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PREFACE

This issue includes a number of essays in addition to the addresses delivered at the first Shaughnessy Memorial Conference, April 3, 1980. The editors have chosen as the introduction to the issue an essay written for a different occasion, Robert Lyons' appreciative assessment of the scholarship and value of *Errors and Expectations*. It is followed by a description of The Mina Shaughnessy Scholarship Program, the creation of which was announced at the conference by Charles I. Bunting, then Acting Director of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, and simultaneously in Washington, D.C., by Secretary of Education Shirley Hufstедler.

The publication of this issue also seemed an appropriate occasion for printing a selection of Mina's speeches and essays which have either not been printed before or not reprinted elsewhere.* The pieces chosen recapture a bit of her spirit and our history—our attempts to rise as individuals, departments, and institutions to challenges which strained our resources, above the limitations of our training, our expectations, our experience, and our institutional structures. They record our struggles to shore up flagging spirits as we coped with budgetary crises and premature predictions and "proofs" of failure; our struggles to find realistic and appropriate criteria against which to hold ourselves, our students, and society accountable.

The addresses delivered at the conference touched upon that theme which quickened Mina's spirit: the centrality of literacy to a thinking citizenry, to the health of any democracy worth its name, to the possession of an enriched, empowered, consciously lived life. These essays convey, we

*Were it not already recently reprinted in Richard Gebhardt's *Composition and Its Teaching* (NCTE No. 08083A), and in Garry Tate and Edward P.J. Corbett's *The Writing Teacher's Sourcebook*, Oxford, forthcoming, we would have also included "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," first published in *College Composition and Communication*, 27 (October, 1976), 234-239.

believe, the inevitable connection she saw between teaching the rudimentary skills of writing and imparting the knowledge which forms the culturally literate person, that extraordinary combination of practical and moral sensibility she bequeathed us.

MINA SHAUGHNESSY AND THE TEACHING OF WRITING

I am particularly honored to be asked to speak on this occasion—a conference dedicated to Mina Shaughnessy and her work. Mina herself liked conferences and she had special expectations of them. In Scott Fitzgerald's stories, there are characters who gaze up at the lighted windows of Manhattan buildings in twilight and are filled with a sense of wonder at the variety of life they sense behind those windows. Mina had some of that anticipation, transferred to conference rooms and conference panels. She was always arranging to have friends and colleagues sit in on sessions running at the same time as one she was attending, always insisting that something interesting was likely to happen at every meeting. No matter how exotic the conference setting, no matter how tempting the sightseeing or the restaurants, Mina would always set her schedule by the conference schedule, listening to as many papers and discussions and workshops as she could. How often her hopes at these gatherings were realized I can't say, but it was often enough to sustain her, for she never stopped poring over conference programs with an expression that belonged to a gambler reading the racing form at Aqueduct.

When I began to think about speaking today to CUNY teachers on Mina's work, I was, of course, reminded of the obvious point that her thought and writing were deeply rooted in the experience of this University. Her book, *Errors and Expectations*, begins by portraying the effects of Open Admissions on City College and its faculty, and the chapter "Expectations" which concludes the book should serve to define the obligations and mission of a great urban university. Most CUNY writing teachers, I think, feel a special relation to this wonderful book. It speaks not only *to* us, in the way of practical instruction, but also *for* us, expressing with such eloquence our own half-formulated purposes and goals. There

Robert Lyons is Associate Professor of English, Queens College, CUNY. This talk, in slightly altered form, was given as the keynote address at the Third Annual Conference of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors, May 1979.

are many passages in Mina's book that are revelations about teaching, and there are many others that strike a more familiar note and recapitulate some of our own experiences as teachers. I would like to quote a passage of the second kind and use it to characterize some of Mina's special concerns:

...Wherever the new students have arrived in substantial numbers, English teachers have begun to realize that little in their background has prepared them to teach writing to someone who has not already learned how to do it. Confident in the past that students who could not master certain "simple" features of English usage were probably not "bright" enough (a much-used term) to stay in college, they now begin to wonder, when large numbers of intelligent young men and women fail to learn a simple lesson, whether the lesson is indeed so simple. And once having asked this fruitful question, their own revolution as teachers of English usually begins.

This passage suggests that *Errors and Expectations* is the work of an academic revolutionary and I would like to explore that suggestion. First, I want to speak about the book itself and its method, and then I want to talk about the word "academic" as it might apply to this unusual book. Finally, I would like to consider in what sense the word "revolutionary" should be applied to this civilized, scholarly, immensely courteous author and her book.

A central concern in Mina's work is represented in one phrase from the passage I just quoted: "intelligent young men and women." The recognition of the intelligence and the adulthood of basic writing students is the key to virtually all that Mina has to say about the teaching of writing. Many teachers and writers had been aware that young people who have not succeeded in mastering the traditional school skills are nevertheless intelligent and worthwhile human beings. As all of us know, there is a substantial literature describing and championing the non-traditional student. Essentially, that literature concentrated on pointing to the special strengths that such students bring to the college environment and on challenging the inadequacies of our school systems or the larger failure of our social system.

Mina obviously knew this literature, shared its concerns, and voiced some of the same criticisms in her book. What was special to her was the decision to turn directly to the actual writing of such students where it most diverged from standard written forms and to raise the question of how these particular documents were themselves manifestations of the powers of "intelligent young men and women." When such student writing had previously appeared in print, it usually served as the "before" in a before and after illustration of some effective teaching technique or it demon-

strated particular features of dialect use or of second language interference. Other than that, such writing was rarely reproduced. It represented the dirty little secret of basic skills courses, classified information because if it leaked out it was sure to appear as part of some professor's demonstration that such students were on the face of it uneducable. This was not a matter of paranoia. It was clear from several essays on Open Admissions and from several letters to the *Times* that examples of unskillful writing by non-traditional students were considered a powerful weapon by those opposed to the broadening of public higher education. From this point of view, Mina had great courage in choosing to examine publicly such quantities of error-laden student writing. But clearly she did not intend her book to be an act of daring. Her controlling argument was that there is little that is random or illogical in such problematic student writing. Error, far more often than we suspect, is a matter of pattern, an effort of intelligence, even if that effort is faulty or misapplied. She needed to provide many examples in order to demonstrate the range of individual difficulties that create error.

The method that Mina used in analyzing error can be shown by quoting a representative passage from her book. In the chapter "Syntax" she discusses some ways in which the pronoun "it" may prove troublesome to inexperienced writers:

Part of the trouble with the word stems from its vagueness. Like other pronouns, *it* refers to something that has already been mentioned, but unlike *he* or *she*, it can refer to any *thing* in the world as well as to some beings (an animal, for example, or even a child when the sex is unknown or of no importance to the context). Beyond this, it can refer to ideas or situations or even to something in the mind of the writer that never quite gets stated on the page. (Certain idiomatic expressions illustrate this vagueness—"It may rain today." "How far is it to Wall Street?" "It's late." "Let him have it.") In analytical writing, where inanimate nouns and abstract terms tend to be more frequent than in talk or written narrative, the word *it*, with its broad range of designata and slight semantic weight, easily becomes a free-floating substitute for thoughts that the writer neglects to articulate and that the reader must usually strain to reach if he can. . .

Mina here presents some characteristic features of "it" as potential sources of confusion; typically, her perspective is not on the grammatical rule but on the various ways a word or form behaves in actual use. Then she narrows down to consider the school situation: does analytic writing place particular stress on the form, or create special occasions for error? At this point, particular misuses of the form by basic writers are cited and categorized. In each instance, Mina's explanation centers on how the error

closely approximates an acceptable usage or how the writer thinks that the error serves his purposes. After introducing and commenting on these examples, Mina then says in a summary paragraph: "The two problems with *it* that have been touched on so far are different kinds of problems requiring different strategies" and proceeds to make a more general distinction between a semantic problem and a word-order problem. Then she moves on to consider yet another function of the pronoun "it." I deliberately chose this passage for discussion because it does *not* display Mina at her most eloquent. What it does do in a modest way is display her method, applied patiently and painstakingly to hundreds of student sentences and evolved in the same way by reading literally thousands of student essays. The persistent effort is to discriminate and classify errors, to order the apparently chaotic, to create a grammar out of ungrammaticality. The importance of such a method is that it introduces system without being reductive. It oversimplifies neither the complexities of English grammar nor the range of variation that articulate but inexperienced writers can create.

Reading this book, a teacher gains confidence through repeated encounters with the general principle that there is a logic of error ("The Logic of Error" was, in fact, Mina's original title for the book). This logic differs from student to student and it is to this logic that teachers must adapt their knowledge of systematic grammar. For example, the students whose errors were cited in the passage I read to you would not need to be guided through a handbook review of all pronoun forms, even though their errors involve a pronoun. They would need to be shown the connection between their idiosyncratic pattern and the pattern of standard written English.

Mina's sense, then, of the potentialities of the intelligent young men and women who are basic writing students led her to recognize the logic of error. Her method transforms the way a teacher would perceive and therefore respond to the omissions, confusions, and derailments that characterize the work of basic writing students. And because it makes us see what we are doing in a new way, *Errors and Expectations* can be called a revolutionary book.

At the same time, the book has virtually none of the attributes of academic books called revolutionary in the last decade. In fact it is remarkable that someone so deeply involved in the most contentious issue in higher education in New York, involved at a college where feelings about this issue were particularly intense, could write without any trace of revolutionary rhetoric. The reason, I think, is that much of the struggle of Open Admissions centered on what Mina saw as a false conflict between

those supporting the rights of a new group of non-traditional students and those insisting on the need to maintain academic standards. The two groups tended to see each other as enemies in this struggle. Advocates of Open Admissions appeared to their opponents as willfully destroying all that made colleges meaningful. Academic life and academic writing came more and more to seem (from the other side of the barricades) to represent outmoded or irrelevant concerns. In the teaching of writing, "academic," for many defenders of the rights of non-traditional students, described a pedantic, rule-bound teacher who insisted on the stylistic etiquette of a by-gone day. Mina's work is distinctive because it does not accept this kind of division. It both upholds the academic tradition and welcomes without condescension a new kind of student within that tradition. Mina recognized the differences between the students she taught and wrote about and the academic world, but she did not think the differences condemned either the student or traditional academic values.

Instead, her work both as a person and as a writer extended an invitation to the non-traditional student, not just to learn something, but to become a member of the academic community. If there was a generous idealism in Mina's sense of her students and their potential, there was a similar idealism in her conception of the nourishing value of the academic tradition for any learner. That sense of idealism about higher education explains some of the paradoxical aspects of her own behavior—the fact that, living in the midst of an Open Admissions debate that found many scholarly humanists at their least humane, Mina should have a more uncritical admiration than most of us do for the great universities, for graduate training, for academic degrees and honors. She was always suggesting that the Ph.D. conferred special wisdom, despite all the evidence we sometimes see to the contrary. There was the further paradox that Mina—an authority on the teaching of basic writing—had as her favorite author Milton, that most academic of the great English poets. (Mina once said her ideal teaching schedule would be a section of Basic Writing and a course on Milton.) Another classic English writer that Mina greatly appreciated because of his relevance to academic writing was Francis Bacon. I remember her demonstrating in detail to a class of graduate students one day how Bacon could show them the way to organize a term paper. Just as Mina found something adult and intellectual in her young students, so she found something youthful and energizing in the tradition of academic discourse that influenced Milton and Bacon.

My point here about Mina's work is therefore related to the one I made earlier about her sense of basic writing students: again, she went further than most of her colleagues in the kind of commitment she made to the

scholarly enterprise. While most of us believe in the value of a college education for our students, Mina had an extraordinary trust in the qualities of academic discourse and in the habits of mind that such discourse fostered. One of her great interests was to identify more precisely the distinctive qualities of academic prose, to analyze the set of rules that guided, consciously or unconsciously, the performance of a successful academic writer. Mina did not finally have the opportunity to do this analysis in the full and systematic way that she felt was necessary, but there are observations about this subject scattered through her work. I would like to draw on a few of her phrases here in order to convey her Baconian assumptions about academic writing. Such writing, she says, "aspires to high standards of verification and sound reason"; it requires "shrewd assessments of what constitutes adequate proof"; it demands "the stances of fairness, objectivity, and formal courtesy that smooth the surface of academic disputation." Furthermore, academic writers need to be skilled in "habits of generalization." "These habits require that writers not only make abstract statements in a language that has been especially developed to extend the ladder of abstraction beyond conventional needs, but that they be able to move back and forth between levels of generalization in the interest of supporting their abstract statements." "Committed to extending the boundaries of the known, the scholar... is constantly proposing generalizations that cover the greatest possible number of instances. This requires both that he make statements that have broad applicability and that he defend them by the support of cases, arguments, and explanations." And finally as a teacher of basic writing students, Mina wanted to know more about the nature of the academic vocabulary, the common stock of words that teachers use as well as the specialized terms of a particular discipline. (When she was at City College, she arranged to have several writing teachers each enroll in an introductory course in an unfamiliar subject area in order to identify its special vocabulary and the special conventions assumed by its writing assignments.)

I've used Mina's comments on the features of academic writing quite extensively, because her book itself exemplifies and enacts all that she thought valuable in the academic mode. It is a book committed to sound reason, and to ordering and clarifying disparate examples of writing through rational discrimination. It is also a book that repeatedly demonstrates the power and value of the mind's inclination to order, whether in establishing causes, identifying problems, or suggesting the procedures for solving those problems.

As a result, the book is habitually classifying, even numbering, as a way

of producing tentative order, from an early section describing “four grammatical concepts that underlie most student misunderstandings about forms” to a concluding review of “seven basic thought patterns that transcend the intellectual classifications of various disciplines.” And one can see in those two examples how she uses this power to order and generalize in the interest of creating a more powerful and more inclusive theoretical model for teachers—“the concepts that *underlie*,” “the *basic* thought patterns.” Yet this inclination to classify never hardens into the dogmatism of a rule book. Mina always acknowledges the complexity of her subject and its constantly shifting nature. She says at one point that grammar itself “is a web, not a list, of explanations, and often a seemingly simple feature of instruction will be located at the interstices of several grammatical concepts.” The remark is characteristic of her sense that, in writing instruction, the seemingly simple is often complex, but that, on the other hand, the seemingly chaotic conceals something coherent and systematic.

Errors and Expectations makes its claims on us, then, through the firmness and clarity of its discriminations—in part through the aptness of its illustrations, and in part through the skill with which it moves back and forth from the specific to the speculative. But there is one more quality that characterized academic writing for Mina and that should be included here: “the stances of fairness, objectivity, and formal courtesy.” Objectivity and formal courtesy are important when a writer is dealing, as Mina was, with material so susceptible to ridicule or to being dismissed as merely inconsequential. Mina’s own tact is evident throughout the book: she looks for no scapegoats, she neither creates nor acknowledges adversaries, and she does not establish her own approach by aggressively repudiating the views of others. It is surprising, when one thinks about it, how many books addressed to skills teachers are anecdotal, colloquial, chummy, or slightly comical in their relation with the reader, and full of examples dramatizing the author in the classroom. Mina uses none of these stratagems, and her personal dignity and respect for her readers, conveyed through the manner and tone of her book, give her a special kind of authority.

I have paid particular attention to the qualities of Mina’s writing that are bound up with the qualities of academic discourse because ultimately that is one of the book’s important legacies to teachers of basic writing, who have sometimes come to doubt their importance in the academic community. *Errors and Expectations* is an academic book in the sense that in its very language and structure and tone, it enacts the academic ideal. Mina’s craft is to demonstrate the habits of mind, the qualities of style, the

procedures of analysis and argument that academic training at its best can provide, and to bring those qualities to bear on matters of great human and moral concern.

For Mina, the technical mastery that enabled students to express themselves also made them freer intellectually. Skills teaching makes students aware of the linguistic rules that facilitate thought and communication. Those rules are mastered until they are no longer a matter of conscious effort. They become instead the habitual resources that allow students to create their own kind of writing performances based on choices *they* want to make. Mina often referred to training in ballet or piano (two kinds of training she herself had experienced) and found them analogous to training in the structure of sentences. "The practice of consciously transforming sentences from simple to complex structures (and vice versa), of compounding the parts of sentences, of transforming independent clauses into dependent clauses, of collapsing clauses into phrases or words, helps the student cope with the complexity in much the same way as finger exercises in piano or bar exercises in ballet enable performers to work out specific kinds of coordination that must be virtually habitual before the performer is free to interpret or even execute a total composition." In Mina's sense of the writer or the person, the goal is invariably choice, option, freedom—key words for her.

I would like to return to my original question—is *Errors and Expectations* the testament of an academic revolutionary? I have already suggested a typically academic answer: on the one hand, yes, since Mina transformed our way of seeing and judging what we do as teachers; on the other hand, no, since she was deeply committed to a tradition of academic discourse reaching back through the centuries. If we look again at the passage I quoted at the start of my talk and continue beyond its last sentence with the sentence that follows, we can see something of the same balancing tendency in Mina's own language:

And having once asked this fruitful question their own revolution as teachers of English usually begins. It is a revolution that leads not inevitably or finally to a rejection of all rules and standards, which would be to deny the very point that is finally being made about language, namely that it is variously shaped by situations and bound by conventions, none of which is inferior to the others but none of which, also, can substitute for the others.

Rule and convention still must be taken into account, even in revolutionary situations. One way to resolve this question is to note that revolution is a word that Mina herself uses only rarely when she is describing what she and

other teachers are doing. Instead, her favorite metaphor is that of the frontier, apt enough, of course, for someone from South Dakota. The frontier of a profession was her term for basic skills teaching. She uses this image, characteristically, with great precision. The frontier is the place where everyone is a stranger, and where nobody is fully at home or settled in. In this new territory, everyone has to get his bearings, students and teachers alike, and everyone has to make adjustments in his habitual modes of thinking and acting. The frontier calls on everybody's resourcefulness and ingenuity in adapting his particular kind of knowledge to new situations. It also calls for a special openness and trust—in a difficult and sparsely populated land, people must cooperate for survival. And the frontier is finally a place where the future is necessarily more important than the past.

Mina's writing suggests much that we ourselves can do in the future. The last piece she published during her lifetime was titled "Some Needed Research on Writing." It is a poignant essay to read today, because it obviously sketches out work she was especially interested in and would have done herself, if she had lived. In the essay she proposes four broad questions that most urgently need to be answered, or to be given better provisional answers than we have produced up to now. Her questions play at the edges of *Errors and Expectations*, because they concern the successful instruction of the students who come to us for help. Each of Mina's questions serves to express one of her major concerns. The first asks how to recognize and stimulate growth in writing skills among ill-prepared young adults, the group usually taught as if they were either conventional college students or much younger learners at an earlier stage of development. The second question concerns the ways instruction can help recover lost time because, for these students, academic and economic pressures require rapid mastery rather than slow assimilation of skills. Her third question addresses the ways in which writers gain the attention of an academic audience by mastering qualities of "craftiness" and "cunning" hidden from the inexperienced writer.

Mina calls her final question ("What goes on and what ought to go on in the composition classroom?") "embarrassingly rudimentary," but it is not a question that brings her back to basics in any nostalgic way. Rather its purposes have been defined—with some academic craftiness—by the questions that have preceded it. Each of those questions suggested that the new students have created new issues, making the writing teacher's profession more crucial, but also more exacting. It seems fitting that Mina's final question (and virtually her final message to her colleagues)

asks us to look at ourselves as we are, to think of the new challenges we face, and to seek to bridge the gap between what is and what ought to be. Mina's own work, as much as that of any single individual, furnished preliminary answers to the questions she raised and made many of us reformulate our sense of the academic responsibilities of college writing teachers.

THE MINA SHAUGHNESSY SCHOLARS PROGRAM:

A FUND-FOR-THE-IMPROVEMENT-OF-POSTSECONDARY- EDUCATION PROGRAM WITH PARTIAL FUNDING FROM CARNEGIE CORPORATION

Named for the late Mina P. Shaughnessy, director of writing programs at City College of New York and member of the Fund's Board of Advisors, this program will provide support to individuals to produce a document or engage in an activity which will significantly advance our knowledge of practical solutions to problems in postsecondary education.

In many respects, Mina Shaughnessy's scholarship, which was based on years of experience teaching writing, exemplifies the kind of work this program aims to support. Using her classroom as a learning laboratory, she began to uncover the hidden patterns of logical thought which nevertheless produced errors in student writing. Her concern for helping underprepared students won her many admirers locally, but national recognition came only after the publication of her widely acclaimed study, *Errors and Expectations*. A modest foundation grant gave her the needed resources and breathing space to produce this highly influential monograph.

The Fund is convinced that there are others like Mina Shaughnessy who, if given additional support to relieve them from the demands of other commitments or to obtain needed services, can make a lasting and profound contribution to postsecondary education improvement. These practitioners are working in all sectors of the field—as faculty, consultants, evaluators, administrators, and counselors in colleges and universities, in state and local agencies, in unions and museums, in libraries, CETA and industry training programs, and community-based organizations. Frequently, they are not able nor would they choose to take a full-time sabbatical from their routine duties. Yet, if given some form of released time and support services, certain individuals can produce work of lasting national significance which will enhance our capacity to provide improved education for all postsecondary learners.

This description was assembled from the 1980-81 Announcement of the Mina Shaughnessy Scholars Program.

Applicants may submit proposals on behalf of nominees which request a maximum of fifteen months of support and a maximum grant of \$18,000. But the Fund also welcomes proposals requesting the same or less financial support for some shorter periods of time—anywhere from three to twelve months.

Following more than a decade of experimentation and change throughout postsecondary education, this kind of practical scholarship is especially needed. It is time to take stock of the lessons learned, and analyze both new and old approaches to teaching and learning. Up to now, few funds have been available with which to offer an opportunity to exemplary practitioners to study and reflect upon their efforts and those of others. Thus, unlike traditional fellowships, stipends, or grants that support academic research directed solely to the scholarly community, this program will seek to support scholarship that is based on actual practice and that will result in products of particular benefit to practitioners and policy-makers.

The kinds of project activities to be supported, then, do represent a break from most of the Fund's past competitions. However, there are also important continuities. As in other competitions, the Fund is seeking to foster *learner-centered* improvement through the Shaughnessy grants. This does not mean that projects will focus only on efforts to improve teaching and counseling. It does mean that all proposals will need to describe the relationship of developments in these areas to improved services and opportunities for learners.

Second, as in the Fund's Comprehensive Program, applicants themselves have the responsibility for identifying the area of practice they seek to address. Although there is considerable latitude and breadth, the Fund expects that applicants will focus on nationally significant issues which have emerged in the last two decades. These include (but are not limited to) basic literacy, the adult learner, higher education's relation to broader societal goals, educational equity, the content of curriculum, counseling and information services, and the relation of work to education.

Program Objectives

In 1980-81 the Fund is offering a maximum of twenty grants under the Shaughnessy Scholars Grants Program. It hopes to support at least as many scholars in each of the subsequent two years. *Institutions, agencies, or other incorporated organizations must be the formal applicants, submitting on behalf of individuals or groups of individuals* (hereafter referred to as nominees). Each application should identify the topics or

areas of practice to be addressed. In all cases, however, the project activities to be supported should extend our knowledge, should assess or otherwise build upon developments which have been underway in postsecondary practice. Thus linked to practice, projects might seek, among other purposes:

- to synthesize new knowledge emerging from actual practice or program evaluation

- to formulate changes in federal, state, and institutional policies that promise to enhance learning opportunities and improve education quality

- to identify needed directions for future improvement based upon the experiences of the past.

The product resulting from each grant should be appropriate to the topic and to the intended audience. The applicant would not be expected to produce a research monograph unless it is deemed the most useful mechanism for conveying information. The range of products emerging from the Shaughnessy Scholars program might include:

- written reports, including those of broadly significant case studies, or of conference proceedings

- books, including policy studies, educational journalism, or traditional journal research articles

- evaluation or testing instruments

- communications materials including scripts for public television and radio, and computer-interactive learning programs

- detailed directories of programs and practices.

Application forms for awards to be offered in 1981-1982 and exact information about deadlines for submission of proposals and for notification of applicants can be obtained by writing in March, 1981 to: Shaughnessy Scholars, ATTN: 13.925H, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Educational Research and Improvement, 400 Maryland Avenue, S.W. Room 3123, Washington, D.C. 20202.

**Proceedings of the
First Shaughnessy Memorial Conference
April 3, 1980**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, not just because of the importance of the subject of this conference, but because it honors Mina Shaughnessy. Mina and I crossed paths a number of times over the last several years. We were first introduced at a Carnegie Corporation dinner by Alden Dunham, of Carnegie. Both the corporation, through its financial aid, and Alden, through his personal interest and encouragement, had supported each of us: Mina, for her book about teaching writing, and me in my work at the Carnegie Commission.

When I transferred from the Commission to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), it didn't take me long to remember Mina and realize the help that she could provide for FIPSE. She became first an informal counselor, then more formally an adviser to the Networks project at Bronx Community College, and finally a member of FIPSE's board. Her counsel, seldom lengthy, was unusually wise and always resolutely, though realistically, optimistic. But I cherish her memory most because she was one of those rare people who put into practice three critical values, values which might almost be viewed in today's society as endangered species. And, because I am not an expert on literacy in any sense of the word, I thought I would talk about the broad values that motivated Mina's work and life and which, I think, are so important to society today.

Characterized briefly, her three beliefs were that teaching makes a difference, that the individual is important, and that literacy is power. Who wouldn't agree to the importance of those beliefs, but when we try to implement these values, they quickly lose ground to competing demands for resources, time, and energy. We are often forced to assume that implementation is complete when only the most minimal threshold of accomplishment has been reached.

Virginia B. Smith is President of Vassar College.

If we really believe teaching makes a difference, why in higher education are we so preoccupied with gauging the potential ability of students to learn, rather than assessing our own abilities to teach. We often hear professors say, "Send us better students." Rarely do we hear them say, "Send us students with great need, students who challenge our ability to reach and teach them." Rarely do we hear that teaching is a craft we can learn, by a scholarly approach to pedagogy, just as we can learn by a scholarly approach to the development of cellular life or any other field of inquiry; and rarely do we hear that teaching underprepared young adults how to write may be a profound task, not a simple task.

Not until we reverse these attitudes will we buttress and make meaningful the tenet that teaching does, indeed, make a difference. And this Mina stood for—in her speeches, in her writing, but most importantly in her actions. She called for the development of a pedagogy for illiteracy, for analysis of errors in writing that would inform the hierarchy of tasks in teaching writing. She called for teachers of writing who would "grope [their] ways into the turbulent disciplines of semantics and linguistics for fuller, more accurate data about words and sentences; . . . pursue more rigorously the design of developmental models; . . . examine more closely the nature of speaking and writing and define the subtle ways in which these forms of language both support and undo each other."¹

Mina saw clearly the relationship of expectation to learning. Teachers, frustrated by a multiplicity of errors, may lower their expectations and thereby contribute to the failure of their own teaching. That teachers' efforts are conditioned by their own expectations is beyond question; learners' efforts are also conditioned by the teachers' expectations. Central, then, to a belief in the effectiveness of teaching is awareness about expectations and how those expectations have been formed.

Historically, American expectations have had a profound impact on education. Believing in democracy, we expected that education would be a key element in our life, but not expecting much of women, we did not initially include them in any of our colleges; and expecting little of slaves, or fearing too much power from literacy, we did not teach slaves to read and write. It was overexpectation, however, which gave us the cruelest disappointment. We expected to teach everyone to read and to write, to use education as a road to social justice, to teach the skills needed in our economy, to wipe out unemployment, and to do it all overnight. Failing to

¹ Mina Shaughnessy, "Diving In: An Introduction to Basic Writing," *College Composition and Communication* 27 (October, 1976), p. 237.

reach these goals easily, we are now adjusting our expectations downward, perhaps to another extreme.

Our legislatures seem to be giving up on support for programs that aid the underprepared young adult. Our high school competency tests may be set at levels that are too basic. Having hoped too much, now, to save ourselves, we may be hoping too little. Were we wrong in our expectations, or did we allow too little time, or apply insufficient or inappropriate effort? There is a subtle difference between hope and expectation. We wait almost passively for a hope to be fulfilled, but an expectation arises because of some action on the part of those with the expectation. What right have we to expect? What have we done to lead us to expect? Implicit in these questions is the assumption that what we do as individuals will alter the outcome, and this of course leads to the second value that I mentioned: that individuals are important, that what an individual does can have an impact on the course of events.

The complexity of modern life makes it extremely easy for us to feel that the individual no longer has any control over her own life, or any power to make a change that could affect others. The acceptance of the system as a given and the necessity for adapting to it as best we can inevitably lead to a sense of depression and the curtailment of creative thought and energy that could improve the system.

Cynicism about our powerlessness as individuals is, perhaps, the greatest deterrent to improvement for both the society and individuals. The acceptance of defeat before trial is particularly prevalent in lower socioeconomic groups and also among underprepared students. Recent ACE statistics on freshmen attitudes reveal that over 50 percent of the entering freshmen felt that they had no power as individuals to change society. Education is committed to the belief that the individual can both be changed and have the power to help others change. It is sobering to think of teaching classes in which 50 percent of the students do not accept the central purpose of education.

When I first went to the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, I was told that with our very small level of funding—it was only \$10 million at that time—I should not give very many grants because the money wouldn't have an impact if given out in small amounts. This position is quite consistent with the philosophy in Washington and with the general push given by Congress to federal programs. One suggestion made to me as the new director was to fund ten projects at a million dollars each. It was argued that this would cut down overhead and staff time; it would make certain that each of the projects was reviewed at length; and it would be easy to explain to Congress. To be effective, it was assumed, a project

would have to be expensive and flashy. We chose the other road—to make small grants to a large number of projects. In many cases we were backing grass roots efforts by individuals. When last year's report on FIPSE by an outside evaluation agency was released, we were all pleased to see that our system of choice had indeed paid off. Not only was FIPSE suggested as a model for other federal programs, but it was clear that many of the projects were continuing to benefit students after the FIPSE funding had ended.

When faith is put in the individual at the operating level, investments and experiments have results. The idea that a panacea may rest in a system or a mass application of funds fails to take into account that human problems usually must be solved through human action and therefore are rarely responsive to grand, impersonal schemes. In Washington, FIPSE was not popular among some of the more committed and better credentialed analysts who were selling, at that time, megasystems. Megasystems are often the response when no one has yet solved the problem at the individual or operational level. That problems of literacy have not been solved before in this nation may well result from our tendency to propose generalized solutions without first analyzing the problems at the level of the individual.

Our response to the need for better secondary education, and for more higher education in the late 50's and early 60's, did not sufficiently consider the relationship between human problems and the need for solutions to those problems to be on a human scale. James D. Conant, in 1959, suggested that our high schools could be better if they were bigger. At the time he made this recommendation, less than one-fifth of our high schools met his size criterion. Now that we have greatly reduced the number of high schools and increased their sizes, we are not so certain that the anticipated benefits are being realized. A recent study suggests that bigger schools do not result in higher scholastic achievements, nor do they produce students who do better in college. Certainly, our own experience in college classrooms would reinforce the results of the study. It is ironic that not many years after Conant's report a new report, *Youth Welfare Policy and Transition*, prepared for the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, stated that American high schools are too large.

Mina was concerned with whether the individual student, particularly the student with educational problems, could receive proper attention in massive systems. It was because of that concern that she encouraged Alison Bernstein [then program officer at FIPSE] and me to put our thoughts on this problem into a book, which was subsequently published as *The Impersonal Campus*. It was Mina's encouragement which led us to dedicate that book to her. Of course, her encouragement to write about issues and experiments was deeply tied to her belief in the power of literacy.

Too often we think in terms of functional literacy as the ability to read enough to take directions on a job, or to get around town, or to fill out census forms. Mina said, "Some people—English teachers among them—have even insisted that writing is a skill not everyone can acquire or needs to acquire especially in an age when television and tapes have liberated speech from transiency and telephones have reduced the burden of ritual and routine correspondence."² But to think of that side of literacy as the only one needed by some is to deny to that portion of our population the real power of literacy.

Certainly, the necessity for writing is substantially reduced in modern society; it is even reduced in massive systems of higher education. Certain types of pedagogy, of necessity, reduce practice with writing. For instance, large lecture classes almost necessitate short answer tests; as the class grows, assignments for written papers decline. When I was hiring people at FIPSE and the Carnegie Commission, I discovered that many were college graduates who had never written a paper and who had taken all of their examinations through multiple-choice questions or other short-answer forms. They had found a way to move through four years of college and earn a bachelor of arts degree or bachelor of science degree, more often the latter, with no experience in writing.

It is possible to teach youngsters about reading through "Sesame Street" and perhaps it is even possible to teach them to write words through "Sesame Street." But reading as a tool, unless it moves quickly to writing, can be simply a passive experience. The expressive experience—that active process of struggling with one's own responses and ideas, and putting them together in a way that someone else can read and ponder—is the side of literacy in which real power lies. As Mina pointed out, "It is in the nature of writing to encourage individuals to discover and explore their own hunches, to ponder over their own words, to respect their own thoughts enough to entrust them to a written page."³ Thus the ability to write is intimately tied to the power to refine one's own thoughts, to develop them sufficiently to permit them to be examined for more than a fleeting moment.

I often wonder whether the Gettysburg Address would have any force for us today if it had only been spoken and not circulated and studied by generations of students. Would Tom Paine's utterances have sparked a

²"The English Professor's Malady." Address at the Association of Departments of English Conference, Albany, New York, June 1977.

³"The English Professor's Malady."

nation if they had only been television speeches? To some extent, the quality of ideas in the nation today has declined as the ability to reach people through modern technology has increased. The current illusion is that satisfactory communication can take place orally. We must ask the question whether oral communication is by its very nature lacking in vigor, precision, and depth, and thereby doomed to be temporal and shallow. But of course.

The real power of writing can be experienced only if we employ appropriate vocabularies to articulate concepts. Many of our college students fail to achieve satisfactory levels of writing for their particular colleges, not because they can't write, but because they don't know the relevant vocabularies. Vocabularies are specific to fields, sometimes strangely so. I remember when I was heading the United States Observer Delegation at the UNESCO Conference on Innovation in Bucharest, everybody was asking if the United States was going to make an "intervention." I thought this a very weighty question and figured we would have to discuss it at length before deciding whether an "intervention" would be made. Then I discovered it meant a "speech," so I said yes, and then learned that a "speech" in official international conferences was a written statement which is reviewed by a great number of people and put into the record.

In one of Mina's speeches, which were, fortunately for us, written, she also showed concern for vocabulary. She said, "... we need above all else to take a closer look at vocabulary, which is of course critical to the development of complex concepts, the maturation of syntax, and the acquisition of an appropriate tone or register. . . . We have done little to describe the common stock of words teachers assume students know—proper names, words that have transcended their disciplines, words that initiate academic activities (document, define, etc.), words that articulate logical relationships, etc. In short, the territory of academic rhetoric—its vocabulary, its convention, its purposes—is waiting for an Aristotle."⁴

For us as educators, then, the challenge is to equip our students not only with writing skills, but also with the ability to acquire future vocabularies. Society changes swiftly, and with those swift changes comes the need for new vocabularies. Even now, and certainly in the future, full powers of literacy require a revised scientific vocabulary and compendium of concepts. A new awareness of technology and its importance in our lives,

⁴ "Some Needed Research in Writing," *College Composition and Communication*, 28 (December 1977), p. 320.

including computer literacy, and a new international literacy are also required. Scientific knowledge not only grows; its orientation sometimes shifts dramatically. Thirty years ago, who talked about pollution? Perhaps if the vocabulary of pollution had been more broadly shared at that time, we would not find ourselves talking so much about it today.

The operative vocabularies in any society depend upon the state of knowledge in that society. To the extent that any portion of the society is cut off from that expanding and changing knowledge, it cannot participate in the society and in the decisions of the society in any meaningful way. In science the shifts have been broad and often revolutionary. Think for a moment of how vocabulary in discourse must have changed when we discovered that not sin but germs caused disease, when we came to know that illnesses resulted from physical rather than metaphysical causes. And today we must incorporate new vocabulary and new concepts as science establishes that pollution causes disease and illness, that chemicals and invisible rays affect our well-being. We moved from a vocabulary of mysterious unseen forces causing illness to tangible physical causes, and now must alter our vocabulary again to take in the new, unseen forces.

Modern communication also increasingly requires computer literacy, not necessarily a mastery of a computer language but knowledge of computer capabilities and limitations. Reliance on computers in daily life will become the norm. With that reliance we may alter our thinking modes, that is, shift to binary analyses. Will that shift necessitate remedial education for solving problems that require more complex patterns of thought? Our most stubborn social problems cannot be solved with simple yes-no, in-or-out responses. Or, in another aspect of modern technology, will we lose the cyclical concept of time, as we switch from reading clock faces to digital screens? It is possible that technology will require new ways to fill in the subtleties of reasoning and thinking that are lost by precise and limiting forms.

The United States is moving into a new era, and that new era will require shifts in our vocabulary. Words like "independent" and "dependent" will need to be replaced by better understanding of words such as "interdependent." The fundamentals of Middle East politics and economy must be mastered. Today the United States, as a result of increases in its Chicano, Cuban, and Puerto Rican populations, has the seventh or eighth largest Spanish-speaking population in the world. In 1976 there were thirty million people in the United States whose native tongue was not English or who lived in households where languages other than English were spoken. In short, ethnic and cultural diversity is far from decreasing and may well increase in the future. We will probably have to include in our literacy criteria for the future the command of two languages, not one.

As society changes, the standards for literacy will change with it, but whatever its current form, its importance to this society remains central. Alice Chandler [Acting President, The City College of New York] told us as she opened the conference that the relationship between democracy and literacy runs deep. I would say that without the empowerment that literacy gives individuals there can be no democracy, for it is that empowerment that makes it possible for us to share not only values, but concerns, and finally to move forward to shared solutions of our problems.

CULTURE AND LITERACY

When I was so richly honored by receiving an invitation to speak at this conference, I searched for a subject that might do justice to my deep admiration for Mina Shaughnessy. It should be a subject, I thought, that has an Arnoldian ring to it, which is why I chose the title "Culture and Literacy" with its allusion to Arnold's great book *Culture and Anarchy*. For, as Mina lives in my memory of her, she is an Arnoldian figure—a poet, essayist, critic, even an inspector of schools, and at the same time a person who integrated all these roles not just in service of a powerful cultural mission, but also in exemplification of literate culture at its best: social purpose, integrity, eloquence, and something very Arnoldian—a sense of style. But Mina also had a powerful streak of common sense and she would certainly have advised me against trying to adopt in this talk the inauthentic posture of an Arnoldian sage. "Stick to your last," she would have said, and in fact she did say something like that to me the last time we met. I was then in New York City trying to break into the convention world of composition experts who were meeting at a conference, and I was not making much progress in this political maneuver. I took the day off to go visit Mina. When she heard what I was up to she said something like this—or possibly, *exactly* like this, since her words are graven in my memory: "You are wasting your time, Donald," she said. "It's not your style. Go back to Virginia and get your grants, do your research, and write your books." The moment she said it, I knew she was absolutely right, and what I am going to talk about on this occasion will be, at least in part, a consequence of following Mina's advice. I will focus on her main interest, the teaching of writing, and I will bring to bear some of our recent research at Virginia. These subjects will also lead out naturally to some of the larger social and cultural issues that deeply concerned Mina Shaughnessy.

The act of writing and the teaching of writing are so complex and elusive that we sometimes neglect their most important dimensions just

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because those aspects *are* so obvious and elementary that we take them for granted. Shocked recognition of this has fostered, for instance, the back-to-basics movement with its renewed emphasis on spelling, motor skills, traditional practice in usage, and so on. The main subject of my talk today concerns another basic aspect of writing, one so fundamental and obvious, that it too has suffered neglect. I mean the cultural aspect of writing. It is a dimension that I myself have neglected in my own work, and one that we writing teachers have often ignored in teaching, because the sheer craft of writing makes so many immediate demands upon our students. That is why virtually all that is written about composition devotes itself to the craft of writing—to coherence, to pre-writing, organization, syntax, sentence variety, and the like. Certainly for those who, like Mina, teach basic writers (and so many of our students everywhere these days are basic writers), the *craft* of writing must be at the center of our concern.

But in the past few months, and in the light of our recent large-scale experiments at Virginia, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, I have begun to realize that the craft of writing is only half the story. This realization has come to me with a shock of revelation, and so I hope you will be tolerant if, still reeling from my newest conversion, I speak with some of the one-sidedness that new converts are all too apt to exhibit. Such one-sidedness may be just what is needed at the moment, since the craft approach to writing is so powerfully in the ascendant. Specialists in the craft of composition are in great demand for teaching posts. Money for composition research is easy to come by. And even now, as I write, Yale University is pondering ways of spending a grant of 1.25 million dollars to improve the writing abilities of Yale undergraduates. Special research grants, special job descriptions, and lots of money are being thrown at the problem. And all of this effort is certainly going to improve instruction in the craft of writing, if only because we are again paying attention to the problem instead of neglecting it. But I should like to suggest in this talk why this laudable effort can only be partly successful so long as it is narrowly oriented to writing as a craft which can be even more efficiently taught, as research uncovers ever more efficient ways of teaching it.

I said that the craft-approach neglects the cultural dimension of writing. Alternatively, one could say that we have stressed the process and product of writing at the expense of the huge domain of tacit knowledge which is never written down at all, but which, though quite invisible, is just as operative as the visible written word. A writing task could be compared to an iceberg whose visible tip is arrangement, syntax, rhetoric, spelling, coherence and so on, but whose much bigger invisible base is tacit cultural knowledge—not just linguistic knowledge, and knowledge about the topic,

but also, and most important, knowledge of what others also know and expect about the topic, about the form, about the writer, and about the world. In short, the cultural dimension is that whole system of unspoken, tacit knowledge that is shared between writer and reader.

It is hard to overestimate the importance of this tacit dimension in the teaching of literacy, though we have paid scant attention to it. Only very recently have psycholinguists begun to deal with this invisible and inaudible dimension of speech. In 1972 there were published some experimental results which clinched the point I am making—even if on a very primitive level—yet making it all the more persuasively, since the experimental tests were so obvious and elemental. The tests concerned whether we perceive and remember what a sentence says as a linguistic trace, or whether we perceive and remember, instead, what the linguistic traces invisibly entail. One of the experiments used the following two sentences:¹

1. Three turtles rested on a floating log, and a fish swam beneath them.
2. Three turtles rested on a floating log, and a fish swam beneath it.

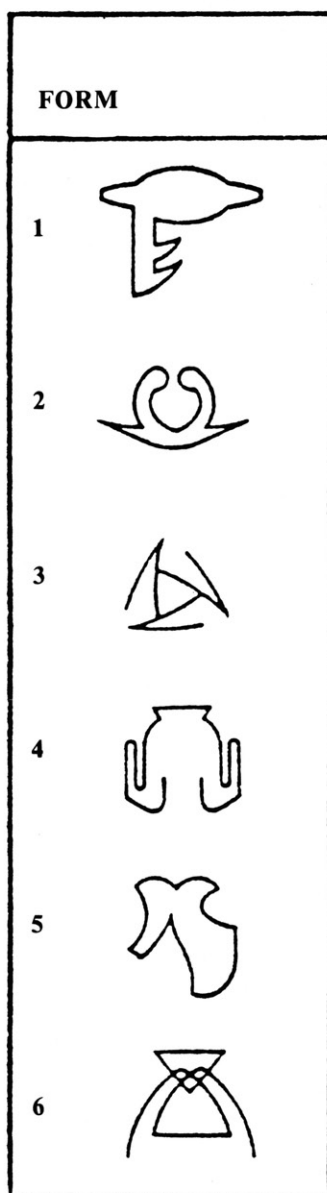
Half of the subjects were given sentence 1, and half sentence 2, along with appropriate control sentences. But in recognition tests the subjects simply identified whichever sentence they were shown. Psychologically the two sentences were absolutely identical. For the subjects, the inference that the fish were underneath both the turtles and the log was actually *stated* by the sentence and was remembered as being explicitly, linguistically stated even though it was not. While I cannot imagine anyone being surprised by this result, this and many similar experiments finally put to rest the theory that the perception and memory of sentences is merely a perception and memory of linguistic traces. Readers also understand and remember an invisible, culturally shared component which many linguistic model-builders now put into a box labeled “knowledge of the world.”

This extra-linguistic dimension was approached from another angle in some experiments reported by Kraus and Glucksberg. I've chosen these particular ones because they are relevant to the special demands of writing, and also because they were accompanied by some convenient illustrations from *Scientific American*.² In the experiment a physical barrier is placed

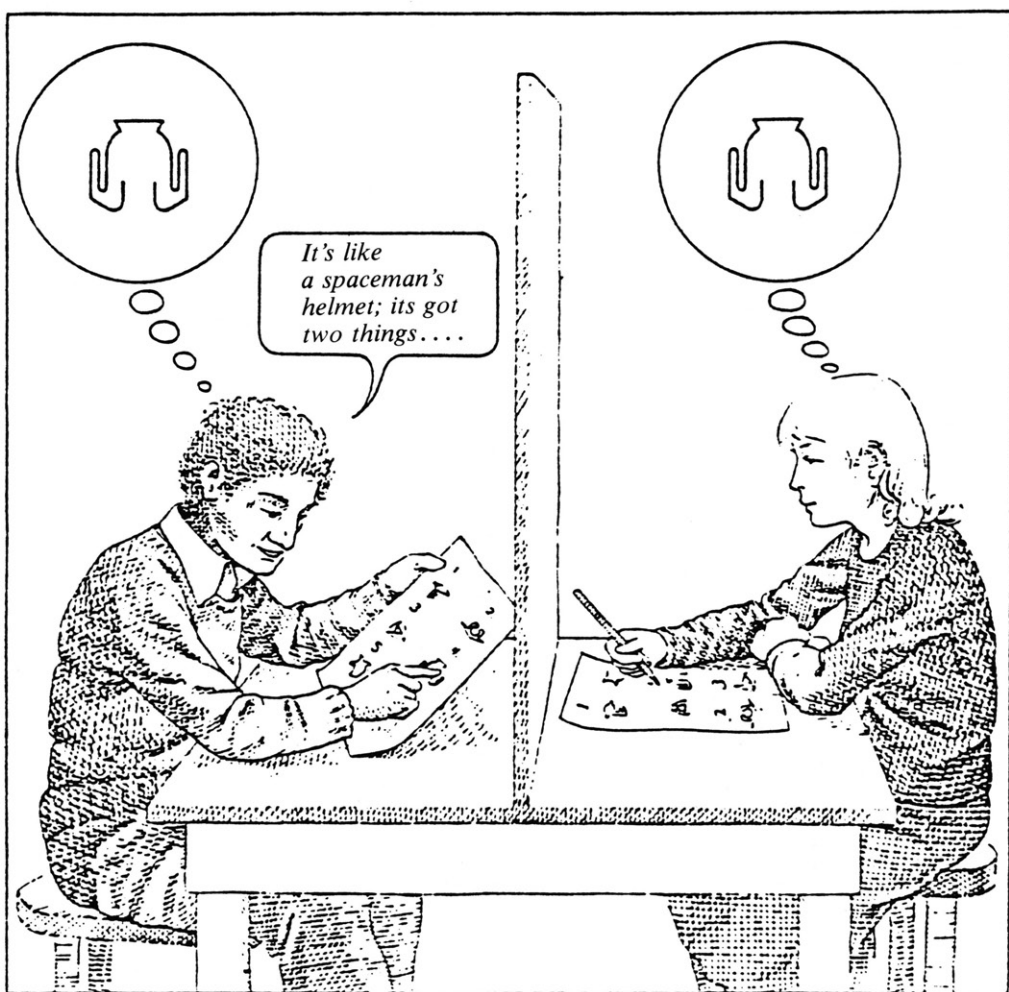
¹ J.D. Bransford, J.R. Barclay, and J.J. Franks, Sentence Memory: A Constructive Approach,” *Cognitive Psychology*, 3, 1972, 193-209.

² R.M. Krauss and S. Glucksberg, “Social and Nonsocial Speech,” *Scientific American*, 236 (February, 1977) 100-105. Line drawings reproduced by permission.

between two subjects so that they cannot see each other. Communication has to take place, as in writing, through words alone. And, again as in writing, only one person is allowed to speak, while the other has to interpret what is spoken. The communicative task was to explain to the other subject how to order a series of unfamiliar shapes. This is what the shapes looked like:

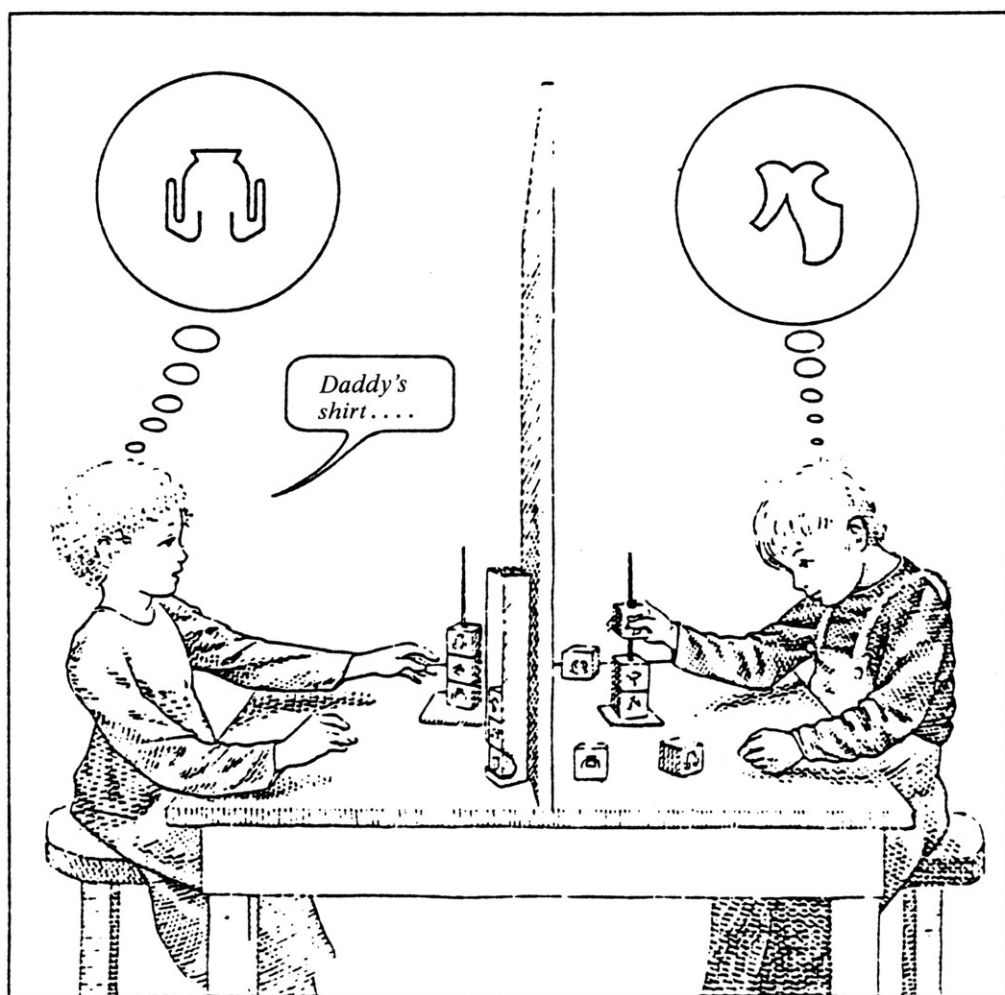


Now when this task was performed by two literate adults, it turned out to be extremely easy. In fact, among the subjects used by Kraus and Glucksberg, the adults always managed to score 100 per cent on their first try. And one noteworthy feature of this adult performance was that, compared with children, adults tended to be very prolix in their descriptions, as though they realized that the shapes would be unfamiliar to the other person, and would therefore have to be carefully related to other shared and familiar shapes. Here is a picture of the adults at their task:



In the illustration there is not enough room to give a full example of the number of words used for each adult description.

Here by contrast is an illustration of a typical performance by children. When the children were of nursery school age, that is, about age four, they could not complete a single error-free trial no matter how often they tried. Kindergartners, age five, performed no better than nursery school children. First graders through fifth graders, that is, ages six through nine or ten, could not complete an error-free trial at first, though they did improve with



practice. Seventh graders, age twelve, did only about as well as fifth graders. And ninth and tenth graders, age thirteen to fifteen, took seven to nine trials before they began to get perfect results.

Developmental psychologists will have their own explanations of the performances of the very young children. What fascinates me is the poor performance of the fifteen year-olds. The American fifteen-year-old subjects chosen by Kraus and Glucksberg were the products of eight or nine years in our school systems. They were *not* trapped in egocentricity, but they *were* deficient in a task which closely approximates the writing task. And what they clearly lacked was not vocabulary, or grammar, or syntax. What they lacked was a sense of the other person's range of knowledge and expectations. They lacked, that is, a good sense of what the other person knew. This, you remember, is how I defined the invisible cultural dimension of writing—a knowledge of the reader's knowledge—a range of knowledge tacitly shared. I believe that there is no developmental reason why a 15-year-old should be culturally illiterate to this degree. Indeed one of the defects in these elegant experiments was the apparent cultural homogeneity of the subject populations. No mention was made of pairing a semi-literate White, Northern adult with a semi-literate Black, Southern adult. No tests were run, apparently, with pairs of highly literate fifteen-year-olds, who were at once practiced readers and proficient writers. Such fifteen-year-olds do exist, and such adults do exist in our culture. And I will wager that the results in such cases would be precisely reversed. My point is, of course, that good education is the specific antidote to cultural illiteracy, and that improvements in literate education would affect performance in this kind of experimental task, which is so analogous to a writing task.

I feel fairly safe with my wager. Kraus and Glucksberg, you remember, found that adults tended to be more prolix than children in performing this task, and this fact is highly reminiscent of Bernstein's sociolinguistic distinction between elaborated and restricted codes—which is a technical version of the distinction between prolixity and conciseness. Culturally literate adults know how to talk to strangers.³ Knowing what the stranger probably does and does not know, they sense when they must be prolix and when they can be brief. In the experimental task above, prolixity *was*

³ Basil Bernstein, "Social Class, Language, and Socialization," in *Language and Social Context*, ed. P.P. Giglioli (New York: Penguin, 1972). Like many others, I decline to accept Bernstein's correlation of restricted code with lower class speech. All social classes use both kinds of codes. Nonetheless, Bernstein's terminological distinction is a useful one.

required, but in another task, it might not have been. That is why cultural literacy (knowledge of what others know) is so essential to competence in the domain of writing.

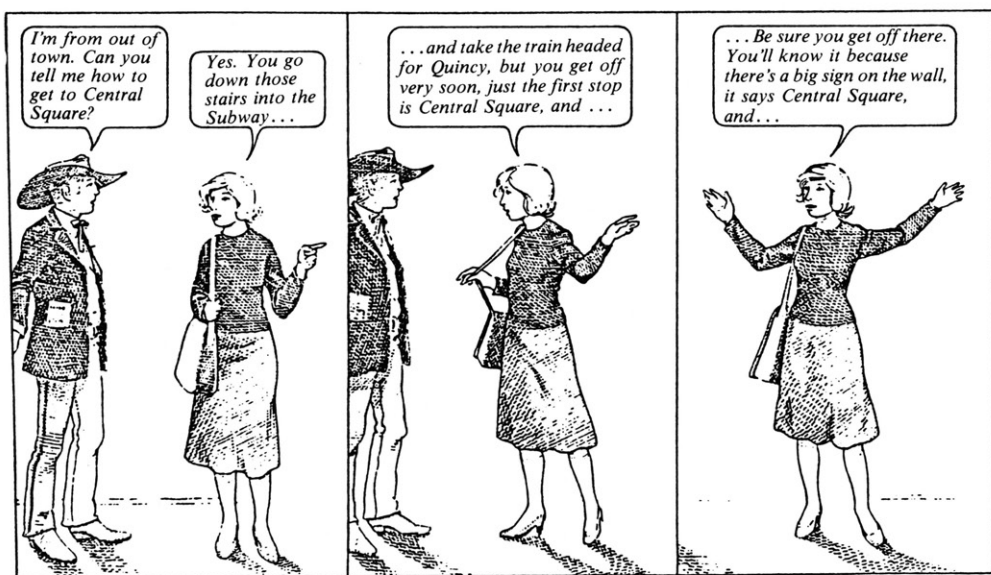
I'll give just one more experimental illustration of this principle before turning to our experiments at Virginia. In this experiment, undertaken by a clever Harvard undergraduate, the researcher goes out on the streets of Cambridge, Massachusetts, with a hidden tape recorder, and approaches passersby with the following question: "How d'ya get to Central Square?"⁴ He is dressed like a native. He is carrying a copy of the *Boston Globe*, and he affects a strong Boston accent. Invariably, he gets a very brief reply to his question:



⁴ Reported in Krauss and Glucksberg, 1977.

As you see, the typical adult respondent answers his question without breaking stride, using just five words which in some quarters would not pass as a complete sentence. For this answer to be adequate, consider just some of the knowledge which the dozens of passersby had to assume that the questioner also knew: where the subway is, which direction you go on the subway to get to Central Square, and also the convention that Bostonians do not use elaborate forms of courtesy when addressing unknown fellow Bostonians—and this is to mention just the most obvious assumptions about the knowledge the other person is assumed to have.

Now in the next phase of the experiment, the undergraduate goes back to the streets of Cambridge in a different get-up and prefaces his question with the statement “I’m from out of town.” After a time he discovered he could get the same results if he just signaled his out-of-townness by adopting a rural Missouri accent which is exotic enough in Cambridge to indicate “I’m from out of town.” In this second phase of the experiment, also repeated dozens of times, this was the typical sort of result:



You will notice that this response to a stranger is similar in its prolixity to the elaborated code used by adults to describe the strange shapes in the previous experiment. In both cases adults tended to use the elaborated codes typical of writing whenever they found themselves talking to strangers, or talking about strange things. For in writing we are rarely on truly intimate terms with our readers. On the other hand, our readers could not be radical strangers—Martians—if we expected to communicate at all. So, the strangeness-quotient in speech, whether of topics or persons, is a purely relative, or rather a purely cultural matter. And our prolixity or brevity will depend upon our degree of shared cultural knowledge. In fact we could state this principle as a universal law for all writers: The amount of information that must be made explicit in a piece of writing is inversely proportional to the amount of information that is already shared between writer and reader.

Before I turn to our Virginia experiments I want to expatiate on this point for a moment, since it bears upon the results of those experiments. A basic writer's lack of familiarity with the knowledge and expectations of his readers is to some degree a problem that faces all writers. None of us can know for sure what sort of people our readers will be, but we know how to make informed guesses, and in particular how to imagine an appropriate common reader for what we write. I say "appropriate" because most writing aims at a particular group of readers, and assumes in them a particular range of common knowledge. For instance if I were writing an article for the *Astrophysical Journal* I would posit a common reader for that journal.

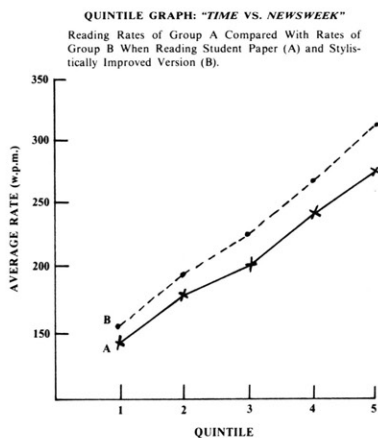
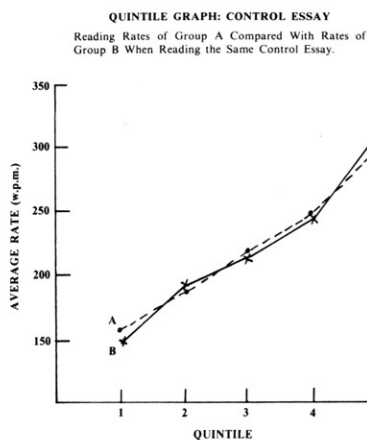
The term "common reader" goes back to the 18th century, to Dr. Johnson. "I rejoice to concur with the common reader," he remarked in his *Life of Gray*, "for by the common sense of readers must he generally decide all claim to poetical honors." And undoubtedly in Johnson's own day there did exist a commonality of literate people who shared much the same grammar school education, who had read many of the same ancient and modern authors, who continued to read many of the same periodicals, including Dr. Johnson's, and who could be counted on to have a certain range of shared knowledge and attitudes. This was the kind of shared culture that defined the common reader in Johnson's day. With much greater variation, it also defines the common reader in our own. The shared culture of the common reader is what one *means* by cultural literacy.

Now the idea of the common reader was one of the principles that governed the composition research we undertook a year ago at the University of Virginia. Our original purpose was to find out how much difference good writing versus bad actually made to the common reader of

our own day. We reasoned that if some consistent difference could be measured between the effectiveness of a well-written text and a poorly written one that conveyed the same meanings, then perhaps some aspects of paper-grading could be related to the real world, with attendant benefits to students, teachers and researchers. We also assumed that if we gathered about two hundred literate adults together in a room, we might get a statistical approximation of the common reader of our own culture and might therefore get highly duplicatable results.

In a typical presentation we did gather about two hundred people in a lecture room, in the front of which was a big digital clock that kept time in seconds. From this clock, the readers could set down the starting and finishing times of each task they performed. Then we distributed booklets, half of which contained an essay written by an inexperienced freshman, while the other half contained an expert rewrite of the same essay. Also included in both booklets were questionnaires about the content of the essays. And, of course, in all cases, we also included identical essays in both booklets as controls.

Our early results were highly promising, because we quickly demonstrated that a rewrite by an expert did indeed communicate more effectively than the original freshman piece, even when the length, meaning, and tone of the rewrite stayed as close as possible to the original. This was apparently the first time anyone had measured the global difference that good writing makes. Just how much difference is shown in the next figure.



These two graphs placed side by side are called quintile graphs because the computer has divided readers of each booklet into five groups, according to their reading rates, with the lowest fifth labeled 1 along the base of the graph, the next fastest fifth labeled 2, and so on. The vertical line marks off reading rates. The *average* reading rate for each of these groups was then plotted above its quintile number and marked as a point or as an X to distinguish the groups. Then we drew a solid line between the X's and a dotted line between the points, thus giving a visual picture of the way our two groups of readers dealt with the two texts presented to them. For simplicity, these graphs leave out separate plots of accuracy scores. And in any case (because of our instructions to the audience), the difference in accuracy scores was rarely more than two percent.

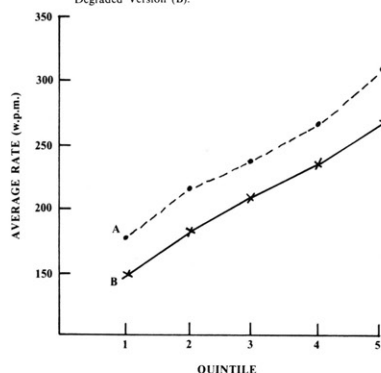
Now this was really a very pretty result. The left-hand graph shows how the two groups performed when they read the same essay, and it shows quite convincingly that our shuffling of the booklets had paired off two very similar groups of readers. Since we always got this kind of result on the control essays, we were persuaded that our procedures were sufficiently reliable that differences in the performances of the groups would be highly informative about writing quality.

And so they proved to be, as you can observe on the right-hand graph. In this case, one half of the audience read the original student essay neatly retyped and properly punctuated, while the other group, indicated by the broken line, read an expert revision which contained only stylistic changes, such as those which composition teachers usually recommend. The expert version was, as you see, read and understood much more efficiently than was the original paper. Moreover, since the student paper was a rather good one—in the B-minus range according to most of our teaching staff—we had apparently developed a rather sensitive measure of the difference between good and bad writing. But what we had also developed, as we went on to discover, was an interesting measurement of some of the cultural dimensions that lie invisibly beyond style and rhetoric per se. It was the later discovery that germinated the subject of this present essay.

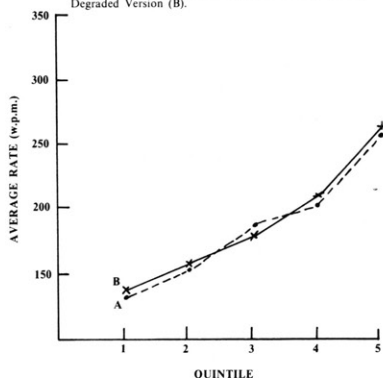
Before I discuss the next figure, I will describe the experiments that produced its results. In these experiments, instead of rewriting student essays, we decided to run some tests on well-written, published essays that had been stylistically degraded according to some specific rules. What we mainly did to degrade the essays was to change the order of clauses or words within the sentences so that the main idea was put in the middle instead of at the beginning or end where the original writer had put it. This also had the effect of interfering with the coherence of the original, by separating words that linked one sentence to another. But since we did not alter the actual words or the order of the sentences, the meanings of the two

versions remained essentially the same. The texts we used were passages from the multi-volumed *History of Civilization* by William and Ariel Durant, which could serve as an endless source of diverse materials, all written in a similar style, and all directed to the same readers. In the next figure you can see how our readers performed when they dealt with two essay pairs, one of them on a rather familiar topic for them, the other on an unfamiliar topic.

QUINTILE GRAPH: DURANT, "EPICUREAN ROME"
Reading Rates of Group A Compared With Rates of Group B When Reading Original (A) And Stylistically Degraded Version (B).



QUINTILE GRAPH: DURANT, "HEGEL"
Reading Rates of Group A Compared With Rates of Group B When Reading Original (A) And Stylistically Degraded Version (B).



The essay on the left was a descriptive piece on everyday life in Ancient Rome, and it focused on the institution of the baths. The essay on the right was an explanation of Hegel's conception of logic as metaphysics. Remember that the styles are equally non-technical in both cases, and that the original versions (represented by the broken lines) were both degraded in exactly the same ways. The only difference was the familiarity of the topic for our readers.

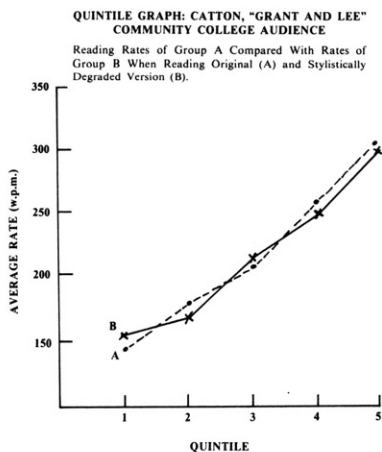
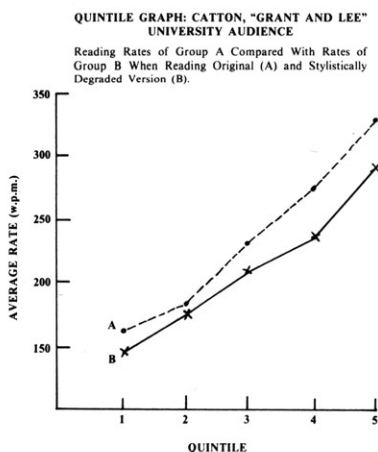
This was by no means an obvious or predictable result. In fact, one could imagine its going in just the other direction, with the double handicap of an unfamiliar topic *and* an incoherent style tending to widen the differences between the two essays on Hegel. What in fact happened, however, was that the topic itself required so much time and effort from the reader that the added effort induced by a poor style became irrelevant.

Or one could put the conjectured explanation in another way: the amount of pondering and dredging-up required to make sense of the linguistic surface was largely going on beneath the linguistic surface. Because the topic was unfamiliar, the assumptions behind the topic (even

though vaguely known to the common reader) had to be worked out explicitly in the reader's mind to make the linguistic surface meaningful. You will notice that the audience read the Hegel about fifty words-per-minute slower than the Roman baths—thus obliterating the magnitude of speed discrimination owing to style alone.⁵

One's first instinct is to say that the Hegel subject was *intrinsically* more difficult and abstract than the Roman subject, but that is probably quite wrong. The Hegel topic was harder for these readers simply because it was less familiar to them. If we had conducted our experiments at a convention of philosophers, it is highly likely that the two graphs on bathing and on Hegel would have looked very similar.⁶

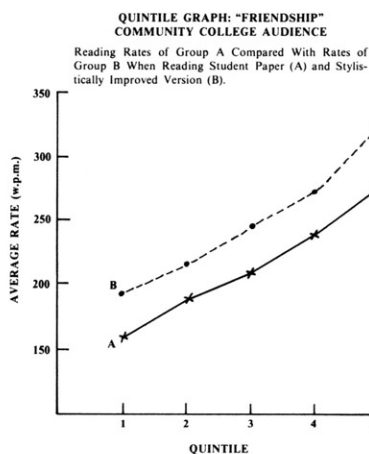
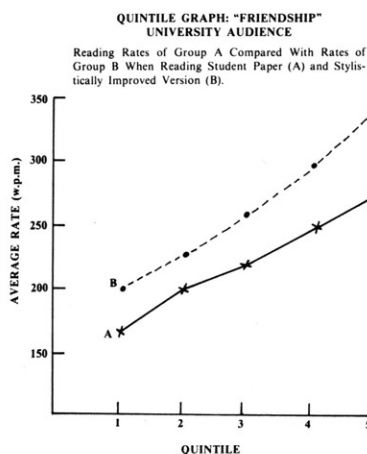
This interpretation is borne out by another experiment we conducted, again using systematically degraded texts. In this case our original text was a passage from Bruce Catton that contrasted the personalities of Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee. But instead of finding another, less familiar topic in Catton's book, we simply presented this same text to two different kinds of audience, the first consisting of about two hundred university students, the second of about two hundred community-college students who were in basic and intermediate writing courses. The next figure shows the results:



⁵ This explanation assumes that there's a limit to the time and effort people are willing to expend in puzzling out the meaning of a text. The limit is probably a generous one in reading the short, 750-word texts which we used in our experiments. When texts are longer, reader tolerance may decline, and the effects of bad writing and hard subjects may be greater with these longer texts. This conjecture must, of course, be validated.

⁶ This point must be validated by further empirical work.

You will quickly notice the similarity with the pairing of Hegel and the Roman baths. For our community-college subjects, reading about Grant and Lee was rather like reading about Hegel's logic in the earlier case. Community college students could do it, and could answer questions accurately, but they had to dredge up consciously so much unfamiliar, extra-linguistic material that the quality of the linguistic surface became irrelevant to them. To show that this interpretation is highly plausible, let me provide one last figure, in which the university audiences and the community college audiences are reading a simple student essay on friendship—along with its expert revision.



From this last example, it seems warranted to suppose that the quality of writing style only begins to make a significant difference when readers are culturally literate—when they have sufficient extra-linguistic knowledge to permit an easy competence in the linguistic sphere.

There is a famous anecdote about a Princeton matron who went to hear the great Einstein speak on the General Theory of Relativity. Her puzzled comment after the lecture was "I understood all of the words; it was how they were put together that baffled me." This is a pungent description of how an understanding of the linguistic surface of speech depends upon an extra-linguistic knowledge of the subject matter which the linguistic

surface treats. And just recently, I ran across a very clever and specific example of this phenomenon in the most recent issue of the *English Journal*. It was called "The Readability of an Unreadable Text," by Robert Gordon.⁷ He took a published text whose readability score was only fourth-grade level on the Dale-Chall index. As you know, these readability scores are based on the familiarity of words, the average sentence length, and the number of syllables in a 100 word passage. Such indexes to readability work reliably on the average because short, familiar words are generally used in familiar ways, and short sentences are easy to process. But this was the passage Gordon chose:

"Well then," said Parmenides, "if there is a one, of course the one will not be many. Thus it cannot have any parts or be a whole. For a part is a part of a whole, and a whole means that from which no part is missing; so whether you speak of it as 'a whole' or as 'many parts' in either case the one would consist of parts and in that way be many and not one. But it is to be one and not many. Therefore if the one is to be one, it will not be a whole nor have parts." (137-d)

This is, in fact, a very easy passage for anybody who knows Plato and what he is getting at in *The Parmenides*, but that includes very few people, I suppose, and nobody in fourth grade. Yet the linguistic surface *is* normal in syntax and fourth-grade level in vocabulary. Psychologically speaking, one might say that the topic is strange to those who lack a well formed "schema" for metaphysical speculation, because they have not been exposed to other passages like this one. In Piagetian terms, they have difficulty in accommodating what is being said to schemata that they already possess. Thus an ordinary reader will need a great deal of time to work out ways of accommodating such a linguistic surface to more familiar schemata. Or, alternatively, the reader might need to get more words from an editor or commentator, in order to help him perform this accommodation. In either case, this simple linguistic surface from Plato will normally require a lot of processing time from a reader.

It seems to me that these considerations have potential application to the teaching of writing. It suggests that there exists an unbroken continuum from cultural literacy, to literacy in reading, and thence to competence in writing. How could a person possibly write better than he or she can read? One has to read one's own writing, after all, in making the most elemental

⁷ Robert Gordon, "The Readability of an Unreadable Text," *English Journal*, 69 (March, 1980), 60-61.

stylistic choices. And how can one read one's own writing on a topic which is unfamiliar—or make guesses about one's reader's knowledge of such a topic? How would one know what to include or omit? Is it plausible to think that the basic writing students who found Grant and Lee to be unfamiliar topics for reading, would be able to write about Grant and Lee effectively? Surely they could do so only after long reading, in which they not only learned about Grant and Lee, but also learned what their own readers could be expected to know about Grant and Lee. One is led to the conclusion that advancement in cultural literacy is a firm pre-requisite for advancement in the skill of writing. This implies, of course, that there can be no quick fix to our students' shortcomings in writing. No amount of training in the skills of composition, in the writing process, and in the basics will by themselves convey the additional cultural information that underlies advancement in general literacy.

This (for me) newly-won insight fosters a certain skepticism about the practical importance of new researches into the writing process. I am strongly in favor of this research. We can never learn too much about the most efficient and successful methods of teaching the skills of writing. On the other hand, we also need a reminder that even in the domain of writing skill per se, the cultural element always obtrudes. Except for spelling, and the motor skills used in forming letters, all aspects of grammar, vocabulary, and habitual speech patterns are determined by the earlier cultural backgrounds of our students. In our diverse culture, every classroom is full of students with very different cultural starting points, and this makes it highly unlikely that we will find a single optimal technique of instruction in writing skills—unless it be the method of individual tutorial instruction.

This insight was the real point at issue in the recent, much-publicized court case in Ann Arbor where parents of Black children argued successfully that white teachers should learn the speech conventions of Black children in order to lead them effectively into the standard conventions. Because the cultural starting points of these Black children were non-standard, the techniques of acculturation should take that fact into account. That was the common sense behind the ideological rhetoric in the case; and that is surely why the Black parents won, and the School Board decided not to appeal. The whole incident points away from standardized methods of teaching writing, towards eclectic ones suitable to diverse classrooms. Most of us teachers in actual classrooms have learned that the most useful composition research has been the experience of our colleagues who teach the same sorts of students as we, in the same sort of cultural setting. Perhaps this fact explains the recent popularity of so-called "naturalistic" educational research.

My skepticism towards a pure skills-approach to composition applies also to our expropriation of findings from other disciplines such as semantics, linguistics, heuristics, psychology, psycholinguistics, and text-linguistics. Here again, I speak as a newly-won convert away from my earlier sanguine expectations. These fields are full of rich insights which add to our theoretical understanding of language. But their contributions are elementary and universal ones. Any teacher of Basic Writing is already dealing with cultural complexities of discourse that make the most sophisticated psycholinguistic experiments seem primitive. This was a conclusion that I reluctantly reached after immersing myself for five years in psycholinguistics, and then writing a chapter on the subject in my book on composition theory. I had to concede that every direct application of new findings from psycholinguistics was already well-represented in traditional textbooks, some of them going back to Hugh Blair's in the eighteenth century.

I hope I am not misunderstood in making these observations. I am not trying to suggest that the skills approach to writing has been overstressed. Anyone who writes knows that writing skills cannot possibly be overstressed or overtaught. My point is, rather, that the cultural approach, the imparting of essential information has been *neglected* as an integral part of our teaching of writing. I also hope I am not misunderstood when I stress that there can be no royal road, even paved with good research, to the teaching of writing. No *royal* road, but a road. There is a body of principles and maxims which successful and experienced teachers have acquired, and which constitutes a system of genuine practical knowledge. My skepticism has simply extended to the hope for a wonder drug that will quickly cure our students' threefold illiteracy in reading, writing, and in cultural knowledge. In short, the burden of my song is that writing competence is a deeply complex and far-reaching cultural acquisition, which has declined even where efficiency in teaching the skill of writing has advanced.

Having now made this point from several different directions, I will devote my last minutes to its positive and practical implications in moving us towards a literate democracy, the subject of this conference. My first inference concerns the unfortunate fragmentation of our teaching of literacy. I know from my own experience that this fragmentation has been accelerating at the college level since around 1950, when college English teachers divided themselves into two separate professional organizations—teachers of literature and teachers of composition—represented by the Modern Language Association on the one hand, and the Conference on College Composition and Communication on the other. The emphasis on composition in the past few years has accelerated this fall into disunity.

My own attitude to this division must be obvious from what I have been saying. It is a very unfortunate and regressive development. Every teacher of writing should ideally be also a teacher of literature in its broadest sense. The teacher of literacy needs also to be a teacher of cultural literacy. The worst of all worlds would be to have separate courses conducted by different technocratic specialists in reading, in writing, and in literature—that world towards which we are now moving. Teachers themselves should be culturally literate, and should be able to teach all dimensions of literacy.

Another inference is that Back-to-the-Basics needs to be supplemented with Back-to-the-Classics: back to content, shared knowledge, cultural literacy. Cultural literacy implies, does it not, teaching shared knowledge about ourselves, our history and our world, our laws, our political, economic, and social arrangements, our classical texts from a great many domains including TV, the movies, and literature. The hope that an invisible hand will somehow integrate the fragmented knowledge that we convey in our schools is beginning to lose its appeal, as we infer from the reinstitution of required courses in the colleges. I hope that these are portents of an insight into the connection between cultural literacy and literacy per se. It is no accident that a report of declines in writing skills was accompanied by a report that forty-seven per cent of our seventeen-year-olds—students on the verge of being voters—do not know that each state elects two senators, have no notion of the fifth amendment, believe that the President appoints members of Congress.⁸ We have all heard these horror stories, yet even as I write this, I read in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* that a plan to assess the actual knowledge acquired by students in different school systems has been attacked by educators as inappropriate to our pluralistic society. In this context the word “pluralistic” begins to sound like a code word for evasion of responsibility.⁹

In my own mind there is a direct rather than accidental connection

⁸ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (New York: Norton, 1978), Chapter 5, “The New Illiteracy.”

⁹ Since writing this, I have had a chance to pursue some experiments with the kinds of tacit information required by articles in *The Reader's Digest*. The tacitly assumed information is signaled, usually, by the explicit words of the text. For instance, in the Grant and Lee text mentioned above, to be familiar with the words *Grant* and *Lee*, and what they signify in our culture, is already to have the requisite cultural information for reading the passage. Hence cultural literacy does not reside in knowledge of a canonical list of texts, but rather in the knowledge that is represented by having a wide linguistic repertory. To understand and know how to use words is to have also the shared information that lies behind their use. So long as a student achieves an adequate linguistic repertory, it scarcely matters how he got there. So a pluralistic attitude toward method and curricula is more defensible than a pluralistic (responsibility-evasive) attitude toward educational aims.

between the new cultural illiteracy and the decline in writing competence. The decline is not altogether owing to TV, which in some respects is a force *for* cultural literacy. After I read one summer about three thousand freshman essays from university and community college students, I was persuaded that the decline in writing competence is real. But in most cases the decline is in the conventions and nuances of writing, more than in grammar and spelling. It seems connected with a decline in the amount of reading and writing students have done, but most of all, with the loss of a sense of membership in a literate community that provides an appropriate audience to which writing can be addressed. This new cultural illiteracy makes writing a strange and Kafkaesque activity for people who cannot possibly have a sense of a common reader to whom their writing could be directed.

There has thus arisen in exacerbated form the phenomenon of writing anxiety—comparable to math anxiety, but in some respects more disabling. Many of the most moving examples in Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* are examples of the writing anxieties of basic writers. And Professor Morris Holland of UCLA, a psychologist, has observed in basic writers the classical symptoms, including physical ones, of acute anxiety.¹⁰ From interviewing such students, Holland found that the chief cause of their fear and disorientation is their uncertainty about how their writing will be responded to—not just how it will be graded, but how it will be understood and valued. The student is like K in Kafka's *Trial* who knows he has broken some law and is to be punished, but cannot say *which* law it might be. I think that much of this disabling uncertainty and anxiety is well-warranted, because there is, for these student writers, no dependable readership and no sense of membership in a literate community.

As teachers we want to introduce our students into this community. In this talk, I have argued that this means we must teach not just shared linguistic skills, but shared cultural knowledge as well. Finally, this raises the question whether this leads us logically to a Napoleonic sort of educational system in which everybody is taught exactly the same things as everybody else. I trust not. But we are led towards such a conception even if only to a limited extent. I have no doubt that there are some things we want every citizen to know—for instance, whether a U.S. senator is elected by the people or appointed by the President, and so on. Perhaps we could agree also that there are some texts or facts that we want everyone to share as a common inheritance.

¹⁰ Morris Holland, "Writing Anxiety," unpublished talk presented in Los Angeles, 1978.

But, beyond this agreed-upon, narrow core of knowledge, a totally regimented curriculum is quite unfeasible. The knowledge most needful changes over the years, and, in any case, educational regimentation is not going to be accepted in this diverse and independent-minded country. So, for us, the idea of cultural literacy must entail not just shared pieces of knowledge, but also shared *types* of knowledge. Even if all high school graduates do not read *Hamlet*, perhaps all of them could read one tragedy by Shakespeare? The cultural commonality would then partly reside in shared types of experience, and common *types* of knowledge is what cultural literacy partly means.

Psycholinguists have shown that these typical structures, called "schemata", are required for both reading and writing. Moreover, these schemata can be shared even when they are built up from similar rather than identical materials. Reading one nineteenth century novel is about as useful as reading another in building up these complex convention systems. Seeing one episode of *MASH* will be as useful as seeing another. The same holds true in building up the shared schemata needed for writing. Nonetheless, the teaching of cultural literacy cannot be haphazard. It will not take care of itself. It requires us to agree about the *kinds* of materials we shall teach, and also about some of the particular facts and texts we shall teach. It would certainly be useful to literacy if this idea of a central shared education were at least being discussed more widely than is now being done. I believe that no subject is more pressing for the advancement of literacy.¹¹

So much, then, for my speculations on the extra-linguistic foundations of literacy. This is where Mina's advice has led me so far. I have been led from basic writing to Shakespeare by what seems to me an unbroken chain of implication. It has renewed my sense of the rightness of training composition teachers in subject matters, including literature, and the wrongness of sustaining a separate class of composition specialists who teach nothing else, and who come to think of writing as a craft and a subject in its own right. On the contrary, writing is a craft that is part of a much wider literate culture which the teacher should not only teach but also exemplify. The English teacher has an authentic double vocation in both literature and in literacy. Mina Shaughnessy exemplified this double tradition so brilliantly that she and her work will continue to be for us at once a reassurance and an inspiration.

¹¹ But see note 9, above.

ETHNOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS IN THE ACQUISITION AND RETENTION OF BILITERACY

Although most of us have lost the innocence of nineteenth century educators and social reformers who believed that widespread literacy itself would automatically usher in a better world, we all—professional teachers and professional students alike—still tend to believe in literacy. Indeed, Stahl has catalogued twelve very common intellectual assumptions, nay, convictions, concerning the benefits of literacy, among them being refinement of language, widening of interest, learning through indirect experience, changing perceptions of reality, acquiring deeper understanding of human nature, and gaining greater perspective on one's self.¹ Not being unduly influenced by the pragmatic philosophy of the New World, Stahl—a product of Central European literary idealism—does not mention the economic benefits from literacy that most Americans would immediately specify. However, be we idealists or pragmatists, we tend to agree that literacy is a good thing and that there should be more of it; that is, that its level should be raised and its distribution more equitably extended. We are alarmed at the currently retreating levels of literacy at the levels of secondary and tertiary education and we bemoan the consequences of such retreat for an intelligent electorate, for a sound economy, and, indeed, for a civilized citizenry. The Old Order Amish and Mennonite skepticism with respect to literacy—particularly their notion of “too much literacy”—strikes us an unsuitable societal model for life in the midst of rapid urban change and increasing social complexity. It is in this very context that I hope to take you for a tour of several schools pursuing literacy in *two* languages.

Given the apparent difficulty experienced by American urban school

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¹ Abraham Stahl, “Creative Writers on the Effects of Reading,” *Journal of Reading Behavior*, 7 (1975), 112-122.

systems in attaining adult levels of *monoliteracy*, it may seem rather indelicate of me to stress, as I intend to do, that *biliteracy*—the mastery of reading in particular, and at times also writing, in two (or more) languages—is not at all a rare skill among that portion of mankind that has successfully won the battle for literacy. I do so, however, not only because societal bilingualism happens to be my particular area of professional competence, but because *biliteracy* particularly lends itself to appreciations that may also help us understand *monoliteracy* differently and, perhaps, even better than before.

VARIOUS KINDS OF BILITERACY

Perhaps the major force for biliteracy today, on a world-wide basis, is the continued spread of English as a second language almost everywhere.² The ability to read English has become no more than a taken-for-granted characteristic of the average younger Scandinavian and German and is close to approaching that status among educated (i.e., literate) younger Israelis, Arabs, Japanese, and Indians (from India). In geographically smaller spheres of influence, French and Russian, too, are having the same effect outside of their own national borders. On a still smaller scale, the movements for one or another international auxiliary language also result in the spread of biliteracy since literacy in any one of them is always acquired by individuals who are already literate in one ethnocultural language. Let us call this type of biliteracy *language-of-wider-communication based biliteracy*. It is usually the result of the expansion of econo-technical, commercial, religious, ideological, or cultural establishments to such an extent that ethnoculturally diverse first language users find it advantageous not only to use the language of wider communication (LWC) when addressing mother tongue speakers of that language, but to use it with one another as well.

Quite a different constellation of biliteracy is that which may be labeled *traditional*. This much over used word means many different things, but one thing that it always means is assumed historical depth. There are a few biliteracy traditions that may have started via the spread of languages of wider communication but that have indigenized “the other language” to such an extent that it has become a well established vehicle of *intragroup* literacy. Indeed, when the two languages are genetically related they are sometimes viewed as one. Thus traditional Jewish biliteracy in Hebrew and

² Joshua A. Fishman, Robert L. Cooper, and Andrew W. Conrad, *The Spread of English* (Rowley: Newbury House, 1977).

Judeo-Aramaic was and is frequently interpreted in this fashion (the two together being designated *Loshn Koydesh*). So is Greek facility in Classical and Katarevusa, and now in Demotiki texts, and Chinese facility in Classical Mandarin and in modern Pekingese, not to mention regional, e.g., Cantonese, texts. However, Old Order Pennsylvania German traditional biliteracy is not of this two-in-one kind. The two—Luther Bible German and English—are definitely *two* and not *one*, although English is also used primarily for *intragroup* purposes. The Older Order folk may, now and then, write a letter or send a bill to an outsider, but what they publish in English they publish for their own edification. This, then, is the hallmark of traditional biliteracy, regardless of the historical or linguistic provenance of the languages involved. Unlike LWC biliteracy, where one language is primarily inward looking and the other is a window to the outside world, traditional biliteracy utilizes two languages primarily for *intragroup* purposes.³

Finally we come to *(im)migration based biliteracy*. This type of biliteracy shares some features with each of the foregoing types. It is like *LWC biliteracy* in that one literacy tradition is obviously acquired from and directed toward *intergroup* communication. It is like traditional biliteracy in that it has a strong authenticity or language maintenance stress as well. It differs from LWC biliteracy in that instead of a language having moved or spread to a new speech community, a speech community has moved to a new language environment. On the other hand, it differs from traditional biliteracy in that the newly acquired literacy tradition is exactly that, new rather than indigenized. Such is the nature of mass migrations in the modern world that quite a bit of *(im)migrant biliteracy* is in evidence. One finds ample examples of *(im)migrant based biliteracy* in expatriate European communities in Latin America, diaspora communities of Indians (from India), Armenians, and Lebanese, the world-wide (particularly the Third World-wide) phenomena of consular and diplomatic/commercial/technical staffs and their families, not to mention the honest-to-goodness immigrants and refugees that have resettled en masse throughout the world—not the least of all in the U.S.A. Certainly New York City is a natural laboratory for the study of just such biliteracy, as it is, indeed, for the study of biliteracy of all three kinds.

³ Charles A. Ferguson, "The Role of Arabic in Ethiopia: A Sociolinguistic Perspective," *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1970), 355-370, and "Patterns of Literacy in Multilingual Situations," *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1979), 582-590.

Let us take a tour of some biliterate school-and-community settings in New York and in doing so, ask ourselves how they manage to do it. For the purpose of ethnocultural comparisons, we will visit a French school, a Hebrew school, a Greek school, an Armenian school and a Chinese school, all five of them being all-day schools and, therefore, teaching English as well as their more particularistic languages. The first school, French, is an example of LWC based biliteracy; the second, Hebrew, an example of a mixed case of traditional biliteracy and immigrant biliteracy (potentially of trilateracy, if Hebrew and Aramaic are counted separately, and of quadrilateracy, if Yiddish too is seriously employed—as it is by many schools of this community); while the last three, Greek, Armenian, and Chinese, are more usual examples of immigrant biliteracy. These schools are representative of the universe of some 1500 such bilingual/biliterate/bicultural day schools in the U.S.A. today, the latter themselves being no more than a quarter of our country's total current bilingual/bicultural schooling effort under non-public auspices.⁴

ETHNOFUNCTIONAL COMPARISONS

In stable bilingual communities the two languages employed have different functional allocations; they are used for at least partially unique situations, topics, role relations, or interactions. To the extent that this functional uniqueness is preserved and protected, their separate functional continuity is maintained. So too, perhaps, with stable societal biliteracy. Speech communities maintain biliteracy institutions such as schools because they are convinced that they need two literacies for two at least partially distinct sets of functions. In all of the communities we are visiting, English is the link not only to the "outside world" politically and culturally, but to most of the world of work, and the worlds of sports and amusement and entertainment to the extent that these are recognized. Parents want their children to be able to read English well—and to a lesser extent to write English well—and most parents in almost all of the five groups have mastered these skills themselves to a reasonable degree. Although some parents in each community do quite a lot of English reading and writing, and although, on the whole, they all generally fall within the broad middle class and are predominantly second generation American born (except in

⁴ Joshua A. Fishman and Barbara Markman, *The Ethnic Mother-Tongue School in America: Assumptions, Findings, Directory* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1979). Multilithed report to NIE under Grant G-78-0133.

the Greek school), the newspaper, the favorite magazine, a little business-related reading, a modicum of correspondence, and a fashionable book every once in a while account for all the English reading and writing of the majority.

When we examine the functional roles and the social reward systems for non-English reading, a very diverse picture is obtained. French reading symbolically stands for *belle lettres* and the highest esthetic experience of Western civilization. It appears, overtly, however, that very little French reading is engaged in, and that which does occur is much more likely to deal with cooking, fashions, and etiquette. Hebrew reading is generally primarily rote recitation of prayers with only one eye on the well worn text. Some Jewish parents do, of course, look into rather recondite Talmudic texts on a rather regular basis, but only the men have ever had a chance to learn how to do so. While Yiddish can be read by some members of both sexes, on the other hand, the material read is far lighter—sometimes humorous and intimate—and the frequency of reading Yiddish is even less than for Hebrew as a result of functional competition with both English and Hebrew. Both Greek parents and Armenian parents generally have a smattering of the ecclesiastical reading necessary at their church services. Their reading in the modern language is also often religiously oriented and overwhelmingly ethnic in content, as is that of the Chinese parents. The children's reading in these languages is equally intra-community oriented; it focuses on material simply not available and, commonly, not desired to be available in English. Only French stands apart from the following generalization to some extent—because French has international connotations that the other languages lack—but for the others it is quite literally true: ethnic mother tongue literacy is pursued and well mastered by children during their school years, because their parents, who may have already lost part of the biliterate fluency that they too had as children, nevertheless view it as a mark of ethnic belonging, sophistication, and leadership. Ethnic language literacy is associated, among adult members of the community, with the ideal ethnic culture, with the best that the tradition has created and with the finest that it has to offer. It is primarily of symbolic usefulness rather than of practical usefulness; it has sentimental functionality rather than broad instrumental functionality. However, for all that, ethnic language literacy is strongly valued by the parents. The school for them is a major socialization channel into the ethnic community and into the pursuit of ethnic continuity. The acquisition of ethnic language literacy is viewed as a prerequisite for the optimal attainment of both community and continuity, even if it is not always absolutely necessary for the adults who support the schools themselves. Coming to know one's ethnicity is strongly

related to literacy in each of these cases.⁵ Their schools focus on “knowing” and, therefore, on literacy acquisition, even if ethnic literacy ultimately becomes a somewhat rare and rusty skill for most adult members of the community.

ETHNOPEDAGOGIC COMPARISONS

English reading in each of the schools is pursued in accord with rather modern American methods. Phonics and whole word methods—analytic and synthetic approaches—are combined, with early emphasis being more on the former than on the latter. Only some ten percent of the children are non-native speakers of English, and even fewer are less than fluent in English by the time they arrive in school. Non-fluent English speakers are given different degrees of initial attention—never very much or for very long since the schools lack the budgets and the manpower and the conviction needed in order to give more attention. Nonetheless, non-English mother tongue pupils never remain a problem for more than a semester to a year at most. There is nothing, furthermore, about the way English is taught that reflects different pedagogic cultures, not even in the Greek and Armenian schools where the teachers of English are generally fluent speakers of Greek and Armenian and were themselves students in schools not unlike the ones in which they are now teaching. With respect to how English reading is taught, the schools are typically good, white, middle class American schools. Not so when it comes to teaching children how to read their non-English language.

French reading, taught with great stress on “proper” standard pronunciation, is taught somewhat before English reading on the ground that it is more phonetic and, therefore, helps in the acquisition of English reading as well. Hebrew and Chinese reading, on the other hand, are taught somewhat later than—and, in the Chinese case, also more slowly than—English reading. Hebrew reading is stressed only after prayers have been fully internalized although readiness for it is introduced earlier; and, indeed, Hebrew reading, when first acquired, briefly interferes with the rapidity and automaticity of prayer.⁶ Chinese reading comes rather slowly and is accompanied by seemingly endless choral repetition and copying

⁵ Joshua A. Fishman, “Language and Ethnicity,” in *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*, ed. H. Giles (New York: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 15-58, and Joshua A. Fishman, “Language, Ethnicity, and Racism,” *Georgetown Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics* (1977), 297-309.

⁶ For earlier Eastern European approaches to childhood acquisition of Hebrew literacy see Diane Roskies, “Alphabet Instruction in the East European Heder: Some Comparative and Historical Notes,” *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science*, 17 (1978), 21-53.

with close attention to the sequence of strokes. Finally, Greek and Armenian reading are pursued simultaneously with English reading. The instructional approach makes much use of coloring books and picture books, singing, and dramatics. Learning to read Greek and Armenian is accompanied by lots of ethnic fun and games. The French school's conviction that French is more phonetic than English is also widely shared vis-a-vis their own ethnic writing systems among Greek and Armenian teachers, is even claimed by the Chinese teachers (!), and is least frequently claimed by teachers of Hebrew. Nevertheless, phonetic or not, Hebrew reading generally seems to be well acquired by the second grade, and Chinese reading, although it takes longer, is not viewed as taking an inordinate amount of time. A "traditional" frame of reference is obviously being employed and being applied to Chinese but not to English, since English is *supposed* to "go faster."

Thus, in terms of ethnopedagogy, we are observing a variety of rationales, procedures, and rates. Ethnopedagogies in New York City represent different traditions of literacy inculcation as these interact with the novel task of imparting English literacy as well. Interestingly enough, however, none of the schools views biliteracy as particularly difficult or problematic, and none of them reports experiencing drop-outs, complaints, or tears in connection with its pursuit. Nothing less than biliteracy is wanted, pursued, or achieved. Biliteracy is viewed as normal in both senses of the word, norm as common and norm as desired.

ETHNOLINGUISTIC COMPARISONS

One of the major areas of applied linguistics in the U.S.A. is that which deals with the teaching of reading to native speakers of those varieties of English that are structurally quite different from standard school English. Most of these "problem learners" are speakers of Black English, and a recent District Federal Court order requires teachers to learn it themselves so that they can better teach *in it* and, ultimately, *through it* to ease the transition to standard English. The difficulties experienced in connection with dialectal distance from the school norm in American public education might prepare us to expect or at least to look for similar or even greater difficulties in the non-English community schools that we have been studying. Actually, no such difficulties are encountered.

Insofar as English is concerned, none of the American-born pupils arrive in school with more than mild non-standard accents, accents which reflect the informal English of their homes and neighborhoods. Many teachers in these schools also share these non-standard accents (intonations, pro-

sodics) but have them under good control, which is to say they can minimize them in school when they interact in the teacher role either with colleagues, pupils, or parents. Some teachers—particularly in the Greek school—teach in accented English although their pupils' English is always less accented than their own. Teachers seem to aim at nothing more than adding school English or strengthening it in the children's pre-existing English repertoire of Greek-English, Armenian-English, Jewish-English, or Chinese-English, respectively. On the other hand, American-born pupils at the French school do not come speaking French-English; and this, therefore, eliminates this particular problem for the French school, except as every school in the world must seek to take vernacular speakers several notches closer to the school standard, at least insofar as reading and writing are concerned. However, it is not really much of a problem for the other schools either. No one's English in the five schools we are reviewing is as significantly discrepant from the school norm as is the English of Black English speakers. Even were it to be otherwise, many teachers in these schools are already at the point that the courts recently required of teachers of speakers of Black English: they already know and speak and are functionally and emotionally comfortable with the local variety of English and can not only understand it but can use it to pedagogic effect, which means that they can use it or not use it and teach their pupils to vary their repertoires as well.

When we turn to the ethnic mother tongues, the situation is somewhat more varied insofar as speakers of non-school varieties are concerned. American-born children do not come to either the French school or the Hebrew school speaking these respective languages. Thus, these children get their first, or first major, exposure to the non-English language in school proper, and, therefore, no dialect but the school dialect is initially learned. As for native speakers of these two languages—some ten to fifteen per cent in each school—neither school is terribly pleased with them, but not for reasons of distance from the school norm. They mostly represent streaming problems in the early grades, for they are already fluent in a language that other pupils are still learning. In the French case, no arrivals from overseas have ever *dared* bring (or so we are told) a non-school variety of the language into school from their homes. Presumably, whether they come from Toulouse, Marseilles or Strasbourg, they have already been dialect disinfected, either by their prior school or by the cleansing effect of crossing the Atlantic. Native Hebrew speakers are also rarely perceived as ethnolinguistically problematic. Indeed, although a few arrive pronouncing glottals not available in the Ashkenazi phonological repertoire,

more arrive with a disdain for religious ritual and belief, and that is infinitely more problematic for the school authorities than a few glottals here or there.

The dialect problem is somewhat more recognizable at the Greek and Armenian schools. In both of these cases, the majority of children arrive either speaking the language or accustomed to hearing it in a variety not identical to that stressed by the school. Additional minor complications enter in the Greek case given the recency of the *demotiki* standard (1977) which the school has adopted and the fact that no *demotiki* texts are available for all grades, particularly the upper ones. Accordingly, *Katarevusa* texts, the semi-classicized variety that alone was considered school-worthy in Greece until a few years ago, are still at times used—particularly in the upper grades. Nevertheless, there is no adult community *Katarevusa*-loyalty to cope with and, apparently, no major intra-dialectal demotic divergence to overcome. Thus, dialect differences of whatever kind are viewed as ephemeral and minor insofar as the school's functioning is concerned. They are no problem insofar as Greek literacy acquisition and retention are concerned. The same is true in the Armenian case. It is not seen as problematic that there are two modern standards—one in Soviet Armenia and one in the diaspora—nor problematic that even diaspora parents and children are derived from a wide variety of countries of origin (Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria) and, therefore, also bring a variety of different dialect backgrounds to the school. Children learn the school variety—spoken, written, and read—with no particular problems related to their home dialects. Then, like the children in the Greek school, they also learn on their own to sound out the older ecclesiastic variety for church rituals that they have already partially internalized. If the children speak different dialects to their parents at home, and they do, these differences are soon leveled at school; and no special exercises or materials or efforts are required for this purpose. Indeed, both schools tell stories of the triumph of the school dialect over the home dialect in certain homes rather than stories about the intrusion of the home dialect into the school.

The Chinese case has the potential for being ever so much more complex. Mandarin, Cantonese, Shanghaiese—all the Chinese dialects are extremely different in their reading pronunciations of the characters (which they share). *P'u-ting hua* ("common speech" based on modern Pekingese) in turn differs from them all. What would a Chinese school do if, indeed, it were to have students from all of these different spoken-dialect and reading-dialect backgrounds? Fortunately, the dynamics of most Chinese-American schools are such that the problem hardly ever arises with any great seriousness. Our school teaches City-Cantonese reading pronuncia-

tion because most of the parents derive from one or another Cantonese dialect area. Although their rural Cantonese dialects differ quite substantially from each other—certainly as much as Black English differs from “school English”—the parents’ and teachers’ view is that Cantonese have “always” learned to read in City-Cantonese reading pronunciation, and that is what their children will do today. In essence, therefore, all the children are learning a new and quite discrepant dialect relative to their home dialect. The rare Pekingese child who may wander into the school is said to make an early if not easy adjustment both to the spoken school dialect and to its reading dialect. Teachers may or may not know the variety or dialect that children bring to school. This is considered unessential. All beginners must learn the spoken school dialect. They do so little by little. At the same time, little by little, they also acquire the reading school dialect. It is just a matter of practice, perserverance, and patience rather than a problem insofar as all involved are concerned.

ETHNOGRAPHIC COMPARISONS

Both reading and writing involve use of arbitrary characters, namely those of the printing system on the one hand and of the writing system on the other. Sometimes these characters are essentially like those of English, as in the French school; usually—in our sample of schools—they are not, not only in their overt shapes and basic rationales (phonemic, syllabary, ideographic) but not even in their direction. Sometimes they have one system for writing and printing as in Chinese, but more often they do not. Sometimes the printing system has both capitals and lower case, but sometimes, as in Armenian, Hebrew and Chinese, it does not. We rarely stop to think just how difficult the total graphic system may be for the beginner, even without the additional complexity of biliteracy to cope with and even without the issue of whether reading and writing should or should not be taught simultaneously in either language.

Complex though this *ethnographic* area may be in terms of all of its possible permutations and combinations, it is really not very complex in practice. There is not a school among our five that makes much of the difference between English printing/writing and its own particular non-English printing/writing. This is never volunteered as a reason why any pupil has a problem in reading/writing. No school has prolonged the period of printing nor made much use of texts that are in writing rather than in printing in order to shield their pupils from the potential confusion inherent in yet another system of characters. Neither dyslexia nor reversals nor mixtures of writing systems are at all common initial problems, and any exceptions to this rule “quickly figure it out.” All in all, writing system

and printing system conflicts just don't exist, either within languages or across them, except as extremely fleeting and unimportant affairs.

Rather than problem causing, the non-English writing/printing systems are generally regarded as identity-related, tradition-related, and sanctity-related. The French school gives handwriting lessons because French and, derivatively, also English *must* be written beautifully. The language that is beautiful to the ear must be beautiful to the eye, too! The ethnic printing systems in the other schools are clearly sanctity-related, and their sanctity is taught to the younger generation. The sanctity of the printing system contributes to the sanctity, to the non-triviality, to the heightened experience of reading per se in those languages. The characters themselves, as visuals and as graphemes, are surrounded by stories, poems, songs, and folklore.⁷ They are related to the establishment of heaven and earth, to the giving of the Law, to holy martyrdom, to the triumph of the spirit, to overcoming adversity, to glorious attainments and incomparable achievements. It is doubly good to read and write in those "oh, so special characters"!

CONCLUSIONS

It is the functional dimension that seems to carry the brunt of the biliteracy acquisition and retention "burden" in the schools we have studied. Our five schools differ greatly with respect to their ethno-pedagogic, ethnolinguistic and ethnographic profiles, and yet these differences are not at all related to any differences between their pupils insofar as the attainment or mastery of biliteracy. They all stress *both* of the languages that they teach, and this stress seems to be paying off. Most pupils come from at least moderately biliterate homes. Literacy in each language has its particular functions. English literacy cannot fill the functions of ethnic language literacy. The immediate community supports and admires the school's stress on ethnic language fluency, and both the immediate community and the greater community stress the importance of English. All the other potentially problem-causing factors are neither viewed, experienced, nor observed to be problem causing. For intact and vibrant and self-regulatory ethnic communities, the outsider's search for problems with biliteracy is met with good-humored puzzlement. The children read well, do they not? Indeed they do! They read, and may yet write, in two languages because they are bilingual and bicultural, with

⁷ See Roskies.

significant literacy-related roles in both languages and cultures. They expect to continue in this fashion. Grant God that they may!

Thus the early childhood acquisition and retention of biliteracy seems to require nothing more than two "cultures of reading" to institute, implement, and reward it. When viewed in societal perspective, children seem to learn to read, in some ways, not unlike the way they learn to speak—by being immersed in a world that reads, that enjoys reading, that benefits from reading, that values reading, that supports reading, and that demands reading for full-fledged membership.

Given this kind of support, societal biliteracy is relatively unproblematic. It easily weathers such minor static as ethnopedagogic, ethnolinguistic and ethnographic variation, given a strong ethnofunctional base. These three dimensions of variation can be realized in any one of a number of different ways, and yet the acquisition and retention of biliteracy may remain unaffected and definitely unimpeded. The eternal quest for better teaching methods must not lead us away from this basic truth. The fact of non-standard speech must not hide it from us. The endless variety of graphophonic and ideographic systems must not distract us. Given societies where reading really makes a difference in what counts and what works for its members, most of their children will learn how to read rather well and rather easily, be it in one language or, if the opportunity presents itself, in two, or even in more.⁸ Certainly, it does not seem to be at all necessary for non-English language using/valuing parental communities in New York City today to consider foregoing their non-English language or the goal of literacy therein in order to foster greater attainments in English literacy among their children.

Social theoreticians and politicians, and those who are both simultaneously, may be uncomfortable with ethnicity, may view it as conflictual, may regard it as a falsification of empirical facts, may consider it expendable, and may in various other ways confuse their own personal and communal experiences and aspirations (ethnically colored ones to be sure, however much *that* may be denied) with "universal processes," but ethnic communities in New York City and elsewhere as well, indeed wherever the economic, intellectual and political climate permits, give ample evidence that their ethnicity is not only integrative, creative, enriching, true, and peaceful, but that it is compatible with good schooling in English as well as in the non-English language which is so meaningful to them. Indeed, as the

⁸ Abraham Stahl, "The Cultural Antecedents of Sociolinguistic Differences," *Comparative Education*, II (1975), 147-152.

French school reveals, literacy in two languages is attainable, at least for the early grades, even without ethnicity and its network of communal support.

The temptation to derive from our work conclusions that might be widely relevant to all the trials and tribulations of literacy acquisition in America today must be resisted. Nevertheless, the comparisons provided by our work *do* prompt some additional questions and observations. If ethnic communities in New York City—surrounded as they are by the world of English—can manage to organize schools that effectively teach predominantly English-speaking children reading and writing in the particularistic languages of their respective ethnocultural traditions, why cannot most of our public schools in New York City organize themselves to effectively teach English reading and writing to non-English mother tongue children or adults? Can the successes of ethnic community schools, and even of non-ethnic non-English schools such as the French school we have been studying, be maintained beyond puberty—when the effectiveness of schooling faces new and stronger competition from out-of-school sources—without far stronger communal functional rewards than those that now seem to be operative? Is the tendency, observed in the schools we have been studying, not to recognize difficulties of various kinds really a valid indication that those difficulties are not there? Or might reading/writing have been even better acquired if such difficulties *were* recognized and tackled? No one study can answer all the questions prompted by its own findings, let alone the questions prompted by other studies and outside realities. A good study frequently fosters more good questions.

Recent studies suggest we may, indeed, now be approaching a period of renewed conviction concerning the potential effectiveness of teachers, schools, and schooling.⁹ Nevertheless, as optimal pedagogy advances, the discrepancy between actual and optimal student attainments grows. Seemingly, then, the familial and societal contribution to attainment becomes ever greater, and without the favorable and constant input of families, neighborhoods, and ever broader societal factors, such as encountered in the schools we have been studying, the attainment of a literate democracy for millions upon millions of English speaking

⁹ Benjamin S. Bloom, *Better Learning in the Schools: A Primer for Parents, Teachers and Other Educators* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980) as well as R. Gary Bridge, Peter R. Moock, and Charles M. Judd, *The Determinants of Educational Outcomes: The Impact of Families, Peers, Teachers and Schools* (Cambridge: Ballinger, 1979).

monolinguals will remain problematic indeed. Thus, it is ultimately at the societal level that “a job must be done,” rather than at the level of methodology per se. Without proper societal arrangements—reward, opportunities, and encouragement—our most advanced methodological refinements come a cropper. With them, they may be somewhat superfluous.

LANGUAGE, ETHNICITY, AND CHANGE

My objectives are several: I want to clarify what ethnicity means and what it does not mean—cannot mean; I want to clarify the relationship, if any, between language and ethnicity, from the viewpoint of a sociologist who views language as a component of culture and not of a linguist or sociolinguist whose primary focus is language itself; and I want to consider how it is that bidialectism or bilingualism can be either a creative process or an impediment, the circumstances under which one or the other is likely, the way in which ethnicity relates to the outcome. I shall explore these issues by comparing the experience of Black Americans and Black Caribbean peoples, especially those in the Commonwealth Caribbean. I shall conclude with some remarks about the implications of what I have to say for what has been called a literate democracy.

Few terms are subject to more confusion than the term “ethnicity.” It is essentially a form of group consciousness in which the primary focus of one’s identity is a group which is defined in a quite arbitrary way. The actual content of belief, the cultural or other basis of this identity, is secondary to the fact of having chosen it as the basis of identity. Ethnicity has three aspects: first, a belief dimension, the element of consciousness, of primary focus; second, a group dimension, the group with which one identifies on the basis of this criterion; and third, a dimension often ignored, an ideological component, a commitment to the idea of ethnicity itself. The best way to illustrate this is to refer to religion where, similarly, there is a belief component, the theology or belief system; a group component, the church; but also, just as important, a commitment to the idea of religion itself; so much so that it is possible no longer to subscribe very much to the belief or to participate in the group, the church, but nonetheless to have a strong commitment to the idea of the thing itself. Every child who has been forced to go to church by parents who themselves never go knows the difference between the actuality of something and a

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strong commitment to it. The distinction is important in understanding what is happening in America today because a great deal of the so-called ethnic revival is a commitment to the idea of ethnicity.

An ethnic group, as I have defined it, is not to be confused with a culture group. All peoples—it's a truism—have a culture, belong to groups. It is spurious to point to this as evidence of the existence of ethnicity, and it is equally ridiculous to criticize critics of ethnic movements by claiming that all people belong to groups. But the culture group is not the ethnic group. Culture, or its main component, language, or a great many other aspects of behavior can become the basis of ethnicity. There is always the potential for a shared culture to become the basis of an ethnic identity, but only a potential. Shared culture does not necessarily produce an ethnic group. To take a dramatic example, German secular Jews and German gentiles who migrate to New York will share a common culture, but sharing that common culture does not make them a single ethnic group; in fact, we know that they are not. The same holds for language; belonging to a common speech community does not imply that one belongs to an ethnic group or has any propensity to belong to such a group.

Ethnicity is basically a chosen form of identity. It is optional, and among the options open to individuals are choosing not to be ethnic, selecting a particular form of ethnicity, or choosing to cross ethnic boundaries. People frequently change ethnic allegiances. Puerto Ricans—Black Puerto Ricans in New York—can opt for a Puerto Rican identity or a Black identity or both or neither. The same is true of Jews in Europe or elsewhere. Further, it is important to understand that there are fundamental differences between ethnic groups, and in classifying them it is wholly descriptive simply to do so on the basis of their formation and their relationship to the wider society in which they exist.

There are three major types of ethnic groups. Traditional ethnic groups are essentially adaptive. By their very nature, they are paving the way for their eventual dissolution in that their primary function is the adjustment, mainly of immigrants, to a new host society. They have existed not only in America, but in India, Southeast Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. By contrast, there are ethnic groups which come about as the basis for political mobilization. Whenever a group has been defined out and discriminated against, it must, of necessity, mobilize on this basis of rejection. But ultimately such groups, like the traditional transitional ethnic group, can opt out of the ethnic mode once the political objectives have been achieved. There is nothing primordial about that choice.

But there is a third kind of ethnic group. It is what I call a symbiotic ethnic group. Such ethnic groups are distinctive in that they have evolved

over long periods, sometimes two thousand years, sometimes less, several hundred, within the context of a particular civilization. Even if they are not involved with that civilization, the particular focal points of their own culture which they have emphasized make their way of life, assuming that way of life becomes a basis for ethnicity, highly conducive to success in the host society. The Chinese in Southeast Asia, the Indians in Africa, and the Jews in western societies are examples of this type. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of recognizing the fundamental difference between this kind of ethnic group, this kind of ethnic identity, and the other kinds of ethnic groups I mentioned earlier. It is a profound error not to remember this distinction, for if one assumes that what is possible for one is possible for another, one is likely to advocate policies which are quite disastrous.

Against the view of ethnicity I have just advocated, there exists a strong counter-tradition, the view that ethnicity is primordial, intrinsic, instinctive, innate. In this view, to be human is to be ethnic, whether one admits it or not; there is something profoundly treacherous about the crossing of ethnic boundaries or the denial of all ethnicity. In this view, anyone who denies his ethnicity or accepts the possibility of no ethnicity is attempting to go against the grain of human existence.

A great deal of the current rhetoric and academic writing about ethnicity in America makes this fundamental assumption, but I have never found it stated in a more extreme form than by Levic Jessel in *The Ethnic Process: An Evolutionary Concept of Languages and Peoples* (Hawthorne, NY: Mouton, 1978). Jessel strongly attacks the position that ethnicity is optional, or chosen, and argues to the contrary that ethnicity is innate, that there is an ethnic process which explains all diversity; that such diversity is inevitable and desirable—desirable because it is unavoidable. Drawing on certain areas of linguistics as well as on ethnology, he argues that there is in man a territorial imperative, the imperative to a speech community, and a strong ethnic homing instinct, so to speak. He identifies all culture with ethnicity and sees all culture as latent ethnicity, ethnicity waiting to be realized. Jessel writes, for example:

The ethnic process may be compared to an anatomical system where the simple group principle is the bare skeleton and the ethnic group is a corporal pool inclusive of integument, physiology, and biochemistry. In relationships between the ethnic group and its individual members, countless interactions take place mentally, linguistically, and societally. If we are to assume that under evolutionary conditions this might indeed resemble the operating behavior of an ethnic complex with a resultant effect of an ethnic society, then a non-ethnic group in an ethnic world must be regarded as an anomaly. It can be conceived of only as a transitory social phenomenon. Either it had

once belonged to an ethnic system and had been squeezed out for reasons presently unknown or it would ultimately find itself as an integral part of an ethnic system in the future.

The notion of a speech community is very important in Jessel's work. He argues that there is an innate propensity for a speech community and further, that the symbolism of language expresses the ceaseless flow of the ethnic process. His is the classic primordial conception of ethnicity, and, sadly, it is essentially this conception that underlies a great deal of the mushy thinking about ethnic pluralism in America.

Now I think any notion of innate ethnicity is absolute madness. And it is particularly dangerous for certain groups whose ethnicity, because of the kind of ethnicity it is, may well create problems for the achievement of objectives which they desire. I want to illustrate my position by comparing the Black experience in the Caribbean and the United States. The comparison is a fascinating one. It enables us to control certain crucial variables and to tease out those elements of the Black experience in the New World which might be due to specific African cultural factors as opposed to those which are a product of the form of discrimination which American Blacks experience. It also hints, to some extent, at what solutions to the problems might be.

Blacks in America and the Caribbean came from essentially the same areas of West Africa. They came from the same genetic pool and the same aboriginal cultures. While they spoke a variety of languages, most of the Blacks who came to the Caribbean and the United States spoke West African languages from the same family of languages. Not only do they have a common origin, but, in broad terms, they have had remarkably similar experiences in their enmeshment with Western civilization and capitalism—primarily the experience of slavery in a particularly virulent form, plantation slavery. And beyond that, in the post-Emancipation period there are also striking parallels.

To understand how the differences came about, one has to look more closely at the specificities of their separate experiences—to begin with what happened to their cultures. While both groups suffered a considerable dislocation of their traditional cultures and languages, the degree to which their aboriginal cultures were retained or transformed varied tremendously between the Caribbean and the United States. These differences are partly due to the migration process, but more due to specific differences in the nature of the interaction between slaves and the dominant, exploitative European group in the two societies.

The Caribbean is a tropical part of the world. The landscape, the

geography, and the climate which Africans encountered there was strikingly similar to what they had known in West Africa. This had important implications for what slaves could do in the Caribbean and what they couldn't do in the United States. In the area of material culture, for example, it was possible to transfer the entire material cultural base of West Africa to the Caribbean. The yam culture complex which is the basis of many West African cultures not only persisted in the gardens which the slaves were allowed to farm in order to support themselves, but actually influenced the material culture of the whites themselves: the technology of the plantation, the method of cultivation, was very West African; the major implement being used, the hoe. It meant too, that the food they ate could be the same. By contrast, while the Southern United States is somewhat warmer than the North, it is still very much part of the temperate climate zone. What you call the yam in the United States is something of a misnomer; strictly speaking a sweet potato is a New World food as opposed to the real yam culture of West Africa which persisted in the Caribbean. And the fact that there were familiar, if not identical, material things encouraged language retention.

The nature of the slavery also differed in somewhat interesting ways. Primarily the differences were demographic. There were, from very early, far more Blacks than whites in the Caribbean. From the beginning of the eighteenth century, Blacks outnumbered whites ten to one in most Caribbean societies outside of the Latin areas. Because of the rather brutal economic decision of the Caribbean whites that it was cheaper to buy a slave as an adult from Africa, work him or her nearly to death for eight years, write him or her off, and then recruit more Blacks, the proportion of the population in the Caribbean who were African was always much, much higher than was the case in the United States and for a much longer period. By contrast, slaveholders in the United States believed that it was always cheaper to rear their own Blacks and imported far fewer. At no point, except for a very short period in the Carolinas, did Blacks ever outnumber whites in the United States.

This demographic difference continuously reinforced in the Caribbean tendencies to retain traditional African elements. The fact that the white population was essentially absentee in the Caribbean meant that the white ruling class never had the same profound commitment to the society and culture of the Caribbean which the whites in the South had to the society and culture they shared with slaves. Thus, they never developed an ideology of paternalism, of creating a new kind of civilization. And although Caribbean whites were far more brutal in actual physical contact than their counterparts in the United States, nonetheless they interfered

somewhat less with the culture of the Blacks, or at least in those areas, primarily expressive, which were not particularly relevant to the plantation's main objective, which was to grow sugar. And finally, perhaps one of the most important differences, the racial insecurity of the rather small white population in the Caribbean meant that whites saw the free colored population as an important buffer in their own survival, a status which the free coloreds used to their own advantage from very early in the period of slavery. In the United States, however, the existence of a large free white lower class population not directly involved with the slave plantation meant that there was constant hostility to free coloreds, and therefore their status was fundamentally different. They were always seen as an anomaly and never recognized.

The status of coloreds profoundly influenced the nature of race relations in the two locales. It laid a foundation in the Caribbean for slavery to be superseded by biculturalism—one culture essentially Euro-Caribbean, the other essentially Afro-Caribbean. This biculturalism, to some extent, had a component of bilingualism because the Euro-Caribbean culture was essentially one in which speaking English properly was a critical factor, whereas the Afro-Caribbean culture, primarily a peasant culture, first spoke a pidginized form of English which later developed into a Creole language. There was, however, an important additional factor—that this biculturalism did not become identified with racial differences. Indeed, the group in the Caribbean which most promoted the Euro-Caribbean culture was not the white community, which was in a state of cultural disintegration and largely semiliterate, but the free colored upstarts who aspired to a black version of the European. From very early, they were far more adept and skilled at European culture than the local whites who slowly sank into slothful ruling-class degeneracy. It was the colored group who went to Oxford and acquired the Oxford accent. It was the colored group who came back and dominated the professions, leaving the whites to stagnate on their plantations.

So a strange situation arose in the Caribbean where there was no identification between race and possessing European culture, or speaking a European language. On the contrary, the situation was genuinely bicultural in that people capable of moving from one language to the other, from a dialect, or Creole more properly, to standard English, also had the capacity to move from one culture to the other. There is no innate ethnic propensity operating here. People are quite skilled at moving from one culture to another—not just acquiring the language, but all aspects of the one culture and the other. Upwardly mobile peasants did not perceive of mobility into, and the acquisition of, European culture as a denial of some

innate racial identity. Notions of racial identity were to come much, much later when intellectuals got in on the act, discovered ethnicity, then read back into their past the pain and agony of denial. In fact, most West Indians were not intellectuals and had very little problem moving from one language to the next, from one culture to the next.

A further point to note is the discovery by sociolinguists that bilingualism is often creative intellectually for the bilingual child. The same may well hold true for biculturalism. There are some formidable challenges posed by shifting from one culture to the next. Consider the problem of a ten-year-old Jamaican peasant in the primary school who is asked by his English teacher to write an essay on "A Winter's Day," when temperatures simmer in the nineties throughout the year, or an even more formidable task, to write an essay on "A Summer's Day," to draw on the concept of "summeriness" in a climate which is a perpetual summer. The genesis of my own early fascination with English literature came in trying to understand what was meant by "a host of golden daffodils"—a flower which, growing up in Jamaica, I didn't see until the age of twenty-two when I went to study in Britain. An intellectual interpreting this situation from the standpoint of ethnic chauvinism will view all of this as a very painful business. In fact, it was nothing of the sort. It is simply wrong to contend that this kind of cultural domination, which in one sense it was, created enormous problems.

The Caribbean experience was, however, quite different from the experience of Blacks in the United States. Here a highly polarized situation developed very early. The dominant culture was always identified with the dominant race and the dominant ruling group. Culture, race, and language became configured and polarized. This polarization was paralleled by the very peculiar form of racism, of racial categorization into Black or white, which exists in the United States as opposed to the more flexible continuum which exists in the Caribbean, where no one claims to be wholly white unless they have just come off a ship from Britain, or wholly Black. While quite invidious in many respects, the Caribbean system, the continuum, allows flexibility. The point that one occupies on the continuum is largely a function of economic success.

Within the context of the polarized exclusion of Blacks in the United States, it was inevitable that the dominant culture and the dominant language should be actually experienced very painfully. It was inevitable, too, that in mobilizing for equality, ethnicity should become an important rallying point since race had been the basis of their exclusion from involvement with the dominant culture. Ironically, then, although there are far more resources in the Caribbean in purely cultural terms for a genuine

claim of a culturally-based identity, it was in the United States, where this claim was far more precarious in objective anthropological terms, that a strong ethnic consciousness developed. Yet this pattern is true of most ethnic movements; they are functions of insecurity about either the dissolution of or the non-existence of the culture which is claimed as the basis of one's ethnicity.

What I've said should indicate first of all that there is no basis whatever for claiming a propensity for the choice of a specific ethnicity. In terms of the two groups I've just looked at, one would expect the great propensity to have existed in the Caribbean rather than the United States. But ethnicity is a function of the situation in which groups find themselves and is chosen for specific ends. Similarly, there is no primordial passion for a speech community except one invented by intellectuals.

This comparison tells us some interesting things about the Black experience in America, and particularly the attitude towards literacy in the dominant language and the problems of relations with the dominant group. First, the literacy problem is clearly not a language problem. West Indian Creole is an even more distinctly separate language than Black speech in the United States. Yet there is no evidence that under the right conditions West Indians have had any problem in learning standard English or in continuing to move between it and the Creole. When I go back home and I am in the company of my mother and my relatives, I speak Creole. When I am with my working class friends, I also speak Creole. When I am with my middle class friends, I speak a version of the Creole which is more a blend of standard English and the peasant Creole. When I am with my more upper class friends, I speak standard English. I have never had any problems making these switches. There is nothing in the nature of Black speech, which we find in an even purer version in the Caribbean, which prevents the kind of acquisition of second languages which Professor Fishman described in the case of the schools he discussed.

Why then the literacy problem? It is partly a class problem, but not entirely. Again, when one looks at the experience of working class West Indians who speak the Creole, one sees no evidence of limitation to a restricted code in language, such as Bernstein describes in England, in their adjustment to and acquisition of the dominant culture. Nor is the problem inherently one of personal domination or of domination by an alien WASP culture. The simple fact of being dominated by another culture does not necessarily mean that a dominated group will find itself incapable of acquiring competence in the dominant culture. The ease of acquiring competence depends primarily on the role models with whom one associates the domination. The crucial difference in the case of the

Caribbean is that it wasn't whites who were identified with the dominant Euro-Caribbean culture, but fellow Blacks. Quite often Blacks were upwardly mobile from the peasant group. Acquiring the dominant culture was like acquiring standard English. One could take it or leave it. Moving into the dominant culture did not trigger the anxieties which one finds so prevalent in Blacks in this culture.

Part of the problem lies in the educational system. A comparison of the two school systems suggests that attitudes are much more critical than the material resources of the schools or the homes of the students. In objective material terms, the poorest Black American is materially much better off than the average West Indian peasant. The poverty of Harlem does not begin to compare to the poverty of a shanty town in Kingston or any rural village in Jamaica. Educational facilities are usually far more inadequate in Jamaica than in the United States. School success does not seem to depend on the physical condition of the home or of the school; it is more profoundly related to attitudes toward the dominant culture on the part of the parents, the students, and the teachers. Attitudes are critical. The fundamental assumption in the Caribbean on the part of those Black teachers who taught me throughout elementary school—in classes which averaged eighty-six students in one-room schoolhouses, sometimes several hundred students in a large room—was that we were teachable: "I did it, so can you." No one doubted for a moment that the students could be taught: not the students, their parents or teachers. If we wanted to succeed, we had to acquire this thing; if we didn't, well, it was up to us. But we never suffered the painful anxieties about it. That is another absolutely critical difference which this comparison points to.

Another important factor is the rewards of literacy, which have differed for Blacks in the Caribbean and the United States. When I was growing up, we all knew that success in literacy through the school system would be tremendously rewarded: one could become a clerk in the civil service, a teacher, a doctor, a university professor, a permanent secretary, or what have you. On the contrary, a Black American child knows that even if he were to pay all the prices, so to speak, and make the effort and succeed, the rewards are not worth the effort because the job he will ultimately get pays no more and is no more secure than the job obtained by a student who dropped out of school years before. And the attitude toward that child, having succeeded, is no different than the attitude toward any failure. This is a critical difference. Recent developments in the Caribbean underscore the importance of assured rewards. In recent years, the number of school places and graduates has begun to outpace, by far, the number of jobs available. So Caribbean students, like their American counterparts, are

beginning to view the rewards of becoming educated as not worth all the effort, and what has resulted is the beginning of a pattern of school failure similar to that in the United States.

Another vital point of comparison between the American and Caribbean experience is the all-pervasive element of racism in the general culture, something which it is not possible to be specific about. But living in a society where the whole ambience, the whole climate is racist, and where one identifies racism so intimately with what one is doing at school must operate as an overwhelming pressure for failure. That pressure does not arise when people live in a society in which they are in the majority, in which there is no pervasive racial awareness, no such racist ambience.

There are still other factors to be noted in explaining the differences between the Black experience in the Caribbean and the United States. I have emphasized so far factors external to the Black group. While it is important to avoid the fallacy of blaming the victim, it is also important to examine the American Black sub-culture itself, to see whether there may be dysfunctional factors which are operative. It seems to me that there are. The problem does not lie in bilingualism. As I have said, there is nothing from a linguistic point of view in the nature of American Black speech which presents a problem. However, there is another way of viewing the language of Black Americans which linguists and sociolinguists tend to neglect. And that is as an institution. There is some danger, not to be underestimated, of institutionalizing Black speechways as an expression of Black ethnicity, some danger that doing so will operate to obstruct the acquisition of literacy in the standard dialect, if only psychologically. It seems to me that there are, indeed, several essentially dysfunctional elements in American Black culture, including Black attitudes toward Black speech—elements which have arisen because Black culture has had to be so much a reaction against white oppression.

This brings me back to ethnicity. The problem with ethnicity is that while it is vital as a means of political mobilization for American Blacks, it is a two-edged sword. I think Blacks have exhausted the constructive possibilities of ethnicity and that a continued commitment to ethnicity not only legitimizes the reactionary ethnic revival (an issue which I can't develop here) but more importantly reinforces styles and orientations which are dysfunctional for the group in its attempt to seek an equal place in that society. These dangers and difficulties are typically ignored by ethnicist intellectuals who belong to successful symbiotic ethnic groups, who, extrapolating from their experiences, encourage Black ethnicity without recognizing the problems which it poses.

I want to end on a note which has been a central theme of this conference:

cultural literacy. Black Americans need to view in a more guarded way the dysfunctional aspect of their ethnicity precisely because they must go beyond acquiring literacy in the purely functional sense. Industrial capitalism has developed a lot of curious, contradictory patterns. On the one hand, continued specialization and increased technology have created a situation which yields the increasing simplification of tasks for working class people. In this regard it is perfectly correct for a Black seeking a job as a fireman or work on a conveyor belt to argue that it is absurd to demand a level of literacy which is not necessary for those jobs. For the increasing pattern of industrial civilization is that even cretins can do many of the tasks of the work place precisely because they have become so oversimplified. For large numbers of jobs, the three R's are at once necessary and sufficient—and it is legitimate to demand that job requirements be appropriate to the tasks.

However, there is another process taking place in the development of industrialized civilization. Paralleling this increasing specialization and simplification of tasks on the micro-level is, at the macro-level, a growing cultural and structural complexity which requires persons who have a broad grasp of what Professor Hirsch has called cultural literacy: a deep understanding of the mainstream culture, which no longer has much to do with White Anglo-Saxon Protestants, but with the imperatives of industrial civilization.

It is the need for cultural literacy, a profound conception of the underpinnings and premises of the whole civilization, which is often neglected in talk about literacy. The people who run the society at the macro-level must be literate in this culture. For this reason, it is dangerous to overemphasize the problems of basic literacy or the relevance of literacy to specific tasks and more constructive to emphasize that Blacks will be condemned in perpetuity to oversimplified, low-level tasks and will never gain their rightful place in controlling the levers of power unless they also acquire literacy in this wider cultural sense. And how does one obtain literacy in this wider sense? Only by becoming totally involved in the wider culture, by refusing to segregate oneself from it, by moving into it, capturing it, changing it.

To assume that this wider culture is static is an error; in fact it is not. It's not a WASP culture; it doesn't belong to any group. It is essentially and constantly changing and it is open. What is needed is recognition that the accurate metaphor or model for this wider literacy is not domination, but dialectic; each group participates and contributes, transforms and is transformed, as much as any other group. There are clear signs that this

wider culture is receptive and reciprocal. Jazz, for example, is now part of the wider civilization; it is no longer specifically ethnic music. The English language no longer belongs to any single group or nation. The same goes for any other area of the wider culture.

I now return to my major point: while basic literacy is critical for getting jobs on the conveyor belt and so on, if American Blacks are ever to achieve the commanding presence they deserve in this society, they must also attain the higher literacy, have command of the wider culture. Striving for that wider literacy is their real imperative.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LITERACY

May I, in my turn, begin by paying warm tribute to the memory of Mina Shaughnessy and expressing my great respect for her work, especially as we see it in *Errors and Expectations*. I thought Benjamin DeMott, writing in *The Nation*, captured beautifully both the local and the larger significance of that book, and I could not match him in eloquence even if, as I hope, I do in admiration. Suffice it to say that her book excited me more than any other I've read in the last twelve months.

Though my title refers to "literacy," my own competence is literary rather than linguistic. So I will assume a very broad definition of literacy and will use it to allow myself room to move around among a range of impressions, observations, and thoughts which have kept coming to me over the past two or three years and which all bear on the state of intellectual training at various levels of education and in particular on the relevance of literature to that training. The material is taken from direct experience and so is chiefly British. It is not part of a scholarly survey, historical or otherwise. No doubt such thoughts have the defects of their origins. But I will at least try to avoid that shuttling between single anecdotes and large unsubstantiated generalizations that is characteristic of so much educational writing which offers itself as based on "first-hand experience."

What I say is bound to be largely sombre, partly because it seems to me that there is much to be sombre about in this whole area and also because one remembers the matters which cause concern more than the unspectacular, steady, day-by-day good work which is still, after all, going on all around us. The bad news always seems more interesting than the good. Which is why, no doubt, Mauriac observed that the novel is one of the happier consequences of the fall of man, and why Auden remarked that goodness is unspectacular and like water rather than gin. There is in Britain now quite a steady flow of right-wing protestations that our educational

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system has come to ruin. For those of us on the Left, the situation is difficult. We may not want to accept the equally strident but contrary claims of some colleagues on our own wing. We may well feel, as I do, that beneath some of the often over-stated assertions of what we call "Black Paper" writers, there lie some justified doubts about what is happening to our educational system. It is well past the time at which the Left should itself loosen its over-rigid hold on the pieties and slogans of progressivism in education and look soberly at those issues which right-wing writers have so far largely pre-empted but not illuminated.

Before I move into the main part of my text, let me, as well as repeating that there is some good practice at all levels of the educational system (even in those "comprehensive" schools which the predominantly right-wing British press never tires of presenting as though they were no more than training grounds for the use of drugs and the practice of illicit sex), also add that, were I not chiefly concerned here with the literacy of books, I could have found some encouragement in the record of British broadcasting at its best over the last thirty years or so. I have in mind especially the achievements in current affairs coverage by both our television systems, a record which has shown that far more people are capable of following and are willing to follow serious programs on important issues than you would ever have imagined from reading our popular press. That press, as the pressures of competition for advertising increase, has narrowed and narrowed its focus, like a soft-porn photographer over-addicted to the zoom lens; so that now the number of bare nipples, sometimes in colour, on any one day in some of the newspapers exceeds the number of items about, say, world political issues. I think we'd best regard these as no longer newspapers. They do not tell us as much about the existing or potential range of interests of their readers as the television current affairs programs do. They tell us that, if newspapers narrow their focus to more and more pin-ups and sports gossip, they will feed our appetite for those things (but we do not necessarily confuse them with *newspapers*). For news and comments we go elsewhere, especially to broadcasts. That would be a more promising approach to the understanding of our present popular newspapers and their relations to broadcasting than one which regards them as the fallen daughters of C.P. Scott of *The Guardian*.

One other achievement of television which has also shown that the potential, imaginative and intellectual, of many of us is far greater than a glance at the news-stands would suggest is the television play. It is suffering somewhat now, chiefly because of the twin pressures of competition and rising prices. But it can still do magnificent things, and its record over

twenty years or so is superb and illuminating. It has attracted some of the best young dramatists, and for two reasons. They have seen television as a new kind of drama, not as an adaptation of theatre dramas to a small screen. They have recognized and developed the special possibilities of the medium itself and have made creative use even of its clear limitations. They have been excited also by the idea of a "theatre" which has no fixed location or fixed type of audience, which is labeled neither West End nor "for the carriage trade." They know that their plays will go into living rooms where sit people who would otherwise never in their lives see a play, who would not dream, for complicated socio-cultural reasons, of "setting foot" in a theatre, but who nevertheless can show responses, can be captured by experiences, which one might never have suspected if television hadn't come along. We are still learning this. It has long been current wisdom that the troubles in Northern Ireland are "switch-off" subjects for television viewers. Yet recently a BBC *Play For Today*, not directly about Northern Ireland but informed and affected by it, a serious and moving play, had an audience of thirteen and a half million, which is almost a quarter of our whole population.

So, if this were a wide-ranging or would-be comprehensive survey of British literacy there would be such good elements, and others, to point to. But my range here is narrower. I really want to talk about respect for the intellectual life—or the lack of respect, rather—which one finds in Britain today. I have a slightly unusual angle of entry to the subject since I have spent twenty-four years in British higher education, roughly half as a university tutor outside the walls, giving classes to volunteer adults at night anything up to sixty miles away from the university itself, and most of the other half as an internal university teacher of English—with a year teaching in the States roughly sandwiched between those two large slices. After all this, I went off to Paris in 1970 and there spent five and a quarter years at UNESCO Headquarters, in charge of that enormous and Byzantine organization's work in the arts, humanities, social sciences, philosophy, population studies, racism, "peace," Human Rights and any other unattached, and probably politically hot, subject which the Organization has been told by its governing body to concern itself with. That experience, about which I have written a book,¹ taught me above all how fragile is the hold on Human Rights across most parts of the globe; how much the Organization's founding principles—that truth should be pursued as objectively as possible and then disseminated as freely and as widely as

¹ *An Idea and Its Servants* (New York: Oxford, 1978).

possible—are disregarded; how few nations—even of those which are professedly democratic—exercise many democratic practices, least of all that of free speech; but that in the end how inescapable and demanding is Yeats's assertion that "words alone are certain good," by which I have always taken him to be talking about the struggle with words to say what you want as honestly as you know how, no matter what the cost to your own public comfort or *amour propre*.

So that was one never-to-be-forgotten lesson from Paris. The other was from the peculiarly French experience rather than the international nature of the job. It was the realization that, publicly at least and to some extent privately also, the French still respect the discipline of the mind to a degree which the British would be embarrassed about, are indeed busy not recognizing. I am not saying the French are cleverer than we are. I am not saying that their attitudes are exportable. Attitudes rooted in a particular culture can rarely be uprooted and transplanted. We should be more careful than we are about cross-cultural comparisons such as those often used in England, when it is pointed out, say, that the city of Berlin spends more on its opera or its Philharmonic Orchestra than is spent on opera companies or orchestras in the whole of Great Britain. I am inventing the comparisons, but the general type of the argument is thus. For you have then to point out that such high-bourgeois support comes from a society traditionally hierarchical and proud of its public assertions; that that same pride has led to other less attractive national manifestations, especially in this century; and that it goes along with a neglect of some other, less spectacular but very humane, activities which we *do* fund. Still, to come back to the French. There is still a sense in which, chiefly I suppose because of their high degree of centralization and because of very much else in their history and culture, one is aware of a society which publicly tells itself that it respects the mind in action. *Le Monde* is an impressive example; their television a less impressive because a ponderous one. The contrast with the British public sense of its own hold on intellectual activity could hardly be more striking.

To start at the simplest level—or, more accurately, the most basic. We were the first nation to be able to report through our Registrar General, towards the end of the nineteenth century, that we were for all practical purposes fully literate. I don't say that, in spite of all the money we have spent on full-time compulsory education, we have gone backwards since then. I have not tried to make that direct and difficult quantitative comparison. I recall the proud late-nineteenth-century announcement so that it can provide a backdrop to this late-twentieth-century fact. Only a few years ago we discovered, largely through the persistence of some people

with a missionary spirit, that roughly two million adults in Britain are functionally illiterate. The figure shocked enough people to set in motion a typically British enterprise. An adult literacy scheme was set up, with initial pump-priming from central government, and the usual assumption that the local educational authorities would take over running and paying for the operation after a few years. A great many volunteers were involved. The BBC put much energy and considerable funds into television and other forms of backup. After a few years we seemed to have been useful to perhaps one in eight of those illiterates. It's a slow process and at this rate will take us till roughly the turn of the century to eradicate the problem.

But, as is so often the case, out of that exercise has emerged another and no less difficult problem. To help people merely to be literate is not enough. The condition of illiteracy is like existing in a twilight world. Illiterate people have been cut off from much in the social, political, psychological come-and-go, give-and-take, which literate people find in newspapers and in all sorts of other forms of print; their vocabulary has not stretched and reached out. So what they need, once they are literate, is help in what we are now calling adult basic education, education tailored to their needs in all those skills for basic coping which people such as we so take for granted that we don't even notice our own simple mastery of them; but which, if we didn't have them, would leave us part blind and deaf, and certainly the victims of all the con men of our kinds of society (to put it no higher). And if you add to the newly literate that range of people who, though not technically illiterate, are nevertheless not literate or numerate enough to handle adequately either life outside or much in their private lives, then you reach a total of adults in need of Basic Adult Education, about three million, we reckon. This is about seven or eight per cent of all adults; not a figure to be easy about. We are approaching this problem in our usual way: a little central funding, much missionary effort from some who are especially interested in the matter, a spotty response by local government authorities, lots of help possible from volunteers—in short, far less than is needed but lots of good intentions, and some good actions. At least, though, this government has continued the Adult Literacy unit for at least a few more years, given it a very slightly better budget, and widened its brief by calling it an Adult Basic Skills unit (the introduction of the word "skills" instead of "education" is so as to make the small expenditure more palatable to a government which wants to cut public expenditure greatly, but also wants to do all it can to encourage greater economic efficiency). So there we are; aware of the issue, with a unit still alive and living on slightly increased injections, but still able to do little more than pick and peck at the problems.

That is a particular area. It is time to move to the more general and more difficult plane. A common attitude in British education today is a reluctance to impose intellectual effort, coupled with a mistrust of the more sophisticated forms of verbal expression, written and oral—though not of technical languages, technical jargon, or that kind of circumlocutory speech which appears to put ordinary acts into a self-sustaining and self-justifying technological world.

A typical example of this latter came over on BBC Radio the other day. A man was being asked whether some new electronic gadget was cheap enough to be bought for the home. His reply came out of the linguistic world of complex forward planning. Behind it one could almost hear talk about the “scenario” of “options” for “space probes.” He replied: “It would fit very well into the realm of conceivability for the average person.” You and I could afford it. One also often finds these days a rejection of the past which includes a disinclination to introduce pupils and students to what I shall deliberately call “the literary heritage” and, concomitant with that, a quite widespread and strong rejection of the value of learning any part of that heritage by heart. But that last attitude has a longer history even than the others. Matthew Arnold attacked it in his annual reports as a Chief Inspector of elementary schools over a hundred years ago. But there was a difference. In his day they still believed in “parrot learning,” but they wanted it to be of capes and bays and rivers, heats and solids, the reigns of kings and queens, and all that Gradgrindery; it was the learning of passages from that “useless” form—literature—which they didn’t believe in.

The British have a fine, one-and-a-half-century old tradition of extra-mural education, offered to their surrounding districts by the universities. To their credit, and against all the odds, it was begun by Oxford and Cambridge, spread to London University, and so moved outwards. The crown of that tradition, and the best single offering by the British to the development of adult education worldwide, was the Tutorial Class, which was invented in the early years of this century from the coming together of Albert Mansbridge, the founder of the Workers’ Educational Association, and the great and good social historian R.H. Tawney, who was at the time a young university lecturer. The essence of the case was that even ill-educated workers could, if given good teaching over time, with guided reading and regular written work, become exceptionally well-trained intellectually. So they had to register for three years of study by lecture and discussion, for two hours on one evening of each week over each autumn and winter half-year. The results fully bore out Mansbridge and Tawney’s faith. Those early classes trained many who later become Labor MPs, union leaders, university teachers and even an editor of *The Guardian*. They also did

something uncovenanted: they helped to redefine not only the teaching but the substance of some of the subjects they offered their mature students. The questions "uneducated" adults can ask about politics or economics can have a special edge. I like, incidentally, to think that the process of redefinition continued until at least the 'forties and 'fifties, since the subject usually called "contemporary cultural studies" (it is a field rather than a subject), which is now being offered in a number of universities and polytechnics, substantially came out of WEA and Extension Tutorial Classes, many of which had started as "straight" literature classes.

But the chief thing to say about the Tutorial Class now is that its numbers have suffered a catastrophic decline over the past thirty years. Most universities offer hardly any such classes. Only a tiny handful offer a substantial number. Instead, they offer short courses, often with fashionable and ingratiating titles. They claim that life is too fast nowadays for any great number of people to be willing or able to commit themselves so substantially and continuously; or they say that the ill-educated but potentially highly-educable workers who manned the early Tutorial Classes have now, because of the improvements in our mandatory educational provision over the present century, passed through the system into full-time higher education. (This is to see the Tutorial Class only as a remedial and short-term expedient. That is, in my view, wholly to undervalue it and so its continuing relevance). Or those who are happy to see the tutorial class disappear claim that modern technological devices—all the apparatus of "distance learning"—can perform much more quickly and effectively what the laborious, slow, horse-and-buggy Tutorial Class set out to do. I won't try to answer all these and other justifications for a great loss, since that would become parochial. On the main question—of whether people can still be called to long and sustained study—let me instance only the immense success of our Open University, which has many more applicants for its demanding degree provision than it has the funds to cater for. That too, people said before it started, was based on a "myth": that people still want and need the disciplines of both group and solitary study of a sustained kind.

If we turn to university studies, in this case in my own "subject," English literature, we see another related tendency. If, to everybody's surprise, the universities moved outside their walls in the nineteenth century, they are less and less committed to doing so in this century, even though their representatives tend to make the right public assertions of their commitment to the local as well as to the international scholarly community. Today that tendency to withdraw has a sharper edge, since the universities are increasingly short of money. But there are deeper pressures

at work and two are dominant, one of long standing, the other a product of the twenty years of growth between the 'fifties and 'seventies. Both converge to intensify the hold among most members of university English departments on rigid subject boundaries. English studies in Britain had a hard time at first, being regarded in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a soft option. You should discover books for yourself, it was argued, and do not need to be "taught" them. (This is not, after all, a discreditable point of view.) So the history of the development of the subject, especially at Oxford, Cambridge, and London, is marked by the drive to give it academic respectability and rigour. Each place developed its special pattern, the one stressing the essentiality of early language studies, another of the historical approach, the third of severe critical training, and so on. Here was, in short, a strong pressure to carve out and defend against the objectors a strictly definable subject.

The second main element is the increased professionalism of staff and the professional subdividing of the elements of the "subject" which came about as a result of the enormous expansion of the universities from the 'fifties to the standstill of the 'seventies. Departments which just after the war had numbered seven or eight members of staff, each of whom was expected to take tutorials or seminars—if not to give lectures—over a wide range of topics, whatever their own particular research specialisms, had by the late 'sixties often grown to thirty or more members. They were turning out large numbers of graduates who also sought and often got jobs back at the universities. It was inevitable that an intense, specialist professionalism should emerge, that people should more and more see their competence as restricted to one quite small area, and their teaching too. What was insufficiently attended to, even in the opportunities for re-thinking provided by the large expansion and adequate new funds, was an attempt at redefinition of the subject itself. Rather, the finer and finer professional tuning continued. That is why, if I may be allowed to inject a directly personal note, I said, when I was invited to hold a chair at the University of Birmingham, that I would want to have no "normal" graduate students, students, that is, studying the usual "literary" subjects, but would want to set up a postgraduate center which would move out from literature to the study of contemporary socio-cultural matters. I remember indelibly being invited a couple of years later to, of all places, a new university to speak to their English Society, the department's staff and student society, about the new center. At the end the professor in charge said that it was all very interesting but he didn't see how they could introduce such concerns. He needed the full three years of his undergraduates' time to get them grounded in "our subject."

The debate continues, especially at Oxford, where it is now in full spate.

Only a couple of weeks ago *The Times Higher Education Supplement* published some major statements by the main protagonists. They were very good and revealing papers. The spokesman for the existing Oxford degree—a highly subject-defined and framed arrangement—wrote elegantly and persuasively about its undoubted virtues and achievements and also about its capacity to change, not in response to the latest intellectual fashion, but as a result of careful, civilized, continuing thought and discussion. It was a fine paper so long only as you accepted his basic premise: that the subject is “there,” that “it exists,” as a clearly definable body of material stretching over the centuries and marked “English Literature,” that though it is a hospitably-defined body, there are nevertheless books outside it which are not “English Literature” and that those inside the definition can be studied in the first place and overwhelmingly (though not entirely) as examples of “English Literature.”

His opponent was, at least to me, more convincing. He simply did not accept the frame. He argued that “English Literature” is not at all “out there” and objectively to be defined, but is an artificial construct, determined by battles long ago, continuing professional interests, and, above all, a whole range of implicit but nonetheless powerful social and political assumptions. There is, therefore, no strictly definable field to be called “English Literature.” There have been, over the centuries, books of many sorts coming out of a vast range of contexts, artistic, social, psychological and political. The field is hence in one sense quite limitless and undefinable. Yet, yes, it has to be defined. But any definition has to begin by recognizing both the enormous variety of materials which need to be addressed and also the error of approaching them in a relative void, free of the constant attempt, the integral attempt, to come to grips with them as part of a continuous and continuing historical process. In not recognizing this, I think many English departments have failed to meet the main intellectual challenge before them.

Last, in this brief list of attitudes at different levels in British education, something about the schools. I want to isolate one element only, one related, though at a less than obvious level, to the attitudes I have described as present in the “continuing education” of adults and in the universities. The battle about comprehensive education is going on at least as strongly in Britain today as it was twenty years ago. We are not making much progress with it. One aspect, recently put forcibly in a book, shows the hooks on which we hang ourselves. The writer argues that the needs of the great majority of people, those who form the bulk of pupils at any large comprehensive school, are so overriding on democratic and egalitarian grounds that the loss of adequate academic training for the gifted pupils

(often shown by the inadequacy of pre-university teaching at some comprehensives, or more pervasively in the generally anti-intellectual and anti-academic atmosphere of some such schools) is a price we should be willing to pay so that the great bulk of people can be at least reasonably educated. But this is a false antithesis, and at bottom not only profoundly mistaken but also profoundly illiberal, a dead-end rejection of much of the best in the Western tradition.

There is, it hardly needs saying, an elaborated ideology behind that and much similar educational writing today, and its common elements are fairly easily identified. It is usually put forward by people who are themselves quite highly-educated and often from middle-class backgrounds. They are commonly, to use their own language, "anti-bourgeois and the whole bourgeois tradition." They reject what they see as an implicit invitation by the educational system at all levels to, in the French term, "embourgeoisify" pupils and students by introducing them—on the false grounds that these are part of a universal and objective tradition out there—to bourgeois forms of speech and bourgeois literature and history. Some years ago they quoted Bernstein extensively but nowadays gain more support from the work of Labov. Applying Labov to Britain they argue that, for example, working-class urban teenagers do not need to be introduced to the "elaborated codes" necessary for public competence. They argue instead that the common speech of urban teenagers who have left school at the minimum leaving age, sixteen, ungrammatical and limited in vocabulary though it may be, can nevertheless be a sophisticated instrument of communication. (Since I too admire Labov, I understand what they are saying and to a limited extent accept it.) They go on to argue that to offer people entry into the world of more publicly-accessible and acceptable speech is to do them no favor but is rather by stealth to mould them into the values and attitudes which that form of converse carries—into becoming a servicing sub-branch of the ruling bourgeois world.

I think them substantially mistaken. The usual public forms of speech and writing are needed by as many of us as possible so that we shall manage better—socially, personally, politically, at work. At the lowest level, they are needed to help us prevent ourselves from being cheated by the armies of admen and door-to-door salesmen and fast talkers in which our kinds of society abound. Noble savages or wise old shepherds are no longer likely to emerge, least of all from big city society; if they did, they would soon be picked clean. Nor need our attempts to give this kind of command to our students mean that we are also selling them a whole hidden bourgeois ideology (or an ideology of any other kind). That is precisely the chief educational challenge before us. To meet it requires us to get below the

levels of both unexamined socio-cultural assumptions in ourselves and the simpler forms of rejection of those assumptions—which often have the shrill tones of people who have just discovered original sin.

At UNESCO I came across another variation of much the same attitude. Among one part of the Secretariat—the full-time officials—there was a tendency, when they were discussing the needs of the developing world, to reject claims that funds should be spent on developing the materials of a reading culture at all levels in those societies—book-publishing houses, magazines, local newspapers. Instead, they had a vision (often nourished on McLuhan and water) of helping such societies to skip the whole Gutenberg revolution, to go in one step from dispersed and tribal oral cultures to a unified, centralized, national culture, through the medium above all of the transistor radio. Thus in one step they bypassed consideration of the degree to which solitary reading and writing, not just listening in groups, are unique nourishers of the critical human spirit. They also gave what looked like intellectual justification to those leaders of some of the new countries who certainly do not want a range of dispersed critical points of light within the societies they rule and so do greatly like the idea of centralized unitary control over the means of information and education through the modern mass media.

I think, too, of much of the language of the proponents of what are known as “Community Arts” in Great Britain, many of whom receive funds from the Arts Council (as does, it hardly needs saying, the National Theatre and the Royal Opera House). The definition of art has been enormously widened recently, and I do not myself in principle regret that. But thereafter the problems begin. Some of those who work in the Community Arts reject the relevance of *all* the traditional forms of art, since they see them as merely historically-conditioned bourgeois products. They believe the giving of funds to such activities is a late-capitalist device to maintain the forms and powers of this kind of society. They call themselves “Community Artists” and their activities “Community Arts” because they usually work in the more deprived urban areas, and their main effort is to involve the surrounding community as such rather than to find “promising” individuals and educate them out of their communities. I do not doubt the sincerity of their intentions, nor the personal sacrifices they often make; and some of their work is inventive, remedial, imaginative, and sometimes genuinely funny, too.

My worry about it is different. It is that it has appropriated an OK word—“community”—and that its single-minded grip on that word shows its failure to recognize the importance, in lasting intellectual and imaginative literacy, of individual—indeed lonely—effort. Individualism it

is likely to dismiss as a product of the ambitious, self-seeking, bourgeois mentality. It also rejects, again as a bourgeois myth, the idea of different standards of effort, of achievement and, finally, of gifts. I support the Arts Council's giving of funds to these activities—though not beyond measure, in comparison with the funds going to the more traditional arts. I know that, because in their nature these arts are trying to grow in places where the land has not before been tilled, much of what they spend may be wasted. That is the price for helping good work to be done and good things to happen. (I should add that community artists stress the *process* of making art as more important than the end result, than what is made or can be imaginatively exchanged with other individuals; again, that can be a tenable point of view.) I can even envisage that eventually this kind of activity in some of the least-provided areas of Britain may produce new art forms which might never have emerged without all their experiments. But in the end, judgments have to be made, not judgments from a blinkered set of preconceptions about what are acceptable artistic forms and what not, but judgments about honesty before the material and respect for the materials, and about that combination of natural gifts and unremitting efforts which is needed for almost any considerable achievement. I will not, to take an actual case, agree that a short story by a London taxi-driver, encouraged by his local Community Arts organization, is good *simply* because it has come out of a community context and is by a taxi-driver who has before not written a line. I won't call it "remarkable" if I find it self-indulgent, unexamined, and ungifted. That does no justice to him, or to what he might eventually produce, or to the idea of art itself. But I hope, of course, that I could bring to any discussion of his work with him something of the humane clarity and firmness Professor Shaughnessy displayed.

We cannot leave people in corners, having to our own satisfaction redefined those corners as nicer than the outside, more public world. We are talking about something different from training people to acquire bourgeois speech and assumptions. Nor are we asking them to learn to express themselves like advertising executives, PR people, or many union officials. We are talking about having that respect for them which requires us to help them gain greater, more articulate, and more self-conscious access to their own personal and social lives. We are asking for this kind of provision and this kind of effort not just so that people can manage their public situations better—though that is useful, since so many words uttered publicly today are out only to persuade us or make us conform—but so that they can stand up better in all sorts of deeply personal ways. If that sounds as though I think that, say, an acquaintance with the best that has been thought and said *automatically* makes you a better person, I do not. But

that experience can make us *see* better, and so can illuminate our moral choices. The rest, as always, is up to each one of us and our moral wills.

We all need literacy, imaginative and intellectual literacy, because it is an essential part of our movement towards greater critical self-awareness brought to bear on our own lives and on what society offers us as the desirable life. We all need the continued nourishment which can be given by contact with other, finer, minds. "The unexamined life is not worth living." It may be that "all art aspires to the condition of music." It may be that music, the visual arts, dance, all work on our consciousness at levels well below those of literature. But literature is the most open, explicit, self-aware, contentious, muddy, involved of all the arts. It tries actually to *say* things as they are and beyond a shadow of doubt; so it is always laying itself on the line, inviting contradiction. In the process it lays its authors on the line, too, and so is—both in its creating and in the response to what is created—the most exposed and taxing of the arts. It demands a discipline of the mind and heart, and the result is always up to be challenged and often is as shaking to the writer as to the reader, perhaps more shaking. If I may venture one personal example. Writing parts of my book *The Uses Of Literacy*, I found I was holding some of my own more submerged characteristics—which I had not before suspected, and often did not find particularly admirable—to a scrutiny I did not greatly enjoy. That came out of the actual writing of those parts. Some of my very elderly relatives found parts of the book embarrassing, not because they discovered anything particularly shocking in the skeletons revealed in the family cupboard, but because the whole idea of a public self-analysis was alien to them and deeply disturbing. Some things ought not to be thought of, after that fashion. People whose backgrounds have locked them into such a response have been denied one of the more valuable exercises of the human heart and mind.

May I end with one other true and more recent anecdote, though I shall slightly blur the time and place? I want to do so because the lesson it taught me—though Heaven knows that at my age I should not have needed reminding—seems to me like the visual equivalent of what Mina Shaughnessy taught us by her capacity to see beyond the words in her students' papers to what they mean, say and are trying to unlock. I also want to end like this because I may have seemed somewhat severe and, in a limiting sense, "high-brow" or even (save the mark) "elitist" in this paper.

I was, not all that long ago, in a public baths, built circa the turn of the century, lavatorially-tiled, smelling of chlorine, very bleak-looking, very shabby. I had been there often, so was beginning to be known. This particular morning the attendant on duty was a man of, I suppose, just over

twenty. He was far too heavy for the good of his health. He sat in the dreary cabin provided at the side of the pool for the use of the attendants, smoking a good deal, brewing a succession of cups of tea and leafing through the day's issue of one of the popular newspapers. On the face of it he looked typecast as what our right-wing press likes to call a "yobbo" or "layabout" (except that, as compared with an increasing number who leave school at sixteen, as no doubt he did, he does have a job of sorts). That day, as I was getting dressed and we were alone in the place (it was about eight-thirty in the morning), he walked over to me, looked up at the great glass roof held up by its Edwardian wrought ironwork and asked: "Have you ever noticed all that iron stuff? It's pretty, isn't it? The other day I found in a cupboard at the back a lot of them old kind of photos—you know, all browns. But they were real pretty." His vocabulary was massively inadequate to what he was trying to say. His conscious sense of the amazing thing that was happening inside him was almost non-existent, and I guess he may soon pass the point at which he can be moved to utter such obscure intimations to a near-stranger (though perhaps it was easier because I *am* a near-stranger, and because he's guessed that I am connected with an artistic institution—the college up the road).

I end with that true story, finally, because it seems to me to underline once again, as Mina Shaughnessy so well knew, that we must resist the constant pressure to undervalue others, especially those who do not inhabit our own publicly-articulate world; but also because it underlines our duty not to romanticize the situations such people are in, but to help them, whilst not doing wrong to whatever may be good in their present worlds, to help them in the right ways, to—and I choose the verb deliberately—*surmount* that world.

**Selected Speeches and Essays
of
Mina Pendo Shaughnessy, 1924-1978**



THE ENGLISH PROFESSOR'S MALADY

It occurred to me not long ago, after having spent close to a decade seeking for ways to help ill-prepared, so-called remedial, students learn to write, that I had perhaps been working on the wrong question. Instead of asking how to go about this task, I should probably, I realized, have been asking why so many English professors don't want to do it—and probably wouldn't even if our methods were to be measurably improved.

I have always liked English teachers, both as my teachers and, later, as my colleagues. They have seemed to me a particularly human group of professionals, with more self-irony and grace than the run of academicians, with even a kind of seasoned and pleasing worldliness that I have always supposed to be one of the results of spending so much time reading and talking and writing about great works of literature.

Still, I must admit that except for a few of the profession's stars, the bulk of the work in basic writing has so far been taken up only by the most marginal members of the profession—beginning teachers or graduate students, paraprofessionals, women, minorities, and of late, the under-employed but tenured members of other departments.

I have by now experienced this division of labor within the profession on a variety of campuses throughout the country. For me, the experience begins, generally, with an invitation to visit a campus as a consultant. Later I usually learn that the invitation has been hard-won by a cluster of basic-writing teachers, with occasionally the support of a conscientious chairman, who have somehow managed to wrest some department funds for the occasion and are determined to make good use of it—of me, that is.

The invitation asks me to advise them on a number of specific matters—the creation of a more efficient writing lab, perhaps, or the design of a placement test. And each time, I set off with my wares in a canvas satchel, expecting to talk shop with a few practitioners. But almost invariably,

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when I arrive, I find that I have been called on quite another mission from the one specified in the invitation: I have been sent for, it turns out, to preach religion to the unconverted—at breakfast, or luncheons, cocktails, and teas. I have been “planted” by the writing teachers in an effort to persuade English professors, and perhaps a dean or so for good measure, that it is both pedagogically possible and intellectually respectable to teach ill-prepared freshman to write for college.

Now this sort of assignment would seem to me a perfectly honorable one to accept provided one’s evangelism took hold and one could claim here and there a stable convert. But I have usually left each campus in its Laodicean calm, my satchel full of unused hand-outs and my spirit daunted by the engaging, impervious sufficiency of English professors.

It was after a number of such experiences, as I was saying, that I decided to take a closer look, not at the problems of basic writing students, but at the conditions that seem to govern the response of English professors to these students and to the subject of writing. And in my reasoning about the matter, I have come up with three conditions besides that of original sin, that figure in what I am calling the English professor’s malady.

First, I would suggest that the subject of writing in most English departments is so flatly and narrowly perceived that it cannot be competitive with other subjects within the department. As a result it becomes the penalty courses in most teachers’ programs, the courses that full professors are often excused from teaching or that all teachers nobly accept as part of the price teachers pay for teaching their “real” subjects. It is the subject, too, which most English professors have never had to study formally and the subject, therefore, that suffers most from a kind of *laissez-faire* entrepreneurship that generates each season a flurry of bright texts, only a few of which represent the best energies and motives of their authors. They are not books important enough to English professors to argue about. Many are never reviewed. They are academically unimportant occurrences in a vast ecumenical reserve called freshman or developmental or compensatory or remedial or basic English.

I do not at this point want to make the usual criticism of the profession for the emphasis it is said to have placed upon its custodial role in the teaching of writing, that is, upon the achievement of formal correctness and the mastery of the academic genres. To teach toward such competencies seems to me both realistic and respectable. My argument is that for the most part, professors have perceived these tasks in pedagogically and linguistically unsophisticated ways and have as a result too often bored or defeated both themselves and their students.

This territory of the professor’s general ill-preparedness can be divided into three parts. The first part concerns their unfamiliarity with the

psychology of writing, that is, with the behavior of writing itself—how the ideas that lead to writing are generated, how they undergo stages of formulation and reformulation, how designs for the ordering and elaboration of ideas evolve, how certain tasks specific to writing (such as revising and proofreading) which are contrary to our impulses as speakers are acquired, or how writing affects cognitive style and development.

Already a substantial body of literature exists on the nature of the composing process, some of it going back to Aristotle, but except for the rhetoricians among us—and they tend either to have split off from English departments or to have taken them over—the subject has inspired little research or pedagogical reform.

Then there is the historical part of writing—the record of what has gone on in the name of freshman composition over the past hundred years or so and the even more interesting record of how ordinary people learned to write and how they used writing in earlier eras of this country's history. From such records we begin to suspect (and studies of the history of literacy in America support this suspicion) that the ability to write was once distributed more widely across classes than it is today and that the uses of writing were more varied and personally gratifying than they are today. Restricted in our notions of what writing is for, we tend to present the skill either as a prestigious or exotic accomplishment (like being able to sketch or play the piano in Jane Austen's world) or as a bread-and-butter skill that guarantees mobility from jobs into professions. Such limited perceptions of this quite remarkable invention called writing encourage us to accept current ways of organizing and assessing writing instruction. They lock us into convictions about what is most important to learn, who should learn what, or who should teach whom at a point when the uses of literacy in this society need to be re-examined, when the possibilities for a much richer definition of literacy exists alongside the threat of a more and more exclusive cultivation of that power.

Third, there is what might be called the anthropological or cultural part of writing, by which I mean the study of the functions as well as the forms of academic writing, the attempt to construct the social realities that give rise to specific kinds of behavior, in this case to specific kinds of writing. Here I am suggesting that it is useful for teachers to think of college as a foreign land, a little world, if you will, with ways of perceiving and doing things that often seem peculiar or arbitrary to students. To someone from within that world, academic discourse is a way (to some *the* way) of using thought and language so as to make the largest general statements possible across a range of data and to do so for an audience that is expected to scrutinize the generalizations and the data.

From many students' perspective, however, academic writing is a

formidable hurdle—an unfriendly register which pitches the writer against an anonymous and exacting reader who is apparently interested in arguments about issues that are either so grand as to be outside the possible control of either writer or reader or so refined as to seem foolish. At the same time, the writer's own impressions and convictions seem to become insubstantial unless they can in some way be neutralized by language and a special kind of analysis.

To approach such discourse in formulaic ways—simply identifying the recurrent and quantifiable features of the sentences, paragraphs, and parts of essays or research papers is to assume already a kind of cultural consent and understanding among students, which in fact does not exist widely today. Somehow teachers must find ways of explaining the tasks of academia so that they make sense as human strategies, ways of solving the problems academicians pose for themselves. And it is difficult to imagine how they can do this without looking both more seriously into the sorts of discourse they generate and more widely at the various ways in which language is shaped to do the work of human communities.

It is hard, too, to imagine a pedagogy growing out of this perspective that would not be much more concerned than most pedagogies now are with the sequence and fit of lessons from one session to the next, as the student moves from the familiar strategies of conversation and the easier forms of writing into the denser forests of formal writing.

The English professor's malady, I am suggesting, then, is at least partly caused by provincialism—by too “local” a conception of the subject he teaches—its processes, its history, and its context. I would add to this a second, somewhat similar, condition that helps explain the malady—a tendency to underestimate the capabilities and the difficulties of students whose backgrounds and states of preparation are very different from his.

It is vital, of course, for a teacher to believe in the educability of his students. We tend finally to turn away from problems we can do nothing about. This is an intelligent response to futility. And the teacher who believes that his students are too limited or too far behind to learn what he has learned is almost certain to prove his point. Thus it becomes critically important that the teacher be right about such perceptions. And here he encounters difficulties, for he has generally had little experience with severely ill-prepared adult students and cannot, or at least ought not to, judge their capabilities until he has committed his best energies and imaginations to teaching them—a commitment he is not likely to make if he already believes them ineducable.

The only way out of this dilemma is for the teacher to hypothesize the educability of his students and to look at their behavior as writers from

such a perspective, assuming, that is, that while what they write may be wrong or inappropriate or inadequate in relation to the models they must learn, their behavior is neither random nor illogical but ingeniously adaptive at one moment, linguistically conservative at another, or relentlessly—albeit wrongly—logical at still another.

Having by now examined thousands of student essays from such a perspective, I can commend the perspective as both pedagogically fertile and linguistically fascinating. Without ignoring the goal of correctness and cogency, the method liberates the teacher from a narrowly prescriptive response to student writing. It reveals in precise ways the intermixing of grammatical forms and logics from different grammatical systems, the intrusions of speaking strategies and habits into written English, the gaps and distortions from earlier instruction, and—above all—the persistent, ingenious urgings of intelligence, of the drive to do things for a reason, to create systems, to survive by wit.

To discover, however, that literateness is not to be confused with intelligence and that young adults who by all traditional measures don't belong in college do in fact have the capability of surviving and even flourishing there is to discover more truth than an English teacher may want to bear alone.

And this brings me to my final point in this etiology of the English professor's malady—namely, that as writing instruction is presently organized, the teacher who wishes to give his best energies to the instruction of ill-prepared freshmen must be ready to forego many of the rewards and privileges of his profession. He must be resigned to being an altruistic teacher—and even though the study of literature may well have ripened the moral imaginations of English teachers to such an extent that the profession produces more than its share of generous (or as some would have it, bleeding) hearts, the fact remains that systems do not function efficiently on altruism, and the educational system must offer the same sorts of prizes and incentives that energize people in other systems—money, time, security, and working conditions that encourage excellence—if the teaching of writing is to advance beyond its present state.

To this, we must add another rude fact—that despite the opening of many educational doors since the late sixties, there is little evidence that much has changed behind those doors. If anything, the lines that divide the privileged from the unprivileged in this society have simply been extended into the terrain of higher education. And nowhere is the line between the two groups more sharply drawn than in the area of writing.

Of the two skills of literacy, reading has ever been judged the more important skill for ordinary citizens to acquire. Some people—English

teachers among them—have even insisted that writing is a skill not everyone *can* acquire or needs to acquire, especially in an age when television and tapes have liberated speech from transiency and telephones have reduced the burden of ritual and routine correspondence.

To be sure, learning to write is hard work. And few, even among those who become highly skilled at it, ever seem to do it for fun, as they might watch television or read a book. Still, there is a special advantage to learning how to get one's thoughts down on a page, one that is related to the very functioning of a democracy. For one can imagine the advantages to any state of having a population of readers: reading remains the cheapest and most efficient technology for passing out directions and information and propaganda. But it is in the nature of writing to encourage individuals to discover and explore their own hunches, to ponder their own words, to respect their own thoughts enough to entrust them to the written page. Writing even teaches about reading. It is the other side of literacy, without which the reader too often reads uncritically.

Despite these benefits, or possibly because of them, the skill of writing in this society is essentially a class-distributed skill. Unless they are exceptionally talented, the children of the poor learn even less about writing than about reading. They learn handwriting, perhaps, in the early grades, but most of them leave school without having learned to compose and perfect their thoughts in the medium that allows for the greatest independence of mind and exacts the greatest effort at articulation. What is worse, they leave school persuaded that they were in some way natively unqualified to learn to write and must now find ways of evading the various writing tasks that are certain to be posed for them in their work and in their lives as parents and citizens.

The experience of open admissions both at City University and in other universities and colleges throughout the country has not only revealed the plight of such students but demonstrated that there are no pedagogical reasons why writing should be an exclusive skill rather than a common skill among our citizenry. It simply needs to be taught. And the fact that it is not taught well—and sometimes not taught at all—to the students who need it most constitutes a true crisis of literacy in this country, where being able to initiate messages should be as important as being able to receive them and where the most fruitful and necessary activity is arguing rather than agreeing.

Today, people are, for the most part, alarmed over the declining levels of literacy among the privileged, not over the traditional sub-literacy of the poor, and it is in the prestigious colleges that a new seriousness about writing can now be found. But until the traditional illiteracy is as alarming

to the American people as the declining literacy of the affluent, our schools will continue to cultivate advanced literacy as a privilege rather than an entitlement.

To prepare only some people to flourish in a democracy and then to argue that they are the only people with the native ability to do so is to consent to the existence, within the boundaries of what we call public education, of the most exclusive country club of all.

I am not certain what English Department chairmen can do or what they might want to do about so large a problem. The responsibility for doing something has clearly fallen disproportionately upon English departments and some would argue that the English professor's very love of literature and his preparation to teach it have paradoxically robbed him of the patience and modesty needed to teach basic writing. If so, then of course the responsibility of a chairman might be simply to lead his department out of the wilderness of basic writing and into the promised land of literature. But should he decide instead to stay and try to bring some measure of order and meaning and—yes, even class—to the subject of basic writing, he will be struggling to meet the claims of both literature and literacy upon a department, and in doing this he will be helping his professors learn to *want* to do the work that waits to be done.

SOME NEEDED RESEARCH ON WRITING

Among most of the arts and skills people attempt to acquire in this society, the sequences and goals of instruction are far more stable and specific than they seem to be for writing. Most students of piano, wherever they study, make their way through similar types of scales and exercises (many are still apprenticed to Czerny's exercises for finger dexterity, now over one hundred years old). Ballet students still practice their *pliés* and *rond de jambes* in much the same order and according to similar developmental timetables, whether their studios are in Kansas City or New York. And athletes have familiar training rituals, known to coaches from big leagues to little. For such skills, teachers need not invent whole pedagogies as they go, nor return with debilitating regularity to fundamental questions about their purpose and procedures. They continue a vital tradition of instruction in which their roles are of unquestioned importance. It is assumed that to learn to play the piano or to dance or to play football, a person must generally become someone's student. And that someone, a teacher, understands what comes after what and what constitutes an acceptable level of performance at each step along the way.

Teachers of reading and writing, particularly those who teach ill-prepared freshmen, enjoy no such stability. In a culture that has been engaged in reading and writing for centuries, the pedagogies of literacy are in a puzzling state of discord, with theorists and practitioners and taxpayers all arguing about how people become literate or why they don't.

The reasons for this discord are clearly complex. It cannot be simply a matter of English teachers' having failed to do their homework. I have been the beneficiary, as both a writer and a teacher, of too many fine texts and theoretical works about rhetoric, grammar, style, and so on to be ready

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now to condemn the profession as roundly as it is being condemned for the state of literacy in America.

Still, I must admit that those pedagogies that served the profession for years seem no longer appropriate to large numbers of our students, and their inappropriateness lies largely in the fact that many of our students these days are exactly in the same relation to writing that beginning tennis students or piano students are to those skills: they are adult beginners and depend as students did not depend in the past upon the classroom and the teacher for the acquisition of the skill of writing.

Most of us learned to write through such a long, subtle process of socialization that we cannot remember how it happened. For some, freshman composition played an insignificant part of their maturation as writers, and for most, it was at best a helpful rather than an essential course. But the students we have now will be able to say—if they are fortunate in their teachers—that they learned to write in such a year, with such a teacher, and that their courses in writing were crucial to their advancement in college.

This is a tremendous responsibility for English teachers. But my own experience with unprepared—severely unprepared—students persuades me that it is a responsibility we can meet if we are willing to give our energies to the development of a pedagogy for writing that respects, in its goals and methods, the maturity of the adult, beginning writer and at the same time admits to the need to begin where the beginning is, even if that falls outside the traditional territory of college composition.

If we accept this responsibility, we are committed to research of a very ambitious sort—so ambitious that I have not been able to suggest its boundaries. What I will do instead is simply raise four questions that have concerned me lately and that might in turn generate specific research plans that would move us toward the pedagogy I speak of.

My first question is "*What are the signs of growth in writing among adults whose development as writers has been delayed by inferior preparation but who are then exposed to intensive instruction in writing?*" Just how, that is, at what pace and in what manner, do such students get to be better at the skills? From a managerial perspective, it would be convenient if the writing of such students were to advance regularly, on all fronts, preferably within one semester, in response to instruction, paralleling the developmental patterns that have been observed among younger learners over longer periods.

Yet experience with the unprepared adult writer suggests that the pattern of development is marked by puzzling plateaus and even retreats in

some areas and remarkable leaps into competence in others, producing very different writing records from those we are accustomed to in better-prepared students, refusing throughout to bring the unprepared writers into parallel courses with their better-prepared peers. Thus, while the most dramatic difference between the prepared and unprepared writer is probably the incidence and quality of error in each group, errors, particularly the errors that are deeply rooted in linguistic habit and not simply the result of inattentiveness, may be more resistant to direct instruction than other seemingly more complex problems that are traditionally taken up after the slaying of the dragon error. I have in mind the skills of elucidation and validation and sequencing in expository writing or the management of complex sentence patterns (which are usually ripe for development among adult students even though their early writings produce many tangled and derailed sentences, a reality which complicates the use of measures of maturity such as the T-unit). I would guess that by the criteria for improvement now common in many remedial programs, the developing writer is likely to be penalized for his or her growth simply because the phenomenon of growth in writing for this population has not been looked at directly, through case studies, for example, over four-or-five year stretches.

My second question is "*What sub-skills of writing, heretofore absorbed by students over time in a variety of situations, can be effectively developed through direct and systematic instruction at the freshman level?*" Here I raise the question of whether some of the slow-growing skills, such as spelling, vocabulary, and syntax, which in ordinary development are acquired gradually and inductively, might not be approached through effective paradigms and conceptual keys appropriate for adult learners although inaccessible to young learners. Teachers' fatalistic views about many of their students' difficulties may well arise out of a failure so far to have found the most productive generalizations about those features of written language that give students the most difficulty, generalizations that may be already available to us in research literature or that lie around the corner, were English teachers inclined or encouraged to turn in that direction. It should not be difficult, for example, to link great improvements in the teaching of spelling at the elementary levels to the major work of Hanna and others in the analysis of phoneme-grapheme correspondences as clues to spelling improvement. There is much still to be drawn from that work, now a decade old, for the instruction of adult learners as well. Or, as another example, there is the recent work of Sandra Stotsky on vocabulary development, which not only gives special attention to the mastery of prefixes among young learners but suggests a systematic

approach to vocabulary development that has applications for older students.

My third question is "*What skills have we failed to take note of in our analysis of academic tasks?*" "The aim of a skillful performance," Polanyi has written, "is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are *not known as such* to the person following them." In my few attempts to work contrastively with experienced and inexperienced academic writers on the same assignments in order to discover hidden features of competency, I have been surprised by the emergence of certain skills and orientations I had not thought to isolate or emphasize as subjects of instruction. I have noted, for example, that the craft of writing has a larger measure of craftiness in it than our instruction seems to suggest. Experienced academic writers, for example, appear to spend little time deliberating over their main intent in answering a question or developing an essay; this conviction evidently reaches them through some subtle, swift process of assessment and association that has doubtless been highly cultivated after years of writing in academic situations. But after this recognition of intent, there follows a relatively long period of scheming and plotting during which the writer, often with great cunning, strives to present his or her intent in a way that will be seductive to an academic audience, which, while it aspires among other things to high standards of verification and sound reason, is nonetheless subject to other kinds of persuasion as well—to the deft manipulation of audience expectations and biases, to shrewd assessments of what constitutes "adequate proof" or enough examples in specific situations, to the stances of fairness, objectivity, and formal courtesy that smooth the surface of academic disputation. One has but to re-read such brilliant academic performances as Freud's introductory lectures on psychoanalysis to observe this craftiness at work.

Now, beginning adult writers are without protection in such situations. They do not know the rituals and ways of winning arguments in academia. Indeed, so open and vulnerable do they appear in their writing that teachers often turn sentimental in their response to it, urging them into the lion's den of academic disputation with no more than an honest face for protection. Furthermore, the traditional formulations of expository writing too easily lead to the conviction that only certain kinds of writing (poetry, for example, or fiction) are concerned with seduction, whereas the formal writing of academics and professionals is carried out at more spiritual (i.e. rational) levels of discourse where the neutral truth is thought to dwell.

This view not only inhibits students from joining in the academic contest but takes much of the fun and competition out of the sport. "The greatest minds," Leo Strauss has remarked, "do not all tell us the same things

regarding the most important themes; the community of the greatest minds is rent by discord and even by various kinds of discord." College prepares students—or ought to prepare them—to survive intellectually in this atmosphere of discord. It teaches them, or should teach them, in the words of a Master of Eton in the 1860's, "to make mental efforts under criticism."

But the emphasis in writing instruction over the past years has not encouraged a close look at academic discourse nor favored such images as the contest or the dispute as acceptable metaphors for writing, with the result that too many students, especially at the remedial level, continue to write only or mainly in expressive and narrative modes, or to work with worn and inaccurate formulations of the academic mode.

As part of this exploration of academic discourse I am recommending, we need above all else to take a closer look at vocabulary, which is of course critical to the development of complex concepts, the maturation of syntax, and the acquisition of an appropriate tone or register. This is probably the least cultivated field in all of the composition research, badly, barrenly treated in texts and not infrequently abandoned between the desks of reading teachers and writing teachers. We lack a precise taxonomy of the academic vocabulary that might enable us to identify those words and those features of words that would lend themselves to direct instruction or that might allow us to hypothesize realistic and multi-dimensioned timetables for vocabulary growth. We have done little to distinguish among the words in disciplines, except to isolate specialized terms in lists or glossaries, and we have done even less to describe the common stock of words teachers assume students know—proper names, words that have transcended their disciplines, words that initiate academic activities (*document*, *define*, etc.), words that articulate logical relationships, etc. In short, the territory of academic rhetoric—its vocabulary, its conventions, its purposes—is waiting for an Aristotle.

Finally, I must ask a fourth question, which is embarrassingly rudimentary: "*What goes on and what ought to go on in the composition classroom?*" The classroom, as I have said, has become a more important place than ever before. For some students, almost everything that is going to happen will happen there—or through work that is generated there. Yet we know surprisingly little about what goes on there. We know what teachers do by our own recollections of what our teachers did, by what teachers tell us they do (which opens up a vast territory of imaginative literature), and by the periodic observations of peers and students that are largely managerial in intent and that pose rather crude sorts of questions about teaching effectiveness.

But we have evolved no adequate scheme for observing precisely the classroom behavior of students and teachers nor for classifying the models of association between student and teacher that govern different styles of teaching. That is, we can perhaps locate metaphors that describe the orientations of teachers and students—the theatre, the courtroom, the clinic, the editorial office, the couch—but we have not analyzed them nor related them to the teaching of discrete subskills in writing. Nor have we entertained or adequately tested any bold departures from the familiar classroom configurations and timetables, even though teaching the skill of writing may be more like coaching football than teaching literature or history or biology.

What I am suggesting through this question and others is that we have as yet no sociology or psychology (not even an adequate history) of teaching the advanced skills of literacy to young adults who have not already acquired them. Yet many such students are now in college classrooms. We cannot hope to solve the problems that arise out of vast inequities in public education by arguing that when those problems were *not* being solved, or even thought about, higher education was in excellent shape.

OPEN ADMISSIONS AND THE DISADVANTAGED TEACHER

Partisans of open admissions find it difficult to know these days whether they are in a rear or a vanguard action. Viewed from the widest perspective, Open Admissions seems inevitable—part of a much vaster shift within and even beyond this society from a rural to an urban population, from an industrial to a service-oriented labor force, from a culture of conformity to one of diversity.

But viewed from a narrower perspective, the perspective of shrinking budgets and growing pessimism about the importance or effectiveness of schools in righting even the educational wrongs of the society, let alone the larger inequities they reflect, Open Admissions seems doomed.

For anyone who has witnessed the success of many young men and women who were taught to fail, has watched them lay claim to their talents, meet their commitments, and set out with a plan in their minds, the widespread pessimism about whether Open Admissions can “work,” as they put it, is baffling. Especially baffling is the fact that this pessimism was deep-rooted even before any of the new students had stepped on our campuses. By now, there is a literature of pessimism, a theology of despair that serves the purposes of those who have already rejected the social policy implicit in Open Admissions.

Unfortunately, the debate about Open Admissions has been and is being carried on in the language of those who oppose it: in the alphabet of numbers, the syntax of print-outs, the transformations of graphs and tables, the language, in particular, of a prestigious group of social scientists who perceive through their language truths that even they seem, at times, unwilling to hear, much as scientists of another kind in another era were led inexorably by the dictates of their language to an atomic arsenal. They are saying, in their language, that schools, when measured by the indicators

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they have selected, affect only marginally the quality of people's lives, and further, that programs designed to help the poor overcome their disadvantages do not succeed. These messages are proliferated through the media and made available to the policy makers, who dip into the reservoir for the numbers they need.

Meanwhile, the two groups who have experienced directly the importance of schools and compensatory education—the students and the teachers—grope for their answers, grapple with words and methodologies they don't understand, experiencing as they do all the frustrations and embarrassments of the person who must say something important in a strange language.

Let me comment upon the disadvantage an Open Admissions writing teacher feels in the face of this arsenal.

There is the feeling of disadvantage itself, the contamination from being perceived as in some way inferior. Thus, too often, writing teachers, sensing that their students' growth as writers cannot be quantified, certainly not in semester segments, perhaps not at all, speak timidly of what is accomplished, or bow to the crude measures of attrition rates, grade-point averages, or objective tests. Unable to describe in the language of the scientists what went on, they often abandon the effort to do so in any language, even the one they have loved enough to study and teach. Or worse, they become easy converts to the new language, vesting it with more authority than the social scientists themselves would claim for it.

What teacher has not felt in those stark lists of behavioral objectives with their insistent parallels—the student will do this, the student will do that—a terrible flattening out of the language and the student in the service of numbers? In how many countless and unconscious ways do we capitulate to the demand for numbers? In how many ways has the mathematical tyranny of the "average" coerced us into moving faster through our lessons than we should in order to "cover the ground," "meet the standard," or play the losing game of "catching up." In how many ways has the need for numbers driven us to violate the language itself, ripping it from the web of discourse in order to count those things that can be caught in the net of numbers. How many young men and women have turned from the wellsprings of their own experiences and ideas to fill in the blanks of our more modest expectations? All in the name of accountability!

But accountability to whom? Not to our students, who come to us so burdened with numbers—IQ's, SAT's, MAT's, etc.—that we can barely see them as individuals. Not to ourselves, who must teach for quick pay-offs that can be translated into numbers so that the ranking and winnowing of human talent can go on apace. Is this our task, then, to prepare

productivity studies for management under the direction of social scientists who are evaluating what they have not studied nor understood? We cannot teach under such constraints; our students cannot learn.

Let me illustrate the insensitivity of numbers with the experience of one student. I'll call her Cora. She came to our college at a time when our writing placement test called for an essay on a person of public significance. (The list of suggestions included the names of some forty men—no women—from many walks and styles of life. Even Pogo was there.) Cora chose to write on George Washington, and this is what she said:

George Washinton has contributed much; in making of American History. A general in the army during the American Revolution. He commened many victories; that lead the thirteen colonies to an indepenent United States. Later became the First President of the United States. His picture is shown on the one dollar Bill and twenty-five cent picence (quart). Parks, Streets, cities, People and plases are named after this great leader. Mr. Washington was an outdoorsman in the very sence of word. He loved horse back riding and hunting. It has been said, "he cut down a cherry tree." Making his home in Virgina with his wife Martha.

Three years later, in another testing situation, she wrote this passage:

Many Americans believe that Puerto Rico is fortunate to be exempted from paying taxes. What most Americans do not know is that the tax exemption is not for Puerto Ricans but for the American investors. The Industrial Incentives Act of 1947, continued even after the commonwealth came into being. It authorized and incouraged private firms (American) to invest in Puerto Rico. This Act was enacted to supply jobs and hopefully raise the Island's economy. At first the idea was good; however, as time passed the Puerto Ricans received the short end of the stick.

Between those two passages lies a story, not a sum. To be sure, the reduction of her error count is impressive, but chances are an evaluator would not have taken the measure of her writing improvement, even on this surface level, from her writing but from an objective test, which she would probably have failed because of her allergy to blanks. At the end of four years, her grade-point average was not impressive because her first two years carried the record of her struggle to survive in academia. And finally, because she decided after four years of running between part-time jobs and classrooms, to get a full-time job and finish up her remaining requirements at night, she is probably entered now as an attrition number in the short memory of some computer. But where in the electronic labyrinth of that machine can I enter this bit: that one day, during her

fourth year in college, Cora came into my office, sat down by my desk, and said, "You know something. . . . I'm smart."

If, as I suggest, Open Admissions has reached out beyond traditional sources for its students, bringing into our campuses young men and women whose perceptions of themselves, whose needs and interests and styles of learning differ from those of the students we built our colleges around, and if the social scientists, ignoring these differences, continue to evaluate the performance of the new students with across-the-board statistics based on old criteria, then it falls upon us to formulate the new criteria ourselves. We must begin to keep our own books, recording in systematic ways our observations of our students' growth over significant developmental periods. We must organize our energies around important questions that bear upon the ways we teach, questions about the nature of error and its relationship to linguistic growth, about the schedules of institutions versus the imperatives of learning, about the costs and complexities of code shifting within the academy, about the very nature of the act of writing, with its power to intimidate or free.

As English teachers, we have fallen into prescriptive habits over the years that inhibit us as observers. My record of Cora's development as a student, for example, is sketchy—a list of her grades in English, a few class papers, some placement scores. Little more. No one who had her as a student kept a teaching log or thought to note the stations of her progress. Perspective and product-minded, we ignored the data that were generated by her development as a writer. Looking back, I recall that she went through many crises that are now blurred in my memory, as are the conferences we had where I was more the learner than she. We have been trained to notice what students learn, not how they learn it, to observe what they do to writing, not what writing does to them.

But until we can describe more precisely than we have the process whereby our students move toward maturity as readers and writers, we cannot challenge those critics who claim that the students do not move at all. The boundaries of our accountability thus lie far beyond the behavioral objectives we are now tacking on to old textbooks. They commit us to close systematic observations over extended periods, to a pooling of our research energies and resources, and finally, to a search within the social sciences themselves for techniques of observation and evaluation and for researchers who will help us see what our students are learning. For wherever numbers can become a measure that informs qualitative judgment without dominating it, we should welcome numbers. And wherever analytical modes such as the case history offer us an alternative to statistical averages or norms, we should welcome research. For we still

know too little about the young men and women who are turning our colleges around.

When the first year of Open Admissions was over at City College, I wrote a short report in which I concluded that the presence of the new students challenged the entire college, much as, in Pascal's law, "pressure applied to a confined fluid at any point is transmitted through the fluid in all directions undiminished." Now, at the end of our third year of Open Admissions, we see the results of that pressure in the imaginative work of many of our teachers and administrators in the City University, in the new programs that are taking root in our colleges, despite our financial woes, in the beginning explorations, through research and study, of new territories that now appear related to the teaching of English, and, most important of all, in the questions we are trying to formulate about traditional conceptions of knowledge.

Open Admissions began as a remedial wing to a few departments on traditional college campuses, but it is now transforming the colleges themselves, exposing far more than the deficiencies of the new students. By probing into the nature of those deficiencies and resisting those who have tried to isolate the phenomenon of disadvantage from the society that caused it, Open Admissions is forcing the real question—not how many people society is willing to salvage, but how much this society is willing to pay to salvage itself.

The answer to that question is not yet in. Until it is, the issue of accountability is wide open.

THE MISERABLE TRUTH

Conferences, I know, are times for saying encouraging things, for sharing successes with one another, and regaining a sense of being engaged with others in important work. But to begin this conference on a note of encouragement seems highly inappropriate today—something like trying to give a pep talk on the Titanic.

These are discouraging times for all of us, most particularly for the teachers who have been working with unprepared students on basic skills. Both students and teachers are already discovering that they are expendable, and the programs they have helped to build over the past five years to remedy the failure of the public schools (and the society of which those schools are an extension) now begin to shake and fracture under the blows of retrenchment.

We experience the crisis most directly on our individual campuses:

Our staffs are shrinking and our class sizes increasing.

Talented young teachers who were ready to concentrate their scholarly energies on the sort of research and teaching we need in basic writing are looking for jobs.

Each day brings not a new decision but rumors of new decisions, placing us in the predicament of those mice in psychological experiments who must keep shifting their expectations until they are too rattled to function.

Our campuses buzz like an Elizabethan court with talk of who is in favor and who is out. And we meet our colleagues from other campuses with relief: “Ah, good,” we say (or think to ourselves), “—you’re still here!”

We struggle each day to extract from the Orwellian language that announces new plans and policies some clear sense of what finally is going to become of the students whom the university in more affluent times committed itself to educate.

A speech delivered at the First Annual Conference of the CUNY Association of Writing Supervisors, April 26, 1976, and published September 9, 1976, in *The Congressional Record*. Reprinted with permission.

If we turn from our individual campuses to the university itself—this vast free city university, the only one of its kind—we see it being pressed to retrench, treated as if it has been distributing handouts over the past six years rather than entitlements, fragmented now rather than federated as each college struggles for its survival and sees in the demise of sister colleges some advantage for itself.

And underlying all this turmoil we sense a growing national indifference to the goals of open admissions. Ironically, as the national press spreads alarm about the state of literacy in the country, funds (federal, state, and city) for teaching the educationally neglected and betrayed are disappearing. Somewhere it has been decided that the experiment hasn't worked, that our hopes were overblown, that we are faced, in the words of *Time* magazine, with "continued failures to improve dramatically the lot of the disadvantaged" through compensatory education.

After no more than one generation of Open Admissions students has been allowed time to lay claim to a college education, and in the face of their achievements during our first faltering years of Open Admissions, the decision has come out against them. Not, one suspects, because anyone has taken a close look at the experience itself, but because the times have shifted and allowed the society to settle back into its comfortable notions about merit, notions which have produced a meritocratic scheme that perpetuates the various brands of race and class prejudice that have pervaded this society since its creation.

Surely there is little in such a scene to generate encouragement. Wherever we look we find reason to feel discouraged, angry, and paralyzed. Open Admissions at CUNY is being trimmed and tracked to death, and we cannot begin to count the cost of its collapse. I can think of only one encouraging thought in the midst of this disaster. It is best expressed in an old Jewish saying: The truth never dies; it simply leads a miserable life.

I have said enough, for now, about the misery. But I have not touched upon the truth—the truth, that is, of what we have learned during Open Admissions about our students, about ourselves as teachers, and about the art and science and craft of writing. Let me mention some of the truths we have uncovered or discovered because they seem to me indestructable, despite retrenchments and shifts in the winds of social doctrine.

First, we have learned—and documented—that it is possible to get a high school diploma in New York City without reaching minimal competence in reading, writing, and arithmetic. Doubtless we suspected this before, but now we know the real taste of that failure. What Open Admissions writing teacher does not remember the shock of those first student essays, the

stunning evidence of failure woven into the very syntax of sentences and the letters of words. For most of us it was a traumatic moment. We asked, What went wrong? What were they doing for twelve years? How can I possibly teach them to write now? Where do I begin? And behind those questions lay the troubling, forbidden thought—perhaps they are ineducable.

For the first time in the history of the city, we created, through Open Admissions, a massive feedback system which revealed an unconscionable failure to meet the educational needs of the poor and the dark-skinned. To be sure, the roots of that failure are tangled, and now that college teachers have begun to talk with and meet with high school teachers (largely as a result of open admissions) they are more sensitive to the many institutional conditions that have made teaching almost impossible in many of our schools.

But whatever the causes, Open Admissions documented the fact of failure. And until that happened, it was possible for thousands of students to drift quietly into the labor force of the city, taking up the jobs that others rejected, convinced somehow that something in them had caused the failure.

Second, we have learned that late adolescence is a creative and critical juncture in life and that, far from being eleventh-hour learners, our students come to us ready to begin their lives anew. And while the skills and priorities of studenthood are not easily acquired at the age of eighteen or over, students have demonstrated that they can acquire them at that age. In fact, much of the energy they mobilize for the effort seems to come from the opportunity college gives them to redefine themselves as young adults who might accomplish something in the world. To encourage this emerging view they have of themselves while at the same time representing honestly to them the amount of work that lies ahead has proved to be one of the teacher's most delicate and essential tasks.

Neither like children nor the retarded—with whom they have been compared—they are a distinctive group: young adults who are capable because of their maturity of observing the processes they are going through as learners, of taking conceptual short-cuts that are not available to children, of alerting us easily and swiftly to the effects of our instruction, of committing themselves to routine and work and constant, often discouraging evaluation, in order to change the quality of their adult lives.

We have not unfortunately had the time nor expertise to study our students as learners nor to document our sense of them as a unique group, ripe for learning and capable of both steady growth and dramatic leaps into new levels of competence. But we have, in a sense, discovered them.

Third, we learned that we didn't know much about teaching writing when we started out, even though many of us had been teaching the subject before, in traditional ways and with traditional students. There were many reasons for our deficiencies, but one of the chief ones was that most of us had not been formally trained to teach writing—only to read and analyze the outstanding belletristic literature of the centuries. Teaching writing was a kind of fringe penalty for teaching literature, and since students coming into college had generally been prepared for college writing by their schools and by the culture they grew up in, we got by. There was little motivation to give much thought to those features of the skill that now seem so central to our understanding of our task. Let me mention at least a few of those features.

We had not thought much about the writing process itself: how accomplished writers behave when they write; what sorts of stages they go through; what coordinations and perceptions are required of them; and how the behavior of our students as writers differs from that of accomplished writers—are they, for example, in the habit of re-scanning their sentences, can they objectify their own pages, looking at them at one moment for semantic sense and at another for formal correctness?

We had not given much thought to the relationship between oral and written language, a relationship that once seemed so simple (merely a matter of the writer's tending to his colloquialisms) but that suggests increasingly profound differences not simply in the ways we choose words but in the very ways we think under two modes.

Faced as we have been with students who have had very restricted and largely unpleasant encounters with written English, we have had to pay more respect to these differences, to observe them more carefully, for one thing, and to find ways of making the transition from one medium to the other more conscious. We have also had to turn our attention to the academic uses of written language, to that "dialect" of analysis that confronts our students not only with many new words and phrases, but with more heavily qualified sentences than they are used to producing in speech and with unfamiliar strategies for making their points or winning their arguments.

We had not thought much, until Open Admissions, about the fact of linguistic diversity, with which most of us collided from almost our first day of open admissions teaching when we found our classrooms filled with native Americans who had grown up with the sounds and melodies of other languages or dialects in their ears and on their tongues—Cantonese, Afro-American, Spanish, Yiddish, Greek, Polish, diverse language groups who nonetheless shared the experience of having had their language differences

ignored or treated as a disadvantage, of having had the fun and pride of language drained out of their school lives.

How we have argued, and puzzled, and struggled over the issue of mother-tongue interference, over whether to change, how to change, when to change those nonstandard features of a student's language that distract the general reader. We have arrived by now, I think, at a rough and pragmatic consensus. But looking back, the important point seems to me that we grappled with both the phenomenon of diversity and the phenomenon of linguistic convention and in doing so developed greater respect for our students' linguistic aptitudes and for the subtle, stubborn, yet mercurial quality of language itself.

Such insights have had, of course, to be incorporated into our teaching. And here we can claim, I think, a major advance. Open Admissions has taught us about learning, that is, about the importance of perceiving where students are in relation to what we want to teach them, about sequential and paced instruction, about being clear and realistic, about going below the surface of our subjects, not in order to become simpler but to become more profound, for it is at the level of principle as well as practice that young adults learn more efficiently.

This was an inevitable consequence of Open Admissions. Traditionally, colleges have been able to guarantee success by selecting their students ahead of time rather than by teaching them after they arrive. Thus it has been argued that in the days when City College screened out all except the most highly prepared graduates from academic high schools in one of the largest cities in the world, the chances of the students' succeeding in college were tremendous, whoever taught them.

If we imagine a continuum of competence, with at one end the exceptionally competent and at the other the barely competent, we could say that colleges have traditionally felt it their responsibility to identify the students at the upper end of this scale and give them four or more years of education. The Open Admissions college, on the other hand, makes a commitment to involve itself in the education of young men and women all along the continuum on the assumption, first, that people are not consigned to their places on that continuum forever but are capable of remarkable growth and development when given the opportunity; second, that the social benefits of advancing as many as possible along that continuum are inestimable; and third, that this broadening of the base of higher education, if properly planned and supported, can further the education of all students on the continuum.

But the decision to open a college to a more diverse population commits that college to becoming a teaching college, a college where everyone, not

just the remedial teachers, accepts the responsibility of teaching rather than merely presenting a subject. Certainly this message about teaching has reached the skills teachers of CUNY. Working this year in the Instructional Resource Center, I have had a chance to do what few of you have perhaps had the time or occasion to do, that is, to take a close look at the work going on in skills instruction. We are all aware, of course, that many of our colleagues have gained national recognition in our field—have published articles, read papers at conferences, served on various professional organizations, produced textbooks. It is no accident, I'm sure, that when five major publishers decided over the past year or so to produce new writing handbooks—a major publishing decision—they chose CUNY English teachers to write them.

What I had not been so aware of, however, was the number of teachers who, without fanfare or remissions and with heavy class loads, have been at work developing imaginative new materials for our students. Probably at no school in the country is there such an accumulation of wisdom and know-how in the field of compensatory education as there is within this university at this moment. I cannot imagine a group of teachers who have ever had more to say to one another. It is a special fraternity joined not only by our common purposes and problems as teachers but by our having come to know, through our students, what it means to be an outsider in academia. Whatever our individual political persuasions, we have been pedagogically radicalized by our experience. We reject in our bones the traditional meritocratic model of a college. We reject it not only on principle; we would simply be bored teaching in such a college.

Such changes, I would say, are indestructable, wherever we go from here. And indestructable, too, are the ideas that have awakened our students. It is puzzling how long people can go on—for generations—tolerating the inequalities that restrict and even shorten their lives. But once the possibility of change touches their imaginations, once a right has been extended to them and they have felt its power to open and enrich their lives, they cannot go back. They may have setbacks. But they cannot go back. CUNY extended a right, six years ago, that has been revoked, and we appear to be back where we started in 1970, only much poorer. But no one can revoke what has gone on in us and in our students.

So the lion got out of the cage before the gates were shut. And we had better keep learning how to teach writing because the brothers and sisters and cousins and children of our students will be back. If we can transcend for a moment the personal disappointments and uncertainties that surround us now, we can perhaps agree that that is a fairly strong truth for a miserable time. And it is a truth we helped to make.

STATEMENT ON CRITERIA FOR WRITING PROFICIENCY

This essay was originally prepared in November 1976 as a working paper for the CUNY Task Force on Writing, which had been charged with recommending to the Chancellor suitable measures for assessing writing proficiency. Its support of holistic readings, delineation of "choices" and "givens," statement of criteria for assessment, and recommendation against quantitative measures strongly influenced the six-level placement scale finally adopted by the City University for the Skills Assessment Test in Writing. Holistic evaluation procedures include the group training sessions of readers mentioned at the end of the document. A very helpful discussion of these sessions appears in Jan Green and Gae Goodrich's "The Working of a Controlled Essay Reading," in Comparison and Contrast, edited by Edward M. White, 1976, pp. 68-75. This report is available from the Office of the Chancellor, The California State University and Colleges, 400 Golden Shore Boulevard, Long Beach, California, at \$1.50 per copy.

Although instruction in writing usually focuses systematically on specific sub-skills of writing such as grammatical inflections and paragraph design, writing competence is more than the sum of these discrete competencies. Rather, it is the successful integration of a number of linguistic skills which interact and combine in ways so difficult to delineate and measure that the holistic judgment of an experienced reader remains the most accurate form of assessment in writing.

When we examine and discuss such judgments, we can see, however, that they involve assessments in two distinct territories of competence. One territory we can call the territory of *choices*, which is concerned with the *quality* of decisions a writer makes in the selection of words and sentence patterns and rhetorical strategies. The other territory we can call the territory of *givens*, which is concerned with correct forms. In the first territory a writer can be judged to be persuasive or unconvincing, interesting or dull, precise or imprecise, organized or disorganized, etc. In the second territory he is right or wrong, according to the conventions of the written code; that is, his grammar, his spelling, his punctuation, or his

word choices will simply be perceived as right or wrong by the general reader.

Very little exists in the way of longitudinal research on writing progress to guide us in determining the role that instruction plays in the maturation of a writer in each of these territories. Furthermore, what little research has been done on the correlation between traditional criteria for writing competence and the criteria that actually figure in readers' judgments suggests a need to reexamine the entire subject of criteria.

The experience with unprepared freshman writers in open admissions classes nonetheless suggests several important features of their development which ought in turn to influence any assessment of their proficiency as writers.

1. In general, skill in the area of *choices* is the result of long exposure to written English. The cultivation of judgment in any skill, while it can be guided and stimulated by direct instruction, is largely a matter of making numerous and often unconscious attempts to approximate the models that are presented to the learner, with a gradual and even imperceptible closing of the gap between the apprentice performance and the model. Much of this growth among writers takes place as a result of students' work in other classes throughout college and cannot be said to have reached its end when they are about to move into their second or third years of college. Genuine growth in vocabulary, for example, is inextricably linked to the students' entire college experience and must therefore be assessed in highly relative terms.

2. The pace and patterns of growth among remedial-level students suggest that they are not likely to "catch up" to their more skilled peers within a semester or two of remedial instruction but that in absolute terms the measure of their improvement is so much greater than that of their non-remedial peers as they progress through college that they can reach comparable levels of performance by the time they are seniors. Thus while an early test of writing proficiency in this territory of *choices* might well reflect significant gaps between the prepared and unprepared populations, it would be a mistake to interpret these gaps as permanent and, on that basis, screen out students who are in fact capable of steady and in some instances dramatic improvement as they proceed through college.

3. Within the territory of *choices* there are certain key competencies that can and ought to be reached by the end of formal instruction in writing and that can provide the foundation for the student's independent development as a writer from then on (provided, of course, he be required to put these competencies into practice in his regular college courses). These include:

- a. The ability to sustain the development of a point or idea over the span of 300 to 500 words
- b. The ability to select words that fall within the range of appropriateness for formal writing (such a criterion would exclude from competence essays that reflect a heavy reliance upon slang, the clichés of daily life, and formalese)
- c. An ability to signal the unfolding plan of a written passage by the use of organized paragraphs, transitional sentences, phrases, and words.

4. Unlike the territory of *choices*, the territory of the *givens* is much easier to describe, arising as it does out of three relatively autonomous linguistic subsystems (grammar, punctuation, and spelling) that have been reduced to principles and rules. To be sure, many of the conditions that govern these rules are themselves so complex as to defeat any attempt to teach them directly. Nonetheless, there remains a substantial body of information about the "givens" that is transferrable by direct instruction. Indeed, it is in this area that remedial teachers have so far shown their greatest ingenuity and effectiveness. But even here there are developmental realities which should influence any decisions about criteria. Primarily there is the fact that there is generally a gap between a student's understanding of his errors and his habitual control over them, and this gap between theoretical grasp and practical application is likely to be largest where students write under stressful conditions that allow little time for revision or proofreading. In addition, some features of these subsystems (particularly those involving certain grammatical inflections and sentence patterns) run counter to vernacular and mother-tongue patterns that lie deep in many students' linguistic intuitions. Such features can be brought to the surface of students' awareness and the errors caused by them reduced to the point that they appear residual rather than habitual, but it would be unrealistic to expect such difficulties to disappear entirely from a student's formal writing by the end of his remedial instruction. More often, they will be substantially reduced during that period and then they will be gradually worn away by further practice and exposure to books and lectures. At least one survey of CUNY faculty opinion suggests that professors are not, in any event, as distressed by occasional errors of form as they are by the lack of development or order in student writing.

5. Within the boundaries dictated by the relative shortness of training time (in most colleges between one and two semesters of courses with three to four hours of class time a week) and the nature of development in writing, it is possible to set criteria for correctness that indicate a readiness to

manage college writing tasks without extra supervision (i.e., supervision beyond that which a professor is expected to give when he assigns papers). These criteria would include:

- a. The ability to write sentences that reflect a command of syntax within the ordinary range of mature writing. This would exclude from competence writing that depends so exclusively upon the simple sentence patterns as to seem childish as well as writing that so tangles syntactic possibilities as to require several readings to comprehend.
- b. The ability to make conventional use of the capital and of the major marks of punctuation—the period, comma, semicolon, and quotation marks.
- c. The ability to spell the common words of the language with a high degree of accuracy and to manage the less common words of the college vocabulary with enough accuracy to sustain the reader's attention on the content rather than the spelling of words. Since the efficient use of the dictionary is itself a key academic skill and since the skill of spelling is in most writing situations a matter of knowing when to look up an uncertain spelling, we recommend that students be permitted to use dictionaries during writing examinations.
- d. The ability to use regularly, but not necessarily faultlessly, the grammatical inflections of formal written English and to observe the rules of agreement that apply to subjects and verbs, pronouns and antecedents.

Such a list of criteria for both the territories of competence we have described here raises questions about how the cutting points in individual criteria are to be determined and how the various criteria are to be weighted in relation to each other. To attempt to solve such problems by developing detailed measures or scoring procedures (for example, to set limits to the numbers of errors in particular categories or to count the number of words in paragraphs or sentences) might well increase the degree of agreement (reliability) among readers, particularly in the territory of correctness, but it will, in the judgment of this committee, reduce the *validity* of the judgment, for no scheme of quantification appears to be sensitive or flexible enough to gauge the point at which a piece of writing is perceived to be incompetent by a general reader. Such judgments arise out of an almost infinite number of possible combinations of strengths and weaknesses, with at one time a notable strength in one area lessening the importance of flaws in others, or at another time severe weaknesses in seemingly minor features outweighing other important accomplishments.

Much might ultimately be learned as data from examinations are accumulated about the correlations between readers' judgments and measurable features of students' essays, but lacking such data now and fearing that any attempt at quantification, no matter how conscientious, would also run the risk of shifting teaching priorities so as to encourage narrowly literal views of writing competence, the committee recommends that the criteria listed above be refined through the process of examining cases in reader-training sessions.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FFORUM: A PRIMER OF WRITING THEORY

fforum is a newsletter for teachers of writing published by the English Composition Board (ECB), a standing committee of the faculty of the University of Michigan's College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA). Its purpose is to provide teachers of writing with a vehicle for conveying information and conducting discussion of their craft.

The informational segment of the newsletter includes (1) articles by experts in the field—theoreticians and practitioners; (2) essays reviewing the work and influence of these experts; (3) critical analyses of their work; and (4) a sampling of methods and materials developed by classroom teachers who have translated their theory into practice. The informational segment serves as a primer of writing theory for overworked teachers of writing who need an economical way to learn about professional developments of current interest.

In 1979-80 we published our first three numbers: The first two were in effect short courses in *Pre-Writing* (Ken Macrorie and Peter Elbow) and *The Traditional Approach* to writing instruction (Edward P.J. Corbett, Sheridan Baker, and John Warriner); the third was a sampler of the ECB's Writing Workshop '80, held in Ann Arbor from 17 through 20 June. The 1980-81 volume consists of *The Development of Writers* (James Britton and James Moffett) and the movement toward *Writing Across the Curriculum* (Daniel Fader and Lee Odell) and a second Writing Workshop issue. Each of the authorities whose work is featured in the newsletter writes an article for *fforum* addressed specifically to teachers who want a summary view of that writer's theory and practice.

The discussion segment of *fforum* includes these features: (1) letters to the editor; (2) a spotlight on a teacher or district willing to share methods, materials, or techniques—whether used and proved or new and provocative; (3) the creative writing, prose and poetry, of both teachers and students; (4) timely announcements of conferences and publications of interest; (5) a column by Doctors Fidditch and Foilitch, a team of resident experts who attempt all professional problems called to their attention; (6) an ECB FreeB—a lesson plan with rationale and format in handy tear-out form; and (7) brief reports from the English Composition Board about various aspects of the writing program inside and outside the College.

Suggestions, contributions, and inquiries about materials and methods are welcome. Everything that appears in *fforum* is available for use by all teachers. For this reason, there are no restrictions on duplication and

distribution of its contents. Nor is there a charge for subscription, which you may receive by writing to: Patti Stock, Editor of *fforum*, English Composition Board, 1025 Angell Hall, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109.

WPA: WRITING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION

WPA, a refereed journal published by the Council of Writing Program Administrators (WPA), is addressed to the interests and concerns of those who administer writing programs in American and Canadian colleges, universities, and other postsecondary institutions. Subscription is with membership in WPA and is available to faculty and administrators who serve or have served as directors of freshman composition programs, coordinators of writing labs and workshops, chairs or members of writing program related committees, or in a similar administrative capacity, and to others interested in the improvement of writing programs and the professional development of writing program administrators.

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