this is an evolution itself out of the single-word sentence I mentioned a moment ago with the example of "coat." Finally we get into phrases and then into whole sentences and, of course, the sentences again elaborate. But for teaching purposes what is important is how things get elaborated. I mean what teases or tempts the growing mind to elaborate? Why doesn't it stay global? You *can* stay more or less global. This is what we mean by differences in development; some kids are more advanced, and others seem retarded, verbally, or cognitively. This has to do with how much they have been teased out—this eliciting process from the environment.

Let's put it this way. You can try artificially to stimulate the growth of sentence structure by lots of drills and exercises and by trying to teach kids directly to analyze the sentence and the parts and to ticket all the parts and so on. I think this has nothing to do with really effective growth and may have a retarding effect. What makes people complicate their sentences, essentially, is questioning by other people. Assuming authentic speaking and writing situations where there is a real reason to be communicating, the elaboration of sentence structure into adverbial and adjectival modifiers depends upon the eliciting action of questions (direct or implied) of other people. *Where* did it happen? *When* did it happen?

Now the egocentric, naive speaker just blurts out things and leaves it there, as kids typically do in show-and-tell if this activity is left in the rudimentary state. We go around the class one kid after another, and each kid shows something, he blurts out something, and then stops, and that's the end of it. What needs to happen is to put show-and-tell into small groups, often without the teacher, in very small groups, three or four, and let the kids question each other about the object. This makes a tremendous difference. They can get in the habit of questioning if you model for them. The teacher models a questioning stance so that the speaker finds out that it's not obvious to the listener where this happened, or when, or how he got something—the object he has—or what you do with it, or how it was made. A million possible questions inhere in any kind of initial statement like that. But the global, subjective-minded learner has to find this out. This implies a very active social process that has not

yet got going in school nearly as much as it should because, I think, it's harder to manage, or seems harder to manage, the way most of us have been trained as educators.

A movement of growth that goes along with elaboration from within and the eliciting from without is what I call going from *co-operations* to *operations.* The use of the term "operation" obviously suggests Piaget. It can be very well exemplified in, let's say, the transition between kids hanging weights on a physical pair of balance scales and their later working with equations. The whole notion of balancing from a physical operation becomes internalized as a mental operation. We speak of balancing equations. That typifies this shift from outside operations to internal ones.

But what I want to talk about is the social operations, which I'll call co-operation as it becomes internalized. It has to do with proper ways of talking together so that a process of expatiation gets going. This can occur at any age. I'm using a fancy term here, but it can happen from preschool on. This is where people listen to each other and pick up on what each other has said and take it a little bit farther, and it includes the questioning that I was mentioning a moment ago that stimulates elaboration. But it has to do with creating ideas together, with exchanging vocabulary, with building on each other's sentence structures as well as on each other's ideas, on each other's comparisons and metaphors, wit, and so on. It's social, collaborative development. If this occurs in small groups, all the time, consistently, this will become internalized and become a part of the inner mental operations of the individuals in the groups.

Now, this can go well or badly. For example, if what happens when people converse is that they all sit around and heap abuse on some outsiders, this will be internalized, and people will think that way. And when everybody simply gives instances of the same thing, for example, how awful Kate is—"Oh yeah, I remember the time she did this" and "Yeah, well, the time I was with her she did that"—it's a very simple additive process that doesn't do very much for mental development. That's what I call the and-and-and model.

There's another kind of model—the but-but-but model, which is just constant contradiction, no matter what is said or what the subject is. The topic may change, but the altercation goes on. It's for its own sake, has its own dynamic. This is often, I'm afraid, encouraged by formal debate. I used to coach debate some in prep school, but I'm not an advocate of it really. I think it's better to have more spontaneous give-and-take and not have people invested in positions they *have* to defend and maintain. That gets ego involvement going and interferes with more useful intellectual work.

You can imagine other kinds of *co*-operation—that is, verbal collaboration—that can be internalized for good or evil, but the kind I'm suggesting is the expatiation type, whereby people listen to each other, pick

up on what each other has to say, and together elaborate and discover what the implications are of each other's ideas. Humor and wit come into this; people pick up on each other's remarks, their humor, and carry it a little bit further, or their metaphors, and so on, and find where things go. If this is done in groups, at all ages, it does become internalized, and individuals all alone begin to think in these very salutary, positive ways.

This is a very sketchy kind of description of growth which I think can be applied to vocabulary, to sentence structure and to compositional forms, to reading comprehension problems, and so on. It has very much to do with what, again, Piaget has called decentering and egocentricity. This in turn relates to the global thinking. That is, I think most of our problems in composing our own ideas, whether we're talking or writing, concern our difficulty in separating ourselves from our audience and from our subject, so that we assume too much; and most of our problems in comprehending what others say and write concern trouble in tuning in on an individual who is separate from ourselves.

Many, many kids, I think, have reading comprehension problems because they can't really tune in on the author, for a lot of reasons. And it takes a lot of maturity to do this, and it takes role playing. You have to put yourself in the shoes of the author. That's the best way to read. People at Stanford who were doing research in hypnosis and who weren't really particularly interested in reading have accidentally come across a correlation between reading proficiency, great interest in reading—let's say, avid reading—and susceptibility to hypnosis. Some people really are willing to go along with somebody else's line of thought, and so on. This willingness correlates very highly with reading and liking to read.

I think that tuning in or role playing is really important. From the standpoint of writing you certainly have to role-play the listener or the audience; you have to sort of guess what they are going to need. Most of the things that school teachers remark about kids' writing have to do with problems of egocentricity. I think it would be much more helpful if we could think of it this way. The problem is knowing what the reader needs or how the reader is going to respond to this or that, as to word choice, the way sentences are arranged, the things you choose to mention, the things you leave out. It's very, very hard to know what to include and what to leave out in talking or writing. You can't say everything, you want to say enough and not too much. All of this requires very close attunement with the audience and being able to role-play him, and it's a movement away from egocentricity.

Well, what breaks egocentricity? Again, it doesn't happen alone. It's a social operation. It's constant comparison, I think. Kids reading together, talking about what they read, trying to act their stories out and discovering in the process of acting them out that they didn't interpret the characters or the plot or the action in the same way. They need to find

all this out; they need to compare their *in*comprehension, *talk* about their incomprehension, openly, not try to *hide* it, and *work out* problems of comprehension—to raise consciousness. You can summarize, I think, so much growth of thought and speech as consciousness raising, whether it's Piaget's decentering—that is, losing your egocentricity—or whether it's moving away from the merely global to the finely discriminated whole.

Now the final part of the growth movement is spiraling around. One comes back over points but at different levels of consciousness so that if kids learn only to break down and analyze, to separate, to divide, this is going to be a negative movement. They have at the same time to learn how to put everything back together again. Our schools, following the general drift of the culture, are somewhat trapped into the one-sidedness that goes with the overemphasis on the left hemisphere of the brain, of being overly analytic, dealing too much with the pieces. Everybody is lost among the splinters of language. It's the drills and rules approach. This has gone on for some time—this isn't new. But I think recent trends in the culture have unfortunately reinforced the worst of the past, and sometimes it wears the guise of being new.

For example, the back-to-basics movement is a double misnomer. For one thing it isn't back to anywhere; we've never been anywhere else in this country. During my childhood or during my adulthood we have followed mainly a drills and rules approach. There was an effort to get away from this in the '60s that *Newsweek* magazine and other various organs have blamed our current ills on. The other part of the misnomer is that it's not back to *basics*, it's back to some people's notion of how you teach literacy. Some people say, "I'm for basic skills," which implies that other people are not. Now I don't know anybody—parent or teacher—who is against reading and writing, do you? So it's kind of a hoax to speak of some people as being for back-to-basics and others as being against reading and writing. This unnecessarily splits us up and creates tremendous problems, and it creates an artificial skills/frills division that we certainly don't need.

The best way to teach the skills, I think, is through other things that are not verbal, that have to do with the right hemisphere functions—crafts, sports, arts. There are many connections with language that should be used. I think that there is no great mystery about how kids learn to read and write. I know we have conferences and we feel that we need them to find out more about how children learn. I think we know a lot more now than we're acting on. I consult all over the country with schools and teachers in very different situations and regions, and I get the same thing constantly, which is that they know a lot more than they're acting on. And they are doing a lot of things they do not believe in. I don't think the problem is that we lack knowledge about child development. I don't think the problem is that we lack sophisticated notions

about curriculum and methods and materials. We have more than we are using. The difficulty in fitting schools to the facts of language life has to do partly with the tendency of any large institution (not just schools) to get lost in its own institutionalism. And in our case, in this culture right now, this has got caught up in some political, economic movements that have been very negative, I think, and I hope we are going to work our way out of them.

Standardized testing is really dictating the curriculum with tremendous tyranny. These national standardized tests don't even test very well the things they are supposed to test—for example, reading and writing. Writing is construed as a lot of skills like formal grammatical analysis, or making dry runs on dummy sentences or correcting dummy paragraphs. No one has ever proved these add up to writing. Do you realize that there isn't any standardized test of writing where people really write, and, therefore, there is a very little instruction in schools in real writing? There are a lot of things alleged to teach writing. They are called composition, but they are various word and sentence and paragraph drills—what I call working with the pieces. I think we are going to have to acknowledge that this is so before we start talking about why writing has gone down, or why literacy has gone down.

The curriculum that is dictated by these very narrow standardized tests comes to us through commercial corporations which, frankly, cannot be trusted. They operate, as most large commercial corporations do, on very selfish principles that make it really impossible to get a worthwhile curriculum into schools through commercial processes. Educational manufacturers, I would say, cannot offer to schools the kind of materials that the curriculum in schools really needs at this point. I think they find it too hard to produce and too hard to sell. Schools, I think, have to take cognizance of this. Teachers have to teach what they know how to teach and not what comes through to them from commercial corporations.

A good model for school learning is home learning of speech; this is very organic, very spontaneous, very interactive, and it works really well. And learning to talk is much harder than learning to read and write. Cognitively speaking, in pure learning terms, it is much easier to learn to read and write than to learn to talk. It doesn't look that way, because there seem to be so many problems with learning to read and write. These problems arise from learning to read and write *in school,* in large groups and mass institutions. I think if we look at it that way we'll make a lot more progress. The problems are not learning problems essentially. They are institutional problems that are being governed by such things as the specific objectives and the accountability movement, which is tied in with standardized testing, which is tied in with commercial programmed materials. We must do our own consciousness raising about the whole educational–industrial complex that is really determining the materials,

methods, and curriculum way outside the classroom. I think that the difficulty is that the people who know most about how kids learn, the ones in the classroom, today have not nearly enough to say about what they can do in the classrooms. One of the aspects of accountability that isn't brought out enough is that you can't tell people how to do their job and then hold them accountable for the results.

If you applaud that, be sure you applaud too some active lobbying by teachers to assert this. Too often teachers go limp and passive. The forces are big. The teachers have to make known what they think the facts of language learning are and try to get their own environment to fit that and not let everything be determined by state legislators, by school boards, who are too far from the classroom to really know how children learn, or by various national movements or commercial corporations. You have to take things back in your own hands a little more or else there won't be much worth in coming to conferences to learn more about how children learn or what the latest methods are. You have to be able to do something about it, and I think this means putting emphasis back on wholes, on the fact that the parts are taught *through* the wholes. *Via* the wholes. By means of the wholes. Not the other way around. You can't teach the wholes by trying to add up all the little parts. So we needn't get into any conflict about who's for basics and who isn't. I think we're all for the literacy skills, along with everything else. It's just a question of whether the small things are going to be taught in the thrust of whole growth or whether they're going to be isolated out very ineffectually into the old drills and rules approach.

Let me stop at this point and leave a few minutes for questions. What would you like for me to elaborate a little bit more on in the few minutes that we have? This is very sketchy, I realize. As I say, more suggestive than documented.

QUESTION: Is development within the whole a hierarchical or sequential process?

ANSWER: Only in a very long-range sense. I think this is sometimes a frustration to educators and curriculum developers, who would like a sequence, let's say, for a year, that holds true for all kids. I don't think you are going to find it, and it's a frustration because we plan by the year. But the kind of growth patterns, or movements, that Piaget, Werner, Eric Erickson, and a lot of other people have been working on are very long-range and these stages are more like blocks of *several* years. Rudolph Steiner says every seven years there is a major turnover in development. Unfortunately, it doesn't fit the school year, and I don't think we can try to wrench it to fit. We have to accept the fact that the growth patterns are very long-range, and it's an argument for much greater collaboration among teachers over spans of several years. This is one of the main things

I find missing when I consult with schools. There is very little connection between one year and the next. Not a rigid lock step between grades 7, 8, 9, 10, and so on but some way of keeping track of individual students over a span of several years so the kids come to you, you know what they have been working on, what emphasis they need now, and you can continue to individualize even though somebody else has been working with the kids for the last few years. We need something like that very much. A kind of bookkeeping system spanning several years so we can keep track of individual kids and not feel that the only way to get growth sequence is to make all kids do the same this year and then next year. Also, the accountability movement has tended to make kids do the same things year after year. And the whole movement toward minimal criteria reinforces a very negative thing, which in this instance is covering—that each teacher has to cover herself or himself for the same minimal learning standards for each child, and what you tend to do is make the kids study the same thing year after year so that each teacher can cover himself, or herself. Let's make sure that doesn't happen.

QUESTION: Would you elaborate on some of the activities which expand the right hemisphere of the brain?

ANSWER: Again, it's an argument for not stripping off the so-called frills in this phony frills/skills split. For example, there is a lot less art and music in grade school than there used to be when I was a kid myself. I think some of the main points of entry into the whole verbal world, into reading and writing, are through other arts and through other media, many of them nonverbal, or through sports or crafts. Not only things to talk and write about but specific ways of getting into writing. For example, from photographs, or from working with physical things and then talking about them. For example, we had kids in the fifth grade making things with toothpicks and paste and so on, and then writing directions for these to other kids and then making how-to-do-it books. They worked out the best way to do it and then put the directions down. Sort of like a recipe book. But the thing is there has to be a reason. Young kids don't particularly like to talk much about the physical operations they are doing; they don't see that much of a need for it. You have to set up a situation where there is a need to verbalize the nonverbal. Well, if you want to relay your directions on to someone else for making what you've made, that's a very well-motivated reason for verbalizing.

QUESTION: Can you say more about reading and hypnosis?

ANSWER: Ernest Hilgard, Department of Psychology at Stanford—I think he is recently retired—has advanced what I said. He and his wife, who is an M.D., worked with hypnosis in a very serious way in the Department of Psychology, and they were working on a scale for measuring how

susceptible various people were to hypnosis, not to any Svengali treatment. They had graduate students and others learning how to talk people into this. So it is independent of the personality of the one giving the instruction. *Experience in Hypnosis* I think is the title of the book—of one book. The matter of reading came up very incidentally—practically accidentally.

I did cover a lot too fast, and when I do that I'm always aware of many, many unexplained things or many overstatements, and so on. So I would welcome a chance to elaborate some.

QUESTION: What's a writing sample?

ANSWER: Well, there was a writing sample, so-called, on college boards—which was removed in the '60s. It's too big a nuisance, you know. It's too hard processing students' writing. So expensive. So they dropped it. Now people are complaining about why kids can't write.

Now, there are many reasons that may account for this fairly drastic falling off in writing skills. But one of the main reasons is that the one thing that really tested writing by having kids write—it may have been under fairly artificial circumstances, but at least they really wrote a whole piece of something—was removed in the '60s. Now, all this influences teachers tremendously because to save their own necks teachers have to teach more or less directly to the tests—particularly in an era of accountability. It puts everybody's job on the line more and more in conformity with test scores. But there is nothing now, no standardized test that I know of, that requires kids to do some honest writing.[1] What is supposed to test writing is correcting a dummy sentence here, tinkering with a dummy paragraph there with multiple-choice answers or vocabulary work, or questions having to do with formal grammatical analysis. None of these will tell you anything about how well a kid can write. A token twenty-minute writing sample is tentatively being restored to the CEEB composition test the Fall of 1978 in recognition, perhaps, of the exam's negative influence.

To some extent there is the same situation with standardized tests in reading. If the scores are negative, you don't know what to make of it. In other words, if kids do well on them—O.K., you can assume they read. But you're really worried about kids who don't do well on them, and about them you don't know anything because there is no oral component to standardize reading tests. And without an oral component you cannot really separate the decoding, word-attack aspect (so-called phonics or whatever) from comprehension. Many kids score very low on reading tests because they simply don't know the vocabulary, or the concepts, and if you *read* the passages to them they would do very badly. But, you

[1]Fortunately, some states and districts are now instituting real samples of writing as part of their standardized testing program.

see, nobody reads them to them. Because again, that's too expensive. Our standardized tests are cheap quickies. That's what they are. And we are paying the price for a cheap quicky; it's ruining the national curriculum, and it has been for years. And it's not *cheap.* It's very expensive.

Setting up shallow, standardized tests that then determine the curriculum, which shrinks to fit them—that's very expensive. You don't save money that way. If you really want to know if a kid can decode, have him read aloud to you—sight unseen—sight-read to you while you follow the text with your eyes and notice the discrepancies, if any, that he makes, the way in which he reads, and so on. If you want to know his *comprehension, you* read to *him.* And then talk with him about what he understood. This is what alternative schools did, for example, in Berkeley, where there are a lot of poor minority students with lots of low scores. They just finally dropped standardized tests and went to their own way of testing to try to find out what kids really could do and what they couldn't. These schools had to introduce an oral component. Have the kids read to you, you read to them, and without that, as far as I'm concerned, the standardized reading tests are not worth very much at all because they don't tell you what you really want to know—*why* the students do so badly on them. You don't know why.

QUESTION: I would like to raise the question of teaching the parts of speech to facilitate foreign language teaching.

ANSWER: I taught French for three years and at that time there was a big controversy among foreign language teachers. The audio-lingual approach was just coming in, with language laboratories and so on, so that when you say, "I'm teaching formal grammar to help the French and Spanish teachers," you may be taking part in a very heated controversy about whether they should use a grammar-translation approach or a more oral-aural, direct-method approach. My feeling is that if foreign language teachers feel it is important—and I can see an argument there—then let them teach it. Most of them want to do it their own way anyway—in a way they figure that fits the target language better. If you're teaching German you might want to go about it a little bit differently from French or Spanish or Russian.

Actually, my own feeling is that the teaching of formal, grammatical analysis, the ticketing of parts of speech in this country, is really a hangover from the nineteenth century, when English was in a very large measure taught as a second language in American public schools because of the waves of immigrants coming in—wave after wave in the nineteenth century. And it made more sense then; it makes more sense to teach formal, grammatical analysis if you are teaching a second language, because the person is older, they don't learn language the same way even by age ten or twelve that they did when they were three or four or one or two. It

makes more sense maybe to codify and use their generalizing ability to teach them some of the truths about the language. But I think it is a hangover from the days when teaching English as a second language was very widespread in the public schools. Now we have special programs as, for example, in California, which has a large Mexican/American population, and so on. Bilingual programs. So it has no point any more in regular classes.

QUESTION: What about grades?

ANSWER: She is asking about grades. I think you can cook up a grade for a kid regardless of what curriculum you are working under. I taught at a very grade-conscious school for a while; those kids had their slide rules out come marking period and they were figuring up. But even so the English Department there finally decided to quit putting individual letter grades on all kids' themes and just to make a general assessment of the writing for a marking period and to come up with a letter grade for the whole marking period rather than for individual papers. And I found that if I did this, I understood students' writing better anyway. I could spot the traits and the trends by looking over all the writing and making a blanket judgment.