

JOURNAL OF BASIC WRITING

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John Creed and Susan B. Andrews

A Longitudinal Study of
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CALL FOR ARTICLES

We welcome manuscripts of 10-20 pages on topics related to basic writing, broadly interpreted.

Manuscripts will be refereed anonymously. We require four copies of a manuscript and an abstract of about 100 words. To assure impartial review, give author information and a short biographical note for publication on the cover page *only*. Papers which are accepted will eventually have to supply camera-ready copy for all ancillary material (tables, charts, etc.). One copy of each manuscript not accepted for publication will be returned to the author, if we receive sufficient stamps (no meter strips) clipped to a self-addressed envelope. We require the MLA style (*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, 3rd ed., 1988*). For further guidance, send a stamped letter-size, self-addressed envelope for our style sheet and for camera-ready specifications.

All manuscripts must focus clearly on basic writing and must add substantively to the existing literature. We seek manuscripts that are original, stimulating, well-grounded in theory, and clearly related to practice. Work that reiterates what is known or work previously published will not be considered.

We invite authors to write about such matters as classroom practices in relation to basic writing theory; cognitive and rhetorical theories and their relation to basic writing; social, psychological, and cultural implications of literacy; discourse theory; grammar, spelling, and error analysis; linguistics; computers and new technologies in basic writing; English as a second language; assessment and evaluation; writing center practices; teaching logs and the development of new methodologies; and cross-disciplinary studies combining basic writing with psychology, anthropology, journalism, and art. We publish observational studies as well as theoretical discussions on relationships between basic writing and reading, or the study of literature, or speech, or listening. The term "basic writer" is used with wide diversity today, sometimes referring to a student from a highly oral tradition with little experience in writing academic discourse, and sometimes referring to a student whose academic writing is fluent but otherwise deficient. To help readers, therefore, authors should describe clearly the student population which they are discussing.

We particularly encourage a *variety* of manuscripts: speculative discussions which venture fresh interpretations; essays which draw heavily on student writing as supportive evidence for new observations; research reports, written in nontechnical language, which offer observations previously unknown or unsubstantiated; and collaborative writings which provocatively debate more than one side of a central controversy.

A "Mina P. Shaughnessy Writing Award" is given to the author of the best *JBW* article every two years (four issues). The prize is \$500, now courtesy of Lynn Quitman Troyka. The winner, to be selected by a jury of three scholars/teachers not on our editorial board, is announced in our pages and elsewhere.

Editors' Column

Errors and Expectations is now celebrating its seventeenth year in print. Mina Shaughnessy, had she lived, would have reached her seventieth birthday in 1994. As editors of the journal that she founded with others at City College, we have chosen to commemorate these dates in the history of our profession by publishing a special section at the conclusion of this issue, entitled "Remembering Mina Shaughnessy."

In thinking of what might be appropriate for such commemoration, we considered many alternatives before deciding to reprint four pieces with which, we suspect, few of our current readers are familiar. Two of the selections are by Mina Shaughnessy herself, one an early piece published in 1970 (for an audience restricted to City College faculty) some time prior to her now legendary appearances at professional meetings and the publication of *Errors and Expectations*. The other is a later essay originally published in this journal which reflects the continuing evolution of her sensibility. We have also chosen to reprint brief tributes by Janet Emig, E. D. Hirsch, Jr., and various members of the City College English Department, including Richard Goldstone, Irving Howe, Leonard Kriegel, Edward Quinn, and Adrienne Rich, to remind ourselves of the breadth of Mina Shaughnessy's influence and the diversity of her friends.

We turn now to a brief description of the articles in the present issue. If there is an abiding theme here, it might be how basic writing teachers can show remarkable ingenuity in discovering the means at hand by which to impress their students with the authenticity of their experience and the value of its expression.

In the first article John Creed and Susan Andrews, both of the University of Alaska/Chukchi College, report on their project, the Chukchi News and Information Service, which offers basic writing students—primarily Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts—an outlet to publish their writing in various newspapers and magazines across Alaska as it preserves the cultural history and

knowledge of their tribal forebears.

In the second article Willa Wolcott presents a longitudinal study of six basic reading and writing students at the University of Florida, showing that while progress was achieved and students became more aware of their strengths and weaknesses, improving their attitude about reading in particular, their progress was neither linear nor extensive.

In the third article, Pamela Dykstra shows the need for basic writers to cultivate and understand the patterns of spoken English in order to become more aware of the structures of written English.

In the fourth article, Geoffrey Sirc describes the effectiveness of using *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* as the central text in his basic writing class as a way for students to understand the importance of passion and strength of character as essential attributes to a writer's growth.

In the fifth article, Effie Cochran addresses the problem of sexism and its various manifestations particularly in basic writing and ESL/ESD classes and goes on to make a number of practical recommendations for the alleviation of these attitudes, habits, and behaviors.

As previously mentioned, four articles and other past tributes collectively comprise the Special Section, "Remembering Mina Shaughnessy."

—*Bill Bernhardt and Peter Miller*

John Creed and Susan B. Andrews

PUBLICATION PROJECT IN ALASKA OFFERS WAYS TO OPEN NEW WORLDS TO BASIC WRITING STUDENTS

ABSTRACT: *This article explains how a publication project can deliver a “real world” writing experience for basic writing students, which provides students a tremendous incentive to 1) thoroughly consider audience, 2) aggressively rework their pieces, and 3) fully comprehend the importance of accuracy, in much the same way journalism students are trained.*

The piece focuses on an award-winning project in Alaska called Chukchi News and Information Service that publishes essays of primarily Eskimo, Indian, and Aleut students in the Alaska press. It also addresses the benefits of publication projects generally, such as Foxfire-style programs that create their own media.

In Kotzebue, Alaska, an isolated Inupiat Eskimo community 30 miles inside the Arctic Circle in northwest Alaska and just 175 miles across from the easternmost tip of the former Soviet Union, an unusual publication project for basic writing students has forged a powerful incentive for students—primarily Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts—to achieve excellence in composition.

This project, called Chukchi News and Information Service, has been operating continuously since 1988 with roughly 175

John Creed and Susan B. Andrews teach English and journalism at Chukchi College, a branch campus in Kotzebue of the University of Alaska. As coeditors of Chukchi News and Information Service, they have won the Alaska Press Club’s Public Service Award, Alaska’s highest journalism honor, as well as three national awards, including the 1991 Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award for Coverage of the Problems of the Disadvantaged.

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published pieces to its credit. The thrust of the project is to instill exemplary performance in student writers by offering them an outlet to publish their essays in the statewide Alaska press, ultimately providing a voice for Alaska Native (Eskimo, Indian, Aleut) and other rural Alaskans in newspapers and magazines that otherwise would not be heard. Students submit their work to the editors of the Chukchi News and Information Service project, who in turn work with newspaper and magazine editors to get the pieces published in the press across Alaska.

The Chukchi News and Information Service project operates out of Chukchi College, a branch campus of the University of Alaska in Kotzebue. (The Chukchi name comes from the fact that Kotzebue sits on a spit that juts into the frozen Chukchi Sea, a part of the Bering Sea.)

Student participants live in rural regions of Alaska and are committed to preserving the history and knowledge of their forebears, while affirming their own experiences as rural people. The college relies heavily on "distance delivery" education to bring the majority of its courses by satellite-assisted audioconference to students throughout Alaska's vast, sparsely populated rural regions.

Virtually all Chukchi's students live in small, remote communities that typically are accessible only by airplane, snowmobile, and dog team in winter or by boat and airplane in summer. They attend classes in their home villages by calling in to a centralized telephone "bridge" that enables everyone to hear and talk to everyone else in these huge audioconference "classrooms," that are spread hundreds of miles apart across America's last great wilderness. Typically, written assignments travel back and forth via the mail, computers, and fax machines.

Despite the obvious constraints of teaching and learning "over the telephone," rural Alaska students benefit from this type of education because it enables them to stay in their home villages, where they can continue to pursue traditional subsistence hunting and fishing activities. In other words, they can remain immersed in the ways of their culture while still pursuing college degrees.

The majority of distance education students in rural Alaska are Alaska Natives, the official name for all of Alaska's three main aboriginal groups: Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts. Generally, Yup'ik Eskimos inhabit southwest Alaska; Inupiaq

Eskimos live in the north and northwest; Athabascan Indians are in the Interior; Tlingit, Tsimshian, and Haida Indians live on Alaska's Panhandle; and Aleuts live along the windswept Aleutian Islands.

Each group has its own language and cultural tradition. For instance, Yup'ik and Inupiaq Eskimos, even though they live "next" to one another geographically, speak distinctly different languages.

Most rural students of the University of Alaska enroll in basic writing classes to fulfill standard university requirements, of course, but also to overcome the difficulties they encounter with English as a result of bilingualism (their Native language being their first language) or of speaking a form of pidgin unique to rural Alaska called "village English."

All basic writing students at Chukchi College may participate in Chukchi News and Information Service if they are enrolled in a variety of classes ranging from developmental English to freshman and sophomore composition to magazine and news writing courses. This publication project "marries" the two disciplines of English and journalism.

Pieces distributed through Chukchi News and Information Service have run in publications as diverse as Alaska's largest newspaper, the *Anchorage Daily News*, to smaller regional papers such as the *Tundra Drums*, to specialized periodicals such as *Mushing* magazine for the sleddog crowd. Many of these pieces are argumentative essays ("opinion pieces" in journalism jargon) written in basic writing classes. Other pieces reflect the kind of news and feature stories typically assigned in journalism courses.

The project's method of teaching writing to both Alaska Natives and non-Natives centers on rewriting, not just once or twice, but multiple times in order to prepare a piece for publication. Instructors' emphasis on the kind of clear, straightforward writing that is suitable for newspapers serves Native students and English as a Second Language students particularly well as they struggle to overcome the difficulties of bilingualism or "village English."

When students must rewrite a piece repeatedly to bring it to publication standards, they typically acquire a deep understanding of the sheer hard work required for top-quality writing. In addition, by focusing on writing as communication with a larger audience, students learn the importance of considering audience, purpose, and style.

As instructors, we usually plant the idea of publication in students' minds starting with the very first piece they write in most classes—a short autobiography. Given a trusting classroom atmosphere, students will share their life stories with other students and the professor in a writing workshop, despite their initial fears about reading aloud. After students have rewritten their piece at least once, we typically mail final versions to all students. The message here? Students right away understand that their audience includes everyone in the classroom, not just the professor. By sharing their work in class, students not only inspire each other, but they also get adjusted to the idea of sharing their work with a wider audience.

Those who then elect to seek a still larger audience through *Chukchi News and Information Service* typically write about culturally relevant and pertinent subjects such as growing up in a family of reindeer herders; averting the tragedy of fetal alcohol syndrome; facing substance abuse among Alaska Natives; hunting, fishing, and gathering in a traditional subsistence economy; coping with the changes brought about by the clash of the Western and Native cultures in this century; and performing traditional tasks such as drying and smoking salmon or tanning animal skins.

"I have seen my mother prepare a whole caribou hide to make leather rope," writes Genevieve Norris of Shungnak, a Native resident in one of northwest Alaska's most remote and traditional Inupiat Eskimo villages. "My mother then washes and strips the hide with a sharp knife, making strips as thin as spaghetti. When this thin leathery rope is dry, my father can use it to make snowshoes and basket sleds" (8).

As Ms. Norris records traditional family activities in this essay for a freshman English composition class, she is also learning the value of audience-based writing. In preparing this written communication for a larger readership across Alaska, Ms. Norris feels—as do all students—the greater responsibility for accuracy that newspaper writing requires as well as the subtle pressure to be precise in describing her own culture if she is to share her world view with thousands of readers.

In fact, classroom research elsewhere has demonstrated that when students are presented with the "real life" situation of having their work published, they fully understand, perhaps for the first time, the importance not only of accuracy but also of audience. Educators Karen Durrant and Charles Duke tested this idea in a class of 25 creative writers, who first were asked

to analyze popular magazines to determine their target audience.

Initially students were not informed that they would be submitting the pieces for possible publication. We did this to see how students would approach the assignment. Several students were ready to turn their pieces in after one revision; however, when students learned that they actually would be required to submit the pieces, they requested more time for revision and went back to their analysis to check on how well their articles seemed to meet the expectations of the magazine's audience. Such a reaction merely reinforced our belief that students need to write for genuine audiences and have their work submitted to those audiences for consideration. (169)

Durrant and Duke's findings also, then, point to the inherent lesson of publication in teaching the value of rewriting or revision. We find that although students initially may resist the concept that rewriting is an essential element of good writing, the "carrot" of publication motivates them—sometimes even spontaneously—to rewrite their pieces six or seven times in order to bring them to publication quality.

These findings are consistently mirrored in Foxfire spinoffs and other writing projects. Ann Vick, an educator who ran a Foxfire project in southwestern Alaska high schools in the mid-to-late 1970s, called Cama-i, recalls:

. . . experienced students from Bethel and Emmonak conducting a workshop session in Mountain Village and, with no adults present, the whole group staying a half-hour after the bell had rung because they were involved in the discussion of whether or not to begin a magazine. And it is students writing article drafts or painstakingly preparing camera-ready copy over and over again, willing to do whatever is necessary, however time-consuming, to get it "right." (xix)

In working student pieces through a series of rewrites, as editors of Chukchi News and Information Service, we try to preserve the student's voice while also providing guidelines for proper usage and grammar. For instance, we left intact the conversational tone of Siberian Yup'ik Eskimo Linda Akeya when she describes what is done with a polar bear once it has been butchered:

Some people can't stand eating the meat, and I am one of these people. But I wouldn't mind keeping the fur. (13)

Certainly, these sentences could have been edited to make them more succinct, but not without destroying Ms. Akeya's unique voice.

Also, it is important to understand that by preserving the student's unique voice, the editor also remains faithful to the text's meaning. For instance, Inupiaq Eskimo Dollie Hawley tells her readers how a missionary teacher came to her village on the northwest coast of Alaska and "civilized the Natives":

I can also remember the teacher teaching us our manners, such as saying "Please," "May I?" or "Excuse me" and "Thank you." She also taught us not to slurp whenever we ate our meals. Slurping was a very big problem in those days. Thanks to God we all learned not to slurp. (14)

With the deceptively simple and humorous phrase, "Slurping was a very big problem in those days," Ms. Hawley conveys the complexity of contact between aboriginal peoples and Western culture. On the one hand, she appreciates the "civilizing" benefits that the missionaries brought, while on the other hand, her humor satirizes the self-righteousness of Western culture.

When developmental students, and particularly minority students, publish pieces drawn from their own experience, they learn more about themselves and their culture, thereby enhancing their self-esteem in an otherwise overwhelming, sometimes indifferent system of higher education.

For instance, in order for Inupiaq Eskimo Hannah Loon to describe how to search for *masru* (wild Eskimo potatoes) that are stored in mouse caches (mounds in the tundra), she must sharpen both her writing and foraging skills. Participation in the traditional subsistence activity of food gathering enables her to take pride in Native culture:

When you find a mound, simply probe it with your stick, or gently step on the ground to see if it is soft. Open the soft spot with the pick and lift the top layer out gently. Using a pair of old gloves, feel around in the hollow area for roots. (17)

With the reinforcement inherent in writing about traditional activities, Ms. Loon can hone exemplary academic skills while respecting her ancient culture and Alaska's rural environment. Indeed, the best student writing for Chukchi News and Infor-

mation Service often springs from the very activities that have sustained aboriginal cultures for thousands of years.

Likewise, Eliot Wigginton found himself concerned with the very same issue of preserving culture when he initiated the Foxfire publications. Wigginton suggests that the value of preserving the culture shouldn't end with its benefits to the community but should be extended to the student participants themselves. Early on in the Foxfire experiment, he discovered that students need a deeper purpose than simply recording local history and lore.

Few of my students seemed to have a genuine appreciation for roots and heritage and family—the kind of appreciation that goes far deeper than simply being amazed at finding out that Grandpa can cut down a tree and make a chair or a banjo out of it or that Mom used to be a midwife and knows how to deliver babies. I'm talking about the peculiar, almost mystic kind of resonance that comes—and vibrates in one's soul like a guitar string—with an understanding of family—who I am and where I'm from and the fact that I'm part of a long continuum of hope and prayer and celebration of life that I must carry forward. (75)

For minority students, the affirmation provided by readers can be especially powerful. For instance, Inupiaq Eskimo Geri Reich is a nontraditional student (as are most writers for the project) who works as an electrician at the Red Dog Mine in northwest Alaska. She was asked in class if workers at the mine had noticed her byline in the local paper. "Oh, yes," she replied. "Practically everybody." She said even "the white guys" who work at the mine and live out of state are now taking an interest in the region, including the problems that local Native people face. She said many of the non-Natives now seem to look at her as a real person and with respect for the first time. She wasn't, in her words, "just a dumb Native anymore."

Instructors who wish to develop a publication project in their classrooms may choose to follow the Foxfire model and create a campus magazine, or simply an in-class publication. For instance, an educator who also has successfully blended journalism with the teaching of basic writing, Maureen Maas-Feary of Genesee Community College, has applied a "journalist's beat" approach to basic writing classes, in which each student covers one subject area that he or she can write about with authority. In piloting this approach, she oversaw the publica-

tion of class magazines drawn from these beats.

The first publication was greeted enthusiastically. It provided a class meeting's worth of reading and discussion material, along with a concrete example of the completion of one great circle of the writing process. (85)

If nothing else, as Maas-Feary suggests, a document of published pieces provides great inspiration for students in the class, as well as for future students.

Indeed, a class-produced magazine, or even an anthology, may be useful as a supplement to a standard text written by professional writers. R. Michael Gold goes so far as to suggest supplanting the professional text with student work:

We urge our students to keep audience in mind when they write. Let us also remember to keep *our* audience in mind when we select readings—with particular attention to avoiding essays that are too specialized, difficult, or controversial. We might simply dispense with outside readings and study only texts produced by class members themselves. Or we might look for outside readings in any number of sources: popular magazines, newspaper editorials, campus publications, published anthologies of *student* essays, and the like. (264)

So the benefits of publication create a domino effect within the classroom. Student writers initially benefit from seeing their work in print. The next crop of students benefits from the models published by former students.

These writing projects can be duplicated in other basic writing classrooms, particularly in multicultural classrooms, throughout the nation. Because we believe so strongly that students should be provided opportunities to develop basic writing skills beyond the classroom, we recommend that educators initiate some kind of publication project, if not predicated specifically on the Chukchi News and Information Service project, then perhaps by starting with the kind of desktop-published, in-house collection of student writing described above.

As for initiating a Chukchi News and Information Service-style project, it could be tested in communities where far more daily and weekly publications serve greater groups of people than the small number of presses in Alaska. And, in large communities, if the mainstream press is hesitant to run student pieces, typically the smaller regional or minority press often

needs free-lance contributions. Basic writing instructors can, at a minimum, develop a cooperative relationship with the editor of the campus newspaper.

Regardless of what approach to publication is chosen, students get excited whenever and wherever they see their names in print. For most participants in Chukchi News and Information Service, this is the first time they have seen their bylines published. Most important, publication provides basic writing students, early on, with a powerful incentive to exceed the expectations of traditional classroom learning.

As a result of their participation in Chukchi News and Information Service, students reap positive feedback from readers in their communities and in their classes. At the same time, non-Native readers in urban areas of the state learn more from these publications about the unique culture of Alaska's Native peoples—the Eskimos, Indians, and Aleuts who have lived off this vast remote land for at least the past 10,000 years.

For example, readers of Inupiaq Eskimo Hannah Loon's article about village English undoubtedly came away with a better understanding of this nonstandard, rural language. Loon writes:

I do not use proper English with those who speak to me in village English because it may intimidate them or make them feel uncomfortable. Although village English may sound "funny"—meaning "bad"—to English instructors, it has its own beauty to my ears. There's no such thing as "correct" village English. I structure my sentences any way I desire. Rules don't limit village English as long as the listener understands. (13)

Such an essay can do much to dispel many of the negative connotations that village English harbors among non-village and non-Native Alaskans and even among Native peoples themselves.

Nevertheless, the above examples do not mean to imply that Native and rural people write only on Native and strictly rural issues for publication. Rather, rural Alaskans' world view also includes interests and concerns shared by other minorities as well as the mainstream audience across America, such as: health hazards of smoking; computers; fish farming; tourism; corporal punishment; mutual funds; cancer; and AIDS.

Also, Chukchi News and Information Service writers come from a variety of backgrounds, not just Alaska Native culture. For instance, Korean-born "Edward" Jae Chang, an English as a

Second Language (ESL) student, published a piece that describes his Kafkaesque experience in the airport when he arrived in America:

I was trying to find Asian people to ask questions, but I could not find any, and all the other people looked the same, like twins. I was worried that my mother, who was already in America, was going to leave the airport without me. (8)

This kind of publication project not only enhances cultural awareness and understanding for all peoples, but it also provides a kind of permanence for the experiences of voices not otherwise heard in the mainstream press. In other words, this kind of project helps write and preserve “the people’s” history. For Chukchi News and Information Service, specifically, the project’s unique writings on a vanishing way of life join Alaska’s historical record, which will be available to future historians, anthropologists, and other researchers, and most importantly, to the people themselves.

We feel Chukchi News and Information Service is a publication project that works well among a diverse minority student population throughout rural Alaska and could be adapted readily to minority student populations throughout the United States. By duplicating the Chukchi News and Information Service writing project, particularly among other minority groups nationally, many of the same benefits of publication would result. For instance, as students provide exemplary pieces to newspapers and magazines in other regions of the United States, the press would respond by reflecting the minority experience more accurately, not just in today’s media but for tomorrow’s historical record. Also, basic writing students would take greater pride in their cultural experience at the same time as they heighten their readers’ awareness of a different world view.

After the sheer hard work of seven or eight rewrites, basic writing students see their work published in the press, tasting for the first time, perhaps, their influence upon the public mind. Ultimately, this awareness of the power of publication provides student participants with a tremendous incentive to acquire the writing skills they need to succeed in college, and more importantly, to become leaders in the Information Age.

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Willa Wolcott

A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF SIX DEVELOPMENTAL STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN READING AND WRITING¹

ABSTRACT: *Six students scheduled into developmental reading and writing courses at the University of Florida voluntarily participated in a longitudinal study designed to trace their progress in reading and writing. According to results from multiple-choice tests and essays, several students progressed during the 3½-year span, although the improvement was neither linear nor extensive. However, through questionnaires and interviews, the six students showed increasing metacognitive awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses; they also improved in their attitudes toward reading in particular.*

The question of what happens over the long term to under-prepared students in a university setting is an intriguing one. As Hull and Rose observe, "Students in [the most remedial] classes are very much 'at risk' to succeed, and, in some ways, they present profound challenges to the stated mission of the institutions that enroll them" (*Written Communication*, 1989, 144). For those of us teaching basic reading and writing courses to specially admitted freshmen at a large public research university, the central issue has always been whether our efforts on students' behalf at the beginning of their college careers make a difference in enabling them to cope afterward. Although

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pre- post-evaluations of our program have consistently indicated its effectiveness, the personal, long-term impact such instruction in reading or writing might have on individual students has been far less clear.

Thus, we have wondered whether our program has succeeded in identifying and building from the abilities that our students *do* have, a practice labeled as “generative” by Hull and her colleagues (Hull, Rose, Greenleaf, Reilly, 1991, 13). We have wondered, too, at what point our students come to terms with what Bartholomae calls the conventions of the academic community (1985, 158-59). To answer these questions, I undertook to trace longitudinally over four college years the progress of one special admissions class; my goal was to determine whether students improved in the reading and writing skills and whether these skills had made a difference for their college success long-term.

Participants in the Study

Unlike the participants in Walter Loban’s (1975) landmark longitudinal study of students’ language skills development, the population in my study shrank considerably, and by the fourth year only six students of the original 139 special admissions students who had entered the university in June, 1989, were still participating in the study. These six were part of the 80 students or 58 per cent of the original special admissions group who continued to be enrolled in the university 3½ years later. Of those 80, 48 were third-year students, 24 were fourth-year students, and 8 were second- or first-year students, who had returned after dropping out for one or more terms.

Like the larger special admissions group to which they belonged, the students in the study also spanned several years: Pauline was a fourth-year student; Jackie, Ella, Dorothy, and Willie were third-year students, and Kimberly, who had dropped out for a term or two after doing poorly, was a second-year student. Jackie, Ella, Dorothy, and Kimberly were African Americans, as was Willie, the only male in the study; Pauline, who was white, was from France and had had very weak English skills when she entered. The composition of this group was typical of the original 139, of whom 103 were African American, 24 white, 6 Hispanic, and 4 Asian. (Since the inception of this study, the number of other minorities and ESL speakers participating in the special admissions program has increased substantially to about 40%.)

Nature of the Reading and Writing Program

Developmental reading and writing courses at the university are directed to special admissions students whose entering SAT scores fall below the state-required 900. (The actual SAT score of the cohort group at this institution is closer to 1150.) Students are given a series of placement tests upon their arrival to determine whether they will be required to take the special courses. These placement tests consist of a mathematics test, the nationally normed Nelson-Denny Reading Test, a multiple-choice test of writing choices, and an expository essay that is holistically scored in a formal scoring by an independent team of trained scorers. (Depending on their performance on the tests, students can also be placed in special math classes where additional help is available, and many are placed in a six-week study skills course as well.) Other resources, such as peer counselors and free tutoring in content-area courses, remain available to them throughout their college careers. Hence, the reading and writing courses comprise but one part of a special program designed to assist these students.

The reading and writing courses are typically two semesters long, although some students are screened out at the end of the summer term on the basis of their course performance and post-test scores. In both the reading and writing courses, students follow a highly structured curriculum that is taught by experienced teaching assistants and by the directors themselves of the reading and writing programs. The classes, which are capped at 12 or 15, meet twice a week, and students receive one credit for each course. The courses are parallel but distinct in that not every student is required to take two semesters of both reading and writing. In fact, after completing their placement tests, two of the six participants in the study were screened out of writing but not out of reading. The curricula in both courses blend an emphasis on process with an emphasis on skills, and, in an adaptation of the "expert scaffolding" set forth by Brown and Campione (1986, 1065), students are given guidance in practicing their skills until they gradually learn to apply the skills independently. Hence, in working with the need for a controlling idea in their writing, for example, students are first asked to identify the strong topic sentences in paragraphs or the thesis statement in essays, then to practice revising weak topic sentences that are assigned, next to complete practice exercises in creating topic sentences for possible paper topics, and finally, to write and revise short essays in which they apply what

they have learned about strong topic sentences and thesis statements. In a similar way, reading students practice comprehension skills in short, nonliterary passages before applying the techniques to longer selections.

Design of the Study

The study approximated a prospective panel design. As defined by Scott Menard, in such a design “data may be collected at two or more distinct periods, *for* those distinct periods, on the same set of cases and variables in each period” (1991, 4). At the end of 1989 students were informed about the study and encouraged to participate in subsequent years. Every autumn thereafter, interested students received letters inviting them to participate within a 10-day time framework in late November. They received honoraria of \$25-\$35 each year for their participation.

Twenty-nine students voluntarily returned in 1990, 15 in 1991, and 6 in 1992. Late each autumn, students wrote a 50-minute expository essay on one of two assigned topics; they took the standardized Nelson-Denny Reading Test; and they completed a questionnaire on their reading-writing practices. During the last year of the study, students also took a multiple-choice test of writing skills—identical to the one they had taken their freshman year for placement purposes. In addition, during the last year students met with me for an interview about their reading and writing experiences rather than completing a questionnaire. A list of the assigned topics, a copy of the questionnaire, and a guide for the interview are included in the Appendix.

Limitations of the Study

The study had several limitations. Not only was the number of participants who continued very small—consisting of self-selected students—but also the procedures themselves were somewhat problematic. That is, the writing sample the students completed each year was limited to one, on-demand writing. While this practice allowed for controlled conditions in that students were writing on similar topics under similar circumstances, it did not allow students to engage fully in the writing process with multiple drafts or with access to resources. Moreover, the use of one essay cannot be considered a reflective measure of any student’s overall writing ability, since it is

limited to one mode and one opportunity that may be marred by chance circumstances. Had I known that only six students would remain in the study, writing portfolios would have provided a better option. The measurement of students' reading progress was similarly restricted to one type of test.

Still another limitation is that students were being paid for their participation. How motivated they were to do well on each test or writing sample remains unknown.

Results of the Study

Reading Results

Students' reading skills were measured by the Nelson-Denny Reading Test. The test was first given in June of 1989 upon students' entry to the university and in November during subsequent years. Overall results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Nelson-Denny Reading Test Results

	Form E 1989	Form F 1990	Form E 1991	Form E 1992
Willie	78	97	97	96
	vocabulary: 36 comprehension: 42	vocabulary: 55 comprehension: 42	vocabulary: 48 comprehension: 49	vocabulary: 48 comprehension: 48
Jackie	59	77	66	81
	vocabulary: 25 comprehension: 34	vocabulary: 39 comprehension: 38	vocabulary: 34 comprehension: 32	vocabulary: 41 comprehension: 40
Ella	71	111	104	116
	vocabulary: 25 comprehension: 46	vocabulary: 49 comprehension: 62	vocabulary: 54 comprehension: 50	vocabulary: 58 comprehension: 58
Dorothy	62	97	77	103
	vocabulary: 24 comprehension: 38	vocabulary: 43 comprehension: 54	vocabulary: 37 comprehension: 40	vocabulary: 49 comprehension: 54
Pauline	51	100	86	102
	vocabulary: 21 comprehension: 30	vocabulary: 42 comprehension: 58	vocabulary: 38 comprehension: 48	vocabulary: 54 comprehension: 48
Kimberly	86	111	108	129
	vocabulary: 48 comprehension: 38	vocabulary: 57 comprehension: 54	vocabulary: 58 comprehension: 50	vocabulary: 77 comprehension: 52

During the 3½-year span of the study, all six students demonstrated clear improvement in reading from their first year to their last. The improvement ranged from 18 points in Willie's

case to 51 points in the case of the French student Pauline, and it occurred in both the comprehension subset and the vocabulary subset. The improvement was not linear, for in five students' cases a drop occurred in scores between 1990 and 1991. (The sixth student received identical scores for those years.) However, the explanation for this puzzling drop at one time may lie in the fact that Form F was given in 1990, whereas Form E of the Nelson-Denny was administered the three other years. Form F may thus be an easier form. If the three score results from only Form E in 1989, 1991, and 1992 are compared, there was steady progress for all students except Willie. While it may be argued that a test-retest factor could have explained the increase in scores, such a cause does not seem likely in that the tests were administered at least 12 months apart and the exams were never reviewed with the students.

Clearly, then, the students showed steady improvement in their reading skills. This improvement may be linked to a change in attitude that several students displayed toward reading, reflecting perhaps both a cause and an effect of their improved ability. Whereas Willie and Jackie indicated that they had disliked reading intensely upon their entry to school, they both said in their closing interviews that they liked it better. For example, Jackie, majoring in criminal justice, noted that she was reading much more now than when she arrived. Now, she said, she felt the need to read the student newspaper *the Alligator*, and she also subscribed to a sports magazine. Willie, who like Jackie had hated reading upon his entry, must do extensive reading for his major—business management. He said in his interview that he also was more apt to read for enjoyment now, and he “gets something” out of it. He now liked reading about his African American history, whereas before, he stressed, he wouldn't have thought of doing so. Even Pauline, a public recreation major for whom reading was still not pleasurable, said that she now read entire books or chapters, rather than relying solely on summaries as she had before. Kimberly, majoring in agricultural operations management, indicated that she read for pleasure whenever she could, such as over the summer; Dorothy, too, said that she enjoyed reading, although she noted that with her advertising major, there was no time to read for fun. Virtually all of the students, then, had developed more positive views toward reading.

The extent to which the students' directed reading instruction in our program may have helped them improve cannot be

ascertained from this small group, even though all students in the study had taken at least one semester of the reading course. Certainly, all students had frequent opportunities to practice their reading, as all six students indicated both on their questionnaires and in their interviews that their courses required extensive reading—an average of at least 4-7 chapters a week. In fact, during the interviews students spoke more often of their reading experiences than of their writing; this occurrence may indicate that reading has been a more continuous component of their college subjects than has writing, which, while emphasized in composition courses, then is often limited to an occasional paper for a course thereafter. Thus, sheer practice at reading—as well as an increasingly larger vocabulary—may contribute to students' seemingly steady improvement in reading. Notably, four of the six students reported that they felt increasingly confident about identifying the main idea in their reading selections.

As shown in their questionnaire responses of 1990 and 1991, some students clearly practiced the reading skills emphasized in the developmental courses, whereas others did not. For example, Willie, Dorothy, and Pauline responded that they previewed chapters before beginning assignments “most” of the time, while Jackie declined from “always” previewing to only “occasionally” doing so. Ella and Kimberly, on the other hand, answered that they “occasionally” or “never” did. As Ella was also the only student who was “never” confident about the main idea in reading, her reluctance to practice recommended previewing skills was noteworthy. Ella and Kimberly also acknowledged twice on their questionnaires that they “never” applied special studying strategies, such as SQ3R (survey question; read, recite, review) to their reading assignments; Jackie and Dorothy also decreased in their tendency to do so, while Willie and Pauline—both of whom confessed to strongly disliking reading upon their entry to school—replied both years that they did apply special strategies most of the time.

The interviews revealed students' growing awareness not only of what they had learned from the developmental courses but also of what they needed to do currently in their studying. For Kimberly, an adaptation of SQ3R had recently proved helpful in her reading even though, she readily acknowledged in the interview, she had not applied it to her subjects until she started experiencing trouble in her courses. (Her earlier questionnaire responses, as noted above, corroborated that tendency.)

She explained that the memorizing she had successfully used in high school in the Caribbean had not worked in college with the volume of reading that was required. Not until she started actively participating in reading by asking questions and writing in the margins did she find she “wandered off” less and began to retain information. This method, though slower than simply reading, she observed, saved time in the end. Now she was even conscious of how well her texts were written, and she became frustrated with poor texts.

The metacognition Kimberly described so clearly was particularly evident in two other students as well. Stressing that he had learned how to find main points in paragraphs and how to read for a purpose, Willie, like Kimberly, practiced his own variation of SQ3R and continued to highlight his readings. Dorothy, too, said that she still used some of the study techniques she had learned in the course, although she preferred taking notes on main ideas rather than highlighting while reading. Confessing that she read too fast for some purposes, Dorothy said she sometimes needed to reread material. She was not alone in this practice. All six students noted that whenever they encountered difficulties in reading a passage, they slowed down or read it over more slowly or tried some technique such as reciting it or summarizing it. What was significant in these observations was that the students did notice when they were experiencing comprehension difficulties.

The growing metacognitive awareness that these six students demonstrated about their reading capability represented a departure from the findings in Baker’s comprehension monitoring study in which college undergraduates did not notice many of the inconsistencies she deliberately set for them in their readings (1979, 371-72).

Writing Results

On the multiple-choice “Test of Writing Choices” given in June, 1989, and again in November, 1992, five of the six students showed some improvement. The test, which was designed by the Center director and validated by the Advanced Placement English classes at two area high schools, contains 40 items that comprise an essay on the importance of continuing one’s education lifelong. Students are required to make rhetorical decisions about the focus of the essay, strategies for development, and appropriate organization. They also make choices

about grammar, usage, mechanics, and sentence structure.

The mean raw score for the six students in the initial administration was 22.16 (or 55%), and the mean raw score was 27.3 (or 68%) in 1992. Students averaged a 5-point increase, although, as Table 2 indicates, the average was undoubtedly skewed by the 9-point increase made by Willie and the 16-point increase made by Pauline.

Table 2
Test of Writing Choices (40 items)

	Raw score in 1989	Raw score in 1992
Willie	18	27
Jackie	25	27
Ella	20	24
Pauline	12	28
*Dorothy	29	30
*Kimberly	29	28

*Screened out of developmental writing altogether

The two students who had received the highest initial scores—Dorothy and Kimberly—showed the least improvement, with Kimberly even scoring one item less. As both students still had considerable room for improvement on the 40-item test, a ceiling factor is not likely to have been involved. What may have been a contributing factor is that neither student had been required to take the special writing course and thus had not received the same type of directed instruction in editing skills that the other four had.

Results of Essay Scorings

Each year students in the study were asked to write a 50-minute expository essay on one of two topics. The topics, copies of which are in the Appendix, followed the paradigm developed by Hoetker and Brossell and used in the state-mandated College Level Academic Skills Test [CLAST]. The paradigm typically is a fragment, containing a class specification and two differentiating criteria. The paradigm is exemplified by such

topic phrases as “a book/that many students read/that may affect them beneficially” or “a common practice/in American colleges/that should be changed” which Hoetker and Brossell describe in their research (1986, 330). The topics required students to draw upon either their personal experience or their general knowledge, to create a thesis, and to support the thesis adequately within the timed framework without recourse to resources.

The essays from the four years were scored holistically by six highly experienced holistic scorers, most of whom have served as chief readers or table leaders for scorings in the state. The papers were scored on the same 6-point scale used for the Florida CLAST. As this exam is required for all Florida public college graduates, the use of its scoring scale indicated where the writers in the study stood in relation to their peers on a common standard. Names on the essays were covered, as were the scores assigned by the first readers. Readers were given a list of the eight topics used in the study although the essays were intermingled at random. Prior to the scoring, the readers independently rated the eight rangefinders used in a previous CLAST scoring and then tallied the results; this training procedure anchored them to the scoring scale.

Results of the scoring are listed in Table 3. The scores reflect the sum of two readers’ scores for a possible total of 12 points.

Table 3
Holistic Scoring of Essays

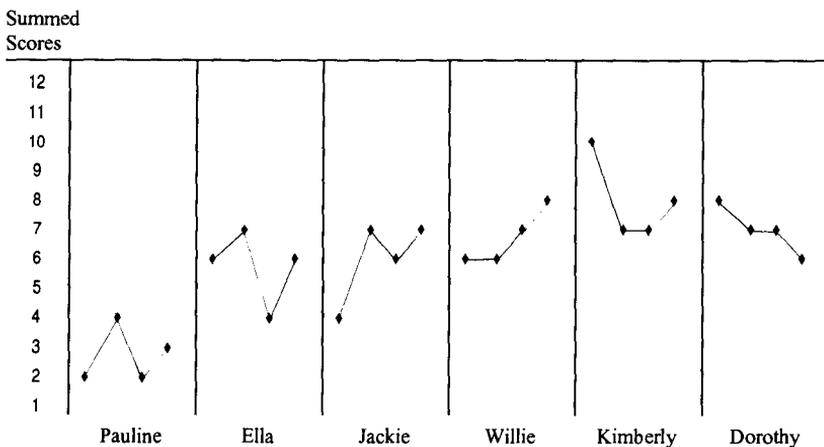
	1989	1990	1991	1992
Willie	6	6	7	8
Ella	6	7	4	6
Jackie	4	7	6	7
Pauline	2	4	2	3
*Dorothy	8	7	7	6
*Kimberly	10	7	7	8

* screened out of developmental writing altogether on the basis of 1989 essay scores and multiple-choice test scores.

As Figure 1 shows, the students initially appearing the weakest in writing either made some small gains or remained the same (unlike the two students who were screened out of the program). However, the improvement is neither consistent nor

linear. In fact, Ella, Jackie, and Pauline all showed a drop in scores from 1990 to 1991, a factor which could possibly be attributed to topic differences. Researchers Ruth and Murphy (1988, 1-16), for example, have shown the importance that topic variations may have on student performance. (Certainly, the eloquence Kimberly displayed in her first essay when she wrote about her bedroom in her home now being sold was never rivaled by her writings on subsequent, more neutral or more analytic topics.) While Dorothy and Kimberly continued to obtain the highest scores of the group, it is interesting to note that their final scores reflected a clear drop from their initial ones; whether the drop was due to a variable such as topic difference or to the fact that they did not have the same amount of directed instruction in writing as the other students did cannot be ascertained.

Figure 1
Holistic Score Results



Results of Analytic Scoring

The essays were also analytically scored on a four-point scale by four other writing instructors experienced in both analytic and holistic scoring. The instructors used a scoring guide that addressed rhetorical elements of thesis, organization, development, content and diction, and grammatical elements of sentence style, sentence structure, usage, and mechanics. A copy of the scoring guide is attached.

Prior to the actual scoring, the instructors met for a training session in which everyone independently scored two essays written by earlier participants in the longitudinal study. A discussion followed the training papers until elements in the guide were clarified and everyone felt comfortable with the scoring criteria.

Each paper was analytically scored at random by two readers, each of whom used a separate guide. The students' names were covered. The scores of the two readers were summed for a total of 8 possible points per category per paper or 80 points per paper. (Splits or nonadjacent scores given by two readers occurred in 7 or 2.9% of the 240 entries). Total analytic scores are given in Table 4.

Table 4
Analytic Scores of Essays

	1989	1990	1991	1992
Willie	49	42	49	58
Ella	49	55	50	59
Jackie	42	68	62	53
Pauline	39	57	43	55
Dorothy	54	57	50	56
Kimberly	56	61	57	61

As also revealed in the holistic scoring, the analytic scores indicated that improvement was not linear; there was no steady progression of analytic scores for any student. Nevertheless, all students showed an improvement in total analytic scores from the first paper in 1989 to the last paper in 1992. For the four students who took the developmental writing course(s), the improvement was more substantial, ranging from 9 to 16 points; for the two students who had been screened out, the improvement ranged from 2 to 5 points.

As shown in Table 5, in several areas the improvement was especially noticeable: All four students who took the developmental sequence improved in the writing of a thesis statement (a skill emphasized in the course); the two students screened out showed no improvement in that skill. Similarly, all stu-

dents but Dorothy improved in writing with sentence variety. Development, word choice, and control of mechanics were also areas in which most of the students progressed.

Table 5
Comparative Performance of Students on Individual Areas
Between Essay 1 (1989) and Essay 4 (1992)

	Willie	Ella	Jackie	Pauline	Dorothy	Kimberly
Thesis	+	+	+	+	/	/
Organization	+	/	+	/	-	+
Focus/Coherence	+	/	+	+	/	/
Development	+	+	/	+	+	+
Content	/	/	-	+	/	+
Word Choice	/	+	+	+	+	-
Sentence Variation	+	+	+	+	-	+
Control of Sentence Structure	+	+	/	+	/	+
Control of Usage	/	+	+	+	/	/
Control of Mechanics and Spelling	+	+	+	+	+	/

KEY: + Improvement of one or more points
 / Same rating

Questionnaire responses given by the participants in 1990 and 1991 revealed students' attitudes toward and practices with writing. All of the students noted that they had written several short papers each term, and all were experienced in writing essay exams. Everyone had been required to write at least one research paper, and both Dorothy and Pauline had been required to write one or more lab reports. Four of the students responded that they felt confident about their writing assignments either "most" of the time or "always"; only Ella answered "occasionally" for two years in a row.

In their interviews Dorothy, Kimberly, Willie, Jackie, and Ella, a special education major, all reported that they liked writing more than they did reading. Interestingly, they had come to the university with that same preference. (In fact, on writing attitude questionnaires administered during the first

summer writing class, the four students from the study enrolled in the course showed they clearly recognized the usefulness of writing, even though their apprehension about writing and their limited understanding of the writing process created barriers for them.) Ella mentioned that time constraints now prevented her from doing any writing for fun, but half of the students wrote that they used writing for personal reasons “most of the time”; the others wrote they did so at least “occasionally.” Jackie mentioned writing in diaries all the time, and Kimberly indicated that she liked to write (and receive!) letters.

Despite their growing experience and confidence in writing, students did not always follow the precepts to use prewriting strategies. They typically answered “occasionally” or “never” to the question regarding their use of prewriting methods. Revising, on the other hand, was a far more common practice, for in the 1991 questionnaire, five of the six students said they “always” revised, and Ella answered that she revised “most of the time.” They also typically responded that they began their writing assignments a week before they were due; only Jackie answered on the second questionnaire that she usually started an assignment the night before one was due. In their willingness to revise and to allow time for writing assignments, students were showing a growing maturity in meeting academic demands.

As was the case in reading, students were also showing a metacognitive awareness about their writing. Pauline, for example, expressed concern about the essay she was submitting for the last time. Although she felt her writing—despite improvement—“was still not good,” she stressed that she caught basic mistakes now that she used to make four years ago; she was, moreover, much more conscious of her words and more specific in her language. Having a choice as to topic was critical for Pauline, who commented that she was no longer scared of writing papers. She also stressed the need both for having adequate time to write and for having access to a word processor. She always used a spelling checker, and she consulted with tutors whenever necessary. Pauline, at 24 the oldest student in the study, had learned to use whatever tools were at her disposal, including the free editing service of her American boyfriend.

Willie, who believed that writing was very important and would remain so throughout his career, felt that he had improved in gaining “flow” with his papers and in learning how

to construct sentences. He noted that he had also learned how to get started and how to express what he wanted to say.

Dorothy, too, felt that her writing had improved, even though she had been strong enough as a beginning writer to be exempted from the developmental course. Despite receiving one "C" in a "Writing for Literature" class (a grade she attributed to her instructor's lack of familiarity with African American culture), she did not let her confidence in her own ability waver, and she continued to take creative writing and poetry courses. Thus, several students showed a growing awareness of their own writing weaknesses and strengths.

Certainly, the depth of their metacognition should not be exaggerated. Flower, for example, in her exploration of the different interpretations students made of an academic assignment, distinguishes between various levels of process self-awareness: the basic level, in which certain strategies are used; an intermediate level in which students "*monitor their own process* [sic], noticing what they are thinking, what they have done so far, reflecting on whether it is working, or simply musing on their own experience"; and a more advanced metacognitive stage, "when the writer can rise to conscious problem-solving and use this awareness to actually guide the process of reading and writing" (1987, 28). Such overall, "active metacognition," according to Flower, seemed absent even from the upperclassmen and graduate students in her own study. The students in this study, while perhaps only straddling the area between basic and intermediate metacognition, nevertheless seemed more aware than in their freshman year of what they needed to do in terms of their own reading and writing strategies to succeed.

Students' Performance in Other Areas

At the time of the interviews, all six had successfully passed the state-mandated competency test CLAST. Three of the students had succeeded at passing all four subsets of CLAST (essay, English Language Skills, reading, and math) the first time. Jackie had retaken the reading subset once, and Kimberly noted that she had found the math subset difficult. Pauline, who failed the essay subset several times, had been required to do additional, individualized study in our Reading and Writing Center to improve her skills. By the time this study was concluded, all six had eliminated the CLAST as a potential roadblock to their future graduation.

In addition to meeting academic requirements, the six had become part of the university community in other senses as well. Each one participated to some extent in extracurricular activities. Jackie, for example, belonged to the Jewels of TAU, a predominantly African American service organization on campus, and Ella did some occasional tutoring with troubled children. Pauline, whose athletic commitments took much of her time, performed some volunteer work one term in a juvenile detention center. Kimberly taught Sunday School, while Willie participated for one year in marching band until he withdrew because of the time involved. Now he, as well as Kimberly, belonged to the Minority Business Society. Dorothy, one of the most active, was a "little sister" to a fraternity and sang in a gospel choir; she also belonged to the Black Student Union and to the Association of Black Communicators. These students' work on behalf of others and their involvement in campus organizations were—on a large, predominantly white campus—significant in what it conveyed about their participation in the university community.

Most of the students worked as well, either on campus or in part-time jobs in the town. As Ella noted, school and work, took up most of her time. Dorothy acknowledged that her job made her schoolwork harder, but she also laughingly pointed out that it prevented her from procrastinating. (Indeed, the restrictive nature of these students' schedules was corroborated by their questionnaire responses that they typically watched television an hour or less a day.) Hence, the improvement that the six students made in reading and writing and their success in school must be understood in a larger context—namely, that these students' schedules were *full*.

Students' Perceptions of the Program

During the interviews I asked the students how they perceived our reading and writing program. Because the developmental courses are required of those special admission students whose placement tests do not screen them out, students sometimes resent having to take the classes. Dorothy, for example, admitted frankly that she had been "very upset" at having to take two semesters of reading. However, looking back retrospectively over a three-year span, students depicted the program in rather positive terms. Dorothy and Kimberly, for instance, who had taken only the reading courses, admitted the classes had helped: for Kimberly it was with her difficult subjects, such as

biology; for Dorothy the help was in terms of broadening her whole vocabulary. While acknowledging the overall helpfulness of the program, Dorothy perceptively pointed to the need for a stronger reading text that would include more open-ended exercises—a change that had already been made for the very reason she cited.

The other four students offered the broader perspective that came from their participation in both the reading and writing classes. Jackie, for example, said that the classes had been helpful and that it was good to come to the university early; doing so, she said, had been a definite *plus* in helping her to get prepared. Ella, who remained the quietest of all the students during the interviews, said that the courses had helped, that the “whole thing” had been good, and that she still referred to the booklets from those classes. In particular, she stressed the patience and understanding of the reading instructor she had had during the Fall semester. Pauline believed that the reading course was better than the writing course, which she criticized for not emphasizing grammar as much as was necessary. However, she conceded that if the program had not been available, she would have been struggling, and she noted that the writing instructors to whom she often talked after class had helped a lot. The personal part was important for Willie also, who said that because of the small classes, he had been able to pay attention. Instead of being just a “spot in a class of 300,” he could get to know the students and “be into what’s happening.” He stressed liking to learn how to read for a purpose and how to get started in writing, and he emphasized how important reading and writing skills are during students’ first two years of college, when “that is all they do.”

Conclusion

The conclusions to be drawn from this study must be very tentative, as the small number of participants and the large number of variables involved preclude any truly significant findings, statistical or otherwise.

On the whole, several students did show improvement in both their reading and writing skills as reflected in the measures used in this study. The improvement was neither dramatic nor linear inasmuch as fluctuations occurred during the intervening years. The cause of these fluctuations is unknown. In the case of the essay, they may be due to topic or scorer variables, and in the case of reading, they may be due to a

different test form. Alternately, they may be attributable to students' increased willingness to take risks in their writing, or they may simply be due to students' test-taking attitudes on a given day. At any rate, improvement in reading did occur for most of the participants from the first year to the last. Interestingly, the students who were required to take the developmental writing courses showed more improvement in writing than did the two students who were screened out.

Certainly, the improvement cannot be attributed solely to the reading and writing courses, for the six students had taken—or were still taking, as in the case of Kimberly's "Writing About Film" class—courses that required extensive reading and writing. But the developmental reading and writing program did appear to provide a useful foundation for these students that enabled them to make the transition from high school to college. Perhaps it gave students both a framework for understanding the conventions and the future expectations of their new academic community and a framework of processes, skills, and strategies they could—when necessary—lean back upon. Thus, Ella continued to refer to the booklets from those courses and Kimberly, when desperate, resorted successfully to the reading strategies she once had been taught in the developmental course.

In this respect, the metaphor of scaffolding that Brown and Campione use seems appropriate. The metaphor conveys a positive connotation in that scaffolds are usually needed—just for a short time—when construction is underway. The scaffold image is positive, too, in what it perhaps implies about instruction—that as teachers we are open to growing and adapting our teaching styles in order to, as Mina Shaughnessy noted in her pivotal study of basic writers, understand not only our students' problems but also their potential for success (1977, 290-94).

Whatever the role our developmental program might have played, these six students showed through their poised responses at the interviews that they have become a true part of the academic community. They remain optimistic about the future, as illustrated through Jackie's dream of going to law school; at the same time, they are realistic about the work ahead, as shown through Kimberly's concern about the prerequisites still facing her in the new major she is taking. They came in at risk, but they have achieved. For them the possibility of actually graduating from the university is very real.

ADDENDUM

As an addendum, I have included some different steps I might undertake if I were to do a longitudinal study again. My main problems stemmed from the decreasing number of participants and from the lack of clearcut data that resulted. Because the honoraria alone did not work as an incentive to bring students back year after year (and because I never would be able to increase the honoraria beyond the \$25 or \$35 amount provided each student annually), I would try instead randomly to establish personal contact with at least some of the participants early in the study. These students would form the focal group of my research, and with them, I would employ procedures that resemble those used by Sally Barr Reagan in her article "Warning! Basic Writers at Risk: The Case of Javier." I would, for example, conduct yearly interviews with the focal group rather than administering to those students the questionnaires I gave the other participants.

Modifying other measures would strengthen the study as well. For example, rather than relying solely on in-class, impromptu essays as a direct measure of students' writing, I would add cumulative portfolios that spanned the students' four years and contained actual work that was meaningful to them. Although, as Despain and Hilgers and as Hamp-Lyons and Condon have pointed out, such nonuniform portfolios might present scoring difficulties, the portfolios would reduce the emphasis on testing that my current measures entailed. Furthermore, because having just one standardized reading test was inadequate, I would employ more than one reading measure. Requiring students to respond in writing to a specific reading passage would surely provide more useful information about students' actual reading and writing skills than standardized measures alone can.

None of these changes would necessarily eliminate the problems I encountered with my first longitudinal study. However, the changes might mean that students would feel more positive about their participation in the study and hence continue to return. Furthermore, if much of the data collected were based on students' actual college work, the results might reflect more accurately than artificial measures ever could the progress and growth students truly experience during their four years at college.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your major?
2. Have you been required to do much reading as part of your major?
3. Have you been required to write many papers for your major?
4. Have you had to do much reading or writing for courses NOT connected to your major?
5. Do you feel the structured course in the reading lab helped you to get off to a good start freshman year?
6. Do you feel the structured course in the writing lab helped you to get off to a good start freshman year?
7. What one thing sticks out in your mind about the reading and writing classes you took freshman year?
8. Looking back as an upperclassman, can you make any suggestions about how to improve these courses?
9. Did you experience any trouble in passing the reading or writing subsets of CLAST?
10. Do you feel your reading and writing skills have improved during your years here?
11. Has your attitude toward reading and writing changed at all?
12. Do you anticipate having to do much reading or writing in your field after graduation?
13. Have you participated in extracurricular activities on campus?
14. Have you worked at a job during your time here?
15. Do you enjoy reading for pleasure? Writing for pleasure?

Name: _____ Age: _____

Expected Major: _____

Prerequisite courses _____
you have taken
toward your major: _____

Average amount of reading your college courses combined typically require:

Less than 3 chapters a week	4-7 chapters a week	8-10 chapters a week	12 or more chapters a week
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Type of writing assignments you completed Spring, 1990 term:

Lab Reports	Research Papers	Essay Exams	Short Papers
Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____

For what courses have these writing assignments been done?

Type of writing assignments you completed Summer, 1990 term:

Lab Reports	Research Papers	Essay Exams	Short Papers
Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____

For what courses have these writing assignments been done?

Type of writing assignments you completed Fall, 1990 term:

Lab Reports	Research Papers	Essay Exams	Short Papers
Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____	Approximate Number _____

For what courses have these writing assignments been done?

Are there any CLAST subsets you have left to take or retake. If so, please list.

	Always	Most of the Time	Occasionally	Practically Never
1. How often do you use writing now for personal reasons (i.e. letters)?				
2. Do you generally feel more confident now about starting each writing assignment for college classes than when you first began college?				
3. How often do you practice pre-writing strategies (such as clustering or brainstorming) before you undertake your writing assignments?				
4. How often do you revise your papers written outside class before you turn them in?				
5. How often do you apply any special reading strategies you learned [such as SQ3R (survey, question, read, review, recite)] to your reading assignments?				
6. How often do you preview the chapters and ask questions in your own mind before you begin to read assignments?				
7. Do you generally feel confident about distinguishing the main idea from supporting material in most of your reading selections?				
8. Must you make a special effort to learn the terminology of your courses or your major field?				
9. How often do you have trouble remembering important information or ideas for tests?				
10. How often do you have trouble relating class lectures to reading assignments?				
11. How often do you have trouble understanding your assignments?				
12. How often do you have trouble writing about your reading?				

Always
Most of the Time
Occasionally
Practically Never

13. How often do you do any reading for personal pleasure? (If so, please list types.) Examples: magazines, leisure novels, newspapers, etc.

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14. If you find a passage difficult to read - perhaps because you have to read it too quickly or your mind has wandered - what do you do?

15. How far ahead do you typically begin your writing assignments? (Please circle answer.)

The day
it is due

The night before
it is due

A week before
it is due

When it is
assigned

16. Do you have any writing skills that you feel need improving?
If so, what are they?

17. How often do you watch television? (Please circle answer.)

Two hours or
more daily

One hour or
less daily

Only on
weekends

Almost
never

18. What extra curricular or social activities do you particularly enjoy?

19. If short workshops that reviewed essential writing and reading skills were to be offered once a term, would you or your friends be likely to attend?

Thank you for your help!

ESSAY TOPICS USED IN LONGITUDINAL STUDY

June 1989

TOPIC A

A possession you treasure for its personal meaning

TOPIC B

A movie or television program that really made you think

December 1989

(for those who remained in the program)

TOPIC C

Items you would want to have if you were stranded on a desert island.

TOPIC D

A lesson you learned from an experience you had or an activity you participated in

November 1990

TOPIC E

An event or activity on the campus (or in your home community) that has had a widespread impact

TOPIC F

An important decision that you made

November 1991

TOPIC G

A person in public life about whom many people have strong feelings

TOPIC H

A beneficial change in your education that could be made at this university

November 1992

TOPIC I

An entertainment personality who presents a good or poor role model

TOPIC J

A social or political issue now in the news about which many people have strong feelings

	Very Much So (4)	To an Adequate Extent (3)	To Some Degree (2)	Not Very Much (1)
1) The paper has a strong thesis—either stated or implied				
2) The paper seems organized, and paragraphing is satisfactory.				
3) The paper seems focused and coherent.				
4) The paper is developed with specific examples, details, or illustrations.				
5) The ideas are thoughtful.				
6) The word choice is appropriate.				
7) The sentence style is clear and varied.				
8) There is control of sentence structure (in that fragments, run-ons, and tangled syntax are avoided).				
9) The paper reflects control of usage (in that subject/verb agreement, pronoun,tense, and dialect errors are avoided).				
10) The paper reflects overall control of punctuation and spelling.				

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Pamela D. Dykstra

SAY IT, DON'T WRITE IT: ORAL STRUCTURES AS FRAMEWORK FOR TEACHING WRITING

ABSTRACT: Basic writers, confused about the conventions of writing, need to understand that speaking and writing are two valid but different forms of communication. That understanding begins with using, not denigrating, their familiarity with oral language. By exploring with students the patterns of oral language, we prepare the foundation for understanding the structures of written language. We need to present speaking and writing as two different ways of organizing and presenting information. This paper provides the background information necessary for discussing with students the characteristics of oral and written language.

"I myself, have no specific style, no consistency, and usually, no idea of what I am doing." These words, written recently by a freshman in a two-year college taking English 101, summarize the problem facing many basic writers: they don't know what they are doing and have no idea how to go about doing it.

Basic writers know they don't know. They just don't know a way out. Their difficulty with writing has been internalized and generalized as an intimidating affront to their intelligence, a denial of their ability to communicate. So they hold on to their ability to speak and further entrench themselves in their reluctance to write.

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The reluctance to write is deeply rooted. Basic writers, in spite of years of grammar tests and English teachers, have not yet learned how to crack the code. As writing instructors, we need to shift the focus, shift the framework and begin anew. That new framework is found in oral language.

Basic writers are comfortable, confident, and competent using oral language. Beginning with what the students already know not only validates the language resources they bring to academia; it affirms the language over which they have control. Oral language is a valuable framework because it is structured. The structure of oral language provides a natural and easily accessible entrance to the structure of writing. When students recognize that speaking, the form of communication which seems to come so naturally and easily, is structured; when they realize that they already communicate in a structure—talking—they are more receptive to accepting another structure for communicating—writing.

Students need to know that speaking and writing are two valid, two valuable, but two different forms of communication. Jack Goody, in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, maintains that the differences between orality and literacy are not due to differences of thought or mind but “to differences in the nature of communicative acts” (26). We need to present speaking and writing as two different ways of communicating, two different ways of organizing information (Halliday 71).

Good writers know what they are doing (Brandt): they are aware of themselves as writers in the act of writing. Before basic writers can be aware of what they are doing, they need to be aware of writing itself. We need to clarify what writing is all about: it is a different way of organizing and presenting information than speaking.

In this paper, I will summarize the importance of the background material which has informed my presentation to students. The term *oral language* refers to natural conversation; *written language* refers to expository writing.

Writers Need to Know Why Speaking and Writing Differ

Conversation, produced face-to-face, is created on the spot. Because understanding can be immediately evaluated and addressed, words can be spontaneous. The speaker does not need to know in advance where the discourse is going; both the author and the coauthor create the “text” together. Words are but one element of the communication; pitch, stress, pauses,

facial expressions, gestures, and references to items outside the text also communicate and tie the text together. Because of the immediacy of shared knowledge and context, words do not have to specify the referent, sentences do not have to be completed, and the subject can change without verbal markers.

Writing, produced with the conversant absent, demands that the writer create meaning in a time gap, the time between the giving and receiving the message. Martin Nystrand calls that gap the “context of production” (107). It is this “context of production,” which distinguishes oral from written language. When a speaker creates, the context is shared immediately; when the writer creates, the context is delayed.

Because the writer cannot “gesture out to the material world right here” (Brandt 62), words alone create context. Writers need to anticipate and fill in the gaps; they need to provide temporal, spacial, and logical connections. We need to present the importance of those connecting words within the framework of making meaning for the reader. Basic writers need to recognize that transitions, subordinating conjunctions, endophoric reference, and reiteration are essential for making meaning. These are not mindless and meaningless academic regulations designed to intimidate; they are ways of insuring that communication survives the delayed context gap.

Basic writers also need to recognize that there is an advantage to the absence of that free-flowing spontaneity of coauthored discourse: time. Without the need to maintain verbal contact with the conversant, without the need to avoid socially unacceptable silence gaps, and without the need to hold the floor by maintaining the flow, writers have time to focus on the text.

Writers Need to Know How Speech Is Produced: Intonation Units

Basic writers need to understand the patterning of oral language in order to appreciate the unique nature of oral language, to understand how and why that patterning is different from the patterns of writing, and to better recognize oral remnants in writing. Spontaneous speech is not a continuous flow of words; it consists of a series of brief spurts, each of which is approximately five words long in English. These intermittent spurts of speech, which Wallace Chafe calls “intonation units” (*Studying Writing*), are marked by pausing and intonation. Pauses, of varying length, indicate the end of a unit. The most consistent

marker is intonation: rising pitch indicates semiclosure of an idea or image; falling pitch, closure of an idea or image (Chafe, *Pear Stories* 14).

Each intonation unit centers on a single focus, which Chafe calls a “focus of consciousness.” A single focus of consciousness expresses a limited piece of information. Chafe theorizes that the size of the intonation units is determined by the amount of information the mind can keep in focus at a singular point in time (*Studying Writing* 13). Although the mind may travel simultaneously across a multitude of thoughts, it must narrow the focus when communicating that knowledge.

Written language follows oral language in presenting information in units. Chafe theorizes that this parallel nature of communication “is probably not so much that writers write in information spurts of that kind, but that they grasp their readers’ need to process information in such chunks. Readers resemble listeners in their capacities for assimilating information” (*Studying Writing* 20). Writers translate intonation units into clauses, using punctuation to mark their boundaries. Although punctuation has a rule system of its own, punctuation marks “are at least rough delimiters of units that are analogous to intonation units” (*Studying Writing* 18).

Before presenting the structuring system unique to writing, we need to explain how people talk—in chunks or intonation units. Basic writers often record information as it comes to them; therefore, a series of intonation units patterns their writing. The following sentence exhibits the oral patterning of intonation units: “They live in a for room apartment, the apartment is very depressing, its crowded and roach infested.”

Helping students understand why they write as they do is an important step toward exchanging the oral pattern for the written pattern. If spoken, the above sentence would be effective and conventional. Separated intonation units not only deliver information in digestible chunks, they emphasize the significant. Isolating “Its crowded and roach infested,” rather than integrating these adjectives in the previous sentence, draws attention to their significance. This basic writer is communicating effectively the oral word; he needs to become aware that the conventions of oral and written language are different.

Writers Need to Know How Speech Is Produced: Center of Interest

Although intonation units reflect the pattern of emerging thought, they do not mirror the larger focus and intent of the

speaker. Chafe calls this larger focus and intent a “center of interest.” The center of interest is communicated by a series of intonation units (*Pear Stories* 27). Oral patterning is evident in the previously cited student’s sentence where three intonation units communicate one center of interest: a crowded, roach-infested, depressing four room apartment.

Because a limited amount of information is held in each intonation unit, the mind surveys memory and reports the numerous amounts of information in a series. When the speaker has communicated the full center of interest, the voice falls. Closure has been achieved in reporting the image. Speakers generally use rising pitch to connect the intonation units and lower pitch to indicate the closure of the center of interest. These intonation markers indicate suspension and closure of thought. If these oral forms of communication were to be marked with punctuation, commas would connect the focuses of consciousness and a period would mark the closure of the center of interest. It is important to note that in punctuating oral speech, the period marks the end of the center of interest, not the end of a grammatical sentence (*Pear Stories* 9-51).

Because the voice falls at the end of the center of interest, the beginning writer may close his completed center of interest with a period. Punctuation here marks thought completion, not the conventions of grammatically complete sentences.

A prevalent basic writer error is the run-on sentence, of which Chafe’s concept of the center of interest offers one explanation. As I reflect on students’ writings, it seems to me that a run-on sentence is often an oral remnant: the basic writer is punctuating a center of interest. The following basic writer’s sentence about her difficulties with writing provides such an example: “I don’t think I write well because, I just seem to have this feeling, whenever I have to write about something out of the ordinary, such as something that I don’t know anything about, I just tend to keep putting it off until its to late, then I have to cram one weeks work into one nights work.”

Recognizing many run-ons as closures on centers of interest provides insight into the logic of this basic writer error. Explaining the run-on sentence to our students as an acceptable oral convention but an unacceptable written convention will enable them, also, to understand why run-ons seem so natural.

Writers Need to Know How Speech Is Produced: Chaining

In oral language, intonation units are most often connected by “and” or “or.” Chafe calls this method of accumulating in-

formation by accretion "chaining." The center of interest remains open as the speaker chains together the various focuses. Speakers commonly use two methods of keeping the center open: simply reporting them next to one another (adjoining strategy) and connecting them with coordinating conjunctions, most commonly with "and." A third method, using subordinating conjunctions, is less common in informal speaking. This more complex method of connecting ideas involves intentional integration, a task avoided by most speakers as they concentrate on one focus of consciousness at a time (*Pear Stories* 9-51).

Basic writers commonly use the oral method of chaining to tie thoughts together. The intonation units are held together by "and" and "or" until the center of interest is closed. The following student, writing about promiscuity, reveals this oral remnant: "But the fact is that they have crossed the line between their body and someone else's when they decided to have sex without any contraceptives to begin with and now they have to face the consequences of their thoughtlessness and perverseness and they have no right whatsoever to take away this new life because of their mistakes."

Chaining thoughts with "and" and "or" is an oral convention which works in speech because of the immediacy of shared context, supplemental prosody and coauthored text. Because of the delayed context, however, written language needs more exact connectives. Explaining to basic writers the differing contexts of oral and written language and introducing them to transitions will provide them with the necessary replacements, and increase their awareness of what words do, and why.

Writers Need to Know How Speech Is Produced:

Topic Announcement

Speakers often begin a conversational segment by immediately announcing the topic to be discussed. My daughter recently began her telephone conversation with "Tomorrow." Spoken with intonation blending both the final lower pitch of statement closure and the higher pitch of question closure, she was both stating her topic and asking if I understood that she was going to discuss something that had to do with "tomorrow." Following what I have termed "topic announcement," she continued to discuss the complications she was facing in maintaining the preplanned schedule for "tomorrow."

The oral language pattern of topic announcement might explain another common basic writer error: the redundant

subject. In the following example the writer, discussing her hopes for English 101, uses the redundant subject: "And the topics we write on, we should have class discussion to fully understand what the instructor expects for us to do."

While topic announcement is an effective convention of conversation, it is unacceptable in academic writing. Because writers have time to integrate thought, the written tradition expects that topics will be announced within a verbal context, not simply blurted out. Again, basic writers need to become aware of the differences between oral and written conventions.

Writers Need to Know Oral and Written Language Have Different Genres or Forms

Because language is situational, different genres involving both vocabulary and structure have developed. The varying characteristics of spoken and written language are reported by Wallace Chafe and Jane Danielewicz in "Properties of Spoken and Written Language."

Their research subjects are professors and graduate students, people skilled in using language, people able to adapt language to varying contexts, audiences, and purposes. The conversations are transcribed from dinner party conversations, lectures from the academic setting, letters written to friends and family, and academic writing from journal publications. The transcribed oral conversations contain all the markings of oral language; the lectures and letters fall in the middle; and the academic papers contain all the markings of written academic discourse. Yet, all are language choices of articulate, educated people. The differences between the oral and written modes have nothing to do with intelligence or the capability to abstract. The subjects know that different codes are at work; they have acquired the knowledge of code-switching. The awareness of code-switching is an invaluable lesson for basic writers who have internalized failure at writing as the inability to perform adequately in the academic setting. Basic writers need to know that choosing language appropriate to the situation is like playing by the rules of the game. Language choice does not reflect one's mental capacities for abstraction or complexity.

Writers Need to Know How Speaking and Writing Differ

Chafe's and Danielewicz's research on the characteristics of speaking and writing will further enable us to guide basic writers

in understanding the oral and written conventions. The research reveals that speakers of both conversation and lectures differ in language choice from writers of both letters and academic papers. Speakers use a limited and colloquial vocabulary, writers, a more varied and literary vocabulary. Speakers have the fewest words per intonation unit; writers have the most words per unit. Speakers separate prepositional phrases and adjectives into separate intonation units; writers place them within the sentence structure. Speakers use the most chaining with “and”; writers incorporate these strung-out intonation units into the sentence structure and use more precise transitions.

Writing differs from speaking because writers have what speakers do not have: time. Time to reflect, time to choose the most appropriate word, time to condense, time to revise. Chafe’s and Danielewicz’s research reveals that time is the factor which enables writers of both letters and academic papers to use:

1. more word variety
2. more explicit references
3. longer intonation units
4. more sequenced prepositional phrases
5. more attributive adjectives and nouns
6. more compound nouns and verbs
7. more participles

Time is the writers’ most valuable advantage. Recognizing that writers have time will counter the disadvantage of having the conversant absent. Writers have time to organize and integrate information by using prepositional phrases, attributive adjectives and nouns, participles, compound nouns and adjectives. Such compact packing increases the size of intonation units and achieves much of what is expected in academic writing.

Conclusion and Implication for Teaching Academic Discourse

Oral language is a valuable approach to teaching writing not only because it is a bridge from the familiar to the unfamiliar, but because it is a framework for presenting the structures of writing. Through this framework, students recognize that writing is but another form for patterning and presenting information. Through this framework, they recognize that genre, not intelligence, is at work.

I have used the oral framework successfully with basic writers by beginning with a discussion about which is easier—

writing or speaking—and why. This discussion, which reveals how writing and speaking differ, sets the stage for looking at the structures we use when we talk and then the structures we use when we write. I begin with the kernel sentence and then introduce all that can be added before a sentence breaks apart. This building-block method differs from the grammar so many students have rejected: a mass of disconnected nonsensical grammatical rules to mindlessly memorize. From this building-block foundation, I have developed for my classes a step-by-step manual which presents writing as building blocks and patterns, a manual which can be used with any standard curriculum.

The oral-written structure provides a framework for responding to students' writings throughout the semester. Students accept that they are dealing with a different structure; they understand what Shaughnessy calls the logic of many of their errors. In our writing workshops students are often the first to comment, "This is how we would say it, but this is how we need to write it."

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Geoffrey Sirc

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MALCOLM X AS A BASIC WRITING TEXT

ABSTRACT: *The Autobiography of Malcolm X offers important possibilities for basic writing classes. Malcolm's story allows students to reflect on the importance of literacy and their relations to it. It also allows them to chart, alongside Malcolm, their own perceptual growth: from a lack of knowledge, through a kind of jaded insider's savviness, to an intensified, ethical consciousness. The autobiography allows students to use personally meaningful sources to develop sophisticated scholarly inquiry. Malcolm's book teaches the importance of passion and strength of character as essential attributes to growth as a writer.*

First of all we think the world must be changed.

—Guy Debord

Basic writers are almost wholly, racially other, by definition. Bartholomae affirms how they are seen institutionally “as childlike or as uncultured natives. There is an imperial frame to this understanding of the situation of those who are not like us. We define them in terms of their separateness. We do not see ourselves in what they do” (69). And like a non-native speaker, a basic writer, according to Bartholomae, “must write his way into the university by speaking through (or

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approximating) a discourse that is not his own" (69). The basic writing student, in such a scheme, must learn a second, prestige dialect, just as those non-native speakers who want to make it in mainstream America must learn a second language. Such learning represents for Bartholomae "a social or historical struggle as an individual writer seeks to locate himself and his work within the privileged discourse of a closed community" (70). Malcolm X's autobiography, as the story of a person from one culture who successfully makes it in another culture, particularly at this level of "privileged discourse," becomes superficially and, I think, ultimately a fitting story for basic writers to use as a key text in their writing course. It allows us to raise many of the crucial questions about our work as basic writing teachers and forces us to deal with the unresolved notion of just how our students can join the institutional academic setting and the larger "culture of power" (Delpit's term).

The way *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* allows us to begin resolution of that question in the writing classroom turns on the way Malcolm's story resolves itself around a notion of ethical character. What I offer here, to enrich our view of students and reflect on our curricular practices, are snapshots taken from networked-classroom computer discussions as well as student papers and reflections from an ongoing classroom narrative in which basic writing is taught around *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*.

Outside-In

There are, of course, many levels on which to appreciate Malcolm's book. As the inspiring educational memoir of an outsider who becomes an insider (of sorts), it allows the center/margin question to be a central reflection in class. Penn Warren captured this inspirational reading in his characterization of Malcolm as

a latter-day example of an old-fashioned type of American celebrated in grammar school readers, commencement addresses, and speeches at Rotary Club lunches—the man who "makes it," the man who, from humble origins and with meager education, converts, by will, intelligence, and sterling character, his liabilities into assets. Malcolm X was of that breed of Americans, autodidacts and home-made successes, that has included Abraham Lincoln, P.T. Barnum, Booker T. Washington, Mark Twain, Henry Ford, and the Wright brothers.

Malcolm X would look back on his beginnings and, in innocent joy, marvel at the distance he had come. (161-62)

We see this “making it” most clearly in Malcolm’s self-analysis while in prison, getting his “homemade education” (Haley, 171), rejecting his self-as-hustler with a working vocabulary of less than 200 words—“I not only wasn’t articulate, I wasn’t even functional” (171), feeling “mentally, morally, and spiritually dead” (189)—in favor of a self “craving to be mentally alive” (179), one who sees how reading and writing can effect a radical self-transformation. It’s just the attitude, an enthusiasm for literacy, we want to foster in our students: “No university would ask any student to devour literature as I did when this new world opened” (173). Just as the convict Bimbi, who could command total respect in Charlestown State Prison with words, becomes a key role model to Malcolm, some of my students see Malcolm as a role model for their own homemade education. Doug, for example, got excited by this picture of Malcolm as a credible, street-savvy dude showing him the power of reading alternative texts. He himself showed up in class a few days later with a copy of Eldridge Cleaver’s *Soul on Ice*, asking me if I’d read it and what I’d thought of it. And Meng, a Southeast Asian student, found Malcolm’s growth into Standard English Literacy daunting but inspiring: “I learned the way Malcolm studied method work. But it’s going to take me humongous time to learn like him.”¹

The theory guiding the literacy education in Malcolm’s autodidactic classroom-cell, however, was by no means formalistic; it was heavily content-bound. His literacy narrative is almost subsumed by its political context: his is the story of the street-wise needing to become hip to ideology, needing systematic thought to be able to read the blur of one’s life. His book’s message urges one to see the blindness, the self-degradation; to see oneself as another person, caught up in a system of dominance; to develop the need to adopt or fashion a hermeneutic for reading the difficult text life offers. The Nation of Islam provided that for Malcolm. The story becomes not just an intellectual coming of age, but an ethical, moral one as well. Just as Detroit Red (the hustling Malcolm Little) becomes ideologized through Elijah Muhammad’s teaching into Malcolm X (the preaching Malcolm Little), so too students can be allowed a similar ideologization. But because the ideology Malcolm learns from Mr. Muhammad is so literally black and white, this is the

level on which the book can pose the most problems for students. Not many white students want to keep hearing they are the devil. And not many black students, whose lives are too often object lessons in the repellent nature of racism, are ready to accept what seems suspiciously like reverse racism. So they reply that Malcolm became a racist. Or they trivialize Elijah Muhammad's teachings through denial. That was then, they say, but things are different now. It might be the response of the dominant to the nontraditional, but it could also be that students are able to see, as indeed Malcolm himself saw, the folly of holding too fast to received ideas, even those received from a purported savior.

There's a very fine line, it seems, between getting hip, seeing deeper, becoming aware, and getting too hip, seeing through, becoming savvy. Many of my students are caught up in the cult of savviness. They are the hip ironists, with David Letterman as their high priest. Their stance is the inside dopester's, whose motto, as Gitlin puts it,

is "never to be taken in by any person, cause, or event."
. . . The premium attitude is a sort of knowing appraisal. Speaking up is less important—certainly less fun—than sizing up. . . . Savviness flatters spectators that they really do understand, that people like them are in charge, that even if they live outside . . . they remain sovereign. . . . It transmutes the desire to participate into spectacle. One is already participating, in effect, by watching. (21)

If Malcolm takes one from outside to inside, there's a danger that one will be left there, with the hollow canniness of an insider. So when students in their reading come across the character of Freddie, for example, the towel attendant at the Roseland ballroom who schools Malcolm in the art of hustling, there is a tendency among them to stop at the point of Freddie's revelation: "The main thing you got to remember is that everything in the world is a hustle" (47). Some, indeed, read the rest of the story from that perspective, that he never stopped hustling. Pat, for example, focused on how Malcolm was a "fake": "Malcolm's whole life was one big power struggle. After he got a taste of it he couldn't quit." Such an interpretation fits in with a larger, cynical world view: "Look at the history books, look at the oppression that still goes on," said Sandra. "There will always be oppression," Brett concurred.

If, as Gitlin says, the savvy view privileges intellectual bystanding as participation, in many of my students, there ex-

ists the feeling that they can discuss Malcolm X without even reading the book. Angie, as a radical African American, for example, is very savvy in her paper explaining the resurgence of interest in Malcolm X. Her paper begins, "Trying to make sense out of the 'so called' phenomenon of Malcolm X's resurgence in American culture is very easy. It came and it went, it went as fast as it came." Angie, I discovered from her work on the informal writing tasks I give to students, rarely did the reading. But, of course, why should she? Malcolm is already-read for her. Students try desperately to see through Malcolm. "Malcolm wanted power," is the way Kelly sizes him up. "Malcolm wanted money," suggests Matt. But a nonsavvy student like Carla isn't so sure: "I don't think Malcolm wanted power, but more to be himself." I mention that I liked the scene where Malcolm whips the Army guy with his mind, but Kelly sees through that too: "On the train scene with the Army guy, Malcolm loved having power over him." For too many of my basic writers, the world boils down to the manipulators and the manipulated; no wonder Freddie is their patron saint. Teika likes that scene with the Army guy because it shows Malcolm "using power white people did not even think he had. . . . It was mental power [,] a hustle." She represents the savvy African American view. She likes that street-knowledge is now legitimized mother-wit. As a savvy African American, Teika will confidently assert: "race is base simply on the color of you skin, you could be brought [up] around all black people if your white you'll always be white." And so, for Teika, what explains Malcolm's "fall" in the Nation of Islam is not betrayal by Elijah Muhammad (as many of the white students remark), but Malcolm forgetting the insider's cardinal rule: "Malcolm wasn't betrayed he simply forgot that everything is a hustle."

The savvy view is the view of conventional wisdom. I allow my students to critique this view early on, by having them comment on the sound-bites from some person-on-the-street interviews that *Emerge* magazine conducted for its issue commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of Malcolm's assassination. Many of these snippets of conversation show the smug confidence and utter wrong-headedness of the savvy reading of Malcolm:

Malcolm X—he was the one that shot Martin Luther King Jr., right? Didn't he supposedly commit some crime or another?

He was the troublemaker, right? Martin Luther King did it peacefully and this guy did it unpeacefully.

Malcolm X was a little too . . . radical isn't the word; violent is better.

(“Remembering” 29ff.)

It is precisely because Malcolm's story is so slippery, so unresolvable, that it resists conventional interpretations. Such easy summaries of his mission or his person become absurd. Even given the amount of published commentary on Malcolm X, the reader is often left with a frustrating feeling that truth has somehow eluded the writer. X is a screen then that becomes too cloudy and dense to see through. Not surprisingly, in the need for an easy reading, the conventional reading seems inflected by racism. Ben commented that “Malcolm was obsessed with hatred . . . and Blacks are obsessed with dwelling on it for the rest of their lives.” How else but as racism can I interpret a misreading like Julie's: “I think he was a jerk who insulted blacks, whites, christians and any body else who didn't agree with him. . . he was a total hypocrit”? Julie, in fact, wound up sounding exactly like one of the snippets from *Emerge*: “Malcolm was to radical for society. King wasn't.” “He's totally negative,” Erick noted, “and has nothing good to say about white people.” Jackie agreed with Erick, calling Malcolm a “black supremacist.”

Rhonda, another white woman, demonstrated her racism, apparent throughout the term, in her final course evaluation:

I am so tired of hearing about racism that I would love to scream at everyone whining about America to go home! I have never discriminated against anyone purely based on race. Those people that yell about “black pride” and us “white devils” should journey back to Africa. Then make a choice to stay there or return. The same is true for every ethnical group.

She drew on these views throughout her coursework, wondering, for example, in a discussion of the book's concluding chapters, “if Malcolm was so happy in Mecca, why didn't he take his family there?” For her, the thought of Malcolm being forced in Mecca to acknowledge goodness in some whites is delicious justice after reading so much white devil; she gloats about “how he must have been feeling to see white people at the ceremonies.” Her take on Malcolm in the media was not surprising. She saw right through Malcolm's complaints about

how unfairly represented he was, ignoring the countless examples Malcolm provides of the way his words were twisted to present him as threat. Instead, she focused only on how lucky Malcolm was that the media gave this radical African American voice any press coverage at all: “the press in America was always making him feel important.” Any attention was more than he deserved, and as such must have been positive. Charlie, on the other hand, observed that “Malcolm as a person has this way of cutting through all the society-media murk and introducing the simple but yet truth full picture.”

Rhonda’s final paper on Malcolm became an apotheosis of her views, as she wrote on how this book should never be used as material in a required class. In trying to argue against the book, yet not wanting to seem overtly racist, she ends up in the contradictory mode of condemning a book she feels she must claim is wonderful: “It is a marvelous book that will stimulate and challenge readers to explore their own ideas and to examine their choices in life. . . . [But] it is simply not appropriate for any English class, where the focus of intent should be thoughts and combining sources into coherent information that is useable by anot[h]er.” According to Rhonda, the book should not be used because the classroom is “incredibly diverse, [since] it is an unwarranted assumption that no students will be offended by the contents of Malcolm X’s autobiography.” If we are to believe the doublespeak of her cultural affront at having Malcolm’s story lent the institutional legitimacy of a college syllabus, Malcolm’s story is simply too real, too wonderful for her:

By putting this book into the classroom, the meanings and experiences are even more removed from the meaning in the book, because not only is the life of this man so incredible that it resembles pure fantasy, but by scrunching this exploration of immensely important social and racial issues into a 10 week course, much of the opportunity for comparisons and reflections are eliminated. . . . The message of hope and perseverance that Malcolm preached was invaluable—much to wonderful to be lost as simply another story that students have to read to pass an English class.

A racist student like Rhonda, then, speaks in a kind of code, in which the complaint about racism is the real problem, not the object of the complaint: “To tell you the truth,” she said in our

last networked conversation, apparently rehearsing her views for the course evaluation, “i am so tired of hearing about nothing but black and white issues and racism and every other form of classifying people that i wish some one would talk about something else for a while . . . i am so tired of the races whining about everything under the sun! name one group of people that doesn’t have a legitimate bitch. . . you can drum a point to death, untill there is only frustration not thought.” Her code is similar to Kevin’s: “I think Malcolm was the one who was actually brainwashed, not the people he was caling brainwashed.” Or Missie’s, who claimed, “First he went to school with white people and that was fine and then he went out with a white girl, but then in the end of the book he said that the white man builds up subconscious defences against anything he doesn’t want to face, but all through the book Malcolm did that to[o].” Malcolm is the racist, not the people he is calling racist.

Inside-Out

Elijah Muhammad becomes a key character in terms of student reaction. Many students have their whole view of Elijah permanently set after they read what they characterize as Elijah having betrayed Malcolm. Ann: “I thought that it was really sad in the chapter ‘Out’ how Elijah turned against Malcolm along with some of his ‘close brothers’. Elijah was such an ass the way he went around screwing all of the women!” Jack: “I personally lost all respect [for Elijah]—I compare him to a modern day Jimmy Bahker.” Oystern: “Elijah became jealous of Malcolm’s success.” Their response to Elijah is a savvy one. They see right through him, only too happy to put another entry in their file of crooked preachers exposed by the media. But such a seeing-through of Elijah Muhammad’s teachings ultimately makes me uncomfortable. I’m especially uncomfortable with their reaction to Yacub’s History (the story of the Big-Headed Scientist who breeds the white race in exile on Patmos with 59,999 followers), which very few of my students take seriously. They scoff at the ridiculous notion of some evil-genuis black scientist breeding the white race as a demonic revenge scheme. They see through Yacub just like *New York Times*’ journalist M. S. Handler saw through him, when he called the “history . . . a theory stunning to me in its sheer absurdity” (Haley xi).

I’m uncomfortable because such a savvy reading sees right

through the value of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam both in Malcolm's life and the lives of many African Americans who belong to the Nation today. It overlooks the fact that such an organization could in some way respond to a genuine problem in which those who overlook it might be subtly implicated. And is Yacub's History any more ridiculous than the mythology underlying any other religion? Seeing the story as "the demonology that every religion has," Malcolm asserts that the tale acts as the "key lesson of Mr. Elijah Muhammad's teachings" (164). I want to recapture what they see beyond, I want to stop Elijah's "message to the black man" from disappearing so soon, without a trace. Degraded though he may be, Elijah provided Malcolm with the hermeneutic key to utterly change his life, to turn him from social parasite to social force. So I like the comment from Vo, an Asian student, that "Muhammad teaching help Malcolm free his people that's a positive gain," or Carla's "Elijah taught Malcolm many things, and I think Malcolm would agree that those things were worth embarrassment if necessary." A savvy reading of Elijah—where his alleged adulterous affairs with his secretaries negates any value in his theories—negates the need to accede to the "true knowledge" (Haley 162) Malcolm claims Muhammad provided him.

Overlooking Elijah Muhammad so quickly means that students can focus mainly on Mecca and what many of them see as Malcolm's ultimate restorative cure, his conversion from seeing "white devil" to embracing all races. So I hear a lot of the importance of Malcolm becoming a "True Muslim": Curtis: "I think the trip to Mecca helped Malcolm understand what the real meaning of the islam religion is." Bill: "Too bad Malcolm didn't go to Mecca earlier." And when Holly asked why everyone in Mecca was so helpful and caring, Mike replied, "That is the way of Muslims." What bothers me about this line of thinking is not the way my students become instant experts on the Islamic faith, but the way they are so quick to embrace Malcolm's deeper immersion into Eastern Muslim practices because they see it as removing the blinders of racism from his eyes. For many students, it becomes a relief. They can finally like Malcolm unequivocally. When the discussion turned to what Malcolm's organization would be like if he were alive today, Ann could confidently assert, "I think that today he would definitely let whites join. . . . Malcolm had much to learn in Mecca!" Courtney observed in our final discussion of the book that "the last few [chapters] are what made the whole thing worthwhile." "True

Muslim,” then, in their eyes means a person who doesn’t hate all whites. There’s a kind of appealing, reductive logic operative; another equation in this mathematics is Elijah Muhammad = liar = hustler = “such an ass” (Ann).

In their rush to move beyond Malcolm as “fiery Black Muslim” (282), students become very much like the core of white media sympathetic to Malcolm in his time yet tired of hearing him repeatedly call them devils. It’s interesting to watch news-reel footage of Malcolm returning from Mecca after writing his famous letter: The reporters have all read the letter’s copy and eagerly await him at the airport ready to have him embrace integrationist goals. Malcolm dissuades them: “I don’t think that I ever mentioned anything about working toward integration” (*Malcolm X*). They want to deny, see beyond the realities that made Malcolm harp on a philosophy of separation. They don’t want to admit that Malcolm can both recognize all human beings as valid, but also admit the impossibility of peaceful co-existence among them. When I commented on how Elijah’s message must have something to offer, given the Nation of Islam’s continued popularity, Rhonda misperceived what I meant by his message. She thought I was referring to the religion of Islam and not the social code set down in Muhammad’s book. So she hipped me: “geoff—it is not elijah’s message the muslem religion is much older than that.” She doesn’t even consider the other message, the “true knowledge.” Students, then, can be as selective in their “truths” as they love to point out Malcolm was in his reading. They seize on the “True Islam” he finally learns, but ignore the “true knowledge” of Elijah Muhammad’s Afrocentric revisionism. I think Charles, an African American, captures a little of the spirit of “true knowledge” in one of his observations. In a discussion of whether blacks and homosexuals can be compared, Shah saw no comparison (“people can choose to be gay”), but Charles considered the question and determined that being born black doesn’t make you black, that racial identity is a kind of choice, too: “Being black is a development not a birthright[.] For instance Brain [i.e., Bryant] Gumble isnt black. . . . Why does he try to hide that . . . A man of his caliber should do much more for us.”

The thing about Malcolm, in terms of this notion of savviness, is that he is not savvy. Speaking out for him is more important than sizing up: “I’m for truth, no matter who tells it. I’m for justice no matter who it is for or against. I’m a human being first and foremost, and as such I’m for whoever and whatever

benefits humanity *as a whole*" (366). If Malcolm became hip to the workings of the inside, the conventions, he didn't remain there for long. He repositioned himself in opposition, out of the Nation of Islam, out of America even. His story, then, allows students the possibility of getting outside the conventional reading, to reflect upon education and position. My students are afforded reflection as to where they stand in relation to the "culture of power." They can think of education in at least two ways: learning how (or if) they can fit into the existing pattern, and learning how they can (if they choose) try to help reshape that pattern. Malcolm's story, if it closes on anything, closes on the notion of social justice, a value for which there is no "inside" information. Penn Warren said the autobiography had the power of a folk ballad (171). Malcolm demonstrates that all fixed positions are just that, positions, which can be resisted and changed. The movement of Malcolm Little—from Detroit Red, through Minister Malcolm X, to arrive at El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz—is one of self-naming, self-activation, a journey through received names and positions to the arrival at one's personal truth.

Student as Malcolm

Students, too, can go beyond the system of Malcolm's own thought, to arrive at their own response to their situation. The book allows students to begin street-critical readings of Malcolm's story. They can become "homemade" theorists, using knowledge that personally matters to them, whether from books or records or magazines. They can go outside of, in a sense, conventional notions of student behavior and student writing, to carve out their own stance as writers, their own uses for writing. Take Jim's critique of Malcolm as cult figure, a very witty, literate, negative response to the book. His girlfriend was in a cult in high school, he did some reading on it then, and he asked if he could draw on the literature he amassed at the time to use in his paper on Malcolm. He brought into his paper the sources that had become meaningful in his own life's problem-solving:

Are the Black Muslims a cult, and if so how should that effect the credibility of Malcolm X, whose ideas were based on their teachings. To determine whether or not the Black Muslims were a cult, we must first determine what a cult is. According to a pamphlet distributed by

Free Minds Inc., a group that provides information about religious cults, a cult is usually characterized by, a leader who claims divinity or a special relationship with God, members that put goals of the cult ahead of individual concerns, and perhaps most importantly, involvement occurs not by conscious choice, but by artificial conversion through the use of manipulative techniques.

Jim's reading of the book proceeds to isolate those events and passages that fit Elijah and Malcolm into the Free Minds' schema. This is typical of students who pick up on Malcolm's knowledge/power message. Roger used readings and rap records with which he was familiar to support points in the various papers he wrote. For his analysis of Allan Bloom, after hearing so much about how absolutely essential canonical writers like Shakespeare are, Roger couldn't resist bringing in (even if he can't cite it properly) the noncanonical H. Rap Brown to snuff out Bloom's Eurocentric lamp of learning, much like Malcolm brought his new learning to bear against Eurocentrism in his own time:

Europeans will always excel in institutions of higher learning when they set the curriculum, it is easy to learn when all you study about is like you because it is interesting. (H. Rap Brown 1968) I began realizing this when I was in high school. I saw no sense in reading Shakespeare. After I read Othello, it was obvious that he was a racist. From reading his poetry, I gathered he was a faggot. But we never discussed the racist attitude in his works. This was when I really began to raise questions. I was in constant conflict with my teachers in high school. I would interpret the thing one way and they would say it was wrong. Well how could they tell me what Shakespeare was thinking. I knew something was wrong, unless the teachers had a monopoly on truth or were communicating with the dead.

For his essay on "life today," twenty-some years after the death of Malcolm X, Roger decides to do a street-scholarly critique of contemporary African American leadership, complete with a gloss on his slang and the use of rapper Chuck D as last-word source:

Rev Jesse Jackson was and is supposed to be a man of God but he has a contract with Coors beer and also Playboy magazine (Interview) which is contradictory to what

he believe's, advocating the consumption of alcohol and exploiting women. Being in a governmental position he know's about the lies and deception but refuse's to expose the problem to the people because the so called brother wants a peice of the pie or he is scared shitless and does not want to end up like the rest of the down leaders, dead. Forgetting your peoples best interest in order to get what you want is not a leader, it is a sell out stunt(not a real action but a faked one) which goes to prove "Every brova aint abrova just cause of color just as well could be undercover."

But he went even further, giving me articles from the hip-hop magazine *The Source* to read. After all, I had been giving him texts to read all quarter, so it seems only fair he be allowed to drop a little science on me. This goes beyond homemade education, it's homemade cultural literacy. As we read and studied ideology in Malcolm, we looked at the ideologies inscribed in popular songs, and for the rest of the quarter, I often got tapes to listen to from students. I like it; it breaks up the one-way educational flow. I felt bad early on in the course one quarter because I had neglected a few months earlier to buy the February 1990 *Emerge* when I saw it on the newsstand, with its 25th anniversary cover story on Malcolm which might have offered my students a contemporary take on the book; but there was Roger, a few weeks into the quarter, bringing it in for me to read.

There is something typically Malcolm about powerful insight coming from such unexpected sources. In Malcolm's book, something as nothing as a student paper helps cause a media explosion; Malcolm informs us that C. Eric Lincoln's *The Black Muslims in America* (one of the two media texts, along with the documentary "The Hate That Hate Produced," crucial in making the Nation of Islam known nationally) was written thanks to a student paper: "Lincoln's interest had been aroused the previous year when, teaching at Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia, he received from one of his Religion students a term paper . . . [written by] one of Atlanta's numerous young black collegians who often visited our local Temple Fifteen" (236). Malcolm then goes on to cite the student's paper, just as compositionists like myself draw on student writing as important source material. Malcolm builds his life in large part on street knowledge: on Sammy the Pimp's observations, conversations with prosti-

tutes, letters from his family, old books in a prison warehouse, and, of course, Elijah Muhammad.

There is something truly democratic in this, in the way traditional privilege is upended. As such, Malcolm's story allows real scholarship, with an inner drive and fire of its own, rather than the mere insider tracings of received or conventional scholarship. Since his story is always evolving, it allows students to bring in things they encounter, things that mean something to them, to help with their reading of both Malcolm and the other texts we read. "Did anyone see Attallah Shabazz on tv last night?" Ann asked in a discussion of the book's last chapters. "Attallah explained things from her childhood very different than the book did. For example she said that she grew up in a very romantic family. But in the book Malcolm made it clear with his wedding and other things that he didn't believe in all of that Hollywood romance. So what's up with that? Could the book be wrong?" Ann is learning a couple of things here: first, to use these kinds of lived sources, like Attallah Shabazz's televised interview, as a device to help develop a reading; moreover, she's learning the basic need to interrogate a text, to wring some kind of truth from it. The best kind of source-logic seems to dramatize that dissonance, allowing voices to chatter in the text (e.g., H. Rap Brown counterpointing Allan Bloom). A dissonance has been created in her mind that she will use her next paper (on Malcolm and women) to figure out. Ann, like many students in a Malcolm X writing class, is internalizing that chatter and developing a stance, an ethic, a characterized reading made from a definite position. And that's the story of Malcolm: how one comes, through education and reading, to develop an ideological purchase on the chaotic text of life. What happened to Ann reflects "true knowledge" gained and hard-won, not just passed on.

Ann, we can say, is a serious student, one who has learned to see the doubled world, the world that is and the world that should be, one who relies on textual mediation to pursue further inquiries. She discovered that texts (even televisual ones) can help one read life just as Malcolm did. Roger was also interesting in this regard. He liked to pepper his network discussion of the book with facts picked up from his own life and reading. He was a young African American student with a lot of lore on which he would draw in his reading of the autobiography (note the reference in here not only to his alternative history texts, but to Flavor Flav): "J Edgar Hoover had sell-out

blacks infeltrate the Nation of Islam To get the low down, and the people who assasanated [Malcolm] were not real members, that whole thing was set up by HOOVER! BELEIVE THAT BOYEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!" Or Jen, who asked in another networked discussion, "did you guys see that commentary of Spike Lee where he was saying in his movie that malcolm and martun luther were one in tha same[?]" Malcolm's is the kind of story that makes very affordable the logic of source-driven exposition, with any valid source counting to show how the book makes sense of the world and vice-versa.

Street-Academic

Since Malcolm's story allows this outside-inside-outside dynamic, I tried to reflect that logic curricularly by moving from the autobiography to reading various institutionalized notions of students and education. That way, I felt, my basic writers could better understand the social forces that work to define them. They might learn, through reading educational theory's depiction of them, how what seems real, what seems true and common-sensical, is simply the conventional, and no truer than anything else. Through Malcolm, they saw common sense ideas about blacks and whites revealed as nothing more than convenient (to some) ways to organize the world. When, for example, Malcolm told his 8th grade teacher, Mr. Ostrowski, whom Malcolm had always thought of as a natural advisor, that he wanted to become a lawyer, my students read what this teacher said to the young black who had gotten the highest marks in his class:

Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you *can* be. You're good with your hands—making thngs. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person—you'd get all kinds of work. (36)

That moment represented a turning point in Malcolm's own history: "It was then that I began to change—inside" (37). Students might achieve a similar demystification; they might, upon reading a selection of articles relating generally to education, Bloom and Hirsch, specifically, come to see how judgments

about them are ideological constructions made to appear common-sensical and "realistic." Post-Malcolm, they came to Allan Bloom's positioning of them as "clean slates" (47) and "natural savages" (48) with a better understanding of the stakes involved in the struggle over their interpretation. They could more critically read descriptions of what their education should consist of and how it should strive to inculcate them into a tradition with which many of them were not too familiar but one they began to suspect had little to offer. They read Bloom moaning that:

Today's select students know so much less, are so much more cut off from the tradition, are so much slacker intellectually, that they make their predecessors look like prodigies of culture. The soil is ever thinner, and I doubt whether it can now sustain the taller growths. (51)

Or they heard E. D. Hirsch sigh that we simply have to face the facts about "the way of the modern world" when it comes to education, how multicultural education "should not be the primary focus of national education. It should not be allowed to supplant or interfere with our schools' responsibility to ensure our children's mastery of American literate culture" (18). And they read him rail at

just how fragmented the American public school curriculum has become . . . [since our curricular offerings in high school now] include not only academic courses of great diversity, but also courses in sports and hobbies and a "services curriculum" addressing emotional or social problems. All these courses are deemed "educationally valid" and carry course credit. . . . Cafeteria-style education, combined with the unwillingness of our schools to place demands on students, has resulted in a steady diminishment of commonly shared information between generations and between young people themselves. (20-21)

Since they had watched Malcolm become a kind of homemade deconstructionist of common-sense wisdom, finding alternative views in traditionally degraded sources like Yacub's History, I offered them a traditionally degraded source, an interview with the rapper Ice Cube, to which they could contrast such ideas. African American rappers turn out to be interesting educational theorists. Reflecting on the contemporary high school curriculum, Cube remarked:

They need to have a whole new list of classes. . . They need to have a course on how to raise babies, given the percentage of people who leave high school and have babies. See they'll make some shit like that career planning an elective. That's why you got people out there don't know what to do. Girls, they say fuck it and go in the county line. Then they sit home watching *Donahue* and thinking, Yo if I have another baby I can make some more money. That's the way they go, getting paid, looking fly, but then they kids be home looking filthy. All because they don't teach you how to cope in the motherfuckin' society. (Tate, 78)

Once the playing field became leveled, with no source more privileged than another, they were able to weigh (in terms of music, for example) whether they believed along with Allan Bloom, that contemporary music "ruins the imagination of young people and makes it very difficult for them to have a passionate relationship to the art and thought that are the substance of liberal education" (79), or whether they felt, like Ice Cube, that modern music represents one of the few traces of the real surviving in an era of exhausted neotraditionalism: "[Kids] ain't listening to what their grandfather be saying. They're getting the real deal on the records" (79). Brett, for example, a white student, weaves in citations from Malcolm X, Ice Cube, and an interview with LA gang members in order to develop his thesis that "black students are being turned off towards education" because "the system seems to have better success in the white society."

Malcolm's book, then, would seem an ideal tool to use to teach academic writing, in the way it encourages the logic of sources, only with vivid, more vital sources. But the book is better at teaching passion in academic writing than usage. Jim's paper, even though a witty approach to the book, had no conclusion and a slew of apostrophe errors. And his was one of the better ones. Roger's paper on Bloom and Hirsch offered a terrific critique: "Europeans came to America and could not survive, so the native americans helped them, taught them how to plant, cultivate, hunt, etc., then after a big feast for thanks they got up off the table and killed everyone they could get their hands on, but Bloom states that young Americans, in comparison to euros we were natural savages." But his paper would be greeted far less enthusiastically, I fear, for formal reasons, by any other teacher in any other department on campus. And so I

wonder, just where do we put the pressure. Is the problem to install a program of bidialectalism, to figure out strategies to get Roger's wonderful ideas into acceptable form, or is it to rethink the place and form of academic writing? We're back to the center/margin question and Bloom/Hirsch's the-tradition-ain't-broke-so-don't-fix-it agenda. Malcolm's is the story of an African American who thoroughly mastered the prestige discourse and was rewarded with martyrdom; Ice Cube's is the story of how insistence on the vernacular, in both language and form, leads to a huge recording contract.

Any answer available to this seeming contradiction lies, I think, in the figure of Malcolm as represented in his text. What I find interesting about the commentary on Malcolm's book is a similar thematic strand beginning with one of the first reviews of the book (from a 1965 *Newsweek*) and continuing right up through to my students' analyses. It's the notion of Malcolm as a self-cancelling text, as being simply too unstable a figure finally to support a consistent reading:

But Malcolm had become a reed bending with every fresh wind. He could talk Pan-African mysticism one day, gun clubs for Negroes the next, separate-but-equal black and white campaigns against racism on the third. ("Satan in the Ghetto" 132)

James Farmer, lately the National Director of the Committee of Racial Equality, has called Malcolm X a "very simple man." Elijah Poole, better known to the Black Muslims as Muhammad and, indeed, as Allah, called him a "star gone astray." An editorial writer of the *Saturday Evening Post* put it: "If Malcolm were not a Negro, his autobiography would be little more than a journal of abnormal psychology, the story of a burglar, dope pusher, addict and jailbird—with a family history of insanity—who acquires messianic delusions and sets forth to preach an upside-down religion of 'brotherly' hatred." Carl Rowan, a Negro, lately the director of the United States Information Service, substantially agreed with that editorial writer when he said, in an interview after Malcolm's assassination, that he was "an ex-convict, ex-dope peddler who became a racial fanatic." Another editorial writer, that of the *Daily Times* of Lagos, Nigeria, called him a martyr.

Malcolm X may have been, in varying perspectives, all

these things. But he was also something else. (Warren 162)

I say if Malcolm X, Brother Malcolm, had undergone this kind of transformation, if in Mecca he had decided that blacks and whites can unite, then his life at that moment would have become meaningless in terms of the world struggle of black people. So I say I do not believe it. (Cleage 15)

Malcolm's project was to make his life, once written down, the principal testament to Muhammad's Truth, a combination of holy text and ex-slave narrative.

And thanks to this strategy, black folks who're looking to put flesh on Malcolm's icon (and many don't even try) have a book that gives them—and particularly the black male—a model for being black. Inevitably the autobiography also suffers from the agenda; tailored to make points, the book ultimately fails as a comprehensive life-and-times telling. Malcolm knew this, and offered, after his break with Muhammad, to remake the story along post-Nation, humanist lines. But Alex Haley vigorously discouraged his subject from making changes, suggesting instead that Malcolm tack on the story of his Mecca trip. That addition—a second strategy—confuses the first strategy by recasting Malcolm's Black Muslim revelation in Black humanist light. What we just have to ask is: what did Malcolm really stand for? Ultimately, the autobiography says too many different things to be politically or religiously pedagogical, in a coherent way. And it ends up concealing Malcolm X. (Wood 44)

There is a sense that because he is unresolvable, he is less valuable; or he is only valuable when, through force of critical will (Penn Warren and Cleage) a reductionist meaning is insisted upon. Such a textual notion, one in which heavy revision is needed until the univocal reading is arrived at, is prevalent in our field. It affirms the need to force a reading, to reach closure. When Bartholomae speaks of the occasion of university writing as "an invitation to bring forward certain kinds of experience and to let others remain silent" (76), he speaks to a view of academic writing in which showing one world doubled in another is seen as a problem, as static. This is just the problem *Newsweek* '65, *et al.* have with Malcolm. Even Malcolm himself

admits the open-endedness of his self/text: "I'm man enough to tell you that I can't put my finger on exactly what my philosophy is now, but I'm flexible" (428). Rather than seeing the autobiography's doubled strategy as problematic, we can see it as the only kind of coherent sense worth insisting on. A doubled reading is more realistic, especially for growth in writing-as-ethos, than the modernist, uniformal one. It's one that represents the often complex, contradictory confusion of life. All texts are palimpsestic. Some students, baffled by Malcolm-as-unresolved, may reject his text ostensibly along lines such as "The way Malcolm changed his mind throughout the book" (Jamie). This marks a refusal to deal with the unresolvable, to acknowledge and explore what the odd, shifting, polymorphous text might mean. Could Elijah Muhammad, perhaps, be both hustler *and* savior? Rather, the doubled meaning is rejected out of hand because of that very difficulty in summation. Ann, then, made a sensible comment, a double-focused one that interrogates, rather than rejects, the unresolvable: "I love the fact that Malcolm was prepared to die for his people rather than hustle what he was doing for money but I hate it when he talks about the morals of society in America were bad because of the way in which women dressed." The autobiography might not close on a neat reading, but it changes lives. Erick even cites Spike Lee's jacket blurb:

[T]he book is very inspiring in that when you believe something go with it stay right on top of it till the day you die, it is like what Spike Lee said about it "The most important book I'll ever read. It changed the way I thought; it changed the way I acted. It has given me courage that I didn't know I had inside me. I'm one of hundreds of thousands whose life was changed for the better." (cover)
That is pretty intense for someone to say.

We see this doubled strategy at work, for example, in Keith Gilyard's recollections of childhood: "I couldn't shoot a basketball high enough to make a goal but I began learning how to dribble and saw my first pair of dead wide open eyes on a fat man lying amid a crowd in front of the fish market with a thin jagged line of blood across the width of his throat" (24). It is ball and death, childhood and death, innocence and death—self-cancelling texts, to be sure; too-hard lessons for a kid to process, impossible lessons to resolve. Malcolm, then makes us change the way we read *all* texts: books, (our)selves, the world. The reading that asks for resolution, for escape from the maze,

is the bogus reading, the old reading, the already-read reading, the historical reading. Malcolm ushers in the post-historical reading where all formal bets are off, where the basic truth and justice of the message are what counts, despite the appearance: "I'm for truth, no matter who tells it. I'm for justice, no matter who it is for or against" (Haley 366). Certain student writing—e.g., "Brain Gumble isnt black. . . . Why does he try to hide that?"—might not count as much in a traditional curriculum but to me it is a powerful truth. Too often composition disallows the exuberant, the peculiarly styled—especially from basic writers. Imagine if Charles' Bryant Gumble riff counted as writing. Imagine a curriculum built on inference, innuendo, a little nonsense, but a solid ethical base, one concerned more with new knowledge than old forms: a curriculum which allowed ideas to appear so contradictorily, they might even cancel each other out . . . *just like in life*. Such a curriculum would suit us well for the journey, as Malcolm suggests in his notes from the road:

You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to *re-arrange* much of my thought patterns previously held, and to *toss aside* some of my previous conclusions. This was not too difficult for me. Despite my firm convictions, I have been always a man who tries to face facts, and to accept the reality of life as new experience and new knowledge unfolds it. I have always kept an open mind, which is necessary to the flexibility that must go hand in hand with every form of intelligent search for truth. (Haley 340)

Gilyard's book is instructive here for another reason. His structural strategy, poetic home language alternating with received academic style, becomes an autocritique of the politics of the bidialectal. Like Malcolm, Gilyard is a balancing act between street and scholar. Gilyard shows it in his alternating structure, and Malcolm shows it in the way his medium and message were fused:

I knew that the great lack of most of the big-named "Negro leaders" was their lack of any true rapport with the ghetto Negroes. How could they have rapport when they spent most of their time "integrating" with white people? I knew that the ghetto people knew that I never left the ghetto in spirit, and I never left it physically any more than I had to. I had a ghetto instinct. (310)

The Gilyard/X take on bidialectalism refines the notion of literacy as a bridge. Gilyard reflects on the bridge that will take him from his home in Harlem to a new home in Queens, enabling him to function in both worlds. But he learns some deeper “true knowledge”: “another truth, which all should know: Most times a bridge is just another two-way street” (26). Education is not just a one-way yellow brick road out of urban reality and on to the Emerald Culture of Power; it’s a bridge that runs both ways.

Many of my white students never have to know that truth. It’s a truth that goes beyond clothes and rap records, beyond even language, all the way to character. Will they ever go into the textual world Gilyard and Malcolm are from? Another theorist of race, New York Knick Doc Rivers, sees this bridge become one-way at a crucial point. He offers a critique of athletic shoe marketing that speaks to this: “The shoe companies say, ‘Let’s make our shoe the street-est, blackest shoe out there,’ because the kids want to be like the city kids . . . They want to dress like them, talk like them, everything except live in the same neighborhood” (de Jonge 38). The savvy attitude is one that can’t settle for the open text. It must close on a one-way resolution. Savviness is a kind of one-way street itself: the savvy reading fixes Malcolm *there*. But the two-way reading can go between worlds: Malcolm is there *and here*. Some students, it seems, can see *out there*, but not *in here*. So it’s not surprising that they can’t see through their firm belief in how the powers of “true Muslimhood” turned Malcolm into an integrationist.

Homer Simpson As Us

Malcolm’s, then, is a book for the long haul, a book that can change a life (Malcolm: “People don’t realize how a man’s whole life can be changed by *one* book” 393). It shows how life is a journey charged by unexpectedness, with serious implications for our choices. At one point, Haley says how, during a press conference Malcolm gives, you could drop a pebble out the window and it would land on a spot where Detroit Red used to sell dope. Most of my students don’t pick up on that reading, but some do; and I have to believe others will—later, as pieces continue to fall into place for them. There are various stages of perceptual growth that can be charted as students work their way through the book, from innocence, to an insider’s smugness, to a principled reading—what Gitlin would call speak-

ing out rather than sizing up, or what Sledd would define as “character,” when he states his fears concerning a “character”-less curriculum in literacy education: “ability, power, and information, without character, may combine to do great harm” (15). Some students can see through almost anything except the bars of their own perceptual cages. Kirsten, in speaking of the turn in Malcolm’s book—from the sensational Hollywood nature of his pre-prison years, to the growth of Malcolm as ideologue—isolated exactly the point where students who have no clue get hung up: “I think the book is starting to get more confusing now because it is dealing with a lot of things we don’t know about.” So Julie, who had blithely dismissed Malcolm as “a jerk,” flatly asserted, “I don’t think he did that much for civil rights he didn’t help Martin Luther King at all.”

I confess, of course, to my enthusiasm for students who seem formed by an ethos, who write with a character informed by decency. Vikki, for example, read a nitpicking discussion over the network regarding Malcolm and Elijah and who’s responsible for what and finally had to cut through it all: “From what I’ve been reading it is to my understanding that Malcolm is a hero. Self-sacrificing. . . . A fighting cause to help direct black[s] to overcome economic and political power struggle was part of his message. Self awareness in chapter Out.” She was the only one in that class who focused on Malcolm’s message, who understood Elijah’s “true knowledge.” Doug was another rarity in this regard. He was a young white student who used the retro-hippie network code-name, “Daffodil,” and, in keeping with such self-styling, he revealed a neo-hippie’s tendency for openness toward a person’s story of oppression. Unlike most of his fellow-students, Doug was not interested in games of cynical acuity, rather he wanted to allow justice to speak. As he listened to another round of how badly Malcolm misjudged the white man, he spoke up: “I’m thinking about how the black people called the whites devils and I don’t blame them. . . . The whites were obsessed with there race.” One of Doug’s final comments to the other students in class was “I really admired the way Malcolm learned everything himself from the books and people he [k]new. . . . The book in some places has been insperational to me.”

Most of the others took the conventional view of Malcolm as culprit in the victimization and character assassination of the white race or as simply confused, misguided. There is a thinness to blanket put-downs of Malcolm, such as those by two

upper-class, always-well-dressed, white, sorority students: Kelly, who stated "I do not feel that Mal. was a sympathetic character at all," and Missie, who added, "I didn't think he was sympathetic either. I thought he was kind of a jerk. . . . I just didn't like his overall attitudes about everything but towards the end of the book he got worse. The epilogue was kind of harsh he cut on white people a lot."

One of the wonderful benefits of cultural literacy, according to Hirsch, is its ability to capture our "national character" (17), and I think Malcolm's book succeeds here, too: for our "national character" is finally, perhaps, the "true knowledge," the deeper meaning of "white devil." I want Malcolm's story to do for my students just what Hirsch says educational material shouldn't—"supplant or interfere with our schools' responsibility to ensure our children's mastery of American literate culture" (18)—because I have seen the fruits of American literate culture and they're murder: "I do not believe this somber situation [of black students' self-segregation on college campuses] is the fault of the white students, who are rather straightforward in such matters and frequently embarrassingly eager to prove their liberal credentials in the one area where Americans are especially sensitive to a history of past injustice" (Bloom 92). Students don't know Elijah's "true knowledge," many don't even know who Malcolm X was, and no emphasis on a prestige dialect or cultural literacy or the insider "culture of power" truths educators putatively withhold from certain students will ever bring that knowledge about. I'm not trying to *withhold* anything from anyone's children. Quite the opposite: I want to *bestow* on them interesting things—like Yacub's History, for example. Yacub's History is not on Hirsch's list; but if Malcolm wouldn't have learned Yacub's History, he wouldn't have been Malcolm X. But then, Elijah Muhammad is not on his list, either. Hirsch tries to sell his notion of cultural literacy in part on its status as "the common currency for social and economic exchange" (22), on how it will rescue blacks from being "condemned in perpetuity to oversimplified, low-level tasks" (11). That's a shockingly deceitful message to the black man—or to anyone of nonprivileged status (as Penn Warren notes, one of the values of Malcolm's book is that race becomes "metaphor" 164). Just as Malcolm's book tells me to go to a hustler for an economics lesson and to Yacub's History for teachings in genetics (or is it ethics?), so I'll go to a rapper, Chuck D, for my educational theory:

We have to have black schools that teach you how your black ass will survive in America, and the meaning of family. . . . [Traditional education of blacks] just doesn't teach us the hypocrisies and the double standards, and how to make it as a black person. I can go to college and high school and get the top grades, and when I go out into the job market, I don't know anything about business. Which means business is a family thing, you know what I'm saying? If you're not family, you're not gonna get that fucking job! . . . Money is not the answer, control is the answer. Control over curriculum, over education. (47-48)

The very notion of the "multicultural" is simply another name for nontraditional, both students and texts that do not correspond to the canon. Malcolm's autobiography is not part of the tradition. And neither is Malcolm. Ultimately, then, Malcolm serves as a point at which the whole discussion—nontraditional students, ways of reading and writing, notions of the academy, multiculturalism, ideology vs. "good writing"—comes together. Berthoff speaks out against critics who would grudgingly allow books like *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, but not in terms of literature, rather sociology perhaps. The question, for Berthoff,

is not of totally disparate categories of performance, out of reach of each other's standards of valuation, but of different histories, or circumstances, or doctrines and conceptions, of "the self"; different working postures and strategies, . . . different expressive intentions embraced and different effects sought, each having its own reasonable measure of virtue. (315)

What Malcolm allows us to do, I think, is change the world. When all voices are heard, I have to believe, something can happen. We learn to value not capital-T Truth, formal and theoretical, but small-t truths, lived and often wildly informal, like Malcolm's own story. For Penn Warren,

Malcolm X let the white man see what, from a certain perspective, he, his history, and his culture looked like. It was possible to say that that perspective was not the only one, that it did not give the whole truth about the white man, his history, and his culture, but it was not possible to say that the perspective did not carry a truth, a truth that was not less, but more, true for being seen

from the angle of “Small’s Paradise” in Harlem or of the bedrooms to which “Detroit Red,” the “steerer,” brought the “Ivy League fathers” to be ministered to by the big black girl, whose body had been greased to make it look “shinier and blacker” and whose Amazonian hand held a small plaited whip. (169)

Some of my students realize the powerful opportunity for legitimizing other ways and forms of knowing offered by Malcolm’s story. Teaching Malcolm has made me realize it, and why I will continue to use Malcolm’s book in my basic writing classes. I am now far more interested in complex, nontraditional prose from students than I was in the past. I don’t think it’s keeping them from any sort of power. I think it’s helping them theorize in order to change the world. Malcolm’s story means a focus on basic values of respect, decency, and the imperative for knowledge—values no more a “construction” than a human being is a construction: “We declare our right on this earth. . . to be a human being . . . to be given the rights of a human being, in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary” (*Malcolm X*). The use of texts like Malcolm’s autobiography in a writing curriculum means a new focus on mission, message, meaning, and character. It means using language to record a content of the truths of experience rather than an archaeology of discourse’s forms and conventions. It means teaching the exploration of powerful ideas rather than the simulation of stock forms. That copy of *The Source* Roger brought in for me to read had a most interesting article that Roger told me he thought I would be especially keen on. And I was. It was about an older African American who operates a pirate radio station out of his home in California, broadcasting his voice to his community as a counter-discourse. The author of the article, James Bernard, in reflecting on the way the old man’s use of some two-bit Radio Shack technology is actually changing the world at a local level, speaks to the core of why I continue to use Malcolm X in my basic writing class:

We are all Homer Simpsons who don’t think any of us have Anything To Say, so we remain mere spectators to the Dialogue. We need an entirely new way of speaking to each other that will inject more of our voices into this National Dialogue. Once we begin to ask questions that concern us, you may be surprised that the person with

whom you've been watching *All My Children* may have some answers. Neither of you will ever be the same. (29)

I can think of no better use for a writing course than to allow things to never be the same.

Note

¹In all excerpts from students' writing and networked discussions, I have preserved students' exact forms.

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Effie Papatzikou Cochran

GIVING VOICE TO WOMEN IN THE BASIC WRITING AND LANGUAGE MINORITY CLASSROOM¹

ABSTRACT: *This paper is addressed to college teachers of bilingual and/or bidialectal students in basic or developmental writing classes. After briefly indicating the long linguistic record of sex discrimination and the strategems it has forced women to devise, the author focuses on this phenomenon's manifestation in basic writing and ESL/ESD classrooms. In an attempt to help teachers of bilingual and bidialectal students address the problem, the article makes four practical recommendations: 1) open-ended classroom drama scenarios designed to be completed in various ways by students, 2) sensitivity to students' (particularly women students') nonverbal communication, 3) avoidance of sexist and racist language (probably unintentional, but no less real), and 4) a brief but representative set of readings and reference texts on sexism and language (provided in the form of a select reading and usage list).*

In 1941 Edward Sapir encapsulated his understanding of the relationship between language and thought in the following statement:

We see and hear and otherwise experience very largely as we do because the language habits of our community predispose certain choices of interpretation. (93)

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Benjamin Lee Whorf went on to expand Sapir's work. What is known today as the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis is based on two cardinal principles: 1) that all higher levels of thinking are dependent on language, and 2) that the structure of language people habitually use influences the manner in which they understand the environment (Chase, 1954).

The relation between language and thought is both synchronic and diachronic (Levi-Strauss, 1966). Language and thought are mutually reinforcing; however, because of their different functions, they often conflict. Synchronically, language influences the categories of abstract thought. We tend to think in the linguistic categories that are given to use as a consequence of cultural reproduction. Those linguistic categories embody certain unexpressed assumptions about "oughtness" or social roles. So synchronically, according to Levi-Strauss, language structures reality. Diachronically, reality makes linguistic categories problematic because thinking is more flexible than language. Levi-Strauss has provided the theoretical basis for adopting a "moderate version" (Martyna, 1976) of the Sapir/Whorf hypothesis: that language influences rather than determines thinking. Implicit in every language are presuppositions about superiority and inferiority, dominance and subordination.

It has only recently become common knowledge that sexual discrimination in human society manifests itself in the linguistic patterns of human speech. Some cultures, for example, have developed double feminine dialects, one for women addressing women and another for women addressing men. Even two distinct versions of the same language are not unknown: a public male language—used exclusively by men, both in public and in private, and a private female language—restricted to women (Trudgill 1983). The millenia-long effect that patriarchal supremacy has had on the languages of human culture is charmingly illustrated by the following bit of dialogue from Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazousae* (393 B.C.) between Praxagora and one of her women co-conspirators, who are planning to infiltrate in disguise the all-male Athenian Senate for the purpose of passing community property legislation:

Praxagora: . . . the time's running short. Try to speak worthily, let your language be truly manly, and lean on your staff with dignity.

First Woman: I had rather have seen one of your regular orators giving you wise advice; but, as that is not to be, it behooves me to break silence; I cannot, for my part in-

deed, allow the tavern-keepers to fill up their wine-pits with water. No, by the two goddesses [Demeter and Persephone] . . .

Praxagora: What? By the two goddesses! Wretched woman, where are your senses?

First Woman: Eh! What? . . . I have not asked you for a drink.

Praxagora: No, but you want to pass for a man, and you swear by the two goddesses. Otherwise you did it very well.

First Woman: Well then. By Apollo . . .

Praxagora: Stop! All these details of language must be adjusted; else it is quite useless to go to the Assembly.

(Oates & O'Neill, see also Gregersen 4)

Patriarchalism in social structure and androcentrism in language have long been contented bedfellows, as this little piece from one of Aristophanes' lesser comedies makes clear. But the passage also illustrates the lengths of subterfuge and deception to which women in male-dominated societies have been forced in order to exercise any sort of public influence. Most women, of course, simply accepted patriarchal conditions with the fatalism thrust upon their sex, while men—even men of good will—continued uncritically to enjoy their positions of professional, social, and familial privilege. Many, indeed, enjoyed their privilege quite consciously, believing their superior position to be justified by creation and/or philosophy: "Male comes first because it is the worthier gender" was a representative opinion among 16th and 17th century English grammarians, an opinion that sprouted from these gentlemen's Latin roots.² The few women who dared to dissent from such sentiments did so surreptitiously if at all.

In view of the foregoing, we should not be surprised to discover that this kind of male-to-female behavior manifests itself among male teachers and students in the basic writing college classroom: Women's comments may be taken lightly or completely ignored; in class discussions, women are often interrupted and on occasion blatantly put down; the woman student is treated condescendingly when she comes up with the "wrong" answer, and with surprise when "occasionally" she is right. Overall, women are treated by some male professors as an

exotic species in the halls of academia, especially when they dare to enter traditionally masculine fields.³

A "Medusa syndrome"⁴ is perhaps more evident in ESL/ESD (English as a Second Language or Dialect) and basic writing classrooms than in "regular" academic classes, despite academic skills instructors' declared sensitivity to their students. In fact, the ESL/ESD female student has even more "going against her" than the average woman college student: She is often a mature adult attempting to pull herself up socially and economically by acquiring an education. She is hindered, however, in not possessing the English for academic purposes (EAP) language facility that would permit her to accomplish her goals. Typically, she comes from the Far or Near East, Central or South America, the Caribbean, India, Africa, an Eastern European country, or the American inner city. Thus, the ESL and basic writing woman student and virtually all of her sisters come from environments that are thoroughly patriarchal. They then enter into a more subtly patriarchal classroom environment, one that is perpetuated to some degree by school personnel. But that is also the creation of their male classmates, with whom they often share a common culture, and who are particularly anxious to hold onto their superior male status in the light of their loss of the other privileges of which they have been stripped by becoming immigrants/refugees, or by virtue of being economically vulnerable males in a highly competitive male-dominated culture.

The behavior of some male language minority and bidialectal male students towards their female counterparts reveals an assumption of superiority in a number of ways. When their female classmates venture to participate, they may be interrupted or unfairly criticized by their male classmates. This happens consistently when the class works as a whole. However, even when students work in small groups or pairs, the tendency of some males to dominate or interrupt is present, though not as overtly as in the larger context—perhaps because the males perceive less pressure to show off before other males in the small group or paired environment.

One solution to this problem is for the teacher to place men with men and women with women in small groups. This works if there are enough male and female students with different linguistic abilities and backgrounds to provide sufficient variety. The unsatisfactory feature of this arrangement is the absence of a mixture of both male and female perspectives during

small group discussion. But even if one sacrifices this dual perspective in order to protect the rights of the women participants, there remains the problem of the whole class situation, where, it seems, some men feel a compelling need to compete with each other in suppressing women.

Another example of sexism in class is insensitive remarks from teachers (male and female), and teachers who unintentionally call predominantly on males in the class. A fascinating example of teachers doing just this is documented by the Sadker and Sadker videotapes. This project featured teachers who strongly asserted in questionnaires that they were nonsexist and always paid equal attention to all of their students. When these teachers viewed themselves and their classroom behavior on tape, they were unpleasantly surprised by their own favoritism towards their male students (who were admittedly more aggressive at getting their teachers' attention).

Yet we make a grievous error if we attempt to identify male students as the major cause of the sexism suffered by women in the ESL/ESD and basic writing classroom. As has been well known since the late sixties, most societies, including the so-called "progressive" western cultures, view women as a class in one of two basic ways: They have either been perceived and talked about as sex objects, or their identities have been defined primarily in relationship to males. In fact, the icon of woman as appendage to man is even indicated grammatically in some languages, and as such—according to the Whorfian hypothesis that language influences belief—may be a partial cause of the cultural practices that manifest female-to-male dependence. For example, in Greek the genitive of possession in a woman's surname indicates that she "belongs" to her father-lord (before marriage) or to her husband-lord (from marriage through her husband's death and until her own). A Greek man, by contrast, is his own "lord" from birth, as evidenced by the nominative case of his surname. A similar grammatical pattern is characteristic of Russian and other languages.

Almost twenty years ago, in her article "The Making of a Nonsexist Dictionary" (Thorne & Henley 1975, 57-63), Alma Graham reported some astonishing findings from her study of dictionaries and textbooks: In a society (the U.S.A.) where there were a hundred women for every ninety-five men, males—she claimed—occupied center stage in textbooks of all subjects, including home economics! In addition, every mother's first-born was male in the texts, and females were consistently ex-

cluded from certain activities on grounds of weakness and passivity. By the mid-eighties, the situation had improved only marginally if at all, with many college texts continuing to stereotype male and female roles and to exclude women from narrative and content (Sadker 1983). And the struggle for inclusive language and the elimination of sexual stereotyping in textbooks continues into the present decade.

It should hardly be surprising, therefore, to find women displaying a kind of masochistic mind-set, stemming from repressed anger over a deep and usually unconscious sense of deprivation and discrimination, both in the classroom and in other contexts. In short, a set of prescribed and proscribed expectations, based on sex at birth (a biological reality), have dictated women's gender roles later in life (a social construct, and—in languages other than English—an arbitrary grammatical category). This condition is of course suffered equally by women outside the bilingual/bidialectal classroom, but for the female ESL/ESD and basic writing student, it compounds the difficulties to which she is already heir by virtue of her economic, cultural, and linguistic situation.

It is time for teachers of basic writing and English as a Second Dialect or Language to direct their own and others' attention to the predicament of the forgotten woman in their classrooms. She urgently deserves to be acknowledged, not only because of the inequity of her condition, but also because her only forum of self-expression may well be that very classroom to which she comes to be heard and understood. I would offer four concrete suggestions for opening ourselves to the nuances of this student's problem and to enable teachers to handle her situation more expertly:

First, we can see to it that our classes provide explicit opportunities for students to vent and discuss their feelings through carefully planned exercises. I have found that the use of open-ended dramatic scenarios help students to vocalize feelings of discrimination and other problems. Such scenarios have the added virtue of providing opportunities for students to display their creativity and flair for the dramatic. The side effects of this sort of classroom activity are numerous. Not only is the student's self-image significantly improved, but also a variety of specific linguistic skills are strengthened in the process: Students are asked to read and comprehend an open-ended dialogue, for which they are then required to provide their own written ending before they even being to speak the dialogue's

lines; "in performance," some listen to the finished dialogue while others speak its lines clearly and correctly, and each group of students enacts the dialogue's ending according to the written problem-solving version they have composed.

Many years ago, in a Hunter College graduate class on Teaching Reading and Writing through Drama, I had the good fortune to work with Professors Sally Milgrim and Patricia Sternberg, using theatre techniques in the context of reading and writing activities. The class was given situations in which students had to resolve dilemmas, ranging from applying for a green card and dealing with an uncooperative and insensitive immigration bureaucrat, to immigration and naturalization citizenship courses, to being involved with the wrong crowd and pressured to experiment with drugs or shoplifting, to begging or attempting to bribe a teacher for a passing grade or cheating on an exam, to job interviews and filing for unemployment, to dating and marriage proposals, pregnancy and abortion. In each instance, students worked in teams to resolve a problematic situation and provide a resolution in dialogue form. Their scripts were then rehearsed with classmate(s) and acted out in front of the class.

Second, teachers of basic writing and language minority students (perhaps more than any other teachers) need to become conscious of the signals sent to students *via* body language, oral intonation, and other nonverbal types of communication. A judgmental sentiment is communicated verbally in a couple of seconds but with a raised eyebrow almost instantaneously. So as teachers we must try to be accepting, inclusive, and nonjudgmental. We also need to notice and understand our students' nonverbal language: Nervous smiles, pauses, and inquisitive glances all have meaning that requires our interpretation; head position and voice inflection are not only culture-specific but gender-specific as well; and certain classroom patterns (such as who interrupts whom, when, how often, and under what circumstances) speak volumes about the real lines of social and sexual power that govern our students' behavior and learning potential. As teachers, we must learn to detect and—when necessary—redirect out of harmful range such forms of student communication. One effective redirecting technique is to inform students of the value of academic culture through discussions that include everyone in the class, encouraging women in particular to speak up and offer their ideas and opinions, thereby providing them with a forum within which to vent their emotions.

Third, as our students' primary language models, we teachers must at all costs avoid the use of sexist and racist language ourselves. Unfortunately, simple "good will towards men [sic]" will not suffice here; there are specific linguistic techniques that must be learned and used if the basic writing and ESL/ESD professor is to avoid this cardinal sin. In particular, the teacher needs to avoid ethnic and sexual generalization, the use of the so-called "generics," and sex- or culture-specific stereotypical expressions (scattered throughout the very language we are trying to help students acquire!). On the second item, we should note that the English language has no unique epicene third person singular pronoun ("singular they" being, of course, also plural), that the word "man" was once *but is no longer* a gender-neutral noun, and that this particular area of inclusive language is fraught with formidable editorial—and therefore pedagogical—difficulties⁶. Of course, if "singular they" was good enough for "such eminent writers as Shakespeare, Shelly, Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, Trollope, Austen, and Woolf, among others" (Cochran's dissertation 18), why not accept it in our own students' writing? (See Dennis Baron, 1 July 1992.) Among other claims, Baron says that, upon close examination, *standard English* proves to be a myth or, at best, "an imperfect and vague set of rules of etiquette" (B2).

Fourth, and finally, teachers can only innovate comfortably in the classroom, without fear of relapsing into sexist stereotypes, if they will only take the trouble to familiarize themselves with some of the literature on the topic of sexism and language, subject to the following caveat: Sexist or *gendered* English has been a millenium in the making; *degendered* English has only recently begun its process of creation, and we are a long way from consensus on solutions to some of the problems created by our awareness of a need for language that is gender inclusive (which is what we really mean by *degendered*). In view of this, we must be careful not to preach certainty in instances where there is as yet none. Michael Newman says it just right:

It only confuses beginning writers to be told to follow a rule where none exists. Simple injunctions: "use *he*," "avoid *his* or *her*," "pluralize antecedents," or even "use *they*" do not do justice to the problem writers face. It is far better to tell them the truth. The issue of which pronoun to use is not so much governed by syntactic rule as it is by meaning, and this meaning is embedded in a social context of gender relations.

What is true for pronominal usage is no less true for inclusive language as a whole, and therefore for every teacher and writer who wishes to be gender attentive.⁷

My personal wish is for the inclusive language group to include all teachers and writers, and particularly all those who teach or learn to write in the basic writing, ESL/ESD, and EFL classroom. Whether one is comfortable with it or not, gender sensitivity is the revolutionary and truly novel linguistic development of our age. As Richard Norris once observed:

Alexander Pope could with a perfect and thoughtless innocence write: "Man never is, but always to be, blessed"; but when I read his words, I surreptitiously wonder if he meant women too. Of course he did; he just didn't mention them. But then that is precisely the point

Notes

¹Parts of this paper appeared in the September 1992 Women and Language in Education issue of *Working Papers on Language, Gender and Sexism* (see Works Cited below).

²*Masculinus genus dignus est quam faemininum et faemininus quam neutrum* ("The masculine is a worthier gender than the feminine, [just as the feminine is worthier] than the neuter.") was a common dictum in Latin grammars of the time, whence English grammarians derived the principle. Elizabeth S. Sklar discusses the matter in detail in her article in *College English* 45 (1983): 348-58, "Sexist Grammar Revisited," including the odd use of the form *dignus* (instead of the comparative *dignior*—"worthier").

³In 1982 Roberta Hall and her colleagues at the Association of American Colleges produced a carefully researched and chilling summary of the obstacles faced by women in academia. More than a decade later, despite significant progress in certain professional arenas and some advances in the academy, every one of the conditions reported by the Hall paper can still be found in today's college classrooms. Association of American Colleges' publications are available from 1818 "R" Street, NW, Washington, DC 20009, telephone (202) 387-1300.

⁴In 1985 (see Cochran 1992, 29) I coined the term "Medusa syndrome" to describe the buried anger that characterizes many men's response to the uncertainties of a transitional period in relationships between the sexes. The condition is experienced by insecure males and by males inconsolable over the loss of patriarchy, and is precipitated by women in powerful or *status*

quo threatening situations. Its chief feature (as the name suggests) is an apparent inability to function normally in the presence of strong women—in effect, petrification.

⁵It has now been documented that the lines between bilingual and bidialectal students have blurred. And in the case of American universities, especially in huge urban institutions like CUNY, we find that ESL/ESD students virtually constitute the mainstream today; they are no longer a numerical minority. For documentation and other statistics, see the *CUNY Issues and Initiatives* statement of the CUNY Language Forum (1992).

⁶In a brilliant and delightful article that one hopes will soon be snapped up by the nearest publisher (“The Rules, the Student, Her Pronouns, and Their Meaning”), Michael Newman leads his readers through the various pitfalls one encounters when trying to find appropriate pronouns for generic—or, more properly, epicene—antecedents. No solution is without its problems: “‘Permissive’ instructors who might be inclined to accept (singular) *they* must deal with the fact that many if not most of the future readers of their students’ writing will consider it to be incorrect. Yet those who support some form of pronominal ‘law and order’ are being naive if they believe it is enough to tell students that the question is simply one of avoiding pronoun-antecedent disagreements. This approach of ‘just say no to antecedent-pronoun disagreement’ leaves students at risk either of being chastised for sexism or of getting lost in the maze of alternatives to epicene *he*.”

⁷For more pedagogical tips for ESL/ESD teaching in general, see the CUNY language minority handbook, *Into the Academic Mainstream; Guidelines for Teaching Language Minority Students*, edited by the author (New York: Instructional Resource center, Office of Academic Affairs, The City University of New York, 1992).

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SPECIAL SECTION

Remembering Mina Shaughnessy



Mina Pendo Shaughnessy is seen (above) on her family farm in South Dakota. Had she lived, Mina would have turned 70 years old this Spring. Her premature death in November 1978 cut short a brilliant, trailblazing career in academia.

Janet Emig

MINA PENDO SHAUGHNESSY¹

Like many of you, I first met Mina Shaughnessy at a CCCC convention—in 1972, at New Orleans. I had missed her splendid keynote address because of a late plane, but I did attend the afternoon discussion she chaired. Almost immediately, we both realized that we had begun an important friendship; and subsequently, we came to attend certain NCTE and CCCC conventions together. Like many of you, we ate our Thanksgiving dinners in some exotic, non-seasonal places—once, an oyster bar in the French Quarter. Then, like many of you, I learned of her death, from cancer, at yet another convention, our most recent. Marilyn Maiz, her wholly devoted secretary and friend, had tried to reach me; but I had already left for Kansas City. Ed Corbett, a survivor, informed the Commission on Composition the Tuesday morning before the convention. The circle closes.

The mailing address is Spearfish, South Dakota. From Mount Rushmore, take the left fork, alternate 14, past Lead, that astonishing perpendicular mining town, back toward the main highway, where 90 turns into 14 and 85. The Pendo ranch extends up those mountains and down that valley, one of the most contained and limpid in the entire West. Mina Pendo Shaughnessy lies buried there, next to her mother's grave.

In every way Mina is home. She had hoped to live there again: on napkins in Manhattan restaurants she would sketch for me the cabin she planned to build, halfway up a mountain, on land her family had given her, a cabin with windows and a front porch looking out over her cherished Black Hills.

Mina could not be understood without understanding that she came from the West. At the December 8th memorial service for Mina at City College, speaker after speaker spoke of Mina's coming from the West; yet it was obvious that, for some of

them, the West was a romantic blur. But the West, like the East of course, is highly specific. Mina's West was—a lush corner in a beige prairie state, near the moon surface of the Badlands; a corner in which a herd of 200 bison can still amble or rumble across the vision; where wild ponies block a car.

There were those eyes—in my experience only certain sailors and Westerners have those eyes, with a purity of vision, coolly undeceived, and a fatality that comes from looking out over indifferent expanses—of sea or mountains or prairie grass. Then, related, the clarity about what was central, bedrock, and what was peripheral, surface green; and an ability I think regional, never to reverse the two.

From Lead, Mina went East. Initially, East meant to her Chicago, as it often does for those in the Dakotas and Nebraska, although, later, it came to mean far more powerfully, New York itself. Specifically, she left to attend Northwestern. I can remember how she described disembarking from the train in Chicago, dressed, she claimed, like Greta Garbo. She helped earn her way through college by doing readings in the local Lutheran churches, selections she had arranged from *I Remember Mama*.

She was good enough as an actress that when she did move to New York after graduation and read at try-outs with a roommate who desperately wanted to get into the theater, it was Mina who would get the part—once, I believe, the lead as Antigone in an off-Broadway production. Whenever I see Vanessa Redgrave, who so resembles Mina physically, as say, Guinevere or Julia, I always think Mina would have made a splendid actress. Indeed, she was a splendid actress in the forum, the theater of academe, that she chose over the absolute certain uncertainty of the actual theater, for which she knew she was temperamentally unprepared.

Eventually, she went instead to graduate school at Columbia, where her passion was Milton. Just two weeks ago, Paul Cubeta, the director of Bread Loaf School of English, described a meeting with Mina last October in which she was attracted to teaching at Bread Loaf not only because she could teach a course in writing but also that, at least, she could teach a course in Milton as well.

For Mina came to her interest in writing the way most of our generation, especially women, came to it—through a back door. She stayed, as many of us did, for visceral, as well as ever-deepening intellectual, reasons. She once described this scene at City College. It was at the end of the sixties; and one of the

first groups of SEEK students was taking the placement exam, the very exam Mina analyzed into clarity and importance in *Errors and Expectations*. It had been raining, and the hair on the bent heads caught the ceiling lights so that all seemed to Mina nimbused, angelic. These were the same students, by the way, Mina would dance with in the cafeteria at Shepard Hall when she grew tired of counting syntactic and spelling errors.

Mina lived long enough to watch at CUNY, her university, what many of us are watching at our own—the quite systematic dismantlement of what she had so laboriously built, to which she may have quite literally given her life. She was even asked to participate in the demise and destruction; for the Savage Seventies are nothing if not thorough in trying to divest us of our most hard-won beliefs and actions.

There is, I believe, only one adequate and appropriate memorial to Mina: that we enact her courage; that we fight the current retreat—no, rout—into the elitist irresponsibility of earlier decades, where once again we agree to teach only those who can learn without our active and imaginative efforts; back to those mean, haemophilic responses to “What is knowledge” and “Who shall have access to that knowledge?” Mina truly believed, without sentiment, in the republic as the shining city on the hill. And she would undoubtedly agree with many of us that unless, as a community, we reverse ourselves and the direction that our schools, colleges, and universities are currently taking, this country is truly no longer morally habitable.

Janet Emig
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ

Note

¹This obituary appeared in *College Composition and Communication* XXX (Feb. 1979): 37-38. Reprinted by permission.

E. D. Hirsch, Jr.

OPENING REMARKS AT AN
MLA SESSION IN MEMORY OF
MINA SHAUGHNESSY,
DECEMBER 28, 1979¹

This session is dedicated to the memory of Mina Shaughnessy, who died last year at the height of her powers. Before introducing the reading of the papers, I have been asked to say a few words about Mina and about the appropriateness of honoring her in this way.

Only a very few years ago—here at the last San Francisco meeting of MLA—Mina came to national attention. Her now famous book, *Errors and Expectations*, was still being prepared for the press, so she was not widely known when she delivered a paper here at the first MLA session in recent memory ever to be devoted to the subject of composition. Some of you here today may have attended that session and heard Mina's unforgettable talk. The audience was large—maybe as many as 300 people in a big, crowded room. The occasion is imprinted on my mind. For all my own nervousness as the first speaker, I was nonetheless struck by Mina's beauty and bearing, and I still remember the way she made her way to the podium, moving deliberately and apparently calmly. She had just been introduced with some rather self-conscious and silly comments, and when she arrived at the dais she did something that was quite startling—she gently indicated in her first impromptu words that composition was too serious a matter to deserve such silliness. I remember my own intense gratification at that moment, when the audience burst into appreciative applause.

Then, as Mina delivered her short paper, called "Diving In," she was interrupted several times by more applause, and when

she finished she was given an ovation as prolonged and enthusiastic as any I have ever heard at MLA. People who heard that talk have told me that their lives were changed by it, that they decided then and there to go into composition professionally—to dive in. Wayne Booth came up to me afterwards to ask who *was* that person, and he later said it was the most exciting MLA session he had ever attended. That was the electrifying effect that Mina always had on those who were lucky enough to hear her speak.

Now that talk, along with Mina's pathbreaking book, is in print. Anyone who reads the text of her MLA talk will admire its humaneness and style, but probably they will not be able to grasp why we all responded on that occasion with such tremendous enthusiasm. Partly it was because Mina was a brilliantly accomplished public speaker. Partly it was because she radiated beauty and grace and a devotion to something beyond herself. Mainly, I think, it was because she projected a moral authority that was unmistakable. About this moral force, her friend Irving Howe has said: "There is a mystery here of human character, the force of true conviction—and how profoundly it can affect people as they recognize its presence. It is a kind of authority without bluster, or prophecy, or ego, or system. And as a result one wanted to please her not just personally but ethically. Her mildest disappointment was a judgment to avoid; her mildest approbation, a pleasurable reward."

For our profession there is in Mina's premature death very little consolation. The marvelous book she left us was just a beginning. Her human influence radiated out beyond the sphere of ideas and ideologies to reach people and inspire them in ways that brought out their best instincts and efforts. It's true that Mina could be impatient with composition experts who were fools or dogmatists. It's true that she was willing to take a stand on controversial issues. For instance, she had the courage to speak of errors at a time when the fashion among experts was to denounce error-hunting. But even the most ardent polemicist was disarmed by the grace of Mina's book, and in her presence extremists were moderated by what Irving Howe calls her "moral radiance." That is why her death is such an immense loss to our profession. She alone seemed to lend us a sense of community amidst our conflicting ideologies. Our understanding of that lost leadership deepens our sense of loss. We not only honor what she has done, we also mourn the loss of a human influence that is irreplaceable.

I want to mention one subject very dear to Mina which she did not get around to in her published writing. For many reasons she would have liked this subject to be mentioned at an MLA session dedicated to her memory. And that is the connection of literature—especially poetry—with composition. Mina was a lover of poetry, and was a poet herself. She saw no abyss dividing the painful efforts of the beginning writer and the highest expressions of the best poets. She saw composition and poetry as threads of one fabric. She saw literature and literacy as belonging together, not as segregated into two domains—the rich suburbs of literature and the poor slums of composition. She felt at home in both districts of our profession, and she was an integrationist. She admired the literary mandarins of the MLA and took great pleasure—amid the glow of her book's triumph—in sharing the same podium with high-powered literary intellectuals like René Girard. She deplored the thought that composition should be left to technocratic specialists who were deaf to the rhythms of literature. She welcomed the economic exigencies that brought literary scholars back to composition classes. She wanted all of God's children to be literate in the full sense, and this was also to include teachers of composition.

Mina, then, was very much at home here at the MLA, and never felt herself to be an exile belonging only in the halls of composition. For her, literacy included literature, and she had an Arnoldian sense of the continuities between them. Her fellow poet Adrienne Rich puts Mina in the tradition of Montessori, Freire, and Ivan Illich—the tradition of those who, in Rich's words, "have understood that intelligence is not determined by privilege." That is so. And Mina also stands in the tradition of Matthew Arnold—the tradition of the poet who is also an inspector of schools, of the literary intellectual who is also a teacher of punctuation—of those who see the continuities in our literate culture, and the importance that writing has in bringing out the human as well as the economic potential of every person in our democracy.

Her favorite poem happened to be by Matthew Arnold. It was "The Buried Life," a poem that is partly about the difficulty of unlocking in words what lies unexpressed within us. I want to quote some lines of it which greatly appealed to Mina, and which also convey something of her legacy:

Ah! well for us, if even we,
Even for a moment, can get free

Our heart, and have our lips unchain'd;
For that which seals them hath been deep-ordain'd!

• • •

But hardly have we, for one little hour,
Been on our own line, have we been ourselves—
Hardly had skill to utter one of all
The nameless feelings that course through our breast,
But they course on forever unexpress'd.

• • •

Only—but this is rare—

• • •

When our world-deafen'd ear
Is by the tones of a lovéd voice caress'd—
A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
And what we mean, we say.

The last word of this brief tribute should be Mina's, and it should be one of her own poems. I've chosen a short birthday poem that she sent to Alice Trillin—a dear friend who had successfully fought off the same kind of cancer that was afflicting Mina:

For Alice on her Fortieth Birthday, May 8, 1978

Having been through rough territory
where thistles really pierce
and cliffs loom insurmountable at times,
shading whole days,

You know that the journey into forty is just a fiction,
a line chalked across our lives because the digits change,
even though we are still stalking adventure,
still longing for our mothers,
still believing that the world is only as old as we are.
So please, beautiful girl, become forty as if
you have just skipped over a hopscotch line
and all the fun is just beginning
and ornery Time has not even thought yet
about calling you home to supper.

Note

¹This talk was given at the Modern Language Association session, December 28, 1979. Reprinted by permission.

Richard Goldstone

IN MEMORIAM
MINA SHAUGHNESSY
1924-1978¹

She gave to this profession a tough compassionate dedication . . . an insistence . . . that the task before us—the education of those who had been formerly discussed as not being worth educating—was simply our most important reason for being teachers.

Leonard Kriegel

Professor Kriegel's statement about Mina Shaughnessy is profoundly meaningful. Since City College was first established in 1847, a shameful question has been recurrently raised and answered: Is it worthwhile providing a college education to the Poor, the Crippled, the Blind; the Irish, the Jews, the Italians; the Blacks, the Hispanics, the Asians? And for the past one hundred and thirty years, the City College answer has been a resounding and triumphant: Yes, it is worth it.

That question raised by the elitists, by the privileged, by the uninformed has been confronted by generations of dedicated teachers among whom there have been Great Teachers—those whose influence has radiated beyond the classroom, beyond City College, beyond New York, beyond the northeast region of the United States.

Mina Shaughnessy, whose death occurred on November 17th, was one of a bright galaxy who, like Morris Raphael Cohen, Harry Overstreet and Mark Zemansky, so intensified the aura of City College that it remains both a national phenomenon and an educational landmark.

When this was written, Richard Goldstone was faculty ombudsman and professor of English at City College.

Her achievement in breaking through the outmoded idea relating to literacy and intelligence has been recorded in her book, *Errors and Expectations*. Only weeks before her death her contribution to educational thought was recognized by the presentation to her of a signed Presidential Proclamation tendered by the National Endowment for the Humanities. Benjamin DeMott, of Amherst, offered his tribute in *The Nation*.* *The New York Times* published the results of her scholarship on its front page in 1978.

Mina Shaughnessy's death coming only days and weeks after the recognition of her contribution to the teaching of writing in today's colleges was the occasion for personal grief among those who knew her. At a memorial service held at City College on December 8th her friends gathered to hear tributes by a handful of her colleagues and students. Led by her husband, Donald, and President Marshak in the Faculty Room in Shepard Hall, 200 colleagues, students and friends heard six tributes articulated by CUNY Distinguished Professor Irving Howe '40, City College Professors Leonard Kriegel and Edward Quinn, famed poet Adrienne Rich, colleague Alice Trillin and former student Lottie Wilkins.

Excerpts from their remarks follow.**

Not that she was Pollyanna. Far from it. But she never lost that clear-eyed breadth of vision she must have had as a tall, awkward adolescent scanning the Dakota hills. (It's hard to imagine her as awkward, I know, but that is what she always claimed she had been as a girl.)

Wherever she got it, it enabled her to see what the rest of us missed. Never mind the obvious example—how she saw what none of us saw in those hills of blue books that collected around her desk. Those same blue books that the rest of us prayed to be delivered from or self-righteously cursed, she looked at with that western-horizon vision, seeing more in those strangled semi-sentences than we ever imagined could be there. (It should be no small consolation to know that there are now thousands of teachers—and thousands more to come—who will have the opportunity to share that

*Although Professor DeMott's tribute was published a few weeks after Mina Shaughnessy's death, it was delivered at a Rockefeller Foundation Conference before her Passing. *The Nation* commented editorially that "Professor Shaughnessy's work may be the most significant advance in years toward what DeMott calls: "the grand project of this society, democratic realization."

**At the time of publication, only Ms. Rich's and Messrs. Howe's, Kriegel's and Quinn's remarks were available. The complete text of the memorial tributes subsequently will be published.

vision by reading her book; not to mention the countless numbers of students who will benefit from those teachers.)

Edward Quinn

Mina loved this city, with its elbowing fraternity, its misplaced passions, its range of styles that might reveal some bond of values. It amused her to treat her friends as quintessential New Yorkers, parochial apologists for the city's discomforts who would rise to hauteur in defense of its culture and its radicalism. She liked to take over a few words of our Yiddish, once telling me she had had a long shlep from Convent Avenue to 42nd Street. In an essay I later wrote, I brought her in anonymously as a cosmopolitan from South Dakota who did a lot of shlepping. She liked that and said, in turn, that she wanted me to visit her ranch back home. What for? To see me, she said, on a horse. What an imagination!

Mina had a puritanical streak, chastising herself for invisible deficiencies, but she had also a good healthy vanity, delighting in her achievements. Once I ran into her and seeing she was beautifully dressed, asked, with just a strain of mischief, whether she was off to a fancy ball. Not at all; she had just come from a remedial writing class. Didn't her students mind those fancy clothes? Why should they, she answered, they knew she dressed for them.

About no other person in the world would one believe that, yet all of her friends here would surely recognize it as a complete truth. Mina never condescended to students with pap about the "creative" benefits of illiteracy; nor patronized them with a rant about "maintaining standards." She knew her job was hard, and went about it. If she came to class in beautiful clothes, well, of course her students would enjoy it. They, unlike professors, knew something about style. And they knew she was their friend: strict, patient, undeluded, sustaining.

Whatever is good in this battered university, whatever we still have of the genuine and sincere, found its embodiment in her work. As long as she was there, battling for her people, one kept some faith. Her remarkable book is a masterpiece of its kind, a triumph of intelligence over lazy habits, of tact over mere method. All the rhetoric of cynicism which has made our culture so dismal these past 7 or 8 years, could be dissolved in a minute by the hard-headed purity of determination that rang in her voice.

There is a mystery here of human character, the force of true conviction, and how profoundly it can affect people as they recognize its presence. It is a kind of authority, without bluster or prophecy, ego or system. And as a result one wanted to please her, not just personally but ethically. Her mildest disappointment was a judgment to avoid; her mildest approbation, a pleasurable reward.

She did not want to die; no, she wanted desperately to live. She was at the peak of her gifts. She was vital and beautiful. She had work to do. She was loved, and human enough to enjoy being loved. The decades of which she was cheated—one wants to rail against the outrage of it. Some of us may find modes of reconciliation, and blessings to those who can; but for me, perhaps others, there is a need to express the feeling that the death of this splendid woman reveals an injustice at the very heart of things.

Yet even in rebellion against this unbearable waste, one wants also to fumble, not to reconciliation but to some terms of peace. The Hebrew prayer asks for “perfect rest for the ceased, in the exalted places among the holy and the pure, who shine as the brightness of the firmament.” Brightness—that is the word one wants here. The brightness of her, the memory that at least once in our lives there shone among us a figure of moral radiance.

Irving Howe

She left an inestimable legacy of connections for her survivors. Her work illuminates the links between literacy and illiteracy, between student and teacher, writer and reader, grammar and literature, between the failures of our society and its visions. She is one of our major educational theorists, whose quality I believe will be recognized more and more as time goes on; I would place her with Maria Montessori, Paolo Freire, Ivan Illich, among the greatest of those who have understood that intelligence is not determined by privilege.

Adrienne Rich

Note

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Mina P. Shaughnessy

SOME NEW APPROACHES TOWARD TEACHING¹

Teaching Basic Writing

I

The term “basic writing” implies that there is a place to begin learning to write, a foundation from which the many special forms and styles of writing rise, and that a college student must control certain skills that are common to all writing before he takes on the special demands of a biology or literature or engineering class. I am not certain this is so. Some students learn how to write in strange ways. I recall one student who knew something about hospitals because she had worked as a nurse’s aide. She decided, long before her sentences were under control, to do a paper on female diseases. In some way this led her to the history of medicine and then to Egypt, where she ended up reading about embalming—which became the subject of a long paper she entitled “Post-mortem Care in Ancient Egypt.” The paper may not have satisfied a professor of medical history, but it produced more improvement in the student’s writing than any assignments I could have devised.

Perhaps if students with strong enthusiasms in special fields were allowed to exercise themselves in those fields under the guidance of professors who felt responsible for the writing as well as the reading of students, we could shorten the period of apprenticeship. But clearly this is not the way things are, and students who need extra work in writing are therefore placed in courses called Basic Writing, which are usually taught by English teachers who, as specialists themselves, are inclined to assume that the best way to teach writing is to talk about literature. If such talk will stimulate the student to write, however, then it will serve most students at least as well as mummies, for the answer to improved writing is writing. Everything

else—imaginative writing texts, thoughtfully designed assignments, elaborate rationales for teaching writing this way or that—is merely part of the effort to get writing started and to keep it going.

There are many views on the best way to do this and there is some damning evidence piled up against some of the ways that once seemed right. Since English teachers are often considered both the victims and the perpetrators of these apparently mistaken approaches, it becomes important for them to try once in a while to think away everything except the facts and insights that their experiences with students as writers have given them.

The following pages are my effort to do this.

II

Writing is the act of creative reading. That is, it is the encoding of speech into lines of print or script that are in turn decoded into speech by a reader. To understand the nature of writing, and therefore the way writing can be learned, it is necessary to understand the connections and distinctions between speech, writing, and reading and to identify the skills that are implied in the ability to write.

For most people, speech is easy and writing is difficult; the one is inevitable, the other acquired, generally under conditions that seem to violate rather than use the natural learning abilities of people. Because of this violation, learning to write requires almost as much undoing as doing, whether one is involved with those skills implied in the encoding process itself (handwriting, spelling, and punctuation) or those skills that are carried over from speech to the page (making and ordering statements).

Beyond these two types of skills, there is an additional opportunity in writing that distinguishes it both as a skill and as a product: the opportunity to objectify a statement, to look at it, change it by additions, subtractions, substitutions or inversions, the opportunity to take time for as close and economical a “fit” as possible between the writer’s meaning and the record of that meaning on the page. The typescript of a taped discussion is not, therefore, writing in this sense; it is, rather, a repetition on the page of what was spoken. And the goal in writing is not simply to repeat speech but to overcome certain disadvantages that the medium of sound imposes upon speech. (In speech, time says when you are finished; in writing, you say when you are finished.)

Writing thus produces a distinctive circuitry in which the writer continually feeds back to himself (as writer and reader) and acts upon that feedback at any point and for as long a time as he wishes before his statement is finally put into circulation. This opportunity for objectifying a statement so as to "work" on it is the distinctive opportunity of writing, and the central goal of any writing class is therefore to lead the student to an awareness of his power to make choices (semantic, syntactic, organizational) that bring him closer and closer to his intended meaning. Ideally, this opportunity should free the writer because it increases his options; it should give him pleasure because it sharpens his sense of what to say and thereby his pleasure in saying it; and it should make him feel comfortable with so-called mistakes, which are simply stages in the writing process. Unfortunately, the fact that writing can by its very nature produce a more precise and lasting statement than speech has led teachers to expect (and demand) a narrow kind of perfection which they confuse with the true goal in writing, namely, the "perfect" fit of the writer's words to his meaning. Teachers, in other words, have not only ignored the distinctive circuitry of writing—which is the only source of fullness and precision—but have often shortcircuited the writing activity by imposing themselves as a feedback. Students, on the other hand, have tended to impose upon themselves (even when bluebook essays do not) the conditions of speech, making writing a kind of one-shot affair aimed at the teacher's expectations. Students are usually surprised, for example, to see the messy manuscript of pages of famous writers. "You should see how bad a writer Richard Wright was," one of my students said after seeing a manuscript page from *Native Son*. "He made more mistakes than I do!" Somehow students have to discover that the mess is *writing*; the published book is *written*.

A writing course should help the student learn how to make his own mess, for the mess is the record of a remarkable kind of interplay between the writer as creator and the writer as reader, which serves the writer in much the same way as the ear serves the infant who is teaching himself to speak. No sooner has the writer written down what he thinks he means than he is asking himself whether he understands what he said. A writing course should reinforce and broaden this interplay, not interrupt it, so that the student can use it to generate his own criteria and not depend upon a grade to know whether he has written well. The teacher can help by designing writing situations that exter-

nalize the circuitry principle. The teacher and the class together can help by telling the writer what they think he said, thereby developing an awareness of the possibilities for meaning or confusion when someone else is the reader.

But if the student is so well-equipped to teach himself to write and the teacher is simply an extension of his audience, why does he need a teacher at all? The answer is, of course, that he doesn't absolutely need a teacher to learn to write, that, in fact, remarkably few people have learned to write through teachers, that many alas, have learned to write in spite of teachers. The writing teacher has but one simple advantage to offer: he can save the student time, and time is important to students who are trying to make up for what got lost in high school and grade school.

To help in even this limited way, a teacher must know what skills are implied in the ability to write what is called basic English and he must understand the nature of the difficulties students seem to have with each of them. The following list is a move in that direction.

Handwriting. The student has to have enough skill at writing to take down his own dictations without getting distracted by the muscular coordination writing requires. If a student has done very little writing in high school, which is often the case, he may need to exercise his writing muscles. This is a quantitative matter—the more of anything he copies, the better the coordination. Malcolm X's exercise of copying the dictionary may not be inspiring enough for many students, but if a student keeps copying something, his handwriting will begin to belong to him. Until then, he is likely to have his problems with handwriting mistaken for problems with writing.

Spelling and Punctuation. To write fluently, a student must feel reasonably comfortable about getting the words and punctuation down right, or he must learn to suspend his concern over correctness until he is ready to proofread. If he is a bad speller, chances are he knows it and will become so preoccupied with correctness that he will constantly lose his thought in order to find the right letters, or he will circumlocute in order to avoid words he can't spell. A number of students enter our classes every semester so handicapped by misspelling and generally so ineffectively taught by us that they are almost certain not to get out of basic writing. It is a problem neither we nor the reading teachers have willingly claimed, but it presses for a solution. The computer, which seems to hold great prom-

ise for misspellers, is still a laboratory. The Fidel chart, so successfully used by Dr. Gattegno in teaching children and illiterate adults to read, has not yet been extensively tried in college programs such as ours.²

Students are generally taught to think of punctuation as the scribal translation of oral phrasing and intonation. Some students have, in fact, been taught to put commas where they breathe. As a translation of voice pauses and intonations, however, punctuation is quite crude and almost impossible to learn. Commas can produce as long a pause as a period, and how much time does a semi-colon occupy? Most students solve the problem by working out a private punctuation system or by memorizing a few "rules" that often get them into more trouble than they are worth (like always putting a comma before "and").

In the end, it is more economical for the student to learn to translate punctuation marks into their conventional meaning and to recognize that while there are stylistic choices in punctuating, even these choices are related to a system of signs that signal grammatical (or structural) information more accurately than vocal spacing and intonation. The marks of punctuation can in fact be studied in isolation from words, as signals that prepare a reader for certain types of constructions. Whether these constructions are given their grammatical names is not important, but it is important that a student be able to reconstruct from a passage such as the following the types of constructions he—and other readers—would expect:

_____ . _____ : _____ .
 _____ , and _____ .
 _____ , _____ , _____ .
 _____ : _____ , _____ , _____ .

Sentence fragments, run-ons, and comma splices are mistranslations of punctuation marks. They can occur only in writing and can be understood once the student understands the structures they signal. This suggests that punctuation marks should not be studied in isolation from the structural units they signal. For example, when the student is experimenting with the ways in which information can be added to a subject without creating a new sentence (adjectival functions), it is a good time to look at the serial comma, the appositional commas, and the comma in the nonrestrictive clause.

Making Sentences. An English-speaking student is already a maker of statements that not only sound like English but sound

like him. Because he has spoken so many more years of sentences than he has written, however, there is a gap between what he can say and what he can write. Sometimes the writing down of sentences is in fact such a labor that he loses his connection with English and produces a tangle of phrases he would never speak. Such a student does not need to learn how to make statements but how to write them at least as well as he speaks them. Other students with foreign-language interferences may have to work on English sentence structure itself, but even here their speech is doubtless ahead of their pens. Learning to write statements, therefore, is at first a matter of getting the ear to "hear" script. Later, when the writer wants to exploit the advantages that writing has over speech, the advantage of polishing and perfecting, he may write things he would not be likely to say, but this happens after his pen has caught up with his voice. Students who have little confidence in their voice, or at least in the teacher's response to that voice, have often gone to a great deal of trouble to superimpose another voice upon their writing—sometimes it represents the student's version of a textbook voice; sometimes it is Biblical; sometimes it is a business letter voice—but almost always it seems to keep the writer from understanding clearly what he wants to say. The following sentence, which seems to be a version of the textbook voice, illustrates the kind of entanglement that can result:

In a broad sense admittance to the SEEK program will serve as a basis of education for me in terms of enlightenment on the tedious time and effort which one must put into all of his endeavors.

A student will usually not abandon this acquired voice until he begins to recognize his own voice and sees that it is safe to prefer it.

There is another skill with sentences which affects the quality of a student's theme as well as his sentences. It involves his ability to "mess" with sentences, to become sensitive to the questions that are embedded in sentences which, when answered, can produce modifications within the sentence or can expand into paragraphs or entire essays. It involves his awareness of the choices he has in casting sentences, of styles in sentences. As Francis Christensen has illustrated in *Notes Toward a New Rhetoric*,³ the sentence is the microcosm. Whatever the writer does in the sentence when he modifies is in principle what he does in paragraphs and essays. The principle of coordination and subordination can be learned there. The foun-

dation of a paragraph, a chapter, a book is there. It is tempting to say that a student who knows his way around the sentence can get any place in writing. And knowing his way means working on his own sentences, not so much to polish them as to see how much of his meaning they can hold.

But for many students, putting sentences on a page seems a little like carving something on stone: an error cannot be ignored or skimmed over as it can be in speech. It is there forever. "Everything has to be exactly right," explained one of my students, "and that makes me nervous." The page disconnects the student from his product, which will appear alone, before strange eyes, or worse, before the eyes of an English teacher who is a specialist at finding mistakes. To make matters worse, most students feel highly mistake-prone about sentences. They half remember prohibitions about beginning with certain words, but they aren't certain of which words or why (probably the result of lessons on sentence fragments). In short, they feel they are about to commit a verbal sin but they aren't certain what sin is. In such a situation, it seems safer to keep still. It is not unusual to have students at the beginning of the semester who sit through several class periods without writing a word, and when they explain that they don't know how to begin, they are not saying they don't have an idea. They are saying they are not certain which are the "safe" words to begin with.

Students who become observers of sentences and experimenters with sentences lose their fear of them. This experimentation can take many forms. Sentences can be examined as if they were separate compositions. A sentence such as the following by Richard Wright can be written on the board without reference to its context:

Those brave ones who struggle against death are the ones who bring new life into the world, even though they die to do so, even though our hearts are broken when they die.

Students can talk about the way the sentence is built; they can try to imitate it or change it; or they can try to build a paragraph by expanding some part of it.

There is a kind of carpentry in sentence making, various ways of joining or hooking up modifying units to the base sentence. Suffixes added to make adjectives or adverbs, prepositions, -wh words like where, when, who, which, etc., the double commas used in appositional constructions—all of these can be seen as hooking devices that preserve us from the te-

dium of Dick-and-Jane sentences. As a form of sentence-play, students can try to write 50- or 100-word sentences that contain only one independent clause. Once discovering they can do it, they usually lose their inhibitions about "real" sentences. Some even move from carpentry to architecture. This sentence was written by a student who was asked in an exam to add information to the predicate of the sentence: "The problem will be solved."

The problem will be solved with the help of the Almighty, who, except for an occasional thunderstorm, reigns unmolested, high in the heavens above, when all of us, regardless of race or religious differences, can come together and study this severe problem inside out, all day and all night if necessary, and are able to come to you on that great gettin' up morning and say, "Mrs. Shaughnessy, we do know our verbs and adverbs."

Ordering Sentences. Order is an arrangement of units that enables us to see them as parts of something larger. The sense of orientation that results from this arrangement creates a pleasure we call understanding. Perhaps because writing isolates a reader from everything except the page, whereas speech is supported by other gestures and by the right of the audience to query and disagree, we seem to be more tolerant of "disorder" (no clear pattern) in speech than in writing. The talker is not, therefore, committed to knowing where he is going in quite the way that a writer is although he often gets someplace in a way that turns out to have order to it. The writer, however, puts himself on the line, announcing where he is going to go before he sees how he is going to get there. He has to move in two directions at the same time—ahead, point by point toward a destination he has announced but never been to, and down, below the surface of his points to see what they are about. Sometimes, having decided on or having been given an over-all arrangement (or plan) that seems a sensible route to where he is going, the writer hesitates to leave the security of this plan to explore the parts of his paper. Result: a tight, well-ordered but empty paper. At other times, the writer stops to explore one point and never gets back because he cannot get control over the generating force of sentences, which will create branches off branches off branches unless the writer cuts them off. Result: a wilderness.

The skill of organizing seems to require a kind of balance between the demand that a piece of writing get someplace along

a route that is sufficiently marked for a reader to follow and the demand that there be freedom for the writer to explore his subject and follow where his questions and inventions take him. The achievement of this balance produces much of the "mess" in writing. Often, however, teachers stress the "administrative" aspects of writing (direction and procedure) over the generative or even assume that the generative is not a part of the organizing skill. This assumption in turn seems to lead to the formulation of organizational patterns in isolation from content (pyramids, upside-down pyramids, etc.) and the efforts to get students to squeeze their theme materials into these patterns. I do not mean to say that restrictions or limits in writing are necessarily inhibiting. They can be both stimulating and liberating, as the sonnet illustrates. But the restrictions I speak of here merely hint at forms they are unable to generate, leaving the reader with the feeling that there is a blank to be filled in but with no sense of how to do it.

Because of this isolation of form from content, students have come to think of organization as something special that happens in themes but not in themselves, daily, as they think or talk. They do not notice that they usually "talk" a better-organized paper than they write, that they use illustrations, anticipate questions, repeat thematic points more effectively in conversation than in writing, whereas the conscious effort to organize a theme often cuts them off from the real content of the theme, giving them all the organizational signposts but no place to go. In talking, they are evolving order; in writing, they often feel they must impose it.

This is not to say that developing a paper is as easy as talking but simply that the difficulty lies not in fitting an amount of raw content into a pre-fabricated frame but in evoking and controlling the generating power of statement. Every sentence bears within it a new set of possibilities. Sometimes the writer chooses to develop these possibilities; sometimes he prefers to let them lie. Sometimes he decides to develop them fully; at other times, only slightly. Thus each step in the development of a base or thesis statement must inevitably send the writer into a wilderness of possibilities, into a fecundity as dense and multiform as thought itself. One cannot be said to have had an idea until he has made his way through this maze. Order is the pattern of his choices, the path he makes going through.

The initial blocking out of a paper, the plan for it, is a kind of hypothesis which allows the writer to proceed with his

investigation. Any technique of organization, however, that ignores the wilderness, that limits the freedom of the writer to see and make choices at every step, to move ahead at times without knowing for certain which is north and south, then to drop back again and pick up the old path, and finally to get where he is going, partly by conscious effort but also by some faculty of intellection that is too complex to understand—any technique that sacrifices this fullest possible play of the mind for the security of an outline or some other prefabricated frame cuts the student off from his most productive thinking. He must be allowed something of a frontier mentality, an over-all commitment, perhaps, to get to California, but a readiness, all along the way, to choose alternative routes and even to sojourn at unexpected places when that seems wise or important, sometimes, even, to decide that California isn't what the writer really had in mind.

The main reason for failure in the writing proficiency test at City College, a test given to all upper classmen, has not been grammar or mechanics but the inability to get below the surface of a topic, to treat a topic in depth. The same problem arises in blue-book essays. It is the familiar complaint of students: "I can't think of anything more to say." They are telling us that they do not have access to their thoughts when they write. A part of this difficulty may be related to the way they have learned to write. And a part of the answers may lie in our designing assignments that make the student conscious of what the exploration of an idea is and how this exploration relates to organization.

Grammatical Correctness. Correctness involves those areas of a dialect where there are no choices. (The "s" on the present tense 3rd person singular is correct in standard English; the use of a plural verb with the subject "none" is a choice; the comparison "more handsome" is a choice but "more intelligenter" is incorrect.) Native speakers of a dialect are not concerned with correctness; they unconsciously say things the correct way. Non-native speakers of a dialect must consciously acquire the "givens" if they want to communicate without static in that dialect. This is a linguistic fact that seems at the outset to put speakers of a non-standard dialect at a disadvantage. But it is a strange logic that says having access to one dialect is better than having access to two, particularly when we know that every dialect or language system sets limits on the ways we can perceive and talk about the world.

Unfortunately, this is not the way speakers of other dialects have been encouraged to think about their dialects, with the result that writing classes and writing teachers seem to put them at a disadvantage, creating either an obsessive concern with correctness or a fatalistic indifference to it. The only thing that can help the student overcome such feelings is to help him gain control over the dialect. It is irresponsible to tell him that correctness is not important; it is difficult to persuade him after years of indoctrination to the contrary that "correctness" plays a subordinate role in good writing; but it is not impossible to give him the information and practice he needs to manage his own proofreading.

The information will inevitably be grammatical, whether the terminology of grammar is used or not. But it is more important to remember that the student who is not at home with standard English has most likely had several doses of grammar already and it hasn't worked. For reasons that he himself doesn't quite understand, the explanations about things like the third-person "s" or the agreement of subject and verb haven't taken. He is not deliberately trying to make mistakes but for some reason they keep happening. What he often does not realize, and what the teacher has to realize is that his difficulties arise from his *mastery* of one language or dialect, and that changing to another often involves at certain points a loss or conflict of meaning and therefore difficulty in learning, not because he is stubborn or dumb or verbally impoverished but because he expects language to make sense. (The student, for example, who finally told me he *couldn't* use "are" to mean something in the present because it was too stiff and formal and therefore faraway, and the Chinese student who could not make a plural out of sunrise because there is only one sun, were both trying to hold on to meaning, as Will James, the cowboy author, was when, he continued to use "seen" for the past tense because it meant seeing farther than "saw.")

These are obviously grammatical matters, but this does not mean they require the traditional study of grammar. The question of what they do require is widely debated. Certainly it should be apparent that teachers working with students who have black dialect or Spanish or Chinese or some other language background should be familiar with the features of those languages that are influencing their students' work in Standard English. This should be part of the general equipment of us all as teachers. And the new insights that come from the linguists

should also be ours. But none of this information will be of much use if we simply make pronouncements about it in class. Students cannot be expected to get more help from memorizing two grammatical systems instead of one, and the diagrams in transformational grammar are still diagrams. The acquisition of new information will not automatically make us better teachers. To make this happen, we need to develop a sharp sense of the difference between talking and teaching. We need to design lessons that highlight the grammatical characteristics of a dialect so that the student can discover them for himself. (It is one thing to tell a student about the "s" in the third-person present singular; it is another for him to discover the power of that schizophrenic letter which clings so irrationally to its last verb to mark its singularity while it attaches itself to nouns to mark their plurality, and then, confusing things further, acquires an apostrophe and marks the singular possessive.) We need to devise ways of practicing that the student enjoys because he is able to invent rather than memorize answers. We need, finally, to teach proofreading as a separate skill that uses the eye in a different way from reading and places the burden of correctness where it belongs--at the end of (rather than during) the writing process. To do things for the student that he can do himself is not generosity but impatience. It is hard work for a teacher not to talk, but we must now be very industrious if we want our students to learn what we have to teach.

III

I have been speaking about the skills that seem basic to writing, but basic writing courses that prepare students for college writing are actually concerned with a rather special kind of prose called exposition, a semi-formal analytical prose in which the connections between sentences and paragraphs surface in the form of conjunctive adverbs and transitional sentences. More simply, it means the kind of writing teachers got B's and A's for in college, a style whose characteristics they have now internalized and called a standard.

Teachers of basic writing are thus responsible for helping their students learn to write in an expository style. They must also give them practice in writing to specification (i.e., on a special topic or question and in a certain form) since many assignments require it. The question of how to reach such objectives and at the same time give each student a chance to discover other things about writing and about his individual

powers as a writer troubles many teachers and creates many different “positions.” Where, for example, on the following list, ranging from highly controlled to free assignments, is it best to begin a course in basic writing:

1. paraphrase
2. summary
3. exegesis of a passage
4. theme in which topic sentence and organizational pattern are given
5. theme in which topic sentence is given (includes the examination question which is usually an inverted topic sentence)
6. theme in which subject is given
7. theme in which form is given—description, dialogue, argument, etc.
8. theme in which only the physical conditions for writing are given—journal, free writing, etc.

Teachers take sides on such a question, some insisting that freedom in anything, including writing, cannot exist until there is control and that this comes through the step by step mastery of highly structured assignments; others insist that students must begin not with controls but with materials—the things they have already seen or felt or imagined—and evolve their own controls as they try to translate experience into writing. Meanwhile students confuse the issue by learning to write and not learning to write under almost all approaches. I prefer to start around #7, with description. But then, I have to remember the student who started a research paper on mummies before she could manage her sentences. “Positions” on curriculae and methods are somehow always too neat to say much about learning, which seems to be sloppy. They tend to be generalizations about students, not about the nature of the skills that have to be mastered, and the only generalization that seems safe to make about students is the ones they persistently make about themselves—that they are individuals, not types, and that the way to each student’s development is a way the teacher has never taken before. Everything about the teacher-student encounter should encourage a respect for this fact of individuality even though the conditions under which we must teach in large institutions often obscure it. Books do have to be ordered and teachers do have to make plans. But perhaps the plans need not be so well-laid that they cannot go awry when the signals point

that way. A teacher must know deeply what it is he is teaching—what is arbitrary or given and what is built upon skills the student already possesses. This is his preparation. But he cannot know about his student until both meet in the classroom. Then teaching becomes what one student described as “simply two people learning from each other.”

In the confusion of information on methods and curriculae that comes to us from publishers—and from each other—it is probably important to emphasize this single truth.

Notes

¹Reprinted by permission from *A Guide for Teachers of College English*. New York: Office of Academic Development, CUNY, 1970.

²Caleb Gattegno, *Teaching Reading with Words in Color*, Educational Solutions, Inc., New York, 1968.

³Francis Christensen, *Notes Toward a New Rhetoric*, New York, Harper & Row, 1967.

Mina Shaughnessy

THE ENGLISH PROFESSOR'S MALADY¹

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 underemployed 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, per-

haps, 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, 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 freshmen 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 writing⁶ 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.

Note

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