

Why We Teach Writing in the First Place*

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Back to the Basics

Schools exist to teach people to think in some systematic way. At the early grades "reading" and "writing" and "arithmetic" are called basic--what they are basic to, is thinking. Later on, in secondary schools and colleges, these basics become attached to particular disciplines--each characterized by a particular pattern of reasoning--history, biology, literature and so on. Along the way, of course, schools teach other things: citizenship, social manners, athletic skills, and the like. And sometimes these collateral skills so dominate the curriculum that original or primary intentions get lost, and we talk about schools which "socialize" or "train" or "bore" rather than "educate."

But the basics which the public always wants to "get back to" are really the primary language skills which make systematic articulate thought possible. Reading provides us access to information and ideas. Writing and arithmetic provide general tools for manipulating and expressing ideas and information. Unlike speaking, which children learn on their own, long before kindergarten, these more abstract language skills are formally introduced in first grade and developed progressively during the next twelve or twenty years. This rather simple-minded formulation about why we go to school is meant to introduce "writing" as one of the truly elemental--basic--studies for serious students from the earliest through the latest grades.

But, of the three R's, the role of writing in learning--and in the school

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curriculum--is perhaps least understood. Everyone believes that reading is the basic skill (the most basic?); without it few avenues to civilized culture or higher knowledge exist. Everyone also knows that mathematical languages are the foundation on which scientific and technical knowledge--and hence our civilization--are built. Everyone does not know that writing is basic to thinking about, and learning knowledge in all fields as well as to communicating that knowledge. Elementary teachers teach penmanship and believe they are teaching writing; secondary teachers often teach grammar and believe they are teaching writing; while many college professors teach literary criticism and expect that their students already have been taught writing. In other words, many different activities are taught in the name of teaching writing. Furthermore, as Don Graves indicates, courses which do, in fact, teach writing sometimes do so in a harmful manner, suggesting that the "eradication of error is more important than the encouragement of expression" (1978, p. 18).

The emphasis on teaching reading in the elementary school curriculum may actually contribute to the neglect of writing. Many American educators believe that reading must precede writing as people develop their language-using skills; this hierarchical model actually separates reading from writing--which may be a fundamental mistake (Stock and Wixson, forum, forthcoming). Schools which subscribe to such an artificial instructional hierarchy are also likely to subscribe to a set of basal readers accompanied by fill-in-the-blank workbooks; these workbooks both help sell the reading series and diminish the amount of writing a teacher is likely to assign in connection

with the reading lesson. Graves even suggests that the dominance of reading in the curriculum discourages active self-sponsored learning: "Writing is the basic stuff of education. It has been sorely neglected in our schools. We have substituted the passive reception of information for the active expression of facts, ideas, and feelings. We now need to right the balance between sending and receiving. We need to let them write" (1978, p. 27).

Graves' position presents reading as the passive receiving of knowledge and writing as the more active generation of knowledge. We know, of course, that this polarity is too severe. Frank Smith (1971), Kenneth Goodman (1968), and David Bleich (1978), among others have demonstrated that reading is both a highly subjective and active process--hardly the passive activity which Graves describes. Each of us "reads" information differently because we have experienced the world differently. However, there remains enough truth in Graves' observation to consider it further. In a sense, reading is the corollary opposite of writing: to arrive at meaning, readers (and--for that matter--listeners too) take in language from "outside" and process it through an internal mechanism colored by personal knowledge and experience. To create meaning, writers, on the contrary, produce language from some internal mechanism which, as it happens, is also shaped by personal knowledge and experience from the "outside." So, just as no reader reads texts exactly the same way as other readers, no writer generates texts which are totally unique or original.

The importance in these qualified comparisons between reading and writing is

this: they are interdependent, mutually supportive skills, both of which are "basic" to an individual's capacity to generate critical, developed independent thought. Few courses of study, however, in the secondary schools or colleges, seem to recognize explicitly this relationship. Whereas reading is assigned in virtually every academic area as the best way to impart information, introduce ideas, and teach concepts, no such imperative exists with regard to writing. In many subject areas, teachers are more likely to assign machine-scored short answer, multiple choice, and true-false tests than significant written compositions. In fact, in a recent study of the kind of writing required across the curriculum in American secondary schools, Arthur Applebee (1981) discovered that only 3% of assigned writing tasks required students to compose anything larger than one sentence; most of their so-called writing was "mechanical"--filling in blanks, copying and doing homework exercises. Other courses may assign periodic essay tests, term papers, or laboratory reports but use them to measure--rather than promote--learning. A recent publication by the American Association for the Advancement of the Humanities reports findings similar to the Applebee study. The report says in part:

Plainly, schooling as usual won't work. Most schools have a powerful hidden curriculum that precludes the development of higher-order skills in reading, thinking, and writing. The elements of this pernicious curriculum include the following:

No writing in the testing program, only short-answer, true-false, and multiple-choice tests;

Writing relegated only to English courses;

Writing viewed as an end, not as a means, of learning;

No systematic instruction in solving problems, thinking critically, and examining evidence;

No opportunities for disciplined discussion in small groups;

No regular practice in writing at length (1982, p. 9).

Not only is the curriculum "pernicious," but teachers are seldom trained to understand fully the degree to which language skills are involved in the development of higher thought:

Moreover, most teachers are unprepared by their education or professional training to teach and foster the needed skills, just as most schools offer no in-service training for teachers and no small classes, released time, or teacher aides to help evaluate student writing (1982, p. 9).

These studies, together with my personal experience as both student and teacher suggest that writing has an ill-defined and haphazard role in the curriculum. And where writing has an established role, that role is likely to be superficial or limited in scope. If we are interested in helping schools to do better what we believe they were primarily intended to do--teach people to reason systematically, logically, and critically--then we need, as Graves suggests, to balance the curriculum as carefully with regard to writing activities as we currently do with reading activities. Moreover, the curriculum should not include merely more writing, but more of certain kinds of writing. Let me explain.

Thought and Language

Thirty years ago George Gusdorf (1953) stated clearly the double and often contradictory role language plays in the development of individuals. On the one hand, humans use language to communicate ideas and information to other people; on

the other hand, humans use language to express themselves and to develop their own articulate thought. These two functions, the "communicative" and the "expressive," often work in opposition to each other; as Gusdorf puts it: "The more I communicate, the less I express myself; the more I express myself, the less I communicate" (Nystrand, p. 128).

Whereas Gusdorf's formulation of the double role of language may seem obvious and common-sensical, it is surprising to see the degree to which schools promote the one, the "communicative," and neglect the other, the "expressive." Most writing assigned in most curricula asks students to write in order to communicate learned information to teachers--through which writing the students will be evaluated, judged, and graded. Few curricula recognize, implicitly or explicitly, that writing can have an equally important role in generating knowledge (the expressive function) as in communicating knowledge. In other words, an individual's language is crucial in discovering, creating, and formulating ideas as well as in communicating to others what has been discovered, created, and formulated.

Why am I making such an issue about the different functions of writing? Because I believe with James Britton that "knowledge is a process of knowing rather than a standard of the known" (forum, forthcoming). Much of the "process of knowing" takes place in language. Not only is it the symbol system through which we receive and transmit most information, it is the necessary medium in which we process or assimilate that information. We see and hear language, we explain experience and sensation through language, and we use language to identify the world. Gusdorf says: "To name is to call into existence, to draw out of nothingness. That which is not named cannot exist in any possible way" (Nystrand, p. 48). By naming objects and experience we represent our world through symbols. Susanne Langer describes sense data--the stuff we take in from outside--as "constantly wrought into symbols, which are our elementary ideas" (1960, p. 42). In order to think in the

first place, human beings need to symbolize, for in using language they represent, come to know, and understand the world. We actually do much of our learning through making language; another way of saying the same thing: language makes thinking and learning, as we know them, possible.

For our concerns here, the process by which we think and learn is most important: what happens to sense data, information, ideas and images when we receive them? How do we manipulate them in our minds, make them our own, or do something with them? Psychologist Lev Vygotsky describes "inner speech" as the mediator between thought and language, portraying it as "a dynamic, shifting, unstable thing, fluttering between word and thought" (1962, p. 149). He argues that "thought is born through words...thought unembodied in words remains a shadow" (1962, p. 153). Other sensory experience--sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touches--contributes to, but does not in itself constitute, formal thought. We often think things through by talking to ourselves, carrying on "inner" conversations in which we consider, accept, reject, debate, and rationalize. The key to knowing and understanding lies in our ability to internally manipulate information and ideas received whole from external sources and give them verbal shape or articulation, which Richard Bailey defines as forming "sensory impressions and inchoate ideas into linguistic form" (fforum, forthcoming). We think by processing; we process by talking to ourselves and others.

This last point is most important: we often inform ourselves by speaking out loud to others. Drawing on the work of Gusdorf, Langer, and Vygotsky, James Britton argues that the "primary task for speech is to symbolize reality: we symbolize reality in order to handle it" (1970, p. 20). Considered this way, speech serves the needs of the speaker as much as the listener. Britton argues that human beings use "expressive" speech--or talk--more to shape their own experience than to communicate to others: the words give concrete form to thought

and so make it more real. This "shaping at the point of utterance" (Britton, 1972, p. 53) helps us discover the meaning (our own meaning) of our everyday experience. As Martin Nystrand summarizes it: language "facilitates discovery by crystallizing experience" (1977, p. 101).

We carry on conversations with others to explain things to ourselves. I explain out loud to a friend the symbolism in a Bergman film to better understand it myself. I discuss with my wife the gossip from a recent dinner party to give that party a shape and identity. And so on. The intersection between articulate speech and internal symbolization produces comprehensible meaning. This same intersection helps explain the role of writing in learning.

Many teachers identify writing simply as a technical communication skill necessary for the clear transmission of knowledge. This limited understanding of writing takes no account of the process we call "composing," the mental activity which may be said to characterize our very species. Ann Berthoff describes composing as the essence of thinking "...the work of the active mind in seeing relationships, finding forms, making meanings: when we write, we are doing in a particular way what we are already doing when we make sense of the world. We are composers by virtue of being human" (1978, p. 12). Janet Emig believes that writing "represents a unique mode of learning--not merely valuable, not merely special, but unique" (1977, p. 122). The act of writing, according to Emig, allows the writer to manipulate thought in unique ways because writing makes our thoughts visible and concrete and allows us to interact with and modify them. Writing one word, one sentence, one paragraph suggests still other words, sentences, and paragraphs. Both Berthoff and Emig point out that writing progresses as an act of discovery--and furthermore, that no other thinking process helps us develop a line of inquiry or a mode of thought as completely. Scientists, artists, mathematicians, lawyers, engineers--all "think"

with pen to paper, chalk to blackboard, hands on terminal keys. Developed thinking is seldom possible, for most of us, any other way. We can hold only so many thoughts in our heads at one time; when we talk out loud and have dialogues with friends--or with ourselves--we lose much of what we say because it isn't written down. More importantly, we can't extend, expand, or develop our ideas fully because we cannot see them. Sheridan Baker writes: "Only on paper, by writing and rewriting, can we get the fit, make the thought visible...where it will bear inspection both from ourselves and others" (fforum, forthcoming). Sartre quit writing when he lost his sight because he couldn't see words, the symbols of this thought; he needed to visualize this thought in order to compose, manipulate and develop it (Emig, 1977).

School Writing

In 1975, James Britton and a team of researchers published a study of the kind of writing assigned to students, 11-18 years old, in British schools. The results of the study are not surprising: "transactional writing" (writing to communicate information) accounted for 64% of the total writing assigned students between the ages of 11 and 18. "Poetic writing" (writing as creative art) accounted for 18%--exclusively in English classes--while "expressive writing" (thoughts written to oneself) barely shows up at all, accounting for just 6% of the total sample (Britton, 1975). Miscellaneous writing, including copying and note taking, accounted for the rest. The figures are more extreme when the research team looked at the writing assigned to eighteen year olds: "transactional," 84%; "poetic," 7%; and "expressive," 4%.

The fact that students were seldom required to write in the expressive mode suggested to Britton that writing was taught almost exclusively as a means to communicate information rather than as a means to gain insight, develop ideas, or solve problems. This complete neglect of expressive writing across the curriculum

is a clue to the value of writing in schools. According to Britton's classification, which closely parallels Gusdorf's identification of the dual function of language, expressive writing is the most personal, the closest to "inner speech" and the thinking process itself. The absence of assigned expressive writing in school curricula suggests that many teachers have a limited understanding of the way language works. As Britton's co-researcher Nancy Martin explains: "The expressive is basic. Expressive speech is how we communicate with each other most of the time and expressive writing, being the form of writing nearest speech, is crucial for trying out and coming to terms with new ideas" (1976, p. 26). According to the research team, personal or expressive writing is the matrix from which both transactional and poetic writing evolve. Serious writers who undertake significant writing tasks almost naturally put their writing through "expressive stages as they go about finding out exactly what they believe and what they want to write. Pulitzer Prize winning author Donald Murray explains: "I believe increasingly that the process of discovery, of using language to find out what you're going to say, is a key part of the writing process" (1978, p. 91, italics mine).

Preliminary findings in Applebee's study of writing in American schools (1981) indicate a pattern similar to the 1967-70 British study; "informational" (transactional) writing--dominated the composing tasks in all disciplines; "imaginative" (poetic) writing was limited largely to English classes; "personal" (expressive) writing was virtually non-existent in the sample. Applebee examines one additional category, "mechanical writing," which the Britton study did not consider in detail; Applebee describes mechanical writing as any writing activity which did not involve significant composing on the part of the writer--filling in blanks, translating, computing, copying, taking notes, etc. This category, it turns out, was by far the most frequently assigned writing in American classrooms and actually accounted for 24% of total classroom activity (Applebee, p. 30).

These studies suggest the kind of writing currently assigned by most teachers and written by most students in the junior or senior high school years. Transactional (or informational or communicative) writing dominates the curriculum while there is little or not evidence of expressive (or personal) writing. The pattern is a disturbing one, for it suggests that across the curriculum, from subject to subject, writing serves a narrow function. In fact, mechanical writing, in which students do not have to originate or develop thought to any significant extent, is the most frequently assigned form of writing. Transactional writing, the only writing of paragraph or more length assigned in most disciplines, communicates information, but usually to an audience already familiar with that information, who will evaluate or grade the writing--hardly an authentic act of communication. Expressive writing, which serves the thinking process of the writer directly is generally ignored throughout the curriculum. As Richard Baily concludes: "the emphasis on writing as a tool for inquiry, a stage in the articulation of knowledge, seems so rare in American schools that it plays a negligible role in the educational system, at least at the secondary level" (forum, forthcoming).

Visible Language

When we speak, we compose. When we write, we compose even better, usually, because we can manipulate our compositions on paper, in addition to holding them in our heads. We can re-view them, re-vise them, and re-write them because they are now visible and concrete. Consider, for example, the following piece of writing produced by Anne, a sixth-grade girl, who was faced with giving her first formal speech--a two-minute explanation of how to do something. She had a topic, "stenciling," but was not at all sure how to create a "speech" about it. To make Anne's task manageable, her teacher asked her two questions: first, what do you want to say about stenciling? To which she wrote:

Stenciling speech

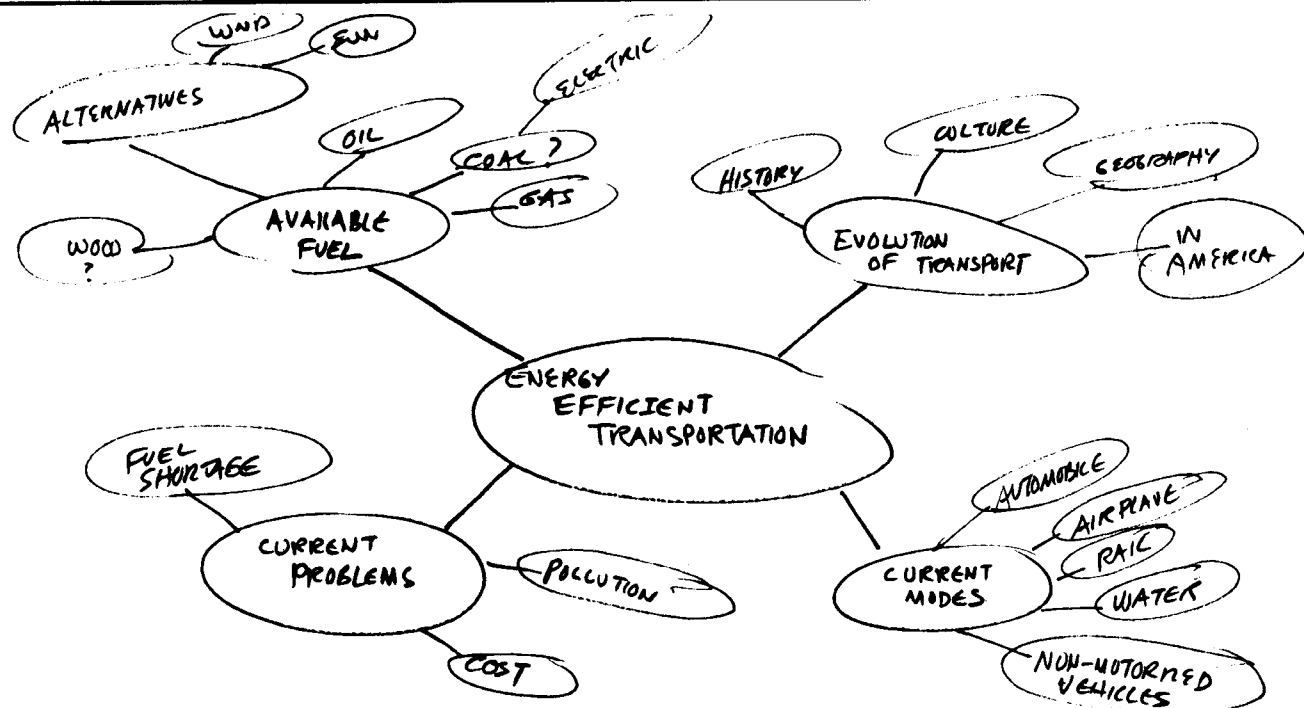
Where you can buy supplies
 What stenciling used for
~~question?~~
 Origin of Stenciling
 Dictionary Definition
 Show sample
 Make one

Pleased with her list, but wondering what, exactly, to do next, Anne again asked her teacher for more help. The teacher asked a second question: In what order do you want to tell this? In another two minutes the speech was essentially organized and looked like this:

-
1. Dictionary Definition
 2. Origin of stenciling
 3. Show sample
 4. Make one
 5. What stenciling used for
 6. Where you can buy supplies
-

The stenciling speech example is meant to make a simple point: by writing out the list "in the first place," the student was able to move to "the second place"--the organization of the speech--and so solve a difficult problem of communication. Writing the words on paper objectified the thought in the world. Peter Elbow reminds us that it helps "to think of writing as input or as movement of information from the world to the writer" (forum, forthcoming). The same "movement" even happens when I write out a grocery list--when I write down "eggs" I quickly see that I also need "bacon." And so on.

Consider another example: Doug, a high school senior needs to write a paper on the topic "Energy-Efficient Transportation," but is not sure what to say about it. He has dozens of scattered impressions, but no developed thought, organizational theme, or focus. His teacher suggests a simple mapping exercise to pull his thoughts together and make them visible. This student produced the following conceptual "map":



Again, this is not a profound example; it is, however, clear testimony to the power of visible language to suggest, define, organize, and create relationships. The visual map is really an elaboration of the bacon-and-eggs principle. In this case, Doug started with a general subject, "Energy Efficient Transportation" and generated as many related subtopics as possible. At some point he can stop and number the clusters according to importance or sequence--or delete irrelevant ones, develop existing ones and add others. For example, one idea, "Alternative Energy" may become the focus for the entire paper. Doug may then decide that "Current Modes of Transport" should introduce his topic while "Evolution of Transportation" is really the subject of another paper. A visual diagram such as this spreads out the options before the writer's eyes and allows him to make carefully reasoned choices about where to go and what to include. While the power of such exploratory writing may seem obvious to many readers, there is little evidence that such writing is valued by, taught, or encouraged by teachers in many school curricula.

A third example of the power of visible language is provided by a philosophy student's journal. Joan, a college senior enrolled in her first philosophy course in summer school, was required by her instructor to keep a journal and record her reactions to the class and to new ideas she encountered during this 5-week course. An entry early in her first week of class read like this:

6/10

This philosophy stuff is weird! Hard to conceptualize. You try to explain it to someone and just can't. Like taking 3 pages of the book to decide whether or not a bookcase is there. Someone asked me if you really learn anything from it. I didn't think so but I finally had to say yes. I really never realized how we speak without really knowing (?!?) what we are saying. Like I told her, the class is interesting and time goes by fast in it but you have to concentrate and sort of "shift" your mind when you are in class. You have to really think and work hard at keeping everything tied in together—it's like a chain where you have to retain one thing to get the

next. I also told her that if you really do think and concentrate you begin to argue with this guy on skepticism, etc. and that's really scary--you think at the end of the book will be this little paragraph saying how everything really does exist as we see it and we really do "know" things, they were just kidding!

Here at the beginning of a summer school course (6/10) she is wondering about the nature of her new course of study. "Weird." She encounters Descartes for the first time and openly explores her thoughts on paper, hoping that his ideas are essentially a joke and that Descartes is "just kidding."

Near the end of course, a month later (7/4), after much debate in her journal about her religious beliefs, she writes:

7/4

You know, as the term is coming to a close I am tempted to sit back and think if I really mastered any skills in Philosophy. Sometimes when I come up with arguments for something I feel like I am just talking in circles. Or "begging the question" as it's been put. One thing I can say is that Philosophy has made somewhat of a skeptic out of me. We are presented with so many things that we take for granted as being there and being right--we were shown evidence and proofs that may be they really aren't there and aren't true. You know, I still feel like I did the first entry I put in this journal--maybe the last day of class you will say--"I was just kidding about all this stuff--the world really is as you imagine it--there are material things, God does exist with evil, etc." But I realize these arguments are valid and do have their points--they are just points we never considered. I can see I will not take much more for granted anymore--I will try to form an argument in my mind (not brain!).

At this point we see her reflecting on her course of study, on her journal, and on how she has possibly changed. Joan remains a Christian--a belief she has asserted several times in other parts of her journal--but she now also calls her-

self "somewhat of a skeptic," as she writes about her own changing perceptions. Again, this is informal writing, not meant to be graded--or necessarily ever read by someone else. But the journal writing assignment encourages her to explore and develop her ideas by forcing her still-liquid thought into concrete language.

Joan's final entry, a few days later (7/9) reflects on the value of this expressive assignment:

7/9

Before I hand this in, I have to write a short blurb on what I thought of this journal idea. I have to admit, at first I wasn't too fired up about it--I thought "what am I going to find to write about?" The first few entries were hard to write. But, as time went on I grew to enjoy it more and more. I actually found out some things about myself too. Anyway I did enjoy this and feel I like would be giving up a good friend if I quit writing in it!

The
End
(for now!)

Personal writing, in other words, can help students individualize and expand their learning by encouraging them to force the shadows in their mind--as Vygotsky says--into articulate thought. Art Young, in studying both expressive and poetic writing, argues that such writing not only encourages students to learn about certain subjects and express themselves, but that it gives them the time "to assess values in relation to the material they are studying" (forum, forthcoming). Certainly we witness our philosophy student using her journal to mediate between her personal values when she enrolled in class and the somewhat different ones presented by the professor during the course.

Teaching Thinking: Two Solutions

My original premise contends that schools exist to teach people basic literacy skills which, in turn, are prerequisites

for people to learn basic thinking skills--which, in turn are prerequisites for civilized cultural existence as we know it. If we want schools to do more than teach the "basics" of thinking, if, in addition, we want schools to teach critical, independent thinking, then we must question the ill-defined role of writing throughout the curriculum. Brazilian educator Paulo Friere contends that "liberating education" only occurs when people develop their critical reasoning skills, including self-knowledge and self-awareness. This ability to think critically separates the autonomous, independent people, who are capable of making free choices, from the passive receivers of information. In Friere's terms, liberating education consists of "acts of cognition, not transferrals in information" (1970, p. 67).

While it may be true that schools exist essentially to teach thinking, it is also true that many schools teach conformity and good manners and help justify the reigning political, social, and economic system. As a consequence liberating education, as Friere describes it, is dangerous in so far as it aims to teach individuals to think autonomously, independently, and critically. Could it be that the lack of expressive writing in the curriculum reflects a lack of interest in critical thought? Or, worse still, are teachers afraid to teach their students to be free?

The Britton research team entertained that possibility: "The small amount of speculative writing certainly suggests that, for whatever reason, curricular aims did not include the fostering of writing that reflects independent thinking; rather, attention was directed towards classificatory writing which reflects information in the form in which both teacher and textbook traditionally present it" (1975, p. 197). And my colleague, Randall Frisinger, gloomily insists that: "Excessive reliance on the transactional function of language may be substantially responsible for our students' inability to think critically and independently....Product-oriented, trans-

actional language promotes closure" (Language Connections, 1982, p. 9).

But I don't believe that most of my colleagues want to promote "closure." I believe they truly want to teach students to be free, autonomous thinkers. They simply do not realize the role writing can play in effecting this. At the same time, however, when I ask teachers from different disciplines to identify the student writing problems which bother them most, a few mention spelling, punctuation, or grammar, while the majority talk about problems related to thinking ability: inability to focus, organize, write a thesis statement, develop a paragraph, use supporting evidence, cite references, etc. When Jack Meiland, of The University of Michigan, asked his colleagues the same question he reports similar answers: "The most frequent complaints were that students did not know how to develop their ideas and organize their ideas. They did not know how to formulate their ideas clearly, argue for their ideas, develop replies to possible objections, uncover hidden assumptions, discover the implications and consequences of a position, and so on" (fforum, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Fall, 1982), p. 23.).

In other words, most teachers recognize that a fundamental writing-thinking connection exists, yet they seldom examine exactly what that connection is, how it works, and how it might inform their pedagogical practice. Teachers like Meiland, who are aware of that connection may actually develop writing or thinking "skills" courses and so teach these basic skills directly, once and for all. Meiland, for example, created a specific, specialized course in critical thinking, where students were "taught intellectual skills directly and explicitly" (fforum, forthcoming). Meiland suggests that the best way to teach such skills is to teach "the associated forms of writing. For example, I teach skills of argumentation by teaching students to write argumentative papers" (fforum, p. 25).

A more common variation of this "thinking skills course," which will improve writ-

ing along the way, is the writing course which means to teach thinking along the way. One such course is offered by Peter Elbow, who teaches his students to free-write, brainstorm, and keep journals in order to explore and develop their thought through personal, private language (fforum, forthcoming). A much different approach to accomplish a similar end would be that of Frank D'Angelo who teaches a highly structured writing course which emphasizes classical imitation. Here students first analyze, then imitate pieces of good writing to emulate "the best features of a writer's style." Such an exercise "mirrors the writer's cognitive processes, leading the student writer to a discovery of new effects" (fforum, forthcoming). Finally, we might look at the approach advocated by William Coles at the University of Pittsburgh, who argues in this issue of fforum that writing must be taught as an avenue to power. "To become alive to the implications of language-using is not, of course, to become free, but it is to have choices that one can not have without such an awareness" (p. 121). Coles' approach stresses the value of language-using for the writers--enabling them "to run orders through chaos, shape whatever worlds [they] live in, and as a consequence gain the identities [they] have" (p. 121). In other words, writing becomes synonymous with growing--the necessary precondition for autonomy and freedom. Many English composition courses attempt to do generally what Coles, Elbow, and D'Angelo suggest, teach both writing and reasoning skills in a single course.

But no matter how successful such skill-specific courses are, I believe the lessons they teach must be reinforced regularly, across the curriculum, in order to have a lasting, purposeful impact. Such courses work best with well-prepared, dedicated, motivated students who are willing to treat seriously what are obviously "practice exercises"--a term used by both Meiland and D'Angelo. Many other students, still groping for a foothold in the academic or social world simply may not be "ready" when such a

course comes their way (or is required in their schedule). While good teachers such as Meiland, Elbow, D'Angelo, and Coles can help generate motivation where little existed before, these courses will not reach all students in all curricula.

A second approach, meant to have an impact on all students, asks students to learn writing and thinking skills in the context of their own career interests. Richard Ohmann writes: "People have concerns, needs, impulses to celebrate or condemn, to compact with others or to draw battle lines against them, to explain, appeal, exhort, justify, criticize. Such concerns, needs, and impulses are what lead people to write (and to speak), when they are not writing to measure" (1976, p. 153). Students assigned to write "exercise" prose on academic topics to teachers who will "measure" them often do so in prose which Ken Macrorie describes as "Engfish"--the stilted evasive prose common to school and bureaucratic writing alike. Much of the poor writing--and poor thinking--according to Macrorie stems from students who "spent too many hours in school mastering English and reading cues from teachers and textbook that suggested it is the official language of the school. In it the student cannot express truths that count for him" (1976, p. 4). Both Ohmann and Macrorie seek to develop intellectual skills within the context of the individual student's life and work. In other words, if we want writing (and thinking) skills to become useful, powerful tools among our students we must ask them to write (and think) in a context which demands some measure of personal commitment--which, in schools, is more likely in their major discipline than in specialized composition classes. Such assignments "nurture the individual voice" by asking that voice to engage through writing, with real, immediate issues (Fader, fforum, Vol. II, No. 2 (Winter, 1981), p. 53).

My colleague, Terry Kent, for example, teaches philosophy and requires his students to explore philosophical issues through expressive writing in their journals--Joan's journal entries (cited ear-

lier) came from Terry's class. Another example of a teacher using writing to promote--rather than test--learning can be found in Helen Isaacson, who teaches folklore at The University of Michigan; she asks her students to generate notes and drafts and speculations about local folklore "to become folklorists, to conduct original research in the field" (fforum, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Winter, 1982), p. 52). In other words, doing real research, and writing about it, has more meaning to most students than inventing a research project to practice writing research papers in English classes. Placing such instruction in a real--rather than imagined--quest for knowledge asks students to both reason and write well--skills they can learn by doing more easily than we can teach by telling.

We know, of course, that the whole school environment influences how students learn to read, write, and think about the world. While individual teachers and particular classes may be the most memorable and visible aspects of education, the more covert structure of the curriculum also "teaches." Schools which offer most of their instruction through large classes, lectures, rote drills, and multiple-choice examinations obviously do little to nurture each student's individual voice. Other schools which offer small classes, encourage student discussion, and assign frequent and serious compositions do nurture that voice.

Recently numerous institutions of higher learning have instituted "comprehensive writing programs" aimed at improving both writing and learning skills across the curriculum: at Yale and The University of Michigan, for example, such programs are controlled by boards composed of interdisciplinary faculty concerned with school-wide policies on writing; at Beaver College and Michigan Tech, faculty members attend "writing workshops" and learn to assign and evaluate writing more effectively in any academic discipline (The Forum for Liberal Education).

Secondary and elementary school programs have also begun more writing across the curriculum programs, influenced nationwide by the work of The National Writing Project and, more locally, by outreach efforts like The University of Michigan's English Composition Board--which, among other activities, distributes fforum free to interested teachers.

I mention these programs to emphasize a particular point: while the programs vary widely in size and scope, all assert that writing is a complex intellectual process central to both creative learning and proficient communication. They argue collectively that writing deserves serious re-consideration, increased attention and ever more thoughtful practice across the whole school curriculum.

The degree to which the curriculum promotes (demands?) comprehensive language activities on the part of students may be the degree to which it creates a genuinely liberating education. It is apparent to me that we need both pedagogical approaches described here: intensive writing/reasoning courses on the one hand and extensive reasoning/writing activities in all courses on the other. For this to happen, consistently, more teachers in all disciplines need to study the several dimensions of language which most actively promote clear writing and critical reasoning. With Lee Odell, I believe teachers might ask questions about their course requirements: Do we ask students to write and talk as much as read and listen? Does each assignment ask students to exercise a particular intellectual skill? (fforum, Vol. II, No. 2 (Winter, 1981) p. 57). With John Reiff and James Middleton, I hope teachers will view assignments as acts of communication between teachers and students and will question: "To what extent do students fail at writing assignments because we...fail to communicate our expectations effectively? Are there criteria we can use both to evaluate our assignments and to revise them for greater effectiveness?" (fforum, Vol. III, No. 1 (Fall, 1981), p. 34). With Don Murray, I believe that "the need to write in the

first place comes from the need to reveal, name, describe, order, and attempt to understand what is deepest and darkest in the human experience" (p.). Do our assignments reflect that need? Do they invite such investigations? Do they encourage such expressions? And do our responses to that writing show that we, too, care about the deep and the dark?

When we teachers ask these questions, we will not find quick and dirty formulas nor single, simple solutions. Learning to write, like learning to learn, defies

prescription. But both writing and learning interlock when teachers ask students to create, contemplate, and act through language as well as drill, copy, and test. As James Moffett puts it, nicely: "Instead of using writing to test other subjects, we can elevate it to where it will teach other subjects, for in making sense the writer is making knowledge" (1982, p. 235). That writing makes sense and knowledge is unquestionable; the real question is, why don't we use it that way?