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Creating an Environment Which Produces Improved Student Writing

George David Brown

Eastern Illinois University

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CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH PRODUCES

IMPROVED STUDENT WRITING

(TITLE)

BY

George David Brown

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1978

YEAR

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CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH PRODUCES
IMPROVED STUDENT WRITING

By

George David Brown

A THESIS

Submitted to
Eastern Illinois University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH EDUCATION

Department of English

CREATING AN ENVIRONMENT WHICH PRODUCES
IMPROVED STUDENT WRITING

BY

GEORGE DAVID BROWN

A. B. in Chr. Ed., Lincoln Christian College, 1975

ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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at the Graduate School
of Eastern Illinois University

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ABSTRACT

Plato said, "When the mind thinks, it talks to itself." The mind must use words when developing ideas, when formulating concepts, when digesting and assimilating information. When the student writes, the mind should think. However, this does not always occur. The main problem in student writing is that the student does not think. For writing is thinking, the most exact and exacting kind of thinking.

This thesis suggests that in order to improve student writing, the conditions for improved thinking must exist. These conditions would include a change of environment from the traditional, authoritarian one to an open, self-appraising one. In the traditional classroom, there is little room for independent thought; the teacher usually asks questions to which he already knows the answers; he has students follow texts which are often arbitrarily chosen, and therefore, often inappropriate; students write for one person, a hypercritical one, who is more interested in the technical aspects of the paper than the ideas; and the writing assignments are often unrelated to student life except that the student will be equated with the paper and an arbitrary measurement will determine the student's worth accordingly.

The main sources for this study are James Moffett, Herbert Muller, Neil Postman, Charles Weingartner, Ken Macrorie, and Frank O'Hare. The synthesis of their ideas has resulted in a

revitalization of a philosophy expounded by John Dewey. His belief that students learn what they do is upheld by recent research in the area of thinking, especially as it is related to writing skills. If students are given opportunity to think, they will learn to do so. By putting an emphasis on the thinking aspect rather than the technical aspects of writing, the teacher is able to motivate students to care to improve their writing because they see a need to do so.

This need for radical revision has been tempered with the realization that the present educational structure does not allow for such changes to be made. But the thesis suggests that some specific, productive changes can be made by the teacher as regards his perspective. After this occurs, the inconveniences of the traditional and/or establishment can be dealt with; it is the teacher, after all, who is the translator of the environment.

Finally, this paper is not a curriculum guide; it cannot be because the curriculum must grow out from the students' needs. It advocates a change in perspective and suggests that such a change will result in students who think. And students who think will write better because writing is thinking.

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My wife says I must publicly thank her for typing the final draft, so at this time I do. Thanks, Kathy.

CHAPTER I

THE STUDENT IS THE SUBJECT

Herbert J. Muller, whose book, The Uses of English, was a compilation of the ideas and sentiments expressed at the Dartmouth conference on English, said, "English teachers go on as if . . . composition is absolutely essential, much more important and practical than literature; yet nothing on record is taught less effectively, amid more confusion and conflict of theory, or hunch."¹ The seminar pursued ways to make the teaching of writing more effective, more in line with what is known from research. Since the conference and the book's publication in 1967, there have been some important discoveries which would clarify some of the processes of writing. But in order for the research to be of value, it must fit the curriculum, and the curriculum must fit the philosophy of the educational system. The philosophy must be built on what is known about how language is learned, which is what research teaches.

The problem, therefore, is in stepping outside the traditional educational system in order to see what the research is saying. If it is suggesting changes in the philosophy of education, those changes should be made. It is of no value to apply the innovative techniques of recent research to traditional systems when the effectiveness of the techniques is in the philo-

sophy as much as in the techniques.

This paper is an attempt to analyze the research and to develop a general philosophy based on positive results of the research. In 1959, at Woods Hole, Massachusetts, a group of educators gathered to decide what English teachers should teach. They were led by Jerrold Zacharias and Jerome Bruner. Their answer was consistent with Dewey's model: "The ideal was clarity and self-direction of intellect in the use of modern knowledge."² The purpose of education, as they saw it, was to teach students how to think. Research has been substantiating this goal as the one which has positive results. Such a simple statement of education's aim can result in a radical change in curriculum. For English, especially, this change in perspective will mean change in structure and content.

It is erroneous to believe that the language is the "content" of English. I. A. Richards said that "learning how to describe a language is not at all the same as learning how to use it with power and discernment."³ Language is not a body of knowledge which must be transferred from the text to the student; the student already possesses a knowledge of language. What he needs is practice in using his language in meaningful ways. In English, teachers who feel that a knowledge of terminologies and/or transformational devices is essential preparation for teaching students to write are following a false logic. Michael Scriven makes this analogy to show the fallacy of such argument: it is like believing that "one cannot swim without having a satisfactory theory of hydrostatics, hydrodynamics and physiology of immersed activity."⁴ These teachers are overly concerned with how a

language works rather than how to teach students to use language effectively. Such teachers are doubly detrimental to their students.

Not only do they believe in a content to be transferred, they transfer an erroneous concept. As the study done by Rosenthal on experimenters and rats shows, people, seeing what they have been conditioned to see, influence the outcome to occur as it was predicted to occur.⁵ The perception a teacher has toward a subject is translated to the student; if the teacher believes English to be a body of knowledge separate from the student, the student will see the course as one which is to be taken, and, once taken is over and does not need to be taken again. This is called the inoculation theory of education. The material is abstracted from the student, and the student is deprived of the knowledge that his use of language and the way language is used on him will affect every facet of his life.

James Moffett says we must "re-conceive the subject in such a way that we can talk simultaneously about both the operations of the field and the operations of the learner."⁶ The learner is the subject and his use of language is the curriculum. According to Korzybski, this is the only way that language can be taught, for several reasons: 1) meaning is not in words--meaning is in people and whatever meanings words have are ascribed by people, 2) the word is not the thing, and 3) semantic awareness is an extension of the consciousness of abstracting, an awareness of varying levels of abstraction.⁷ This fits Piaget's theory on development of symbolic expression, which depends on nothing less than general mental growth. Language is contingent on the mind's

ability to grow from egocentricity. Moffett says, "The teacher's art is to move with this movement, a subtle act possible only if he shifts his gaze from the subject to the learner, for the subject is in the learner."⁸

Training a student in an awareness of the manner in which he uses language, and language is used on him, will be the basis on which the student can understand his world. This process of acting on someone through words is an art. Moffett would organize his course so that students would become aware of the mental processes involved in selecting, reorganizing and coding material. The aim of such a course would be to teach students to present material successfully. They would be taught to consider subjects, audiences, syntactic manipulations, order and logic in developing material.⁹

According to Moffett, the principle concept for teaching composition is this:

Composition means handling both dimensions [selecting material and considering audience] at once; a speaker must stand in some relation to both his subject and his audience. It is not always possible . . . to tell which choices of words and organization stemmed from selective summary of the subject and which from an effort at getting certain effects on an audience. . . . So to delineate a sequence of kinds of discourse, we must use two dimensions of abstracting as coordinates with which to map the universe of discourse. ¹⁰

Rhetoric involves training the student in growth from himself, in learning perspectives which were initially alien, in assimilating experiences other than his own, and applying all of this to his writing. Moffett calls this a naturalistic language curriculum, one which teaches according to the relations of speaker-listener-subject, functionally and holistically. The student is involved in actual discourse in which he learns and

improves upon the basic components of style, logic, semantics, rhetoric, and literary form by writing in the first and second person.¹¹ Through practice in many types of writing situations to effect different results the student progresses in his ability to preferentially select that combination which is most effective. Moffett asserts that "increased consciousness of abstracting has as much to do with developmental growth as has progression up the abstraction ladder."¹² Moffett believes that students' ability to communicate will grow in direct relation to their awareness of the constructs of language.

In order to make students aware of the language, the factors involved in choice, the teacher must make those decisions important to the student. And the student must feel he is making important decisions. Most importantly, the student must learn to appraise information, to have a system of analyzing language. Moffett says, "Increasingly, in the future, people will need to know, not how to store and retrieve information, which can be done by machines, but what the nature of information is and how it can be best abstracted. This is why, ultimately, substance is less important in English than structure."¹³ The aim of a curriculum based on this philosophy is to teach students to think. The thinking will cause an improvement in composition skills.

CHAPTER II

RESEARCH VERSUS GRAMMARS AND TEXTS

In much traditional education, which includes the use of texts and grammars, thinking is subordinate to memorization and drills. Research has shown these grammar practices to be ineffective in improving student writing, most probably because of the separation of the student and the content. Following is a list of recent research which indicates the adverse effects of traditional English education. This listing is by no means exhaustive.

Examination of studies before transformational-generative grammar (1957) showed that the relationship between formal grammar study and writing is very weak. Frank O'Hare reviewed a number of these studies and concluded:

Study after study tested the hypothesis that there was a positive relationship between the study of grammar and some aspect or other of composition. Result after result denied the hypothesis. Many findings either clearly indicated, or at least strongly suggested, that the study of grammar not only did not have the desired result, but that there also resulted some undesirable side effects. 14

Herbert Muller noted that a study of five hundred research projects on the methods of teaching composition (with the aid of a munificent grant of \$13,345 by the U.S. Office of Education) revealed how inconclusive most of the findings were: "The clearest agreement was that the study of traditional grammar had a

negligible effect on the improvement of writing."¹⁵

James Moffett says flatly, "Grammar has nothing to do with style beyond the elementary properties . . . little if anything in the study of grammar will help him to speak or write more effectively."¹⁶

Hayakawa explains the problem as a self-perpetuating one. "The problem is that students begin by writing poorly. To improve the students' writing, the English teacher says, 'I must teach them the fundamentals of grammar, spelling and punctuation.' He then places excessive emphasis on the grammar and ignores the students' ideas. He destroys student interest, confidence, and trust. This accomplished, the student writes even more poorly and the teacher redoubles his effort."¹⁷

Semour Yesner says academic writing is viewed as a trap by the students, and not a way of saying something. The student, "aware that he leaves a trail of errors behind him when he writes . . . can usually think of little else while he is writing."¹⁸

Elisabeth F. Haynes, in a recent English Journal article, did a compilation of much research done in recent years.

In 1935 the Curriculum Commission of the National Council of Teachers of English reported that scientific studies had not shown that the study of grammar was effective in eliminating errors. Strom in 1960 published a summary of over fifty studies . . . and concluded that a knowledge of traditional grammar has little effect on accurate expression in writing and speaking. She stated that the investigations show overwhelmingly that direct methods are more effective in improving writing than are grammar drills and diagramming.¹⁹

Transformational grammar did not fare any better in effecting better writing habits in students. According to Sherwin, the findings of studies to date support the viewpoint that linguistics is about as effective as traditional grammar in improving writing.²⁰

O'Hare summarized the evidence by noting that while a knowledge of transformational and traditional grammar is an indispensable tool for the researcher and a potentially useful tool for the teacher of English, "there is no justification for assuming that it will help students write better."²¹ Although grammar is an important part of knowledge, it lacks utilitarian value. As Postman said, the study of grammar does not belong in the center of language and communication study, but rather, it belongs on the periphery.²²

The research aside, there is still evidence that grammar is an ineffective tool--the students themselves. Not only do they not write better, but they do not retain the information. Each year the student is retaught grammar terminologies, drilled in identification, made to memorize forms which he promptly forgets as soon as the study is concluded. Students do not see the need to apply the rules of grammar to their writing, and it does no good to force (by coercion or threat of grades) students to learn those rules for a class, a test, a day, when the student sees no need to retain them for later application. So why do English teachers teach grammar?

They teach grammar for the same reason they correct student writing for grammatical errors. First, they were taught to. Second, they would feel guilty, as though they were not doing their job, if they did not. And yet, like grammar drills, correction has little effect on student writing. In experiments on the effects of traditional correction, the results have shown minimal difference between the counts of errors between papers

thoroughly corrected by teachers and papers given only low marks. John Fellows (1931) found no differences between the two methods in his study, nor did Lois V. Arnold and Dwight L. Burton (1962). Correction is time-consuming and ineffectual, yet tradition and habit make it the dominant trend in teaching writing.²³

Most probably, grammar drills and grammar correction fail for the same reasons: 1) the student is not actively involved, 2) the emphasis is on the product rather than the process, and 3) the format is negatively oriented; it assumes ignorance on the part of the student.

Actually, the reverse is true. The fact is that the child has an intuitive grasp of the grammar apart from its terminologies. Linguists have said for several decades that the child masters the basic structure of his language by the age of five, in addition to a vocabulary of several thousand words.²⁴ Ken Macrorie points out that by the age of six, a child often speaks rhythmically and metaphorically.²⁵ All of this is accomplished outside the inhibiting, negatively-oriented traditional educational system. In ignoring this almost innate ability the student possesses, and instead, concentrating on the ignorance of the terminologies of traditional grammar study, teachers discredit one of the greater intellectual achievements the child ever makes.

The adverse effects of grammar correctness are demonstrated by the dialectical problem posed by standard English. Students from non-standard dialectal backgrounds, whose dialect is consistent with the home environs, are judged by the standard dialect as incorrect. For a student to accept the standard dialect as correct, he must admit the limitations of his family's

language. Moffett says that learning to write correctly involves a shift in dialect as well. Therefore, to join the preferred speech community, the student must make a psychological transition. He says, "Teaching a prescriptive body of rules designed to induce correctness appears blandly technical and humanely naive."²⁶

Moffett has a similar disrespect for the textbook as a writing tool. The following quotation is a summary of two chapters he devoted to deleting grammar study and textbook usage from the curriculum.

They [textbooks] install in the classroom a mistaken and unwarranted method of learning. They take time, money, and energy that should be spent on authentic writing, reading, and speaking. They get between the teacher and his students, making it difficult for the teacher to understand what they need, and to play a role that would give them the full benefit of group process. They add secondary problems of their own making. They sometimes promote actual mislearning. They kill spontaneity and the sense of adventure for both teacher and students. They make writing appear strange and technical so that students dissociate it from familiar language behavior that should support it. Their dullness and arbitrariness alienate students from writing. Because they predict and pre-package, they are bound to be inappropriate for some school populations, partly irrelevant to individual students, and ill-timed for all. ²⁷

Until reliance on traditional or transformational grammar is eliminated from the curriculum, the important innovations supported by research cannot be implemented. Until teacher reliance on texts is eliminated, the main obstacle to actual communication will continue to defeat the efforts of the most dedicated of teachers. There is no content apart from the student.

CHAPTER III

THE DEWEY PRINCIPLE

A good curriculum, on the other hand, is one in which the teacher helps the student see what he is doing with language, and, by means of this awareness, see what in particular he might be doing. Moffett maintains that student writing should not be mere exercises, but rather authentic discourse. The direction of the learning process necessitates that the students first have an intent, second, that they have a content. After these essentials are met, students can be made aware of the technical points. To have students work on the minute aspects without placing importance first on the intent is to perpetuate the problem Hayakawa delineated. The student must be involved in the writing process; to try to involve them in the technical aspects before they are committed to the work is to alienate them from the whole process. More often than not, it is this animosity toward the work which produces grammatical errors, not ignorance.

In improving student writing, the teacher is actually stimulating the cognitive abilities of the student. Moffett notes several factors which need to be remembered in consideration of this:

The reasons why children do not elaborate as much as adults stem from causes other than ignorance of grammar. . .

They may have trouble holding in their minds at once several syntactic relations or levels of embedding. They are not intellectually ready to relate ideas in logical ways other than temporal, or to range ideas in a hierarchy of subordination, or even to perceive the listener's need for such ranging and emphasis. They need to hear and read a lot of elaborated sentences so that they can internalize the forms and relations. And they have to discover, through speaking and writing, the deficiencies of simple sentences. They must construct sentences that answer the felt needs of their maturing thought, their exchanges in conversation, and their efforts to fit what they write to what they have to say. There is good reason to believe that the final answer to linguistic elaboration lies beyond language, in general cognitive development, and that intellectual stimulation is far more likely to accelerate syntactic growth than grammar knowledge. 28

The conviction that students must experience higher levels of syntactic maturity, as well as see the need for them, fits the Dewey principle that a student must be actively involved in order to learn. The student must be doing--Deweying. This is the essence of what has been said thus far. The teacher must see the student as an integral part of the content he is to teach. The student must be given opportunities to experiment with language. Moffett feels this is the primary factor in improving language use: "To learn to talk, the child must put his data into action and find out what happens . . . imitation of other's speech, as heard and read remains a major way of learning language forms, but conversational response is the chief means the child has for making progress in speech production itself."²⁹ The teacher's function should be that of a coach. The idea would be to guide the learner by providing feedback and response. The learner's job is to alter his communication in relation to the feedback he elicited. It is essential that the student see the need to alter his writing and the way to alter his writing.

John Dewey's belief in the value of firsthand experience

is upheld by many educators today. Postman and Weingartner readily agree that "it is not what you say to people that counts; it is what you have them do." They point out the neglect of this principle in the traditional classroom.

In most classrooms what students do is sit and listen to the teacher. Mostly, they are required to believe in authorities, or at least pretend to such belief when they take tests. Mostly, they are required to remember. They are almost never required to make observations, formulate definitions, or perform any intellectual operations that go beyond repeating what someone else says is true. They are rarely encouraged to ask substantive questions. 30

Certainly, this message gets through to the students. The way they are taught determines what they will learn. As Marshall McLuhan puts it, "The medium is the message." The result is that, regardless of the ideas expressed within the content, the structure negates any positive images. The traditional structure destroys the thinking initiative. As Postman and Weingartner suggest, the message comes through:

No teacher ever said: "Don't value uncertainty and tentativeness. Don't question questions. Above all, don't think." The message is communicated quietly, insidiously, relentlessly, and effectively through the structure of the classroom. 31

If the message were a book title, it would be I'm OK--You're Not OK. The teacher/student relationship is often anything but conducive to forming students who are independent learners.

Ken Macrorie, in Telling Writing, builds his curriculum on the strategy that students learn by doing. He also strives to make his students aware of the language they use. His primary concern is for the honesty of their language, and such honesty can only come after the experience of manipulating structure so that it says what the student wants it to. He utilizes George Bernard Shaw as an example of Deweying: "I learnt to speak as men

learn to skate or to cycle--by doggedly making a fool of myself until I got used to it. Then I practiced it in the open air-- at the street corner, in the market square, in the park--the best school."³²

CHAPTER IV

MOTIVATING STUDENTS

Peer Group Pressure

The motivation for the activity suggested lies in intellectual stimulation and in emotional stimulation. To get the students to become personally involved in their work, many English educators suggest that the audience be made real. Postman, Weingartner, Moffett, Macrorie and others suggest that the way to do this is to have students write for other students. As Moffett points out, real writing will cause the student to consider all the facets of discourse. But in traditional writing, the problem is in the structure which does not allow for change.

The student is writing to the same old person, the English teacher who has given him a what for by demanding the assignment and by holding the power of grades and disciplinary authority over him. No wonder that what he learns most is to dope out the idiosyncracies of the teacher and give him what he wants. 33

Macrorie calls such writing Engfish, and he, too, blames it on the forced writing which most teachers compel their students to produce: "A program for improved writing . . . will not succeed unless the beginning writer becomes experienced through engaging in critical sessions with his peers. Both good and bad aspects need to be dealt with." 34

Not only is writing for a real audience a motivational fac-

tor, it is instructional as well. Ray C. Maize reported that students who submitted compositions to peers for correction gained as much in writing test scores as did those whose work was evaluated by teachers.³⁵ Additionally, the teachers benefited since they had to spend only one eighth the time after hours to devote to correction.

Macrorie feels the remarks of the student critics are the most valuable response a writer can receive: "Learning to write communicatively is painful, but if the writer builds confidence slowly and solidly, he will rise to the level."³⁶

Moffett admits that the artificiality of the classroom cannot be totally eliminated, but asserts that writing for peers most resembles the way the student will have to read, write, speak and listen in the real world.³⁷ The format he suggests is for the teacher to have the students write for the entire class group, then to have the students read and discuss the writings in a workshop fashion. The immediate positive results are in the number of so-called writing problems which clear up when the student really cares. The student sees his writing as serving a real function, to organize and present his ideas to class members.

Peer group appraisal of student work has a group dynamic effect. It utilizes the positive skills each group member possesses to raise the level of the entire group. Traditional education, on the other hand, negates such potential. As Moffett complained,

Most of the furious flagging of hands and clamorous talking at once in traditional classes is actually provoked by the teacher, who usually has asked a question to which he knows the answer. The children are competitively bidding for the teacher's approval and place no value on what other children say. ³⁸

In effect, students are taught not to communicate in such situations.

Another aspect of peer group appraisal is that the students learn the art of evaluation. Evaluating the work of others requires understanding, establishing a criteria, formulating judgment, and helping to make the necessary improvements in the work itself. Students are actively involved in critical review of the way language is used. Moreover, the relationship of writer and audience can be explored and measured in terms of response. Instead of a delayed and limited response which most teachers write in the margins of student papers, students are able to communicate with an involved audience; they can immediately tell whether or not understanding is communicated. Such reaction is essential for a writer to learn to assess his performance.

Relevancy of Material

Student assessment of one another's writing will work only if the writing assignment is relevant to their needs. The choice of topic is as important as the peer group audience; in actuality, the two should not be divorced in considering the topic. As Moffett pointed out, "The problem with typical composition courses is that they involve meaningless assignments. Too many papers go nowhere in particular because they have nothing to say."³⁹ Relevancy is a necessity for determining the topic. Wendell Johnson complained that teachers fail because they appear to emphasize "writing" instead of "writing-about-something-for-someone: You cannot write writing."⁴⁰

The English teacher cannot act as a real audience because

the student equates him with a parent, authority figure, a grader and a nit-picker. But when students write for other students, they become aware of their need for control over language. They learn to sharpen their awareness, to become more conscious of their abstracting. The more a student understands that his information is relative and can be enlarged and modified, the greater his application of audience consideration.⁴¹ Awareness which leads to openness results in cognitive growth. Students who are able to evaluate, differentiate, and assimilate language and concepts and ideas are capable of mental growth. This is probably the greatest value of the writing process. Writing gives students the ability to control their thinking processes, to formulate them and identify them so that they can be dispassionately judged. It is the ability to judge ideas which needs to be developed. A democracy more than any other society needs literate, informed and critical citizens. It should be the aim of English education to train students to think for themselves.

Freedom to Think

Students passing through traditional English classrooms are missing the opportunity to develop their minds by learning the processes of assimilating information. The traditional classroom has little use for inductive and critical thinking, yet the students need this ability if they are to cope with what has been called future shock. In order to acquire this ability, students must accept responsibility for their learning; but first they must have the opportunity to do so. They must be free to question the system which dictates what they learn and how they

learn it. Postman and Weingartner see the answer in a radical revision of the educational process wherein students learn to ask relevant questions. They suggest that "once you have learned to ask questions--relevant and appropriate and substantial questions--you have learned how to learn and no one can keep you from learning whatever you want and need to know."⁴² The inquiry method is not designed to do better what old environments try to do. They say:

It activates different senses, attitudes, and perceptions; it generates a different, bolder, and more potent kind of intelligence. It will cause teachers and their tests and their grading systems and their curriculums to change.⁴³

Most importantly, it gives students the opportunity to think for themselves.

Moffett sees the need for rational inquiry into language "wherein the students sharpen and subdivide questions until the questions become answerable."⁴⁴ But he warns that such a study should not become a manipulation toward grammar--syntax. It should focus on the language as a reality with which students must cope. In other words, the inquiry environment should not be made to fit the traditional curriculum. It would destroy its basis for existence, that of student freedom to learn responsibility by working with relevant areas of inquiry.

Macrorie favors this movement because it allows students to use their powers, make discoveries, and find alternative paths. He says, "It does not utilize the Errors Approach, but is pragmatic--looks for strategies and tactics that work."⁴⁵ Such an approach requires teachers who are willing to step out from behind the traditional authority which keeps open communication

from occurring. And there is a danger in the inquiry environment.

As Postman points out, "All authorities get nervous when learning is conducted without a syllabus . . . Once you start a young man thinking, there is no telling how he will go."⁴⁶

Such radicalism is against not only the traditional educational system, it goes against the twentieth century's aspiration for man. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. said:

Our contemporary American society, for example has little use for the individualist. Individualism implies dissent from the group; dissent implies conflict; and conflict suddenly seems divisive, unAmerican and generally unbearable. Our greatest new industry is evidently the production of techniques to eliminate conflict, positive thoughts through public relations to psychoanalysis, applied everywhere from the couch to the pulpit. Our national aspiration has become peace of mind, peace of soul. The symptomatic drug of our age is the tranquilizer. "Togetherness" is the banner under which we march into the brave new world.⁴⁷

But the inquiry environment does not exist to impose standardized meanings. Rather, it helps students improve their unique meaning-making capabilities. Training students to cope with realities which require that new meanings be made is the basis of the inquiry environment.⁴⁸

Certainly the concept of relevant inquiry is dangerous, but a quick review of the existing option should help in realizing its viability. Postman says:

Schools are functioning to destroy individuality, instill fear of failure, instill obedience to rigid conventions, destroy natural curiosity and love of learning . . . The school system is to service a dehumanizing economy, not to consider the welfare of children.⁴⁹

The question is, Do we want to develop conscious students? Do we want them to become autonomous, creative, inquiring people with the will and intelligence to determine their own destiny?⁵⁰

To accomplish this, the educational system must be reoriented so that the student becomes the center of the curriculum. To remain with the traditional system is to ignore reality. As Postman put it:

If it is practical to persist in subsidizing at an ever-increasing economic and social cost a system which condemns our youth to ten or twelve or sixteen years of servitude in a totalitarian environment ostensibly for the purpose of training them to be fully functioning, self-renewing citizens of a democracy, then we are vulnerable to whatever criticisms can be leveled. ⁵¹

This appeal for a democratic approach is not an attempt to promote student anarchy. However, it is an appeal to allow students the freedom to write what they think. The teacher's function should be to aid the student in his thinking processes and in his presentation of ideas. When the teacher acts as an authoritarian, judging the ideas, he inhibits the student's desire to express himself. In inquiry, it is not the students who are more capable at determining relevant areas of inquiry. However, the students must see the value of the inquiry.⁵² It must come from a felt need on the part of the student, and the teacher who is able to consider the student as the subject is far more likely to enhance the communication operations of his students. Postman suggests a productive alternative to traditional inquiry. In it the students would study language situations from current events. They could consider the social and political implications, and in doing so would learn important content as well as language skills.

CHAPTER V
THE WHOLE MIND

There has existed throughout history the belief in the mind and heart as existing independently. In applying his belief to education it would be wise to recognize the wisdom of Plato: "Reason must have an adequate emotional base if education is to accomplish its purpose."⁵³

This concept is finding support in research on the processes involved in thinking. Researchers are discovering that the brain is in actuality composed of two separate hemispheres which have unique functions, one emotional or artistic and the other rational. Teachers must organize their curriculums so that students can become totally involved with their work. They need to assimilate the analytic and the metaphoric natures in order to write most effectively. The necessity of making composition assignments relevant to their feelings becomes obvious. To carry the application one step further, students gain practice in coordinating the rational and emotional hemispheres. In so doing they learn to analyze their feelings, to give them substance, to find out their validity. And teachers who wish to teach effective writing need to be able to deal in the real and sloppy emotions of students, to help them find a language for what they think and feel.

Denny T. Wolfe Jr., and R. W. Reising cite a report made by Bob Samples to the Phi Delta Kappan:

After several years of testing and evaluating, we came to the realization that when one invites both mind functions into equal partnership, three things characterize the learning ecology:

- (1) higher feelings of self-confidence, self-esteem and compassion;
- (2) wider exploration of traditional content subjects and skills;
- (3) higher levels of creative invention in content and skills.⁵⁴

All three of these are applicable to improving the educational process.

On NBC's Today Show, May 22, 1978, Tom Brokaw interviewed Dr. Robert Ornstein, medical psychologist, who discussed the two hemisphere theory and its implications. Dr. Ornstein said that recent research on the activities of the brain suggests that, because each side of the brain performs different functions, the left side analytical and the right side artistic, it is a mistake to fragment the education of the student by emphasising one facet over the other. Our traditional system gives emphasis to the technical aspects of student writing, but students are not trained to draw from their creative abilities. As a result, their study of language is superficial; it fails to help students utilize their full potential; it ignores their need to gain control over the language which would help them to gain control over realities.⁵⁵

Noam Chomsky said, "When we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the 'human essence,' the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to man and that are inseparable from any critical phase of human existence, personal or social."⁵⁶ It is a great mistake to cause

students to abstract language from its emotional essence, to make it a matter of grammar or punctuation, to make it inconsequential.

Moffett would deal with the duality of writing by involving students with the thought and emotion of writing. Such objectives, when properly introduced, would supply motivation necessary to facilitate the learning of the technical aspects. He believes:

Language learning is ultimately a cognitive matter. Both reading and writing are at once shallow mechanical activities and deep operations of mind and spirit. There is no necessary connection between writing and composition. Comprehension and composing are independent of written symbols. The basic problems of understanding what someone else says to us, or of putting thoughts into words, can and should be separated from mere decoding of letters and mere transcribing of speech, which involve only perceptual and motor skills, not thought and emotion. ⁵⁷

Moffett believes that writing is a process which requires an involvement which is emotional. It is the teacher's function to build a positively-oriented curriculum which guides students in developing an awareness of their use of language. Such a task is far from easy.

Noam Chomsky pointed out that although our understanding of the mechanisms of language and thought and behavior have advanced in recent years, it is a mistake to believe we have the ability to understand man's mind. The intricacies of the mind are too complex to be programmed according to external operations. He says, "What little we do know about human intelligence would at least suggest . . . that by diminishing the range and complexity of materials presented to the inquiring mind, by setting behavior fixed patterns, these methods may harm and distort the normal development of creative abilities."⁵⁸ In other words, it is a mistake to try to use behavior modification or other techniques

to order the mental development of students. It is a mistake, as well, to inhibit student incentive by forcing writing in an authoritarian environment. The relationship between the teacher and the writer must be one of trust and acceptance. Teachers who are willing to let students think need to be ready for independent thinking.

CHAPTER VI

A HOLISTIC CONTENT

Thus far this paper has dealt with the perspectives to consider in formulating a philosophy for teaching effective writing. It has included research on the thinking processes as well because the interrelationship of thinking and writing needs to be exploited for effective writing to occur. This next section deals with the content of an English curriculum when it is seen as facets of languaging a child must develop rather than a body of knowledge a child must learn. Because these facets are interrelated, each being stimulated by the mind's attempt to communicate, it is a mistake to fragment the reading from the speaking from the listening from the writing. It is equally wrong to try to separate the child from his reality by forcing information for which he sees no relevance.

The consensus of the Dartmouth conference regarding what was to be taught in the classroom was this: "We must think less in terms of the subjects a child must learn and more in terms of experiences they can enjoy and gain interest from."⁵⁹ The purpose of any content is to give the student an expanding perception of the world. This is the process whereby students develop a greater cognitive awareness. The need is for the content to begin where the child is, and then move him outward from himself.

The Media

In accordance with the inquiry-based methodology previously discussed, perhaps the best place to begin a study of language, how it is used, would be in a study of the mass media. The goal would be to teach students how to read the news, recognize when and how it is slanted, distorted, and sometimes suppressed. The analysis of propaganda is not only highly relevant, it causes students to think in terms of the reality of language in their own world experience. Ours is an age of propaganda. The behavioral sciences have convinced the marketeers that a manipulation of the media is also the manipulation of minds which results in profits. It will require an enlightenment of the procedures and practices of propaganda to free students from exploitation. As Postman noted, "Being illiterate in the processes of any medium leaves one at the mercy of those who control it."⁶⁰

Father Ong explained the necessity of such an approach:

These mass media are a part of the student's life world, often the chief source of his ideas about life and his values, and if the student cannot see what they do to him--for good or bad--and recognize his own responsibility for the part they play in his life, he certainly cannot be expected to do anything very real with Shakespeare or Golding or anyone else. ⁶¹

The media is closest to student perception of language. He must first begin to understand its strategies before he can begin consideration of particular authors. Hayakawa suggests an even more critical consideration that students must become aware of: television advertisements are often intentional lies, promises without meaning, and as such, subvert our trust in others. They destroy the integrity of communication when they become detached from motive. Words become only words, and are void of meaning.⁶²

An awareness of the purpose of words is essential for students to learn to make critical judgments of the media.

Moffett argues for a naturalistic curriculum, one which helps the student develop an understanding of language. This means a teacher must give up some favorite works in order to meet the needs of the student; no matter how much the author says to the teacher, if it is beyond the student, it should not be forced on him. Moffett would have the curriculum designed so that the teaching of discourse would include thinking, speaking, listening, reading, and writing.⁶³ It is a digression from the goals and from the students' needs to spend time on material irrelevant to their needs and beyond their understanding.

Moffett sees the primary aim of education as one which aids the student in his growing perception; this is accomplished by Deweying, that is, by giving the students practice.

The human capacity of symbolize first and secondhand experience into an inner world to match against and deal with the outer world . . . Such a capacity is not taught; it can only be exercised more or less beneficially. It operates integratively on all fronts at once, at all ages. Education as we know it hinders the growth of this capacity perhaps more than it fosters it. The learner expends most of his intelligence coping with the demands of arbitrary contents . . . instead of using his native apparatus to build his own knowledge structures from what others have abstracted. Since the latter is what he will spend the rest of his life doing, whatever the future, this primary activity, I submit, should gain priority over all else in education.⁶⁴

Thinking cannot be programmed. Stimulation of cognitive processes is accomplished by having the students react, and then, inspect their reactions. Of course, what they will be inspecting is the language they used to express those feelings; they will be analyzing their discourse, and thus, learning language.

Speaking

One trouble with the English curriculum is that too often reading, writing, and speaking are taught separately, without enough attention to their intimate connections. In many high schools, speech is taught as a special course, often with style as a more important goal than effective communication. Albert H. Marchwardt points out though, that "language is a system of patterned vocal behavior by means of which men co-operate in society. The word vocal is crucial here; language is a set of sounds, an aural phenomenon. Only speech provides all the essential signals--inflection, stress, pitch--that allow us to study language and characterize it."⁶⁵ Students need to be made aware of the relationship of the symbols to their thoughts. The study of the symbols for their thinking, speech, should be included in the study of the symbols for their symbols, writing. It is this closeness to the thinking processes which is the advantage of speech; the vitality of actual discourse is an aid to understanding meaning, to the feeling which can be lost in written communication.

It is the real problem of how to communicate speech through written discourse that can be exploited at this point. Moffett has this strategy:

Writing must somehow compensate for the loss of voice features. . . and for the loss of gesture and facial expression. Correspondence offers an excellent opportunity to teach some of the real functions of punctuation, diction, and stylistic devices. Commas, dashes, and semicolons, ironic word choice, reversal of word order often do what we do other ways in speaking face to face. Writing should be taught as an extension of speech. Nowhere is this more sensible than with punctuation.⁶⁶

Practice in communicating in the two mediums trains the student in an awareness of their distinctive qualities and inadequacies.

Moreover, it teaches the students to be aware of how effectively the language system worked for them.

Listening

Communication requires a listener for the speaker. Such an obvious need is nevertheless overlooked in teaching discourse. The listener's role is assumed to be passive, and therefore instruction in listening is limited to punishment when etiquette is breached as when students are talking when another student is answering a teacher's question. But the art of listening, which few people possess, is one which requires a great amount of concentration. Unlike thinking, speaking, reading and writing, there is no opportunity for digression or regression of the mind or the eye. Total awareness of the speaker, total attention to his every gesture, is required for effective listening. In the traditional classroom situation, listening is not taught, not even nominally. When teachers ask a question to which they know the answer, they are listening for a particular response instead of to a particular response. And students realize the limitations of what is required of them; they are in a structure which makes what other students say unimportant; therefore, students are trained not to listen.

Allen Berger and Anne Werdmann sought ways to improve the listening skills of students. They first distinguished between "listening" and "auding." Auding means listening to, recognizing and interpreting spoken symbols. They then list fifteen activities which are considered to be mnemonic. The basis for improving these listening skills is stated thus:

Understanding feelings accompanying messages requires checking out the listener's interpretation with the speaker. In small group discussions require students to paraphrase a speaker's message before responding to it. . . . News reports from radio and TV provide models of speaking and reporting techniques. Use them to have students separate fact from opinion, identify biases and evaluate effectiveness. ⁶⁸

Hayakawa's Language in Thought and Action would be a good teacher's source book for such activities. Like Moffett, he asserts that awareness is the essential item for the growth of the language skills necessary for survival.

Moffett's concern for the manner in which we assimilate and categorize knowledge is applicable to increasing the listener's awareness. He notes that we cannot sense all of reality; in fact we edit it. We have prior Gestalts which condition what we will see. He says, "We look at and look for."⁶⁹ It is as true of listening. Such selectivity allows the listener to tune out interference, but it also causes lapses which result in distortion of what the speaker said. The listener can pick up what he wants to hear while disregarding the remainder. This is why slogans, catch phrases and mottoes are so popular. Also, listening gets muddled with the thinking it prompts, and as a result, what is retained is often a fusion of the thoughts of the two persons. Furthermore, what is retained is reorganized, recoded, so that features are deleted.⁷⁰ Training students in listening will help them to get important information, get it correct, and to make judgments based on that information. It will certainly stimulate greater awareness of how language is used.

Reading

Some mention needs to be made concerning reading, and con-

sequently, literature. This paper is involved with content of English only as it applies to teaching effective writing; therefore the section on literature will remain quite general. As has been pointed out, literature's concern should be with the expansion of the student's experience, not with his formal knowledge of literature. The case for literature on that basis is quite strong.

In moving to particular writers, it is best to remember the words of Solomon, written some 3300 years ago, "Of many books there is no end." Add to that the books written in the past three millineums and the result is an over-supply of potential works for student study. It is far wiser to give students the skills necessary for analyzing language and literature than it is to give them a sampling of a particular period or author. An appreciation of the humanities cannot occur without an understanding of its voice.

Literature deals with the problem of values; it encourages free thinking; it exposes students to unique perspectives and situations. Authors are presenting different value systems, lifestyles, and beliefs to students. The English teacher serves a difficult function by selecting certain texts for student reading. Social scientists and logical positivists say that teachers have no right to make value judgments on works because the basis for judgment is subjective, without a verifiable guideline.⁷¹ But it is the emotional nature of the literature which is basic to human nature. The value of literature is not in the judgments it makes, but in the struggle to express those feelings. Hayakawa calls literature "the most exact expression of feelings."⁷²

According to him, people who have read literature have lived more than people who cannot or will not read.

The emotional value of literature is supplemented by the propensity it has for expanding student perspective on different values and beliefs. James Miller said:

All literary works embody some vision of life, system of values or moral dimension, and that although this dimension is not the key to their artistic value, it calls for moral imagination in good reading. It creates something of a problem with many of the world's classics, which embody beliefs remote from ours, likely to be uncongenial to students; to read them well calls for both historical sense and moral imagination. ⁷³

Literature allows students to discover that people are people. The emotional aspects of literature make it real for students, but this is not to say that feelings are the criteria for value. In the study of literature, there is a need to keep in balance the cognitive and affective development of the students. In so doing, students begin to read and accept perspectives other than their own, they begin to become civilized, to enlarge their sympathies and to cooperate. ⁷⁴ The enjoyment they get in reading to understand will result in a greater awareness of life, literature and language. As a result, they will apply themselves to writing in direct proportion to their interest in literature. As they see the examples of effective use of language, they attempt to imitate even emulate those works

CHAPTER VII

RESEARCH IN WRITING

This final facet of discourse, that of writing, involves incorporating recent research into the curriculum, research which has had positive results. Certainly, theories of writing are not without faults. Frank O'Hare describes the problem as one of metatheory. There are too many variables in the writing process to develop an all-inclusive program ideally structured for all situations. But the aim of teaching writing, when kept in line with the goals of discourse, can be defined clearly enough so that it serves as a guide and standard of evaluation for the curriculum used.

What teachers want to train their students to do, and fail so miserably by utilizing traditional concepts to effect it, is to train the students to write effectively. In defining effective writing, Ken Macrorie says, "If you can learn to say in a few words all you want to say, with precision and fullness, you will delight yourself and your reader."⁷⁵ Learning to be concise, precise, grammatical, and honest should be the aim toward which teachers guide their students. In teaching writing, however, teachers sometimes ignore the obvious.

Frank O'Hare, whose research on sentence-combining is the issue which this section deals with, put forth this logic: "The

last thing a writer does is to put words down on paper in a particular order. Perhaps English teachers have not sufficiently realized the desirability, indeed the necessity, of helping their students acquire the ability to put words down on paper, to manipulate syntax."⁷⁶ O'Hare believes that students trained in sentence-combining would be better trained to think in rhetorical terms, to make better syntactic choices, because they would have built a wider repertory of alternatives.⁷⁷ The crux of his argument is this: Writing is, among other things, a physical act, and as with most physical acts, practice is a necessary step on the road toward competency.⁷⁸

The sentence-combining method involves incorporating information into more concise, effective syntactic structures. The belief is that the mind can be trained to process information in more effective ways by practice in recoding existing information.

The terminal unit is the shortest complete thought which can exist. As bits of information, chunks, are added to the terminal unit, the redundancies are deleted. The result of the embedment and reduction of these chunks into the terminal unit is complete thoughts which are syntactically more mature. By example:

The tree is tall + The tree is green =

The green tree is tall. or The tall tree is green.

Or the tree is tall and green.

or any other combination in which essential information is included. All three examples carry different emphasis; consequently, different meaning. This example shows the way that syntactic options can emphasize selected features. The example also shows

that sentence-combining is not concerned with the why of structure to the detriment of how. The belief that in doing these syntactic operations, they learn them is an example of the Dewey principle. Such practice is finding support by the evidence of research.

According to some researchers, practice at memorizing and reproducing longer sentences may help the students develop skills characteristic of increasing cognitive maturity.⁷⁹ According to K. W. Hunt, the ability to chunk information would explain the reciprocal relationship between chronological maturation and the ability to produce and receive more complex sentences.⁸⁰ As the child matures, he tends to embed more sentences, which results in an increase in clause and T-unit length in his writing. Sentence-combining gives the student practice in writing the more syntactically mature sentences, altering his language-embedding rate of growth. The inference seems to be that in so doing, the student is altering his cognitive development as well.

The brief history of research into the sentence-combining operations begins with a study done by Bateman and Zidonis, in 1966, on the effects of transformational grammar on improving writing. Their contention was that "pupils must be taught a system that accounts for well-formed sentences before they can be expected to produce more of such sentences themselves."⁸¹ Their study involved:

Comparing the writing performance of twenty-one students who were taught transformational rules and concepts over a two-year period with the performance of twenty students who were taught no grammar, Bateman and Zidonis concluded that because a generative grammar seems to be a logical representation of the psychological process of sentence formations, a knowledge of such grammar enables students to increase the

proportion of well formed sentences they write, to increase complexity without sacrificing grammaticality, and to reduce the occurrence of errors. ⁸²

Bateman and Zidonis believed that their research showed that a knowledge of transformational grammar was "the factor which significantly altered the writing behavior of students exposed" to their experimental treatments. The significance of their study is that students who studied the transformational grammar ended up writing sentences that had fewer errors and were more complex syntactically than the students who did not.

There is abundant research which contradicts the Bateman-Zidonis claim, research which shows that young children have already mastered grammatical structures before they enter school. Obviously, they have done so without the benefit of a system which explains what process occurs. The Bateman-Zidonis study was poorly executed and negated any conclusions which might have been made. ⁸³

Mellon rejected the Bateman-Zidonis claim that "the learning of grammatical rules per se could lead to improvement in student writing or that these rules could be applied in any conscious manner by writer." ⁸⁴ He suggested that it was the sentence combining and not the grammar that had an effect on student writing. He, therefore, implemented his study in this manner:

In the other study, by John Mellon, about 250 seventh-grade students of different schools, socio-economic classes, and academic tracks comprised the population. The experimental group was taught certain transformational concepts and rules of transformation in preparation for the main treatment, which consisted of novel sentence-building exercises that required students to embed one or more dummy kernel sentences into a base sentence according to the previously learned rules. . . The control group worked its way through one of the other of Warriner's traditional grammar texts, and the placebo group studied no grammar at all. All subjects wrote nine pre-test

compositions in various modes of discourse and nine post-test compositions in the same. Extensive grammatical analysis--centering on the number and frequency of nominal and relative embeddings, and on clustered modification and depth embedding--was made of this large corpus of writing. The resulting data made possible not only comparisons of syntactic growth among the three groups but also with the norms for such growth as established by Hunt.

Mellon's study is of great importance. It is the first to establish that some kind of formal language exercise can cause students to write with greater syntactic fluency than normal growth would occasion. ⁸⁵

Moffett's attitude toward sentence-combining is quite positive. Though his appraisal of the Hunt-Mellon study is overly optimistic, he does express some rational guidelines for the sentence-combining activity. He agrees with Mellon that learning the concepts and rules of transformational grammar or any other grammar will not improve sentence production. His interpretation of what Mellon's study shows is stated thus: "It is essential to be precise about just what this valuable study proves: embedding exercises based on transformational rules will improve syntactic versatility in writing."⁸⁶

O'Hare was not convinced that the conclusions of Mellon's study were entirely true. He set up an experiment based on the Mellon study in which he tried to determine how much of the altered writing behavior was a result of the transformational rules, and how much was the result of the sentence-combining exercises. He noted that since the variations in syntactic maturity are indisputable, and "normal" (average) can be accelerated or retarded under certain treatment conditions, then would the sentence-combining practice alone enhance normal growth of syntactic maturity.⁸⁷

To begin, O'Hare needed to define syntactic maturity. "Traditionally, observations of language development or syntactic

maturity have identified the lengthening of sentences and increased use of subordinate clauses as indicators of progress toward a mature style."⁸⁸ For this reason, O'Hare established the minimal terminable unit, or T-unit, as the device for measurement. A sentence would become "better" when one main clause had any subordinate clause or nonclausal structure attached or embedded in it. This was the basis of the Mellon study as well as Hunt's guide for determining "normal" maturity.

In Mellon's study, "the experimental group ended the year embedding 1.9 secondary statements per independent clause as compared with 1.4 for the control group. . . In frequency and depth of embedding, and in frequency and size of clustered modification, the experimental group led both control and placebo groups."⁸⁹ This significant difference can be somewhat misleading; as O'Hare studied the results of the Mellon study he came to the conclusion that using this device as the measuring instrument involves a fallacy.

Christensen has objected to the Hunt-Mellon measure of syntactic growth on the grounds that these measures may reinforce bad style. Moffett had to agree that "complicated sentences and multiple embeddings can make for awful writing. And who would disagree that much insufferable officialese results from the overuse of long noun phrases? Syntactic complexity is no virtue in itself, surely." He goes on to add that "the point is to be able, not obliged, to complicate one's sentences. Appropriateness--matching language structure to thought structure, and form to effect--must be the criterion."⁹⁰

O'Hare notes (while Moffett ignores) the fact that the results

of Mellon's quality evaluation were disappointing. The control group was judged on post-tests to have written compositions that were significantly better than those in the experimental group.⁹¹ In other words, the syntactic complexity attained by the students in Mellon's experimental group was offset by the inappropriateness of the sentence structures in which the embeddings occurred.

In O'Hare's experiment, the pattern Mellon established was followed but with one major exception. Instead of transformational rules as signals for embeddings or additions, O'Hare gave word hints. His system did not require the students to have any formal knowledge of grammar. Instead, O'Hare felt that it would facilitate the sentence-combining operations if a series of signals were used which capitalized on the student's inherent sense of grammaticality.⁹² The experimental group was given extensive practice in combining groups of kernel statements into single sentences which were structurally more complex than those students would normally be expected to write.⁹³ The control group received no formal grammar instruction at all. This is because Mellon's study showed that the control group, which studied Warriner's traditional grammar, and the placebo group, which studied no grammar at all, ended the year at essentially the same level. From this Mellon concluded:

Conventional grammar is in fact a kind of placebo treatment itself, in that the effects which it produces do not differ significantly from those observed in a no-grammar environment.⁹⁴

O'Hare felt that rather than waste the time giving traditional grammar drills, it would be better to utilize it in meaningful activity. His control group, therefore, studied no grammar at all. But for his experimental group, about one and one quarter

hours per week was set aside for the sentence-combining exercises. These were in no way similar to traditional drills.

Instead of the historical usage and grammar drills which are negatively oriented, concentrating on errors instead of building confidence, in these exercises (especially at the beginning) there was almost no concern with error. Moreover, the students themselves decided on the adequacy of a sentence. As Moffett states: "The activity of combining sentences undoubtedly constitutes a powerful teacher of syntax--if related to will and choice, and if will and choice are exercised during authentic discursive tasks."⁹⁵ O'Hare saw five positive features which are not typical of traditional grammar drills: (1) they are easy to do, (2) they gave the students confidence in their ability to manipulate sentences, (3) the test was against the student's own sense of grammaticality, (4) progressing down the kernels gave positive reinforcement, and (5) students were impressed with the maturity of their final sentences.⁹⁶ Most importantly, it required no study of grammar, transformational or traditional, and therefore, avoided negative aspects of grammar study. As Postman said, "Positive reinforcement has been proven to be more effective than punishment."⁹⁷

The results of the O'Hare study were impressive, especially when compared to Mellon's study. The syntactic development of the seventh graders in the experimental group was significantly greater than the control group's. In all six factors of syntactic maturity (words/T-unit; clause/T-unit; words/clause; noun clauses/100 T-units; adverb clauses/100 T-units; adjective clauses/100 T-units) the experimental group excelled.⁹⁸ In comparison

with the normative data presented by Hunt (1965) the experimental group reached maturity beyond typical eighth graders, and quite similar to that of twelfth graders.⁹⁹

More important than syntactic complexity, however, is the appropriateness of the sentence structure. In order to determine the quality of papers in his study, O'Hare matched his students according to sex and I.Q. After the study was completed, eight teacher judges selected the experimental papers by about 70% over the control group in overall quality, with an either/or decision made on each pairing. In effect, O'Hare's experimental group not only attained significant success in syntactic maturity, but they applied this skill to their compositions and wrote more effectively.

O'Hare believes his experiment proves that sentence-combining, taught in the proper environment, will facilitate syntactic skills already possessed by "training" the memory and increasing the cognitive "chunking" ability of the students. He says: "Sentence-combining forces the student, as he embeds the given kernels into the main statement, to keep longer and longer discourse in his head."¹⁰⁰ Sentence-combining is a method of training the mind in relevant thinking and writing skills. The technique is effective when the proper environment exists.

In reflecting on why sentence-combining had such positive results, it became apparent that mental stimulation was a key.

quote Moffett:

"There is good reason to believe that the final answer to linguistic elaboration lies beyond language in general cognitive development, and that intellectual stimulation is far more likely to accelerate syntactic growth than grammar knowledge." 101

Intellectual stimulation effected by sentence-combining tasks can facilitate the emotional and creative efforts of the students. O'Hare felt that it is essential that teachers train students in these communicative skills. "It is not enough for a young writer to have something to say . . . he must be able to express it, to manipulate sentence structure in order to recapture the experience for his reader."¹⁰²

In applying the sentence-combining techniques to the classroom situation it is necessary to make them a real part of the activity. Moffett suggests that "what Mellon and Christensen try to do by arraying sentence types in sequential exercises can be better done, I submit, by exploiting the sentence-combining activities ordinarily entailed in naturalistic tasks."¹⁰³ He suggests that the rewrite stage of composition is where such instruction might be more effective.

Macrorie sees syntactic development as the main course of composition:

"The marginal comments indicating slips in grammar spelling or mechanics are not ordinarily used until a writer is polishing his work in final draft. The experience of . . . teachers has shown that such reading for correction rather than helpful editing has had little positive effects."¹⁰⁴ "These little matters of reference and agreement are the higgledy-piggledy of grammar. More crucial matters exist. When you think of word order--the way words come together in phrases and clauses (pieces, hunks, segments, absolutes, whatever you call them at the moment)--think of how you may control it to bring your writing alive."¹⁰⁵

Certainly, to reduce sentence-combining operations to soulless drills is to rob them of any possibility of effectiveness. Mrs. Sybil Marshall wrote:

"I would give them enough patterns, but not in the form of exercises. I would give them patterns in speech, in books, in plays. I would not subject my pupils to ten minutes a day

under the ultraviolet lamp of intense grammatical exercises, but would instead seek out every patch of literary sunshine until grammatical usage and good style, the balance and cadence of sentences, and the happy choice of the most significant words soaked into them through everyone of their senses." 106

Moffett, without the prettiness of Mrs. Marshall, says, "There are alternative methods to grammar teaching for developing syntactic maturity: sentence-expansion games, good discussion, rewriting of notes, collaborative revision of compositions, playing with one-sentence discourses, and verbalizing cognitive tasks."¹⁰⁷ Most importantly, as Moffett says, "What will further the normal growth of sentence elaboration is practice in language tasks that are at bottom intellectual."¹⁰⁸ The relationship between increased syntactic development and increased cognitive powers seems to be a reciprocal one; as the thinking processes increase, the writing maturity increases. And as sentence-combining facilitates writing maturity, it also increases the cognitive powers of the students. "Generally, the increasing complexities of sentence structure, described as embeddings by transformational grammar, accompany the increasing cognitive ability to interrelated and subordinate clauses and propositions."¹⁰⁹ He asserts that transformational linguists themselves have never claimed that a knowledge of their grammar will improve a learner's speech or writing: "To hope, by means of grammatical formulations, to shortcut through the deep, cumulative learning that comes from speaking is to indulge in wishful dreaming."¹¹⁰

Moffett feels that the process of sentence-combining is one in which students must gradually develop their own standard of syntactic maturity. He suggests that lengthy clauses must come

before the concise ones, and that sentence-combining will culminate in the student's ability to determine which of the options are appropriate, which result in good style. He says, "In sum, the activity of combining sentences undoubtedly constitutes a powerful teacher of syntax--if related to will and choice, and if will and choice are exercised during authentic discursive tasks."¹¹¹

CONCLUSION

Students will learn to write more syntactically mature sentences if three conditions exist: (1) they are exposed to them, (2) they have opportunity to practice writing them, and (3) the learning environment is conducive to the positive reinforcements suggested by this paper.

Of the first condition, exposure to mature sentence forms, O'Hare noticed a peculiarity in the texts from which students "learn." While reviewing the Mellon study, he noticed that the sentences in the traditional tests (used by students in the control group) represented "immature types which junior high school composition teachers rightly exhort their students to avoid, although the experimenter finds without exception that all widely used seventh grade texts are limited to these puerile sentence types."¹¹² Because these sentences are the models for student writing, imitation of them is a backward step. "These students experience sentences. . . far below their attained level of syntactic fluency."¹¹³

As for the second condition, that of involvement (Deweying), Moffett says, "the trouble is precisely that we teachers are prone to conceive language as an external object instead of an internal operation. As for expanding one's linguistic repertory, that certainly must be done by receiving and producing sentences oneself. Input indeed is needed: the learner must hear and read

many sentence constructions that would not initially come to this mind. But he needs to try out the forms he takes in."¹¹⁴

The third condition, a conducive environment, has been the motif of this paper. Research has shown such an environment is essential for effective teaching. New ideas in research, such as sentence-combining, cannot be implemented in the traditional environments where rigid structures suppress and destroy their effectiveness. Traditionalists, looking to the research for techniques that can be applied to their philosophies, must not expect positive results in stale environments. Training in thinking requires attitudes and activities beyond the nature of English education as it is presently taught, but it needs to be done. For cognitive stimulation may be the best developer of syntax and the most appropriate tool for preparing students for the twenty-first century. It can serve as a catalyst for literature and humanistic values. Most importantly, it can create an awareness of language within the student that results in more effective thinking and writing because the student sees the communicative process holistically.

APPENDIX

Below are some sample sentence-combining exercises from Frank O'Hare's text, Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction. His appendix of sample problems extends from page eighty-one to page one hundred-one. The lessons are chronologically arranged to show the sequence of growing complexity in the sentence combining operations. The following problems are a cross-section to show the process. A. is the problem, and B. is an acceptable answer:

1. A. The quarterback threw the ball well yesterday. (NEG)
B. The quarterback didn't throw the ball well yesterday.

- A. John was painting something on the wall. (WHAT-QUES)
B. What was John painting on the wall? (p. 81)

7. A. Julio should admit SOMETHING.
He was there.
B. Julio should admit he was there.
or Julio should admit that he was there.
or Julio should admit the fact that he was there.

- A. SOMETHING is certain
Human beings will survive. (THAT)
B. That human beings will survive is certain. (p. 82)

- 10 A. The fish soon discovered SOMETHING.
The worm was dangling in the water for some reason. (WHY)
B. The fish soon discovered why the worm was dangling
in the water.

- A. SOMETHING angered Miss Frump.
The girls chattered noisily. (S' + ING)
B. The girls' noisy chattering angered Miss Frump. (p. 85)

- 20 A. I get nervous every time Ben goes for a swim in the
ocean because he does not believe SOMETHING.
SOMETHING is possible. (THAT)
The undertow sweeps him out into deep water. (IT-FOR-TO)

B. I get nervous every time Ben goes for a swim in the ocean because he does not believe (that) it is possible for the undertow to sweep him out into deep water. (p. 87)

22 A. SOMETHING angered Mr. Mulvaney.

Miss Frickert insisted SOMETHING (S' + ING)

There were spooks in the house. (THAT)

She had just rented the house. (WHICH/THAT)

Mr. Mulvaney is the policeman on our block.

B. Miss Frickert's insisting that there were spooks in the house (which, that) she had just rented angered Mr. Mulvaney, the policeman on our block. (p. 89)

ENDNOTES

¹Herbert J. Muller, The Uses of English (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), p. 98.

²Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, How To Recognize a Good School (Bloomington, Indiana: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1971), p. 9.

³Neil Postman, "Linguistics and the Pursuit of Relevance," English Journal, LVI (1967), 1162.

⁴Frank O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1973), p. 31.

⁵Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969), p. 94.

⁶James Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 13.

⁷Postman and Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, p. 107ff.

⁸Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 59.

⁹Ibid., p. 31.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 32.

¹¹Ibid., p. 12-13.

¹²Ibid., p. 24.

¹³Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁴O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 5.

- ¹⁵Muller, The Uses of English, p. 102.
- ¹⁶Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 69.
- ¹⁷S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action (Chicago: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), p. 144.
- ¹⁸Seymour Yesner, "The Basics and the Basic Value of Human Beings", English Journal (January, 1978), 16.
- ¹⁹Elizabeth F. Haynes, "Using Research in Preparing to Teach Writing," English Journal (January, 1978), 82-83.
- ²⁰Ibid., p. 83.
- ²¹O'Hare, Sentence-Combining, p. 2.
- ²²Postman, "Linguistics and the Pursuit of Relevance," p. 1162.
- ²³Allen Berger and Anne Werdmann, "Listening and Auding," English Journal (May, 1978), 36.
- ²⁴Muller, The Uses of English, p. 41.
- ²⁵Ken Macrorie, Telling Writing (Rochelle Park, New Jersey: Hayden Book Company, Inc., 1970), p. vii.
- ²⁶Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 156.
- ²⁷Ibid., p. 209.
- ²⁸Ibid., p. 163.
- ²⁹Ibid., p. 190.
- ³⁰Postman and Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, p. 19.
- ³¹Ibid., p. 22.
- ³²Macrorie, Telling Writing, p. 66.
- ³³Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 12.
- ³⁴Macrorie, Telling Writing, p. 67.

- ³⁵Berger and Werdmann, "Listening and Auding", p. 27.
- ³⁶Macrorie, Telling Writing, p. 69.
- ³⁷Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 12.
- ³⁸Muller, The Uses of English, p. 108.
- ³⁹Ibid., p. 100.
- ⁴⁰Ibid., p. 101.
- ⁴¹Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 27.
- ⁴²Postman and Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, p. 23.
- ⁴³Ibid., p. 27.
- ⁴⁴Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 186.
- ⁴⁵Macrorie, Telling Writing, p. vii.
- ⁴⁶Postman and Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, p. 30.
- ⁴⁷Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Decline of Heroes," Adventures of the Mind, ed. by Kichar Thruelsen and John Kobler (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1959), 103.
- ⁴⁸Postman and Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, p. 97.
- ⁴⁹Postman and Weingartner, How to Recognize a Good School, p. 12-13.
- ⁵⁰Ibid., p. 13.
- ⁵¹Postman and Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, p. 152.
- ⁵²Ibid., p. 57.
- ⁵³Ibid., p. 60.

⁵⁴Denny T. Wolfe, Jr. and R. W. Reising, "The Two Brain Theory," English Journal (May, 1978), 32.

⁵⁵Dr. Robert Ornstein, Today, NBC Telecast, May 22, 1978. Interviewer, Tom Brokaw.

⁵⁶Noam Chomsky, Language and Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1972), p. 100.

⁵⁷Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 15.

⁵⁸Chomsky, Language and Mind, p. 101.

⁵⁹Muller, The Uses of English, p. 81.

⁶⁰Postman and Weingartner, Teaching as a Subversive Activity, p. 166.

⁶¹Muller, The Uses of English, p. 142.

⁶²Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, p. 100.

⁶³Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 211.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 215.

⁶⁵Burton; Donaldson; Fillion; Haley, Teaching English Today (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1970), p. 217.

⁶⁶Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 41.

⁶⁷Berger and Werdmann, "Listening and Auding," p. 38.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 38.

⁶⁹Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 20.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 22.

⁷¹Muller, The Uses of English, p. 18.

⁷²Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, p. 113.

⁷³Muller, The Uses of English, p. 92.

- ⁷⁴ Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action, p. 117.
- ⁷⁵ Macrorie, Telling Writing, p. 26.
- ⁷⁶ O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 74.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 71.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 41.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 31.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 32.
- ⁸¹ Ibid., p. 9.
- ⁸² Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 164-165.
- ⁸³ Ibid., p. 165.
- ⁸⁴ O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 10.
- ⁸⁵ Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 165-166.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 166-167.
- ⁸⁷ O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 20.
- ⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 20.
- ⁸⁹ Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 166-167.
- ⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 171.
- ⁹¹ O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 25.
- ⁹² Ibid., p. 25.
- ⁹³ Ibid., p. 27.
- ⁹⁴ Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 167.

- ⁹⁵Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 177-178.
- ⁹⁶O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 30.
- ⁹⁷Postman and Weingartner, How To Recognize a Good School, p. 63-66.
- ⁹⁸O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 63-66,
- ⁹⁹Ibid., p. 67.
- ¹⁰⁰O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 31.
- ¹⁰¹Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 163.
- ¹⁰²O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 75.
- ¹⁰³Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 178.
- ¹⁰⁴Macrorie, Telling Writing, p. 68.
- ¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 242.
- ¹⁰⁶Muller, The Uses of English, p. 42.
- ¹⁰⁷Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 180-181.
- ¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 53.
- ¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 53.
- ¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 168.
- ¹¹¹Ibid., p. 177-178.
- ¹¹²O'Hare, Sentence-Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, p. 30.
- ¹¹³Ibid., p. 30.
- ¹¹⁴Moffett, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, p. 168.

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