

# In the Limelight

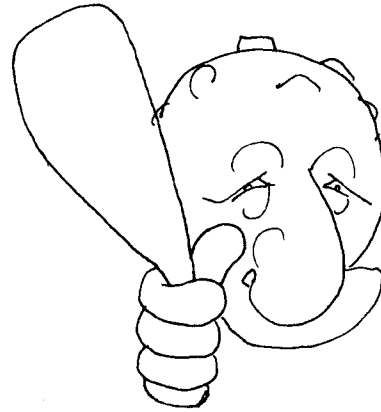
## READING, WRITING, AND THE CERTIFICATION OF TEACHERS: MCTE TAKES A STAND

Stephen Judy

Teachers of writing and teacher educators interested in writing should know that the State of Michigan is considering the addition of required course work in reading to the certification programs of prospective elementary and secondary school teachers. In the spring of 1979, two separate movements to this end got underway: One, an effort to revise certification code requirements through the State Board of Education; the second, an attempt to pass legislation (Public Bill 4460) to mandate reading instruction. Both proposals require six semester hours in reading for high school English teachers, six semester hours for elementary teachers, and three semester hours for secondary school subject-matter teachers. The legislative bill, which passed the House of Representatives in the spring and was sent to the Senate Education Committee, requires the work for an initial or continuing certificate, while the Board of Education proposal aims at undergraduate programs only. Both proposals were scheduled for additional action toward the end of 1979.

The Michigan Council of Teachers of English has carefully studied both proposals. In drafting a position statement, the Council officers expressed concern that the proposed code revisions totally ignore writing and oral English. The Council has therefore gone on record as recommending that the phrase "teaching of reading" in both proposals be changed to "teaching of communication skills, to include the teaching of reading and writing, and the related areas of listening, speaking, and language development." The umbrella term "communication skills," which admittedly has overtones of educationese, was selected after long discussion because it has been used previously by the State Department to describe the language component of State Assessment. Thus "communication skills" has fairly precise meaning in the minds of many Michigan educators.

Most important, the Michigan Council of Teachers of English feels that State officials must be persuaded to promote an integrated approach to language skills,



one that places writing on a par with reading and acknowledges the role that oral language plays in developing both reading and writing. In arguing its point, the Council has noted that:

--writing, listening, and speaking skills, like reading, are critical to success in school at all levels.

--public concern and dissatisfaction with the schools includes all communication areas, not just reading.

--a great many skills basic to reading are also basic to writing, speaking, and listening.

--the Michigan Assessment program includes communication skills, not just reading.

--research shows that reading, writing, listening, and speaking are learned in concert.

Representatives of MCTE presented their position statement at public hearings held in Lansing and Traverse City in September, and copies have been sent to the State Board of Education, the Governor, and members of the State Senate, including the Chair of the Education Committee, Senator Jack Faxon. Meetings have also been held with Douglas Smith, the Governor's Educational Specialist, and Dr. Eugene Paslov, Interim Superintendent of Public Instruction.

(cont. on p. 52)

**Stephen Judy** (cont. from p. 44)

In general, response to the MCTE proposal has been favorable. Governor Milliken noted that literacy was an important priority in his State-of-the-State message and wrote:

There has been a suggestion [that] to broaden the certification code revision to include writing, speaking, and listening along with reading would be a substantial contribution to code revision. There has been support for this broadened revision, and I, too, favor the expansion of the amendment to include the communication skills. (Letter of October 2).

But the final wording of the proposals, and whether the changes will go through the State Board, the Senate, both, or neither, remain undecided as of this writing. MCTE urges concerned teachers to express their opinions by writing the State Board, the Governor, and their State Senator.

The Michigan Council of Teachers of English is also concerned that passage of the proposals in their present form might have a negative effect on future developments in the teaching of writing and oral English in Michigan. For instance, though the present proposals are chiefly aimed at new teachers, it seems quite likely that in the future the State may want to extend the requirement to teachers in-service as well. It would be unfortunate if a massive retraining program for teachers were to exclude oral and written composition. Even more important, the proposed revisions present a one-dimensional view of literacy which places reading at dead center and ignores related language skills. That is an incomplete view, not acceptable to those who consider themselves teachers of more than decoding skills, who are, in fact, teachers and professors of "English."

Stephen Judy teaches at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan, edits the NCTE English Journal, and is presently serving on the MCTE Subcommittee on Teacher Certification.

**Catherine E. Lamb** (cont. from p. 43)

our discussion, I could show Laura why I disagreed with her evaluation, while at the same time recognizing what she had done well in her argument. We both knew the criterion of completeness could not be met, given the limitations of the time she had for research, the resources available to her, and the length of the paper. I also agreed with her that her first two premises--statements about what is--were well enough supported with factual evidence meeting the other criteria of quantity, variety, and precision. However, in the third premise, she had not defined "inefficient." In the fourth, as she knew, she was speculating, but she also relied only on a quotation from then Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, Joseph Califano. Finally, she had not recognized that, even if all four premises were well-supported, they pointed to a different conclusion from the one she had drawn, something like, "The United States' health care system is in serious difficulty." These premises with their new conclusion could be the statement of the problem in a revised essay. She might then claim that any solution would have to meet the problems of high cost which will continue to get higher, uneven distribution, and inefficiency, and demonstrate that a national health care plan will do this best.

One other point becomes evident in a discussion such as this one. When students begin applying inductive standards to evaluate arguments, they see quickly that, at best, inductive standards can account for only part of why an argument is rhetorically effective--why people change their minds, or are moved to take action. The world of logic is neat and orderly; that of rhetoric, messy and unpredictable (and much more interesting, I tell my students). Because of what inductive standards are not, they help to show us what else rhetoric is.

Catherine Lamb teaches at Albion College, Albion, Michigan. She is especially interested in the relationship of rhetoric to other disciplines, error analysis, and literature by and about women.