

### Pro (cont.)

not the instructor. In "A Method for Teaching Writing" (College English, 1968), Elbow recommends de-emphasizing content and style while encouraging the student to consider his audience and the effect he would like his writing to produce. This shift in focus from teacher to audience requires the student to be more personally involved in subject choice, selection, and arrangement of words and ideas. Eventually he discovers, with classmates, what constitutes good, or effective, writing. This change in focus can lead from prewriting exercises to rewriting experiences. Both strengthen the total writing process.

Prewriting re-establishes the authority of the self, of the writer, and relegates the teacher to the role of reader. This is not only less threatening to the student, it is more comfortable and rewarding for the teacher. Macrorie states in Telling Writing (1970): "Most English teachers have been trained to correct students' writing, not to read it." One reward of the prewriting approach is that student essays are often more interesting and better written. A student who discovers his own topic, his own voice, his own uniqueness through prewriting often makes fewer mechanical errors.

### Prewriting Techniques

One technique Macrorie and Elbow recommend is free writing. The student writes as fast as possible, without an attempt to control or to shape his ideas. Such free writing is not irresponsible playing with words, nor is it only a spontaneous overflow of feeling which lacks thesis or structure. It is the furrowing of the mind, the overturning and exposing of topics with interest, details for support, and phrasing of words which can give birth to one's own style. A few days, or even one, spent in free writing can awaken student writers to an awareness, too often buried by years of rote learning, that each one's view of the world is different and individual, and although we share common methods for communication, we will differ in our use

### Con (cont.)

"real" person, writing honestly about some bit of experience for which the author has deep feelings. All go for the emotional jugular vein: the death of Grandfather, the first stirrings of love in an adolescent breast, a moment of supreme embarrassment. Eventually, these examples become no less distressingly recognizable than the sort of dry, committee-composed English which Macrorie finds so odious. Clearly the antidote to English is not another monotonous sort of prose--in this case the searing, exhibitionistic personal narrative. What students need is not simply freedom from one conditioned sort of prose and license to compose in another clichéd style. They must be helped to compose in a variety of registers which reflect varied purposes and audiences. While appropriate enough for his own brand of good writing, Macrorie's prescriptions for personally effective writing--an honest voice, re-creation of experiential immediacy, surprising juxtaposition, active verbs and figurative language--would be largely out of place in most of the writing of most people. Good narrative is one thing, but there are many other types of good writing which exhibit distinctive features. Faithful Macrorie-ites may believe that the skills gained in composing personally effective writing will transfer to other writing tasks. The result is more likely to be inappropriate word choice and unwarranted intrusion of the "real" person when students attempt the impersonal, objective writing of business and academy.

One final difficulty I have with both Macrorie and Elbow is their over-reliance on the peer group forum for responding to student writing. Faith in open honesty, subjective response patterns, and the personally supportive nature of these groups are reminiscent of an earlier enthusiasm for the validity of gut-level feelings in classroom sensitivity groups or encounter sessions. Some students might desire and profit from a degree of such intimacy with peers; others, however, neither want nor expect to make themselves personally vulnerable to it.

**Pro (cont.)**

of them. Free writing is subjective and leads inward to the re-discovery of "I." This re-discovery helps the student realize that the "I" is implicit in all writing, even when not expressed. To the inexperienced student, third person writing can be derivative, contrived, dull. There is a need to awaken the inner voice.

From discovery of self as a source for individual expression, the student can more confidently explore his world through observation. Exercise writing in describing objects, persons, or places, in narrating events, in explaining actions or beliefs, extends a writer's skills. He develops his ability to gather, select, and arrange details for effective presentation. Such exploration helps shed indifference to the world.

Two other prewriting activities also effectively involve the student with others and himself. The first necessitates occasional rearrangement of the class into group workshops, where students can gain responses to the potential strengths or weaknesses of their work during preliminary rough drafts. Such group sessions have resulted in the "publication" of "first editions" of student writing. Elbow suggests that all students write on the same topic and read the material of all other students.

Journal-writing is probably the most widely used prewriting technique. Macrorie calls journals "seedbeds" because they provide an opportunity for daily writing, a place to experiment and practice, a casebook for ideas. Good class preparation is needed, however, or journals can deteriorate into dull diaries or catalogues of names and places. Students should be encouraged to write responsively, inquisitively, reacting to themselves and others, to events and thoughts, to studies and plans as well as remembrances. To learn to write competently, one must write often and without fear; the journal satisfies these prerequisites.

(continued on p. 24)

**Con (cont.)**

Peer groups should not be the only sort of help provided for student writers, nor should all of them be expected to contribute subjective, emotionally determined responses to the writing of their peers. Just as some students are indisposed to forced subjectivity, so others are admittedly ill-equipped for the cool objectivity of reasoned criticism. There should be a place for both.

Given the variety of writers and kinds of writing, classroom instruction should be various. Not just freewriting, but strategies of structuring, researching, collaboration, and heuristic questioning. Not just personal narrative, but reports, technical descriptions, letters, reviews, advertisements, critiques, abstracts--even drills and exercises. Not just supportive peer groups, but teacher and peer criticism, actual real world tasks and audiences, self-editing--and even handbook instruction. Freewriting, personal narrative, peer groups--all have their place in the classroom. But for too many devotees, these methods become exclusionary. As teachers of writing, we should allow for diverse methods, strategies, materials, or approaches, in the hope that students will find ways to improve the writing they will choose or be expected to do.

*Steven Bernhardt is assistant director of the Introductory Composition program at the University of Michigan.*

**Teaching (cont. from p. 7)**

process itself--when they learn that they can just scribble pages full and at the end of the scribbling have perceptions and ideas that are useful--then they will not have such a hard time putting in the sweat necessary to turn the rough mess into an organized finished copy.

*Peter Elbow teaches at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington. His new book Writing and Power will be published by Oxford University Press in 1980.*

# From the Notebook

## TEACHING WITH KEN MACRORIE

Cheryl Stevens

I use Ken Macrorie's Writing to Be Read with my college-bound seniors in Advanced Composition. Macrorie's approach to writing stresses originality and economy of expression, avoids clichéd and hackneyed expression, and, above all, recommends honesty.

### Memorable Utterances

I begin discussing the first chapter of the book with a fairly fundamental assignment asking students to submit three examples of original word expression --memorable utterances by children. Reaction to the assignment seldom varies:

"I don't have any brothers or sisters."

"You kidding? I avoid little kids at all costs. They'd make a cup of coffee nervous."

But, they do it, and their examples ring with what Macrorie calls the "authentic voice." It is sincere, simple, and honest--language not yet made dull and empty by twelve years of schooling. High school students need to relax and go back, to rediscover the truly memorable diction of childhood. This assignment helps them to do it.

Another technique to get them to unwind and write freely minus slush and pomposity is free writing. I have them write continuously for five-, ten-, or fifteen-minute spurts on any subject they choose. I tell them that it is practice before the game, that they should write to improve, that there is only one rule: Do not stop to ponder or pause, just write and keep writing. Sometimes I fill the board with words or phrases to give their thoughts direction, to suggest writing ideas.

### Journals and Honesty

Chapter 17 in Macrorie's text is a beautiful description of what a journal is and can contain. A journal is a place to

fail or succeed, to try Erma Bombeck humor, to write a serious poem or a mini-short story without fear of failure. My students write in theirs twice a week, outside of class, and turn it in every other Friday. Their journals are never used against them. They are read, comments are made, and an overall reaction suffices for "grades."

*By honesty, Macrorie doesn't mean total honesty. For example, if a girl refuses a Friday night date with, "I cannot go out with you," instead of, "You are a total bore," Macrorie would not take exception. His quarrel is on another level.*

Journals are also an invaluable aid to encourage improvement of writing. Specifically, I use journals to stress detail, example, all the basics of good writing, and Macrorie honesty. By honesty, Macrorie doesn't mean total honesty. For example, if a girl refuses a Friday night date with, "I cannot go out with you," instead of, "You are a total bore," Macrorie would not take exception. His quarrel is on another level. He labels as dishonest the posing of a question such as this: "Have you ever wondered what it would be like to fall down the basement stairs into your sister's boyfriend's lap?" Dishonest. No one ever did wonder what it would be like.

Mad magazines's Snappy Answers to Stupid Questions, an illustrated paperback, brings home Macrorie's point about honesty in a humorous, memorable fashion. A lady is shown on her hands and knees searching the grass. Around her neck clings a chain and what is left of her pearl necklace. A passerby asks her what she is looking for even though it is perfectly obvious (a dishonest question). Only now there is a snappy answer. She replies, "I'm looking for nothing. I'm grazing."

Another picture shows a couple, shortly after entering a restaurant, being asked: "A table for how many, Sir?"

Since it is obvious there are two of them, Mad feels it deserves a snappy answer. The man responds, "A hundred and two. We like to change chairs a lot." Spend fifteen minutes with that type of back-up. It is visual, humorous, and students love it.

### "Murder the Cliche Day"

Several chapters stress tightening, originality, and proof reading. I try to underscore these aims with several activities. One is "Murder the Cliche' Day." Students are asked to share clichés.

They are given a page containing 50 unfinished clichés and are asked to finish the expressions. Most are surprised at how many they know. I explain that if they know them, their classmates know them; therefore, those expressions must be weak, unoriginal, overworked. They are never to use them again, ever!

Another tightening exercise consists of having students choose three teachers they particularly admire and would like to know more about. A day is chosen and several staff members are invited to class to answer questions. I've found these teachers rather enjoy "The Hot Seat." Afterward my students are told to write a brief one-page paper on any three teachers. There is one stipulation: they may not use the word "is." This is not easy. They labor, moan, and glare a lot. But it does get across a point. Good writing requires work--reaching for good description and relying less on "safe," overused diction.

### Twisting Words

Macrorie also teases students into twisting clichés. In his chapter on "Playing With Words," he lists clichés and asks students to change, twist, and fracture them into something resembling original expression. I give my students a list of proverbs and they do the same thing. The ingenious ones conclude: A fool and his money are soon partying, Dead chickens don't count, and A penny saved is not worth the trouble. A corol-

lary to this assignment asks students to choose a proverb, fracture it, and write a paper illustrating their newly changed proverb. This fractured proverb is an example of student work.

*Once there were two rich farmers who desired to be richer. They both owned large farms and raised prize chickens. Each farmer had his own favorite chicken: one had a prize rooster; the other had a prize hen. The rooster had won many prizes for his size and beauty. The hen also had won many prizes and produced broods of prize-winning biddies.*

*Now these two farmers were greedy and wanted more money and more prizes from their chickens. So they got together and decided to match the prize rooster with the prize hen and have the most fabulous and valuable chicken ever.*

*The farmers went to work, building an elaborate carpetted chicken coop in which the hen was to lay her egg on a feather bed. They moved the hen and rooster into their new home and began to rub their greedy hands.*

*They waited.*

*From inside the coop came terrific squawking and screaming, pecking and flapping. Out came the hen and rooster fighting like cats and dogs. Quickly the farmers separated the hen and rooster. Not soon enough, however, for the chickens had pecked each other bald. The farmers sadly gathered up their ruined chickens and went home, leaving dreams of wealth behind.*

*The Moral: Don't count your chickens before they're matched.*

*Cheryl Stevens, English Department Chairperson at Northwest High School in Jackson, Michigan, teaches Advanced Composition, English literature, and Journalism. Ken Macrorie was one of Ms. Stevens' instructors at an NDEA Institute for high school English teachers during the summer of 1966.*

# In the Limelight

## WATERFORD MOTT HIGH SCHOOL WRITING GRANT AUGUST 1979

Norm Ballou, Project Director

In February, 1979, the Michigan Department of Education awarded the Waterford School District a \$6,000 planning grant to improve written composition by high school students. The money, from ESEA IV-C funds, was to be expended between February 7 and September 30, 1979, at Waterford Mott High School. Depending on our findings, our recommendations, their effectiveness and the availability of future funding, we may request an implementation grant to expand our program to all secondary schools in Waterford--three junior and three senior high schools.

### May, 1978: Identifying the Problem

Our planning grant proposal began with a recognition of poor student writing in the high school--the "why" for curriculum change. There followed a grants' seminar conducted by Mr. Ron Arnold, Director of Instructional Services, Waterford School District--the "how" of proposal writing. At the grants' seminar (May, 1978), we suggested that writing improvement in the high school was an area that needed improvement and might well qualify for an ESEA IV-C grant through the State Department of Education. Then, since other departments had also made grant recommendations, we waited for a decision from the Waterford School District's Instructional Services Department regarding our own.

While we waited, we informed ourselves about current problems in writing and techniques for addressing those problems without any excessive expenditure of school district funds. Because ours is a middle class district with declining enrollment and a recent school millage failure, we have little money for travel to observe programs in other districts or to hire consultants. Mott's English department head attended the English Composition Board Conference at the University of Michigan on May 12, 1978. The

University's findings concerning the writing needs of entering freshmen and transfer students and the importance of writing instruction in all curricular areas were later invoked in our grant proposal.

During the summer some data on composition were collected--in a very casual, unorganized fashion--from English Journal, College English and Phi Delta Kappa.

Then, in October 1978, Ron Arnold gave us this information: (1) writing improvement was a major district priority in Waterford-Mott; (2) and writing improvement met the criteria of the Experimental/Demonstration office of the State Department of Education; therefore, (3) ours was one of the three proposals that should be formalized and submitted to the State Department of Education for consideration.

### October, 1978: Shaping the Proposal

Our first step in writing the proposal was a five page documented narrative describing the problem, offering evidence that it existed, showing current district concern with the problem, suggesting steps in its solution, specifying the aim(s) of our effort, and noting how success would be measured.

Our next step was to gather additional concrete evidence of our high-school students' writing problems and to discuss within the English department at Mott some possible solutions to them. We cited evidence of poor writing from teacher observations, from surveys of parents on the effectiveness of writing instruction in Waterford schools, from the results of a voluntary basic-skills-certification (competency) exam given in March and October of 1978, and from surveys of vocational program graduates in 1974 and 1976. We also noted the findings and purpose of the English Composition Board at the University of Michigan to show that the problem of

inadequate writing skills affects even academically talented students.

We had very few solutions to suggest. Indeed, the purpose of our proposal was to buy time to develop a plan that would identify specific strategies to address the problem of our students' poor writing performance.

After gathering this evidence, the English department head, with guidance from the Director of Instructional Services, made out the project application, which in our case consisted of a two-page abstract and an eleven-page proposal expanding the previously written narrative.

As we waited for a response to our proposal, we continued to learn what we could. Specific advice came from two sources. Dr. Robert Graham of Oakland Schools helped us at this time and later. He gave us multiple copies of classroom-tested materials on teaching composition that were developed by and for Oakland County English teachers. On October 31, 1978, three of our English teachers attended a seminar on holistic scoring presented by J. Evans Alloway of ETS.

#### **February, 1978: Tapping the Resources**

By February our proposal was approved, and Rebecca Rankin, Mott's principal, together with Ron Arnold and Norm Ballou, Mott's English department head, traveled northward to Lansing to attend a planning grants start-up session and meet some of the instructional specialists of the Michigan Department of Education.

By February 28, 1979, we had determined which of Mott's English teachers would be available for a two-week workshop; we had selected four teachers from other departments for a one-week cross-curricular writing workshop; and we had submitted summer workshop requests and a budget breakdown for our planning grant.

On March 4, three of our English teachers attended the ASCD conference in Detroit to learn about the Northern Virginia Writing Project, a derivative of the Bay Area Writing Project.

On March 21, Bernard Van't Hul and Alan Howes made an ECB visit to Mott and spoke to the entire Mott staff and many district administrators in the morning and the English department and department heads from our other two high schools in the afternoon. Their presentation was excellent, their enthusiasm contagious. Had we been prepared, we could have had a cross-curricular writing commitment from our staff that very day.

On April 26, the department head attended an ECA writing seminar conducted by Miles Olson of the University of Colorado.

On May 2, three English teachers attended a presentation by Stephen Dunning at the Oakland Schools.

Three teachers and our principal were in attendance during the three-day ECB workshop in June at the University of Michigan, and we came back to Mott full of good ideas.

#### **Fall, 1979: Facing the Future**

Now, two weeks before the opening of school in September, we have completed our three weeks of in-service workshops and a significant amount of research on writing. We have determined that our English department now meets or will soon meet each of the nineteen NCTE criteria published in March, 1979, as "Standards for Basic Skills Writing Programs." We have compiled a list of specific methods and techniques to be used in our writing courses (emphasizing process, varying audience, grouping, conferencing, prompt feedback from teachers, frequent writing, writing assessments, writing files, practicing pre-writing, publicizing good writing, creating a non-threatening atmosphere, and so on). We have begun accumulating a professional library on composition; and we have developed a  
(continued on p. 22)

# Between Classes

## FROM HARTFORD POEMS

Roy M. Davis

Mamie Howes taught piano  
and voice  
up the street from my childhood.  
When she sang for her students,  
neighbors said,  
Doc Lawrence must be operating  
in his clinic.....  
without ether.

She chewed her food 37 times,  
and survived the grim struggle with T.B.  
and died at a hundred and one  
in her spinster bed  
at the nursing home.

I played her piano for six months  
before catching puberty.  
Afternoon sun glinted on her spectacles  
as she told me to  
arch my fingers and  
breathe from the diaphragm,  
in her old house  
with dry rot  
and falling porches  
up the street.

The best baseball player  
in Van Buren County  
never made the big leagues.  
"Squirt" Van Wert came from  
his mother's womb  
tossing a baseball  
up and down.

He threw tomatoes at the barn  
and wore us all out catching  
while he pitched.  
He had a heart murmur  
but the team doctor  
let it slide.

His senior year we were  
County Champs.  
Three up, three down for nine  
innings, just like  
a machine.

A year later he gave up pitching,  
stretched out, a smile  
on his face.

Down the old road  
by the woods  
stood a ruined shack--  
bare ribs,  
smelling of mortality.

Long deserted, gusty wind  
blowing  
through the open places.

And in one corner of  
the room  
a grinning cat skeleton--  
waiting to pounce  
and give  
little kids their  
first scar.

School picnic sounds faded across  
Indian Lake  
as I rowed still water that  
captured all light and drove it  
into our eyes.

She trailed her hand in coolness  
feeling heat that echoed in us  
from our sun.

Under trees dripping fuzzy pollen  
she looked up from her stillness  
capturing all light and  
driving it into my waiting eyes.

The residents of Maple Hill  
never complained  
when we rode our bikes  
out there  
to watch the sun go down  
and smoke forbidden  
cigarettes  
in twilight stillness  
leaning against the tombstones.

*Roy Davis has collected reminiscences of a small town in western Michigan in his soon-to-be published Hartford Poems. Today Dr. Davis teaches Humanities and American literature at Pioneer High School in Ann Arbor.*

# On the Bulletin Board

## RESOURCES IN THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION

### Publications

The teaching of writing is an area now rich in resources. The purpose of this regular feature will be to keep readers informed of upcoming conferences, current research, books, articles, and periodicals on both the theory and practice of composition teaching. A fruitful place to begin is with the largest and most influential organization in our profession, the National Council of Teachers of English. NCTE publishes a major periodical at every level: Language Arts, for elementary teachers; English Journal, for intermediate and secondary teachers; and College English. All three journals regularly publish articles on the teaching of writing, many of which are useful at more than one level. For auxiliary groups NCTE publishes English Education, for teachers of teachers of English, and Research in the Teaching of English, both of which also cover writing instruction and theory, as well as College Composition and Communication, a journal wholly devoted to the theory and pedagogy of composition. (Details on membership, publications, conferences, are available by writing NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.)

NCTE also publishes a wide range of books on language arts instruction, among them a number of collections of practical classroom techniques for teaching writing, most of which are adaptable to specific course and level needs. The books listed in the annotated bibliography provide a cornucopia of activities, exercises, and assignments for the composition class.

Berger, Allan, & Blanche Hope Smith. Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1974-1975: Re-Vision.

Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1974. Practices range from elementary to college level. Section Three is on writing, including such articles as: "How Does the Writer Write?", "How to Paralyze the Novice Writer," "Marginalia and

*Other Feedback," "Getting to Know You: First Week Activities," "The Honesty of Anonymity," others. (107 pp.)*

Clapp, Ouida, ed. Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1975-1976: On Righting Writing.

Urbana: NCTE, 1975. An elementary to college mix. Six sections: "Getting the Writer Started" (including "Methods to Motivate Composition Students"), "Finding a Subject," "Developing Point of View: Sensing an Audience," "Sharpening Technique," "Writing to Clarify Values" (including "Values Clarification, Journals, and the Freshman Writing Course"), and "Exploring Writing Systems" (including one on career education, one on research papers, one on fictional biography, and "Researching Old Murders"). (121 pp.)

Clapp, Ouida, ed. Classroom Practices in Teaching English 1977-1978: Teaching the Basics--Really!

An elementary-college mix. Two of the six sections are on teaching writing--one on prewriting, one on revising and editing. (148 pp.)

Geuder, Patricia, et al, eds. They Really Taught Us How to Write.

Urbana: NCTE, 1978. Students named teachers who "really" taught them how to write and those teachers wrote these articles based on their classroom experiences. The pieces are aimed at high school students but are adaptable. Part One: "The Student Prepares to Write" includes "Teaching Before the Composition is Written" and "Writing: A Wrestling with the Angel of Language"; Part Two: "The Student Writes" includes sub-sections on short term assignments ("Be Your Own Boswell," "Students Walk Out") and long term assignments, projects, and course descriptions ("The Community Documentary," "A Rationale for Teaching Composition"); Part Three: "The Student Has Written" includes "The Teacher as Editor" and "The Conference Evaluation: A Renewal". (140 pp.)



Judine, Sister M., ed. A Guide for Evaluating Student Composition.

Urbana: NCTE, 1965. Aimed at high school teachers. Four sections: 1. The Audience: For Whom Does the Student Write? 2. The Evaluator: What Standards Does He Meet, and How, with Large Paper Loads? 3. The Total Writing Practice: Does the Teacher See All Its Aspects When Evaluating? 4. Communication: How Do We Measure Its Success or Failure? Includes "Evaluating a Theme" and "How to Write an F-Paper." (162 pp.)

Koch, Carl, & James M. Brazil. Strategies for Teaching the Composition Process.

Urbana: NCTE, 1978. For high school and college teachers. A compendious collection of practical activities for the classroom, involving setting an atmosphere ("The Comfort Zone") and each stage of the composing process, Prewriting ("Value Exploration," "Self-Disclosure," "The Telegram: Form and Audience"), Writing (chiefly work on sentences and paragraphs), and Postwriting ("Peer Essay Reading" and activities to gain coherence, improve style and transitions, and correct mechanics.). Appendix A: "Setting Priorities for Diagnosing Student Writing" is particularly helpful. (108 pp.)

Laque, Carol Feiser, and Phyllis A. Sherwood. A Laboratory Approach to Writing.

Urbana; NCTE, 1977. A thorough explanation of and rationale for a laboratory approach to teaching writing.

Long, Littleton, ed. Writing Exercise from "Exercise Exchange".

Urbana: NCTE, 1976. Junior high to college collection. Brief articles, culled from Exercise Exchange, a periodical published by the Department of English, University of Vermont, Burlington. Sections include "Prewriting," "Diction," "Themes, Thesis, and Paragraph," "Style," "Ideas for Whole Papers and Special Topics," "Rewriting." (152 pp.)

Ohmann, Richard, & W. B. Coley, eds. Ideas for English 101: Teaching Writing in College.

Urbana: NCTE, 1975. A collection of reprints from College English, containing early manifestations of significant later texts and theories including articles by Lou Kelly on the open class, Peter Elbow, and William Coles, both on their unique writing classes, Kenneth Bruffee on collaborative learning, Francine Hardaway on "What Students Can Do to Take the Burden Off You," and Barrett John Mandel on "Teaching Without Judging." (234 pp.)

Palmer, Orville. "Seven Classic Ways of Grading Dishonestly,"

The English Journal (October, 1962), 464-467. Off-print. 1) Grading by abdication; 2) the "carrots and clubs" system; 3) by default; 4) testing zealots; 5) changing the rules mid-game; 6) psychic grader; 7) the impossible perfection rainbow. (4 pp.)

## Events

The Northeast Regional conference on English in the Two-Year College will be held October 18-20, 1979, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English will be held November 22-24, 1979, at the San Francisco Hilton, San Francisco, California. Information is available through NCTE.

If you are aware of upcoming meetings, conferences, and events in writing, please send me the information for inclusion in this feature. My address is: Robert L. Root Jr., Department of English, Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, 48858.

Robert Root directs Introductory Composition at Central Michigan University and serves on the MCTE Steering Committee.

**Editorial (cont. from p. 2)**

school of thought; or it will treat a topic important to the teacher of writing.

We are especially gratified that after we decided to make the work of Ken Macrorie and Peter Elbow the thematic center of this first issue of fforum, each of them agreed to write a brief piece especially for fforum readers. We are delighted, furthermore, by similar commitments from several authors who will be featured in future issues.

Balancing fforum's informational component will be one for discussion. At this exciting time of a first issue, we ask you to react to content and format and to tell us what you might wish were here. It is our intention to serve your needs and interests. Please address your letters to:

Patti Stock  
fforum  
The English Composition Board  
1025 Angell Hall  
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48109  
(313) 764-0429, (313) 764-0433

At present, we are assembling materials for issues dealing with schools of thought represented by the following writers: (1) Sheridan Baker, Edward Corbett, and John Warriner; and (2) James Britton and James Moffett. We hope you will write for one of these issues. If you are interested in contributing an article, please let us know as soon as possible.

Several other features of fforum specifically need your input. In each issue we plan to place "In the Limelight" a teacher, school, or school district doing work in the state which is of interest to all of us. We need you to share your newsworthy projects with us if we are to make others aware of them. In the feature "Between Classes," we will publish your poetry or prose or that of your students if you will share these with us. Finally, in their column "From the Guidance Office," a team of resident experts, Drs. Fidditch and Foilitch, are

ready to tackle, or grapple with, any and all professional problems you call to their attention. We plan to share with you in "ECB Reports" as well as providing an "ECB FreeB" in each issue. The "FreeB" is a lesson plan (complete with duplicatable materials) offered for your consideration.

There is this to say about "copyright": Everything that appears in fforum is intended for your use. For that reason there are no restrictions at all on any use you wish to make of it.

And this, about receiving fforum: This first issue is being sent to all secondary schools, colleges, and universities in Michigan. If you wish to continue to receive fforum or to begin receiving it, please notify us. There is no charge for subscription.

And this, about thank you's: To those of you who wrote for this first issue, who agreed to meet an unrealistic deadline, who encouraged the editor with your enthusiasm, thank you.

And this, for Bernard Van't Hul and Dan Fader: THANK YOU.

**Waterford Mott (cont. from p. 18)**

packet of materials and suggestions for increasing the amount of writing in non-English courses which we will offer to the entire staff.

Much of our effort is in staff development. If we can help teachers feel confident as teachers of writing, not significantly increasing their paper load, and let them see writing improvement in their students, we will have succeeded as staff development consultants. If we can help students feel confident as writers, significantly increasing their paper load, and let them see their own writing improvement, we will have succeeded as teachers.

*Norm Ballou is English department head at Waterford Mott High School in Pontiac.*

ECB FreeB

Cheryl Stevens' "Teaching with Ken Macrorie" reminded me of Reginald Page's "Obituary," a poem distributed to members of a workshop for teachers of writing at the 1978 NCTE Convention in Kansas City. The poem lends itself to activities which may be of use in units on diction, poetry, and structure of language.

It exemplifies masterful use of concrete terms and specific reference while provoking students into thinking of other messages in which abstract terms or general reference would be more effective.

Focus on the diction of the poem opens the door to students' insight into structuring and ordering ideas in poems and other texts.

Goals:

1. To give students practice in the control of concrete and abstract terms, specific and general reference
2. To reinforce the concept that language choice varies with a writer's purpose
3. To help students see that all writing, including their own has the potential for several structures of expression
4. To guide students to an appreciation of Robert Page's effective use of "kinesthetic imagery"

Materials

Robert Page's "Obituary" (duplicated on the reverse side of this sheet)

Procedure

1. Having introduced key terms (concrete, abstract, specific, general, denotation, connotation, imagery, kinesthetic) at some time before the lesson, distribute copies of "Obituary." Begin the class by reading the poem aloud.

2. Ask students to identify the instances of concrete diction in the poem. (Relate the concrete words to specific reference.)

In the discussion that takes place, explore questions such as these:

- Why does the poet refer specifically to ordinary objects in a poem entitled "Obituary"?
- What do these specific objects suggest about the poet, his likes and dislikes, his relationships to other persons, and so on?

[As students answer in general statements, write these on the board. Observe that answers to such questions as you have been asking are often stated in general terms.]

- What would the poet gain or lose by substituting abstract terms for the concrete ones? General reference for specific?

- Why would a responsible editor of a newspaper accept or reject such a poem as this if it were written as an actual obituary?

3. Ask students to write their own obituary poems for the next class meeting.

4. Read several or all of the poems aloud. (It can be fun to have students guess who the poets are.) Students will respond to their classmates' imaginative choice of details, to their ordering of details, to effective use of repetition and variation of words, images, and line or sentence patterns.

In the course of the discussion, observe that there are sundry structures for expression inherent in topics themselves. Try rearranging the details in one or several poems. Ask why the student writers ordered the details as they did?

Extend the discussion into points of comparison among Page's, the teacher's, and the students' obituaries. Observe the degree of success in vivid use of concrete diction, control of kinesthetic images, in repetition and variation. Revise some poems--beginning with the teacher's own. Ask what is gained or lost in the process. Encourage all the language experimentation that the lesson is designed to foster.

Note (from Patti Stock):

If you adapt this lesson or parts of it for use, will you please let me know of your successes or frustrations?

OBITUARY

Mr. Page is survived by  
a watch with a broken band  
two guitars  
a brother  
four friends  
seventy four records  
one grey coat  
the collected works  
    of a college education  
a folder full of photographs  
two surfboards  
sundry stereo components  
a pair of jungle boots  
two sisters.  
assorted eye glasses  
a duck decoy  
two cameras  
a bronze star  
driftwood seashells and sand  
a duck decoy  
and a wife  
to place the things  
a life collects.

- Reginald Page -

# From the Guidance Office

Dear Drs. Fidditch and Foilitch::

I have a serious professional problem. I teach English composition to eleventh- and twelfth-graders in a suburban high school. They are anxious about their writing. Their parents and counselors tell them they must have the basic skills if they hope to be accepted at the colleges of their choice.

Specifically, my students wish to know how to punctuate well. They say, "Ms. Punctilio, please teach us how to punctuate well."

Every time I try to teach them a lesson on the virtue of the comma, the expressive power of the colon, the exhilaration of the dash, they slump, sigh, squirm, sleep, and, as if that were not enough, snore.

Doctors Fidditch and Foilitch, can you help me?

Sincerely,  
(Ms.) Inez M. Punctilio

Dear Ms. Punctilio:

Your students' direct way of saying things is gratifying; your appeal to us in their behalf is moving.

You didn't mention the shelves of dusty handbooks that offer hundreds of drills and exercises in the very skills that your anxious students covet. You have found, I suppose, that the best of those drills and exercises fail to help any but the rarest of students.

Let me relay to you the simple yet exciting practice of a teacher in North Farmington (who will identify herself, I hope, so that we can give you her name in a later forum), who told me what she does for students like yours. I'll describe her method in steps:

Step One: She finds some prose (expository or narrative--any kind that figures to be interesting to her students).

Step Two: She takes fifteen minutes of class time to dictate a paragraph or longer segment to her students--first at ordinary speed, for them to enjoy the prose, then slowly, so that students can copy her dictation and punctuate as they copy.

Step Three: She initiates a discussion of how the students punctuated what they wrote--allowing, of course, for differences among their choices; allowing as well for a student's improvement on the punctuation of the published writer (whose editor is only human, after all).

The crucial factor, as always: That North Farmington woman seems herself a witty and interested teacher, able to identify prose that kids enjoy listening to and obviously eager that they should learn in their own good time.

Sincerely,

Bertrand M. Fidditch

Dearest I.M.:

Your students' anxiety (and that of their "parents and counselors") puts me in mind of a middle-aged drunkard:

There was this drunkard, of middle age, whose youth had been wasted in the single-minded getting of money and status and power--along with the spouse and children that had accrued somehow. For this drunkard there had never been time to pause for higher things--for contemplation, for conversation, for golf.

Trucking one morning down the turnpike en route to a Board of Directors' meeting in a company pickup, the drunkard caught, in the corner of one red eye, some golfers contemplating and conversing about the unrepaired divot on the thirteenth tee.

Seized of a sudden by a blend of remorse, envy, and resolution, the

drunkard directed the company chauffeur to take the very next exit and, by-passing several bars, to drive directly to the country-club pro shop, where the pro was holding office hours.

To the pro the drunkard explained: "I have never taken time for higher things--have never held a golf club in my hands. Yet know, in my middle age, I covet the contemplation and conversation of my peers--and their handicaps. My liver is shot, it's true; my limbs are shaky. It would give me migraines, moreover, to practice at keeping my eye always on the ball. Nor do I have time to work now on a backswing and on pitching and putting and all that.

"But I am rich. Name your price and teach me simply the basics; teach me how to play eighteen little old golf holes below, say, eighty. I will pay."

"Be gone," said George Guru (golf pro, called GG by his pupils). "Abandon spouse and children and the getting and spending of money. Take cold showers and long walks. On those walks, carry a stick. With it, hit stones and contemplate where they roll. Forty-five dollars."

The drunkard bellied up for a double at the country-club bar--extra dry, to steady the nerves--and complained to the bartender: "That Guru guy in the pro shop, he flatly refused to teach me the basic skills."

The bartender's dacquiri smile (frozen) melted into a sympathetic frown. Then, to be in time for the Board of Directors' meeting, the drunkard sped away--a sadder but not much wiser woman.

Fondly,

Ignatius Foilitch, B.S., Ph.D.

### Pro (cont. from p. 14)

The prewriting approach is just that: an approach. It does not, and could not, attempt to solve all problems related to the teaching of writing; it can help to create a comfort zone for student confidence within which student and teacher can work together. Criticism is easier to take when it is given constructively by a teacher-reader in an atmosphere where the student has learned that although he may not be the best, he can write; he can improve.

After Lucas taught at Cambridge for forty years, he observed: "To write really well is a gift inborn; those who have it teach themselves; one can only try to help and hasten the process." The prewriting approach can be a way "to help and hasten the process."

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