Growth in Kinds of Discourse

Discourse begins in dialogue. Children first learn to speak from conversing. Dialogue is verbal collaboration, which means that utterances are chained by the reciprocal prompting of each speaker by the other. Sender and receiver constantly reverse roles. Feedback and correction are plentiful and fast. Statements are mixed with questions, because speakers can get immediate answers, and mixed with commands, because speakers are localized together in the same space-time and hence more personally related. The *I-you* relation dominates the discourse, in fact, so that the organization is determined by a succession of social exchanges even when the dialogue is an earnest intellectual discussion sticking close to a topic. Dialogue may of course vary tremendously in maturity but the less developed a speaker the more she is *limited* to dialogue. *Growth consists of extending one's range of kinds of discourse by learning to monologue at different abstraction levels.*

Monologue arises from dialogue. One speaker solos for a while within the context of a conversation to tell an anecdote, describe something she saw, explain a point of view, give a set of directions, or otherwise *sustain some continuity.* Thus are narrative, exposition, and argumentation born. Most kinds of discourse are monologue and, in self-contained form, are written. To compose and to comprehend most discourse, then, the learner must learn to spin out from within herself some monological continuities based on the kinds of logical and rhetorical chaining that we have described. She must forego at times the give-and-take prompting and fast feedback of dialogical succession.

It takes emotional as well as conceptual and verbal maturity to compose alone, even just orally (though once able, a person may verbalize compulsively as a defense!). To shift from collaborating to soloing is only one case of the general law that external activity becomes internalized. As mind digests matter, so personality incorporates sociality. Furthermore, composing monologues requires a certain inner attention to the ordering of thoughts and an understanding of the receiver's need for some elaboration. Comprehending monologues requires an ability to focus steadily on one thing and to hold in the mind a stream of accumulating statements until they can be assimilated.

Growth Sequence 21: From mixing various kinds of discourse within dialogue to singling out and sustaining each kind of discourse separately in monologue.

At first, children talk indiscriminately to themselves and to their toys and to their partners at play. Even if you teach senior high students, it is important to understand this play prattle, because it is a base line from which all later growth can be better perceived. The first monologuing is very egocentric in that it does not allow much at all for an audience other than the speaker. (Adults accuse each other of talking only to themselves when they feel discourse is not "objective" enough.) Also, the subject is something present in front of the child—something she is watching or playing with. Actually, the subject is the child's feelings about what is present. Invoking our communication triad (page 58), prattle represents speaker, listener, and subject at a point where egocentricity makes them barely separate. A lot of prattle does not, in fact, even attempt to communicate but represents sheer vocal exercise and sound games, word play.

Gradually this egocentric monologuing begins to divide into external speech aimed at other people and internal speech for oneself that goes underground and becomes merely thought as the child begins to discriminate between herself and others. Verbal thinking then goes inward and merges with nonverbal thinking. Once more socially aware, there is seldom point to "thinking out loud."

In the same way that she begins to discriminate between talking to herself and talking to others, the child begins to discriminate between talking about herself and talking about other things. From prattle focused entirely on her involvement with things facing her here and now, she turns to subjects out of sight but not out of mind and thence gradually extends for the rest of her life the space-time compass of what she discourses about. She talks about absent people and objects, events she remembers, and things to do later. This movement of growth away from self occurs over both physical and psychological distance and results in increasingly clearer separation of speaker from subject. The three-way fission of verbalization into distinct "persons," schematized in Figure 2, describes in one way the decline of egocentricity and the rise of impartiality, because another way of viewing composition and comprehension problems is as a blurring of one's mind with the world and with other minds. But true growth merely *enables* a person to achieve this analytical clarity; it does not enforce it.

Varieties of monologue

Once launched into monologuing and the differentiation of sender, message, and receiver, the learner then begins to differentiate among the various kinds of discourse so that she can match them to her gradually diversifying thought. Prattle about play objects leads

directly to labels and captions, a kind of discourse in which one says what one sees, or comments on what one sees, and which consists often of single words and sentence fragments like a child's disjointed speech. Word play clearly derives from and extends to more sophisticated levels the creative experimentation with sound and sense, the playful vocal exercising, that characterizes so much of prattle. Invented dialogue and actual dialogue are of course a direct outgrowth of child-family conversation and ultimately cover the greatest range of subject matter. Though word play, labels and captions, and actual and invented dialogue spin off directly from a child's first oral speech, they all exist also in written form, so that growth is partly a matter of carrying these kinds of discourse over into writing and reading.

Invented stories, true stories, directions, information, and ideas are first done orally as fragments of dialogue—an anecdote here, a scrap of fact here—but as whole discourses unto themselves, they are most likely done in writing. True stories take off from the here and now of prattle, other running commentary, and such sense-bound discourse as labels and captions and provide a fitting language form for memory, either that of the author or of someone she is drawing from as a source. Narrative shifts discourse up the abstraction scale, in other words, to accord on the one hand with whatever higher conceptualization memory represents over the senses, and on the other hand with whatever higher verbalization sustained monologue represents over the partnering of dialogue.

In the literal mode

We have said that the learner expands from the present to the past to the future and then to the timeless so that the tense of her predicates is an index to her relative emphasis among sensation, memory, and

Figure 2
Growth of Communication Triad
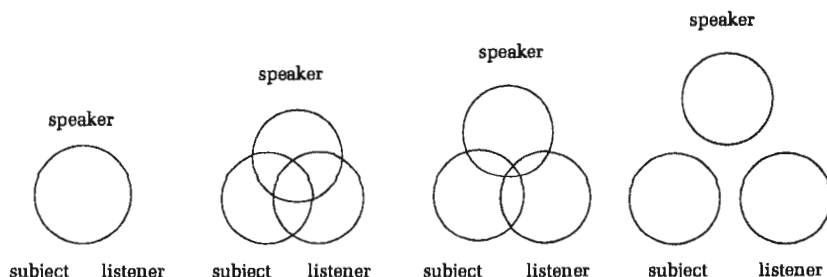
reason. It is one thing to predicate one sentence in a certain tense but quite another to make that tense predominate throughout a whole discourse. The dominant tense of a discourse establishes the abstraction level—if the discourse is in the literal mode. Preschoolers can state a generality in the present tense of generalization, but they will have to grow considerably before they *monologue*—chain a string of statements—in that tense. Actually, the predominance of a higher tense does not mean that it appears quantitatively more than another; the bulk of many an essay of generalization consists of past-tense documentation of only a few generalities, which dominate by forming the superstructure of the discourse, whereas the necessarily longer narrative elements only support.

So entire discourses may be scaled in composing and comprehending difficulty according to the abstraction level of the dominant tense. A blow-by-blow sportscast runs entirely in the present progressive (halftime generalizations are another matter!), and a traditional novel runs off almost entirely in the past tense. A highly theoretical work will consist, on the other hand, entirely of the present tense of generalization led by conditionals. Here is one way of representing lower and higher discourse continuities:

now . . . now	present
then . . . then	past
if . . . then	general

A common mixture, however, interweaves narrative documentation or illustration with timeless generality:

then . . . then . . . if . . . then

Growth Sequence 22: Toward discourse increasingly expanded across time and space as indicated by overall organization and dominance of tense.

Monologues in the literal mode

WHAT IS HAPPENING	Prattle	Recording
	Interior Monologue	
	Blow-by-blow accounts	
	Captions	
	Field and lab notes	
	Letters	(Point of view from
	Journals	within events not
		yet ended)

WHAT HAPPENED	Autobiography Memoir Biography Reportage Chronicle History	Reporting

WHAT HAPPENS	Articles of factual
	   generalization
	Essays of idea
	   generalization
		Generalizing

WHAT COULD OR
MAY HAPPEN
	Essays of argumen-
	   tation theory
	Science, philosophy,
	   and mathematics
		Theorizing

The order from letters and journals through chronicle and history is a whole progression within itself based on a shift from present to past and from author to other(s) as subject (first to third person, singular then plural). This is a growth order in the sense too that higher orders depend on and subsume lower ones. Generalizations about humanity, for example, may be based on history, which is based on source documents like memoirs and archives. Biography digests letters and diaries, and reportage abstracts ongoing notes. Students working at higher levels will have to draw on their own or others' work at lower levels. This absorption of lower by higher discourses corresponds to the hierarchical abstracting that takes place in the nervous system as people make information internally. Surely, being able to do this intuitively with raw material must be some kind of prerequisite for doing it consciously with discourse.

Let's examine now the following ten kinds of discourse, which are to some extent also ways of cognizing.

Word Play*

Labels and Captions

Invented Dialogue*

Actual Dialogue

Letters and Memoranda

⌈ Directions

 Invented Stories*

⌊ True Stories

⌈ Information

⌊ Ideas

Leaving aside for the moment the special nature of figurative discourse (marked by asterisks), we have a crude growth progression in that dialogue comes early, letters and memoranda are dialogue-at-a-distance, and labels and captions are directly bound to sensory objects or images, whereas the last five follow the order of narrative to generalization. Directions, invented stories, and true stories are bracketed together because they follow chronological order, for the most part, and so are roughly on a par, as are information and ideas at their level of *what happens.**

Younger learners will find later discourse areas hard to work in, but even primary children may practice language in all ten areas concurrently, either by speaking some kinds before they can write them, or reading them before they can speak them, or by sending and receiving very short instead of long continuities. So this list indicates developmental sequence only in a very rough way: students may be expected to cover the lower areas sooner than the higher.

It is essential to understand, however, that all students will be working in all areas all the time. Although some higher areas build, in a sense, on some lower ones, it is definitely not necessary to hold off work in higher ones pending "completion" of lower ones. No one kind of discourse ever gets completed because these are lifelong learning categories. Not only is it true that less developed learners should be given credit for what they are able to comprehend and compose orally in an area of discourse, but by practicing orally they are learning the bulk of what they need to know in order to read and write in that area.

If one understands well the way in which naming, phrasing, stating, and chaining are nested within each other so that larger governs smaller, then it should be clear why it is undesirable and unnecessary to rig separate instructional sequences for vocabulary, grammar, paragraphing, and organization. Working within discourses of different abstractive levels ensures that students will come to grips with all the issues of diction, sentence construction, and organization. If students spread their work from easier to harder discourse areas in the directions we have indicated, this will of itself automatically program sequences at all language levels. Shifting, say, from narrative discourse to that of explicit generalization necessarily entails shifts in language and rhetoric and thus tends to bring successively to the fore different language structures and compositional issues.

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* For the theoretical development of this spectrum of discourse, see *Teaching the Universe of Discourse.* For practical application of it, see *Student-Centered Language Arts K--12,* Part III of which is organized by it.

Tense, as indicated, is one thing that changes. But so do other things. Adverbial phrases and clauses of time, place, and manner that abound in recording and reporting give way, in generalization and theory, to phrases and clauses of qualification; temporal connectives, transitions, and organization perforce yield to logical ones. The kinds of paragraph structure one uses tend to shift. Labeling and captioning naturally focus on names, phrases, and single sentences. Things named in fables *must* be figurative. If teachers counsel their students well about which sort of discourse to tackle next, they will also be sequencing work in the substructures of discourse. The detail with which we have treated naming, phrasing, stating, and chaining aims to show how one can detect growth in these substructures, not how to sequence them in isolation. Assessing growth of substructures is one way of helping teachers evaluate and recommend whole discourses.

Growth Sequence 23: Toward a more fully discriminated and articulated repertory of kinds of discourse in which to practice composing and comprehending.

In the figurative mode

Invented dialogue and invented stories cover plays and fiction, of course, in which characters, settings, and actions are themselves figures of speech, standing, as they do, for aspects of experience. Word play covers the juggling of meaning for its own sake, but figurative language occurs obviously in any kind of discourse. It's just that in word play it may be the whole discourse, as in a pun.

Poetry, plays, and fiction are not just what they seem. On the surface, script and transcript, novel and biography look exactly alike, and judging from the language forms only, we would often not be able to tell real from invented. The difference is the other dimension or so of meaning given these works by the kind of ricocheting of reference among items inside and outside the text that we discussed as the figurative use of language. Taken literally, factually, a poem, novel, or play seems to represent no higher skill to read or write than the prattle, true story, or actual dialogue that each respectively simulates. But of course in simulating rather than factually abstracting, an author is in fact abstracting at a much higher level than the form he simulates. *In telling what happened, a novelist is also telling what happens.* The difference between *King Lear* and a transcript of a local hearing, which as written dialogue it resembles, lies in the nature of artful, multileveled composition.

Author's of imaginative literature are not just *abstracting* directly up from the ground in the manner described for abstracting from. To some extent they are composing, over that sort of abstracting, another sort. Their people, places, actions, and objects are already themselves abstractions of others they stand for. Putting these into play creates a much higher abstraction, in fact, than merely reporting or dramatizing what some real people actually did, unless, as with case histories, the real personages and actions have been especially chosen because they will be taken figuratively as tokens of a type. The more meaningful in this way is a case history or biography the more it must be selectively composed like a play or novel. Art is a double editing of reality, once by the holistic mode and once by the linear, and selectivity is the key to making a literary work operate both literally and figuratively at once.

Put it this way. Characters in literature, including children's literature, are concepts. The Wizard of Oz, the Three Billy Goats Gruff with Troll, Alice and the Red Queen and White Knight are concepts. So are Hamlet, Oedipus, and the Man with the Gray Flannel Suit. So too are the settings and the key physical objects of literature—the church tower in *The Master Builder,* the ring in the Tolkien trilogy, West Egg in *The Great Gatsby,* the way stations in *Heart of Darkness,* and the moldering wedding cake in *Great Expectations*. These concepts are not explicitly stated and can be grasped only by means of everything else in the work. The ultimate referents are in us, the readers, but we understand what these items stand for, though meaning is only implied, because they are significantly bound to other equally well selected items, all of which are reciprocally defining. In literature, what relates concepts are story actions; the plot predicates personages and objects into statements, as verbs do literal concepts. Thus we apply the term *conclusion* to both a syllogism and a story and speak of the "logic of the events." The chaining of events in a plot corresponds to the linking of literal statements by logical conjunctions.

People project into invented stories those unobjectified forces of the psychic life that are hard to name or even recognize. At any time of life we have some inner material that we cannot express directly and explicitly; we have to say it indirectly and often unconsciously, through metaphorical fiction. Usually, the older we grow the more we can objectify and talk explicitly about feelings and ideas, but children must for a long time talk and read about these things through a sort of allegory. There are two reasons for this. One is that children are not ready to acknowledge to themselves a lot of their thoughts and feelings because they must defend against them. Another is that their abstractive powers are not developed enough to enable them to

conceptualize, name, and interrelate these intangible things. As regards their deepest inner material, adults are in the same boat, and so we have art. In other words, students progressively push back the frontier of the unknown by converting the implicit into the explicit.

Whereas adults differentiate their thought into specialized kinds of discourse such as narrative, generalization, and theory, children must for a long time make narrative do for all. They utter themselves almost entirely through stories—real or invented—and they apprehend what others say through story. Young learners, that is, don't talk and read explicitly about categories and theories of experience; they talk and read about characters, events, and settings, but these are charged with symbolic meaning because they are tokens standing for unconscious classes and postulations of experience. The good and bad fairies are categories of experience, and the triumph of the good fairy is a reassuring generalization about overcoming danger. In *The Wizard of Oz* the wizard is a humbug, and the bad fairy can be destroyed by water; Dorothy is stronger than she thought, and the adults are weaker than they appear at first. *Alice in Wonderland* makes a similar statement. A tremendous amount of thought—and intricate, at that—underrides these plots. So youngsters understand that *what happened* is *what happens,* but they grow toward a differentiation of kinds of discourse to match the differentiation in abstraction levels of thought.

Growth along the fictional dimension can be described by Northrop Frye's five kinds of heroes (*Anatomy of Criticism*)—the supernatural or divine figure, the mortal but miraculous man, the king or exceptional leader, the average man, and the ironic antihero. This progressive scaling down of the hero not only traces the history of literature, with its shifts in dominant literary modes from epic and myth to legend and romance, to tragedy, to bourgeois novel and play, to a very inner and underground fiction, but it also corresponds to the withdrawal of projection, to movement from the farfetched and there-then to the actual here-now.

Children recapitulate the history of the species to this extent: they first embody their wishes for power in fantasies of omnipotence akin to the myths and epics of divine and supernatural heroes. The figures, actions, and settings they like to read about and create are as remote as possible from themselves and the circumstances of their own lives. Gradually settling for less, though, they shrink their fantasies increasingly toward figures like themselves dwelling in their own time and place, thus passing through legend and romance, tragedy, and realistic fiction. This passage comes about partly because they are gaining real power as they grow and consequently need less and less to fantasize about power, partly because they are

becoming more aware of and explicit about their wishes and fears and thus want to read and write about them for what they are, and partly because they are yielding their unlimited reality to the adults' official version of reality. All this, however, does not mean that in the beginning they cannot already appreciate familiar realism in some conscious areas of experience, or that later they will not still need the farfetched modes for unconscious areas of experience.

Growth in invented stories and invented dialogue runs somewhat the reverse of growth in the literal mode. Whereas the symbolizing of recognizable, objectified experience does proceed up the ladder from the here-now to the there-then, it is in the nature of disguised psychic material that one symbolizes it first in the there-then and only gradually comes to represent it in explicitly personal terms. In other words, as regards their external observations and acknowledged feelings, people move, when speaking and writing, from the firsthand, first-person concrete levels of abstraction toward the secondhand, third-person timeless realms of abstraction. But as regards their unconscious psychic life, they move along a continuum that begins in the farfetched, with things remote from them in time and space, and work backward toward themselves. As children we project ourselves first into animals, fantastic creatures, folk heroes, and legendary figures. Slowly, the bell tolls us back to our sole self. Gradually we withdraw projection as we become willing to recognize the personal meaning symbolized in our myths, and able to objectify inner experience to the point of treating it explicitly.

Growth Sequence 24: From there-then settings and farfetched characters and actions to the here-now of contemporary realism.

Realistic fiction represents a return toward the literal, at least in the domain of figurative narrative. But another kind of figurative discourse may arise as narrative declines—lyric and dramatic poetry, both of which contain some of a culture's highest thought, couched in metaphor. Poetic drama tends toward the lyrical or philosophical not only in soliloquies and external monologues but even in the dialogue, which is freed from the conventions of realism by the convention of poetry itself.

The most valued poetry of a culture reaches the top of the abstraction hierarchy in *thought* but may do so in the most concrete *language*. That is, the figures make, by means of metaphor, "statements" of the most universal truth, but this truth is unparaphrasable because the depth so valued consists precisely in saying more than could ever be said in the literal mode. Great poetry breaks the bounds

of language, says things it ought not to be able to say, breaches the unspeakable, which is the goal of it all.

Growth Sequence 25: Toward poetry of increasing distillation, however concrete the language.
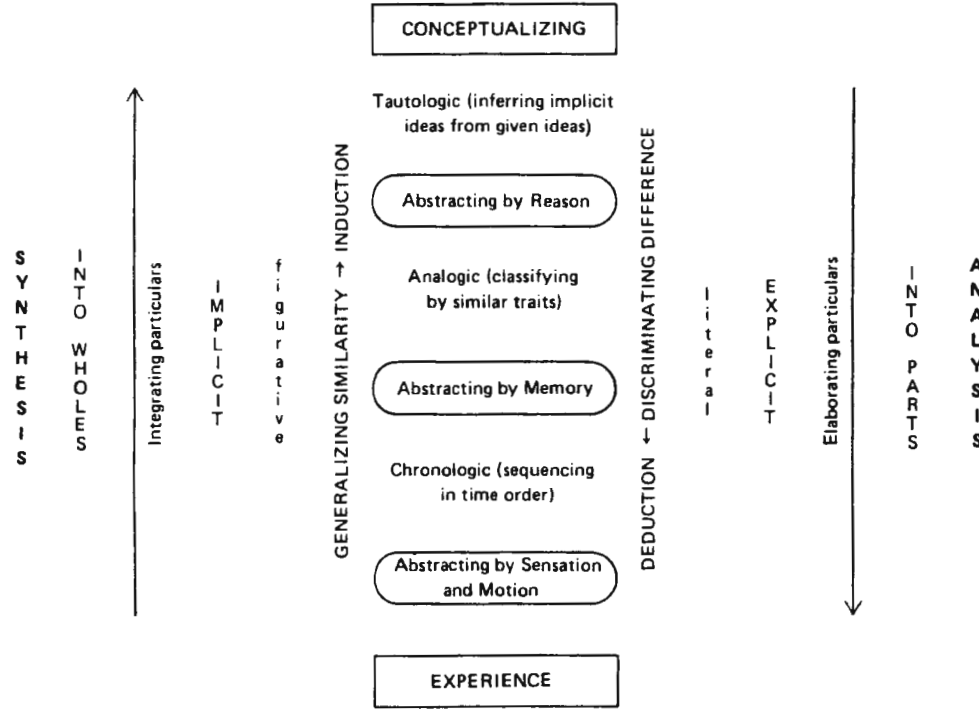
The very highest growth in discourse ultimately carries a person through language entirely and back out into the wordless world, just as the story journey returns one to the here-now. If story lovers keep on growing far enough, they may realize in actuality the marvelous powers they admired in epic and supernatural figures. The final twist is that tales of power can be converted from metaphorical to literal reality. This happens at about the same stage of growth as when poetry lovers so bend language back upon itself that they spring their minds free from lifelong verbal cages and live liberated beyond thought and speech.

From all these ways of growing there results a sort of master growth that is meta-linguistic. That is, one becomes detached from language, conscious of oneself as a language user, and able to verbalize about one's verbalization. This is inseparable from becoming meta-cognitive—able to think about one's thinking. Both are major ways that consciousness itself grows, since consciousness inevitably includes forms of selfconsciousness.

With awareness of oneself as a chooser goes greater choice. "Getting on top of" discourse in this sense relates directly to familiarizing oneself with its various repertories—with the diverse kinds of discourse and the relationships among them; with the riches of vocabulary and the possibilities of sentence constructions; with all those varieties of naming, phrasing, stating, and chaining described earlier; and with the infinite creativity of how one may organize language within any particular form of discourse. Becoming familiar with *repertories* is becoming aware of *alternatives* in composing and comprehending. Alternatives are choices about how to create and interpret texts or speech acts. In this way, getting to know the pluralities of language is tantamount to raising consciousness about oneself as a chooser (if one indeed enjoys the liberty of making decisions among these alternatives). In other words, metalinguistic growth is a form of consciousness-raising, which depends not merely on grasping some concepts but on taking personal action.

Growth Sequence 26: Toward increasing consciousness of oneself as a language user and of the language alternatives one has to choose from.

Figure 3 The Forms of Thought

CONCEPTUALIZING

Tautologic (inferring implicit
ideas from given ideas)

Abstracting by Reason

Analogic (classifying
by similar traits)

Abstracting by Memory

Chronologic (sequencing
in time order)

Abstracting by Sensation
and Motion

EXPERIENCE

SYNTHESIS

INTO WHOLES

Integrating particulars

IMPLICIT

figurative

GENERALIZING SIMILARITY ↑ INDUCTION

DISCRIMINATING DIFFERENCE

DEDUCTION ↓

literal

EXPLICIT

Elaborating particulars

INTO PARTS

ANALYSIS

Mental growth moves in both directions at once.