



# WLA Newsletter

. . . writing as a liberating activity. . .

SPECIAL ISSUE

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## WRITING AS A LIBERATING ACTIVITY:

A Position Statement

by

Richard C. Gebhardt and Barbara G. Smith

Students too often are asked to write on subjects external to their own needs and experiences as human beings. Students too often are pressured to use composition as a mechanical fill-in-the-blank formula for conveying information. Students too often are persuaded that personalized writing -- in contrast to logical, rational, knowledgeable forms of academic discourse -- is defective or undesirable. As a result, student writers have adopted poses, faked and phony, in their compositions in order to resist and yet comply with these pressures and persuasions, in effect disguising their personal integrity and creativity with hypocrisy. Roger Sale identifies these pressures against creativity and personal response in his book, On Writing. He records, for instance, the shocked response of a student to his suggestion that she write papers the way that she writes letters: "But I can't write that way. Not on an English paper." And Sale goes on to identify the source of the student's consternation as the differences of formality, organization, technical accuracy, and spontaneity that separate genuine student writing from the kind of writing expected in most English classes (New York: Random House, 1970, pp. 3-4). Ken Macrorie, of course, has written about this required, artificial, impersonal, uncreative language, too -- the "Engfish" of Uptaught (New York: Hayden, 1970, pp. 3-18).

Writing teachers too often assign subjects external to the needs and experiences of students, pressure students to view composition as a mechanical formula, persuade students that personal writing is undesirable, and otherwise force students to hide their personal integrity and creativity behind faked and phony poses. Many writing teachers do these things as matters of conscience: they believe in the distinctions which Roger Sale outlines so well. These teachers believe so completely in writing that is formal, organized, and accurate that, even when they also value spontaneity and freshness, they throw the weight of their instruction and the authority of their grading behind the kind of composition that Sale's student knew so well.

The average writing teacher, Donald Murray suggests in A Writer Teaches Writing, is as compulsive with red ink as an alcoholic is with whiskey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968, p. 135). Changing the analogy, R. W. Reising confesses his tendency to bleed red-inked comments "upon everything from misplaced commas to undeveloped arguments" over all of the blank spaces on student papers ("Controlling the Bleeding," College Composition and Communication, February 1973, p. 43). If this commitment to the corrected paper is limited to marking only the manner of the student's presentation, then the lessons that instructors teach become those that Fred T. Wilhelms

describes in "English: Liberal Education or Technical Education?" -- that writing is an artificial, antiseptic process in which the way an essay is written far outweighs what the student says and why he/she wants to say it at all. It is Wilhelms' view that such lessons are dehumanizing pressures toward "the rigid and closed personality" of the student (New English, New Imperatives, Henry Maloney, ed., NCTE, 1971, p. 63).

Of course, many teachers see the phony poses and recognize the depersonalization that occurs when students make their writing conform to the artificial conditions that have been imposed on them. They may recognize, as the student may feel, that the act of writing is a personal, creative thing, the source and product of which is the self of the writer. And they, like the student, may be frustrated because the pressures of the composition class too often prevent spontaneousness, creativity, and personal expression. These teachers read books and essays, such as A Writer Teaches Writing, How Porcupines Make Love, "Teaching English Composition as a Creative Act," and "Teaching Without Judging" (see the February 1973 College English for these two articles), and they echo in their own ways the judgment Reising renders on his penchant for marking: "Oh, I realize I should know better." But the necessity of remedying the usage problems of the weaker students, the drive to "finish" the text, the looming presence of the department syllabus, the teacher's own pre-conditioned ideas about the acceptable climate of a classroom and the appropriate behavior of a teacher, and the teacher's legitimate concern for the clarity of student writing -- all these prevent many well-intentioned teachers from actually implementing in their classroom teaching educational principles to which they subscribe intellectually.

The frustration which this array of conflicting ideas generates is not alleviated by most of the textbooks that teachers use in writing classes. For, assuming that writing equals exposition and that writing is something a person does for others, too many textbooks focus on external, mechanical, or purely utilitarian concerns and techniques. Handbooks to English provide detailed guides to grammar, usage, organization, research, and letter writing. But they usually assume that the student already has something he/she wants to explain clearly to others; and they usually concentrate on external, academic subjects for writing, paying little attention to the student's feelings toward his/her subject or toward writing itself. Issue-Oriented Anthologies seem to focus on the student's feelings, but they usually are biased in favor of the formal development of opinions, and they run the risk of generating artificial and ungentle essays on the ideas that editors insist that all students consider. Books of Outright Writing Instruction are built on the essentially unliberal and uncreative assumptions that there is a right, or at least a most effective or most efficient way to write, and that this one way applies to all students without exception. And, of course, other than the books intended for creative-writing classes, almost all writing texts assume that writing means essay writing and so limit their instruction to methods and techniques of exposition.

We feel, however, that writing includes many sub-forms, and that the very individual process of writing involves the decision of whether to write an essay, a story, a poem, a journal, a letter. And we believe that writing is an internal activity in which the chief factor is the writer himself rather than external issues (whether current or not), or structures, or methods of composition. Of course, writing is a process that ends in an artifact, in a product that conveys something to others, and so usage, structure, clarity, and the like are important. But these things must be seen in the perspective of the whole process in which individuals work with language to understand their ideas and themselves and to express their insights in ways that reflect their own personalities. Therefore, to make our intentions in editing the WIA NEWSLETTER clearer, we offer these statements:

- Writing is a creative activity which by its very nature explores relationships between disparate materials and uses language to give new forms to the relationships.

- Writing provides a context in which a person can think out and try to express ideas, emotions, and responses to life in forms as diverse as the essay, fiction, and poetry. This context-for-exploration is important because schools and colleges provide little incentive for such introspection.
- Writing is a liberating, liberalizing, humanizing activity which should be made to connect with the student's development as a human being and with the whole process of education, rather than identified with the all-too-often artificial atmosphere of the writing class.
- Writing is a means for one human being to communicate achieved insights to other human beings, and so a writer must be aware of the clarity of his/her writing for others, recognizing that choices in language, structure, and usage will have a direct influence on the effectiveness of his/her writing.

In line with these statements, we feel that the writing class should keep the individual student at its center by focusing, more completely than is typical, on writing as a creative process of self-awareness and self-expression. The writing class should get the student started writing, but it should not dictate a single writing process. Instead it should let the student try different means of written expression. And it should handle the necessary aspects of usage, organization, and language from such a perspective and in such ways that they do not in any way prevent writing from being what it rightfully is -- a creative, liberating, humanizing activity.

#### WLA IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

WLA Newsletter began in a workshop on Writing as a Liberating Activity at the 1973 College Section meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English. Its editorial policy consistently has emphasized the role of writing classes in freeing student imagination and creativity and the broadening of student outlook and opinion. Such concerns led the newsletter to be equally interested in the imagination, creativity, and broadened outlook of teachers. And, indeed, from its first issue, the WLA Newsletter has appealed to innovative and energetic composition teachers concerned with dull expression and flabby thinking in student papers.

Most of the writing teachers who wrote and read the articles in the first issues teach in America's colleges and community colleges. But with the Fourth Issue, which contained Vivian Davis' report on a "liberating" conference for Texas high school teachers, the WLA Newsletter broadened its scope to include high school teachers and their attempts to teach writing in a creative liberating way.

This Special Issue contains excerpts from Issues Two, Three, and Four. It is being distributed by the Findlay College English Department in the hope that the WLA Newsletter might be of as much interest to secondary teachers as it has been to college writing teachers. We would like to see future issues of the newsletter serve as forums where high school and college writing teachers can share their common joys and challenges.

To this end, the WLA Newsletter invites your reports, reviews, reading suggestions, and discussions (pro and con) of the WLA philosophy. Submissions are especially welcome for these regular features:

- Teaching Plans: Brief outlines of a course unit or teaching tip.
- Course Reports: Short descriptions of effective writing courses.
- Reading Lists: Brief, annotated lists of interesting, informative reading.

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SOUTH PLAINS CONFERENCE LIBERATES TEACHERS\*

Vivian I. Davis  
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Traditional curricula and methods, to a large extent, enjoy the confidence of students, parents, administrators, text writers, and the general public. Though most people will admit that they never learned to write well in school, they will at the same time tell you that in their day, when teachers were harder, when grammar was taught, when spelling and mechanics were scrupulously red-pencilled, we had better writers. The idea that writing should be a liberating act does not yet enjoy widespread support. Nonetheless, there are teachers who believe that the best way to help students mature as writers is to change the conditions under which they are expected to write. They want to try new strategies, to redesign their courses, and to involve students in their writing. But it is difficult to change in a system which continues to be committed to "the way we've always done it." I believe it is the job of us teacher trainers who try to motivate teachers to change to give them support even when their efforts are timid. And I tried to do just that in a three-week workshop, "Teaching Writing in the Secondary School," offered by the English Department of Texas Tech University.

I assumed that the workshop would support change if it: 1) allowed teachers to commit themselves to change at the level of feeling; 2) allowed them to decide what should be changed in their own classrooms; 3) helped teachers relate theory to their own practice by helping them devise new teaching strategies; and 4) gave teachers the opportunity to practice some of the new strategies they devised in a non-threatening atmosphere from which they could receive immediate feedback. Of course, even if the workshop helped teachers gain the confidence to try something new, it could not guarantee that their classroom practices would change once they returned to their own schools, but I felt that there would be much greater probability that more teachers could teach differently given the experience of the workshop.

Though all the teachers had taught at least three years, none of them had taken a composition course since they were college freshmen; a few said that they wrote for their own pleasure, but none of them thought of themselves as disciplined writers. They were no longer in touch with the way it feels to have to write, especially under conditions imposed by the composition class. It was necessary to let the teachers feel through that experience so that they would become once again consciously aware of it. We began the workshop with a consideration of theme evaluating and grading. The purpose was to allow the teachers to talk with each other about a frustrating task they all have. Our discussions grew out of three articles in Hipple's Readings for Teaching English in Secondary Schools.

After some teachers volunteered their personal grading procedures for their colleagues to analyze, I asked that we consider the way students must feel about having their writing graded. Before attempting to answer, we role-played a "typical" in-class high school writing assignment in which the teachers were expected to write, "correct," and hand in a theme by the end of a forty-five minute period. After the papers were returned to the teachers, I asked them to resume the discussion of student attitudes about grading. Of course it was impossible for them to talk about attitudes of some hypothetical students somewhere. They responded entirely in terms of their attitudes toward the way their papers had been evaluated and the way the assignment had been given from the start. Though they knew it was role-play, many teachers explained that their feelings were very real, that they had not felt that way since the last time such a thing had happened in an honest-to-goodness composition class. Soon teachers were discussing things they did, but hoped never to do again. In order

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to get them to commit themselves beyond mere statements, I asked the teachers to consider what they could do to be sure that they would change those practices they wanted to change. This led to the next phase of the workshop.

Though teachers have good ideas about what they want to change, they want to be relatively sure that they can expect the new way to be defensible and workable. To answer this need, we explored theories of teaching writing and attempted to find out why some of the old practices had become so ingrained in our teaching of writing. We used Jersild's When Teachers Face Themselves and Parker and Daly's Teaching English in the Secondary School. Here teachers found some ideas they had had before validated by "experts."

Realizing that it is often easier to do things as usual even when you know that there may be a different way, I asked the teachers to decide on one thing they wanted to do differently in the classroom, and to structure it into a segment of work they would teach. They were asked to make detailed plans explaining exactly what activities they would try and why, what responses they would expect from students, and to cite alternative approaches in the event one approach did not work. They were also asked to prepare to teach one lesson from plans they were making to a demonstration class, so that they could feel through their new techniques before they had to put them into effect in their own classrooms.

Taken as a group, the teachers tried to make two basic changes in the way they teach composition. They allowed students more time so that they could go through the entire writing process before they were asked to turn in their work. They tried to focus on the most neglected phases of the writing process--pre-writing, particularly directed but unstructured student-to-student talk, and editing and revising.

At the conclusion, teachers were asked to answer several questions in evaluation of the workshop. More than ninety percent of the teachers said that the most useful feature of the workshop was working with the demonstration class. Most of the comments also included some allusion to the discovery that students are not given time enough to write. Commenting on additional features that could be helpful in another workshop, several teachers asked for ways to be in continuous touch with each other throughout the year, and others asked for more opportunities to write themselves.

I believe that my assumptions for the workshop were, if not verified, at least supported. Each teacher was committed to attempting some changes in the classroom. Of course, since the workshop was voluntary, those teachers who attended it were probably highly motivated to change. The real test is what they will do when they are back in their own classrooms. I believe two things will keep them encouraged: communication with colleagues who are also trying to change, and immediate and honest feedback from their students.

I hope our workshop provided them with the kind of liberation they need to be able to accept students as the most important resource in the teaching of writing. Newsletters, such as this one and others similar to it, will help them to be in touch with their colleagues across the country, but I understand what they mean when they express the need to communicate with someone they know who feels what they feel as they grope their way to better composition teaching. We need to revive the art of letter writing.

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#### IS A WRITING CONFERENCE NEEDED IN NORTHWEST OHIO?

Recently, the Findlay College English Department has received several inquiries about the possibility of arranging on-campus Writing Workshops for high school composition teachers. The department could organize a workshop for a day or several days by drawing on material incorporated in its ten-week course in The Teaching of Writing.

But is a Writing Workshop needed? Would it help your effectiveness as a teacher to get away from your everyday setting and discuss new methods of writing instruction with other experienced teachers? If it would, let us know your interests and needs.

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TEACHING PLAN #1: Establishing a Climate for Open, Creative Learning

CONTRIBUTOR: Richard C. Gebhardt, Findlay College, Findlay, OH 45840

ORIENTATION: Here is the sequence of activities I used during the first seven days of my most successful section of Findlay College's required freshman course, Self Awareness through Writing--a sequence of activities that established an open, creative atmosphere in which writing seemed to work as a liberating activity. My dissatisfaction with my writing classes, and the recommendations of two teachers I respected, had led me earlier to begin experimenting with isolated techniques for establishing more open, sensitive classrooms. But it was only when I conceived of the techniques as inter-connected and clearly related to the subject matter of the entire course (eg. self-understanding, autobiography, associational keys to creative writing) that this sort of activity really worked. Maybe it will work again. Maybe it won't. And maybe you or I will find a dozen more effective ways to establish writing classes as dynamic, personal places for writing and learning.

UNIT SCHEDULE:

Day One

Sound Filmstrip on Identity (Man's Search for Identity, Part I)

The class then discussed a few points in the filmstrip, points that connected clearly with the course. I used this as a transition to a very brief statement about the course's approach and atmosphere: writing as a means of self-discovery, writing as a creative activity, the class as a resource to be used rather than a requirement to be met.

Day Two

De-inhibitors and Climate Setters:

Escape from the Plastic Bag (Eyes shut. Flex muscles as if trying to break through an envelope of plastic wrap.)

The Airport Game (Do to fast music. Students move around in a confined area but try not to touch others. Penalty for bumping: both people freeze, adding to the congestion.)

Handshaking (Introductions--self to another person, then that person to a third person.)

Sound Filmstrip on Identity (Man's Search for Identity, Part II)

Informal group discussion on the topic, What Questions Would be Good to Ask to Really Get to Know Somebody Else? I played the role of a person being interviewed. I replied candidly and fully to each question put to me by the class, and then added a word or two on how that specific question might be altered to interview people other than a college teacher. (Clearly, the class learned more about me than it did about interviewing; but within the context of establishing class rapport, this is exactly what I had in mind.)

Day Three

Airport Game

Handshaking

Mirror Game (Partners--ie. the last people introducing themselves in the handshaking sequence--face each other, one pretending to be a full-length mirror reflecting the movements of the other. One moves, and is mirrored, in time to music, and then the roles are switched.)

Interviewing: The mirror partners worked out an "interview schedule" of questions intended to get at a person's real identity. Then the partners used the questions to interview each other, keeping notes on their answers.

Day Four

No class. Each student was working on two related assignments: a two-page biography of himself (in third person), and a two-page description of the mirror partner (based on the interview and his observations of the partner during the mirror game and the interview).

Day Five

The mirror teams trade papers so that student A reads the paper that student B wrote about student A and the one that student B wrote about student B. Then the teams react, as the partners discuss how their perceptions of each other differed.

Day Six

Free Association Exercise. As I indicated a category (eg. a kind of car), the students jotted down the specific item in that category (eg. a rusted-out Volkswagen) with a "personality" most like theirs.

Then the mirror teams interviewed each other to find out the why of each answer. And they worked together to find common principles or similar traits running through the answers. (As answers on one student's list, a rusted VW, a condemned garbage scow, and an ugly old gymnasium might well suggest an interesting trend.)

Day Seven

Open Writing Workshop. Students came to work individually and with each other rather than to have me perform; students requested my reactions and suggestions and otherwise took the initiative for the direction of the class.

Assignment: Write a description of yourself using as many details as possible from the list of associations you created yesterday.

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## Identity, Atmosphere, and Creativity

Margaret J. Adams  
Case Western Reserve University

My professional role as a teacher is not separate from my identity as a person. I think that this realization was one of my happiest discoveries when I first started teaching. Reading and writing are immensely important to me as ways of satisfying my curiosity and my urge to shape my thoughts into words. I go into the classroom as a person who is convinced of the power of words; I know how crucial language is to me in discovering and shaping the world.

I found that I was most successful as a teacher when I revealed what touched me personally, what had meaning for me, concretely, in terms of my own experience. I don't mean that my classes became confessional, but in the classroom I was myself, Peg Adams, who admittedly didn't know beans about a lot of things, but knew quite a bit about others. It shouldn't have come as a surprise to me that I was a better teacher when I was more informal and personal; it seems obvious to me now that the best style of teaching for any person is fundamentally an outgrowth of her personality, of her consistent way of relating to people.

I am an approachable person, and my teaching style reflects this; whatever enthusiasm and commitment I have for the learning process is available to my students because I show it. I allow my feelings to surface naturally in my contact with students, in the classroom, and in one-to-one teaching situations. I have

tried to break down every barrier I can between teacher and student, without sacrificing the greater authority that my training and practice in writing naturally give me.

People in my classes call me by my first name, if they feel comfortable doing so. This alone tends to break down barriers. So does sitting around a table, or arranging chairs in a circle. I change my place in the group at every class meeting, just to break the class habit of looking in concert to the same place for approval or disapproval; I refuse to be the sole dispenser of approval in the classroom to encourage students to learn from each other, as well as from me. I am not a lecturer in my classes; I am a questioner. I usually tell students that I am happiest when I do the least talking, because when they do the talking they are involved and excited about what we are discussing. I see myself as a shaper of discussions, rather than as a leader; I try to work with the material that the class itself evolves, pointing out connections, showing further ramifications of what's been said, pulling it all together to demonstrate to the class how much they know.

I count on mutual respect to create trust and cooperation in my classroom. My students are as free to question and criticize me as I am them. I encourage them to say what's on their minds, and I take the consequence of being put on the spot, being asked to explain myself. Many times their arguments have made me re-evaluate my teaching, and I let them know when I've decided I've made a mistake, just as I tell them when I think they are wrong. This give and take goes on in the classroom, and in individual conferences where we discuss writing in detail.

I think it is this atmosphere that stimulates student creativity. Students are most creative when they feel free to tailor writing assignments to their own interests and feelings. If I assign specific topics, I am generally open to the changes that students suggest in order to make their responses individual and personally meaningful; because I encourage such suggestions, it becomes the student's responsibility to make them. I also try to stimulate creativity by using assignments that ask the students to examine and write about everyday objects precisely and concretely, in order to re-discover, through careful observation, what they are already familiar with. We use student writing as the basis for class discussions, and many students are surprised, I think, at their ability to perceive and communicate. (This was in a class made up of students who had all failed freshman English at least once, and the last thing they thought they were was creative.) This approach seems to be the most specific stimulus to creativity that I have used, and I want to try it again, because I sense that the most creative thing that I have done in my teaching is to examine continually the needs of my students in relation to my own method of meeting them, and to change my methods in response to the needs I perceive.

## TEACHING PLAN #2: A Fiction Sequence, Or How to Teach Students to Write a Story Without Really Trying

CONTRIBUTOR: Richard C. Gebhardt, Findlay College, Findlay, OH 45840

ORIENTATION: The subtitle of this outline is deceptive--read "deceptive" as "a bare-faced lie"--but it suggests the attitude I tried to project to my students as I led them through a sequence of in-class activities and writing assignments. In working up this sequence, my attempt was to devise a series of activities which would involve students in plot-sequence, conflict, characterization, and dramatic scene--an instructional series, moreover, that would involve some fresh and enjoyable classroom activities, and that would suggest fictional writing as an alternative means of dealing with the biographical subjects that the required freshman class in Self-Awareness Through Writing had been writing essays about.



UNIT SCHEDULE:Day One: Pantomime--A Key to Character and Conflict

The class, divided into several pantomime teams, worked for ten minutes to prepare a wordless play of an assigned fairy tale:

"The Three Little Pigs"--seven students

"Little Red Riding Hood"--five students

"Goldilocks and the Three Bears"--seven students

"Humpty Dumpty"--seven students.

Then each team presented its play, and the audience guessed (correctly, in each case) what the teams' assignments had been.

I led the class in a discussion of conflict as it had appeared in the plays. We considered (very generally, of course) such things as the values of different characters; the appropriateness of the characters' actions to their values; tensions and decisions faced by the characters; and actions taken by characters to face/avoid the tensions and decisions. While we had only scratched the surface of the subject, by the end of this one class hour the class had arrived at some understanding of the idea of characters-in-conflict.

Day Two: Original Pantomimes

The pantomime teams from day one worked together to write a fairy tale appropriate for 1973. They were to choose a basic subject matter to help determine the plot. And then they were to decide on the identities of the main characters, the values of the main characters, and the conflicts probable when the characters would come together within the subject-matter area selected.

Out of the raw materials generated by these discussions, the students wrote stories or scripts for wordless two-minute plays involving a politician bank-rolled by a drug pusher, a microcosm of society in a stalled elevator, and the love affair between a male technician at Cape Kennedy and the Earth's first woman (and women's lib) astronaut. Students developed these subjects individually, as an out-of-class assignment; but the individual students were bound by the common decisions their teams had made about characters, conflicts, and general subject matter. (A brief example of these writing projects appears elsewhere in the newsletter.)

Day Three: The Pantomime Critics Awards

The class, working part of the time in small groups, read stories and scripts, performed wordless plays, and discussed the original pantomimes from the point of view of characters-in-conflict. Ultimately, the class chose the pantomimes that were the best in each of three categories:

Best Delineated Conflict (consistency of characterization to values, plausibility, etc.)

Best Use of Specific Details

Clearest Presentation of Acting Directions

Through the discussions leading up to these awards, the class reviewed conflict but also went on to consider setting, physical characterization, exposition, the physical composition of a scene, and differences between fiction and drama.

Class Four: Some Spadework for Fiction

During the hour, students worked through a pre-writing exercise for fiction. This exercise asked students to:

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Collect details about a real person  
Think in detail about a made-up situation in which the person would be very happy or very uncomfortable.  
Decide who would be the most likely "teller" of a story about this person in this situation  
Write a patch of dialog between the main character and another character in the made-up situation.

#### Class Five: A Short, Short Story

In this hour, students began writing short (very) stories based on the details and approaches developed during class four. The story was not due for several days; the class was an open affair in which students could try ideas out on each other and on me as they started writing.

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#### DOTS and LINES and TEACHERS

Ann Major  
Bureau of School Service  
University of Kentucky

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There's a delightful movie, based on a book by Norman Juster (1963), entitled The Dot and the Line. Essentially, the movie portrays the trials and tribulations of a very straight (in every sense of the word) line as he attempts to overcome his rigidity, to become more open and free, in order to win the love of a dot. In this story, which can be considered a parable of the creative process and the creative person, the line does learn to bend to form complex and versatile shapes.

The line's rival, an unruly, uninhibited squiggle, in spite of his Bohemian appeal, loses out in his competition with the line after the line has learned to merge his innate freedom and spontaneity with his learned self-discipline and responsibility. The squiggle, who would no doubt score in the upper quartile on a creativity test of divergent thinking, goes on being a wild and unkempt bit of anarchy. The line, meanwhile, has broken the rigidity of his being--in his structure--through exciting and profound ellipses that have not only uniqueness but also relevance and meaning.

Few would quarrel with the most obvious message in the film: that neither the self-control of the line nor the originality and spontaneity of the squiggle are sufficient to meet one's challenges and problems. And yet for a decade or longer these two qualities have been regarded in almost all classrooms as opposing positions in curriculum. In both philosophy and method we have often adopted an "either-or" position. Either we teach factual content and the realities which are the core of a body of knowledge, or we encourage students to use their imagination, dream in the fringes of knowledge, make guesses about how things might be. We either teach autocratically in traditional classrooms or democratically in pupil-determined programs in experimental schools. We either report progress or deficiencies by grades and test scores, or we have conferences and a system such as Pass-Fail. We either teach convergently by posing conceptual situations which have one selected or acceptable answer measured by single-answer tests, or we teach divergently for pupil-generated alternative answers measured by subjective tests of the pupils' own ideas. Enough? There are many more examples of "either-or" boxes we have been forced into or find ourselves caught within. An honest self-evaluation by a teacher often reveals a philosophical dedication to one of these more extreme positions with only occasional (and perhaps uncomfortable) attempts to incorporate methods from the other.

## Student Writing

## "Four Between Floors"

Nancy Devor  
Findlay College

Four people stood in the old hotel elevator as it ascended in the building. First floor, second floor, third, fourth, up up then stop, at the tenth floor. No, the door did not open. The elevator was not at the tenth floor. The four people were stuck between the ninth and tenth floor.

Bill Bored looked discouraged and rolled his eyes with disgust. Mr. Bored was a businessman, about 50 years old, an egotistical, uncaring type of man. He looked impatiently at his watch.

Mary Wana thought the whole situation was hilarious. She stood with her hand over her mouth, giggling. Her wire-rimmed glasses kept sliding off her nose. She wore sandals, bell-bottom jeans, and a beige, embroidered loose-hanging blouse. Her black, shiny long hair draped down around her shoulders. She carried a huge macrame purse.

Frank Furter did not know what was actually happening. He leaned against the railing with a blank expression on his face. Frank, a plumber by profession, wore an extremely tight blue uniform. Around his waist, he wore a belt fastened in the last hole. In his hand he held a grey lunch box.

The fourth person, Ted D. Baer, was scared. He nervously fingered the torn "no smoking" sign and snatched a handkerchief out of his pocket, patted his forehead, and glanced around to see if anyone was watching him. His "salt and pepper" suit and bow tie completed his "teddy bear" qualities.

Mary, Frank, Bill, and Ted eyed each other, shrugging their shoulders. Bill Bored then stepped over to the button panel and pushed the one marked "ALARM".

For a short while, which seemed like forever, everyone ignored each other and waited for the elevator to start again.

Mary Wana reached into her purse and pulled out a strange-looking pipe. The pipe was a marihuana smoking device complete with roach clip. At this point, Mr. Bored gave Mary the dirtiest look you've ever seen. Mary returned a smirky, smart-alecky expression. Ted D. Baer looked more frightened than ever. Frank finally figured out what was happening. Nevertheless, the blank stare remained on his face. Bill Bored grew more and more impatient and began to search above his head for an escape hatch.

Mary lit her pipe and the sweet smoke filled the elevator.

Ted D. Baer played with his worry beads, while Frank twiddled his thumbs. Bill's impatience soon turned into anger.

Suddenly, the elevator jerked and the four people sighed with relief as it began to move again. At the tenth floor the door burst open and two fat, mean-looking policemen grabbed Mary, Ted, Frank, and even Bill to take them to Police headquarters for questioning.

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WLA NEWSLETTER: A Reason for Optimism!

See Wallace Douglas, "On the Crisis in Composition,"

ADE Bulletin, No. 40, March 1974.

We are mentioned on page 4.

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THE POEM A WORD MAKES:  
Poetry As One Way Toward Liberating Writing

Barbara G. Smith  
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University of Kentucky

CONTINUED from the first issue:

"Through classroom exercises involving sensory explorations, free association, denotation and connotation, alliteration, rhyming, imagery- and metaphor-making, I try to help students discover that composing with words is fun. We start with poetry, because in a poem the words one-at-a-time in an intriguing economy do take on a life, a liveliness, a reality all their own. They squirm, dance, shine; they pout, protest, smoulder. . . .and making poems from words brings about the realization in teacher and in student alike that writing is a process of choosing, of trying to control the vagrancy or the ambiguity of words, allowing the magic of words to work for, rather than against, the writer. . . .How the exercises from freshman writing can be transformed into an examination. . . .is just one example of the application of poetic techniques toward liberation writing." For PARTS ONE and TWO and excerpts from the first issue of WLA see "Notes from Kalamazoo: Sequel to Workshop 26, Writing as a Liberating Activity," College English, Vol. 35, No. 7 (April 1974), 869-874.

PART THREE. Word Choices.

Source: Your sensitivity to the nuances of words, rhymes.

Purpose: To discover the impact of connotations of words. To discriminate the effective, affective word from the ineffectual, inappropriate word.

Study the CAPITALIZED/lowercase pairs of words in the following poem. Decide in each pair which word fits the poem best. Explain briefly why you choose, how you choose each word.

You PLACE/seat yourself beside me  
with your gentle cultured wiles--  
A tissue paper person with superficial SMILES/grins.

You speak of Mr. Eliot and you talk of Mr. Yeats  
And you beg me now to TASTE/sample your spiced forbidden  
meats.

Now you PLAY/strum a golden instrument  
with tones like sweet rewards,  
But you never stop to question  
what may HIDE/lie behind the chords.

You talk of last night's lover and of warm orgasmic lands  
But I believe that last night's lover was quite  
WITHOUT/ devoid of hands.