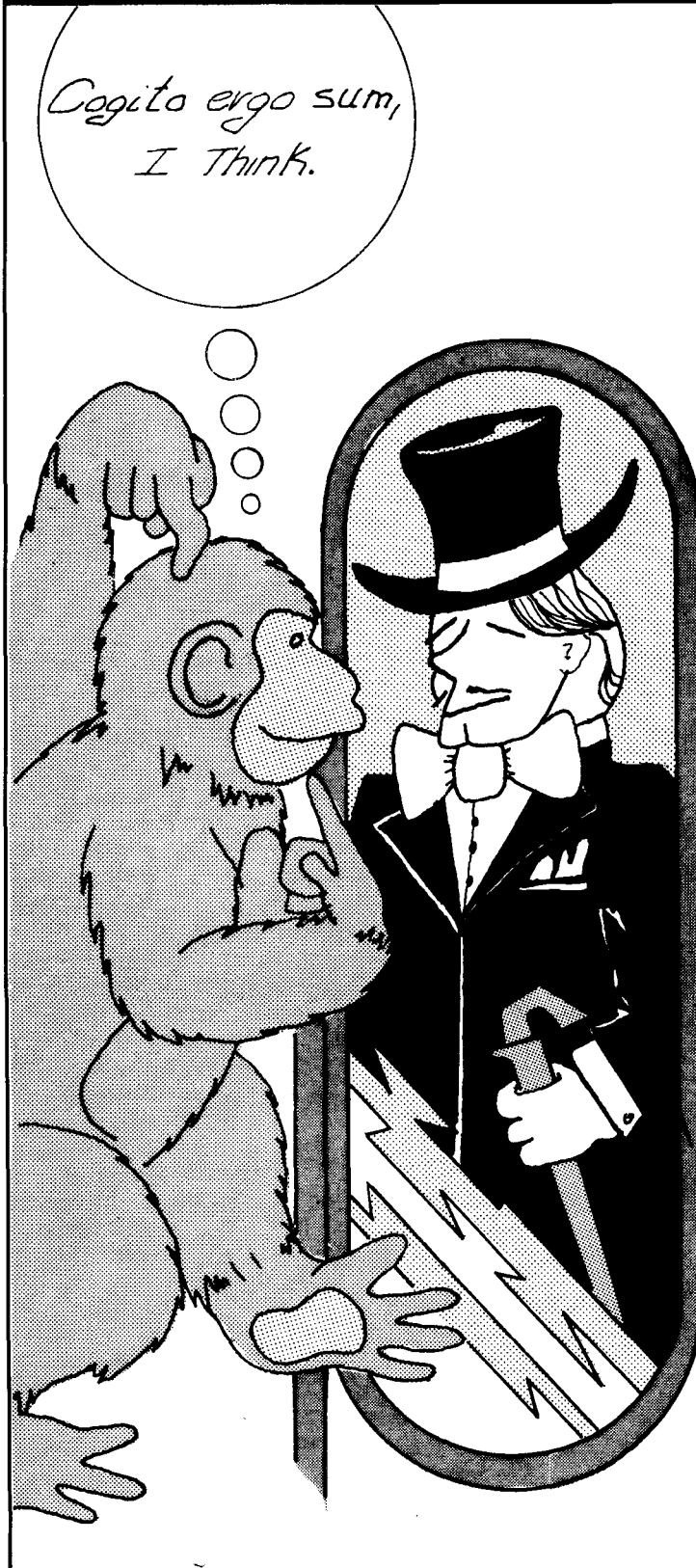


FFORUM

A Newsletter of the English Composition Board, University of Michigan



LANGUAGE-USING ANIMALS

Ken Macrorie

At lunch today Joyce, my wife, told me she had read in The New York Times that, unlike most animals, the young of higher apes are able to identify themselves in a mirror and react, some going so far as to preen themselves before the glass. This afternoon I picked up a copy of Undressed, a broadsheet of writing done by a student in a winter, 1978, class of mine. One story, by Lois, began this way:

When I was about two and a half, my parents, my brother, and I were watching TV. One of those terrible World War II movies came on where the Japanese pilots shoot at the Americans and scream jibberish to each other. I'm not sure whether it was just because the Japanese were so obviously the bad guys, but I suddenly realized that they looked weird.

Lois went on telling how she had called the Japanese "funnies," then looked over at her older brother and realized he resembled them. She began screaming in a sing-song voice, "Jimmy's a funny!" Eventually her father picked her up and placed her in front of a mirror which showed her she was a funny also. She became hysterical. The two Korean children had been adopted by an American family of German stock. "Since then,"

(continued on p. 3)

From the ECB

fforum, the Newsletter of the English Composition Board, is intended to give teachers of writing throughout Michigan a forum of fact and opinion about their art. In another article in this first number, Patti Stock, editor of the newsletter, speaks of what she envisions for its future. This brief piece is intended to supply a context for that vision:

The ECB has accepted a seven-part responsibility from the faculty of the College of Literature, Science, and Arts at Michigan. Six of those parts--Assessment of all incoming undergraduate students; Tutorial instruction where necessary; Introductory Composition; Writing Workshop support available to every student; Junior/Senior Writing courses; Research on the effects of the program--are encompassed within the College. The Board's seventh function is to articulate its writing program with those of secondary schools and community colleges throughout Michigan.

A part of that seventh function, fforum has been preceded in its intent by two conferences in Ann Arbor in May and December of 1978, a workshop also held in Ann Arbor for three days in June of 1979, and eighty-four seminars on the teaching of writing offered during 1978-79 on the campuses of Michigan high schools and colleges. During 1979-80 the ECB will continue to provide seminars to faculties of schools it has not visited before, and it will convene a second writing workshop on the Michigan campus next June. In addition, the Board has agreed to offer in this academic year at least twelve half-day seminars to teachers at Bloomfield Hills Andover High School in order to assist them with further development of their writing curriculum.

The idea of fforum is exciting to everyone here at the ECB. Please help us to make it useful for you as well.

Daniel Fader

EDITORIAL

The ancient Roman forum, like the Greek agora before it, was a marketplace forming the center of public business and open discussion in its society. It was with this model in mind that the English Composition Board's fforum was conceived as a meeting place for discussion of writing and mutual instruction by teachers of writing in Michigan. Mindful of

the significance of the historical forum, we remembered the practice of another era. In the middle ages, some scribes used doubled letters to serve as capital letters; hence, our own distinctive, twentieth-century fforum. The name of the publication itself reminds us of a historical legacy of professionals who taught writing and leads us toward a promising future for a field of study coming to new understandings of itself.

FFORUM

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We who teach writing base our work on a rich heritage of theory and practice; moreover, we have current research and developing theory to assimilate as we teach. The challenge is great. To serve you in meeting this challenge, we designed fforum to include articles by experts themselves, essays reviewing the work of those experts, critical analyses of their contribution, and a sampling of methods and materials developed by classroom teachers who have translated their theory into practice. Each issue will focus on the work of a specific expert or

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Waterford Mott High School Writing Grant



October 15, 1979

Dear Reader,

When the ECB Newsletter was proposed at the June Writing Workshop in Ann Arbor, its design and content were uncertain, but its purpose was not. It was intended to be a useful tool for mutual instruction and dialogue among teachers of writing throughout Michigan. As the first issue of fforum is distributed, we ask you to help us achieve our purpose by evaluating its design and content. Your responses will also help us shape our Outreach Program in the future, especially our second annual Writing Workshop next June. Please respond to the following questions in a separate letter or in the space provided below.

What is your opinion of:

1. fforum's balance of instruction and dialogue?
2. The instructional components:
 - A. Articles by the expert(s) in "At the Lectern"?
 - B. Article reviewing the work of the expert(s) in "In the Library"?
 - C. Articles, pro and con, assessing the work, in "At the Bar"?
 - D. An article presenting a teacher's translation of theory into practice in "From the Notebook"?
3. The dialogue components:
 - A. An article featuring the newsworthy activity of a teacher, school, or school district in "In the Limelight"?
 - B. Creative writings of teachers or their students in "Between Classes"?
 - C. A team of resident experts considering professional problems you send them by letter or telephone in "In the Guidance Office"?
 - D. Announcements of publications and events in "On the Bulletin Board"?
 - E. "ECB Reports"?
 - F. The "ECB FreeB"?
 - G. The "Editorial"?

If you have suggestions for content of future issues, I'd be happy to receive them. Meanwhile, I hope you enjoy fforum as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

Sincerely,



Patti Stock
Editor

P.S. Will you please circulate this first issue of fforum among the members of your department. The generosity of the A.W. Mellon foundation enables us to send fforum to interested teachers of writing throughout Michigan. If you wish to receive it, please send us your name and address.

P.P.S. You are free to duplicate parts or all of fforum for yourself or your colleagues.

At the Lectern

wrote Lois, "I've learned that people will accept me, Oriental or not, as long as I accept myself."

In the seminar where Lois's story was read aloud, the listener-readers were stunned. It was told simply and tersely with no embellishments, a Greek tragedy of recognition, touching fears of identity universal in all of us.

Six months later I was looking in a kind of mirror as I thought back over the experience of teaching 38 seminars in the last 14 years. The people ranged from 9- to 50-year-olds. As I stared at the glass of memory, I realized that I (and other teachers around the country who had directed similar seminars for a number of years) had before me a body of experience like that of an anthropologist who does field research. Week after week, month after month, year after year, we had observed groups of 10 to 30 people randomly chosen (within the selective processes of school enrollment) doing the same thing. They had attempted to tell of their experience truthfully, and were present to see the effect upon others who sat listening to the stories while holding a typed version of a narrative in hand.

At that moment I saw that some generalizing was justified. Writing is ordinarily read by an absent reader. That's its function--to provide communication between people who aren't in each other's presence. But in our seminars, the writers faced their readers, and perceived their body language, appreciative laughs, gasps of amazement at sensing common feelings, gulps, grunts, inarticulate "oh's," sharp intakes of breath, or glassy-eyed stares, all to be read as keenly as the listeners were reading the writing. I know about "creative writing" workshops, where for years writers have made up a critical audience for each other; but so often there they respond in what they consider "literary ways," careful to echo the teacher's pet critical attitudes or theories. Here, all responses were honored.

In the mirror I saw students who had begun the course writing freely, encouraged to concentrate on truth-telling and not worry about punctuation, spelling, or grammar, and then were further countenanced in the first three meetings by a prohibition set on responders against negative comments--"Positive remarks or nothing at all." Such a beginning encouraged that voice in their heads that speaks as most persons begin the strings of words that make up sentences and meaning on paper. Lois had written something shaking to us and to herself; the voice had supplied it in a flow.



Again and again in these seminars, writers use live metaphor, subtle alliteration, powerful parallel structure, significant rhythms, grabbing openings, and endings that let go. The situation frees them to be what they are--language-using animals. When the physical responses of the group are strongest, a paper that evokes them is often said by the writer to have "just written itself." Without realizing they are using a literary term, responders often say, "It all seemed to come from one voice."

But when these same writers think they are being asked to write a "critical paper," they usually lose the flow of words in their heads and write English, the labored, word-wasting, empty dialect

of the schools. I'm beginning to understand why. Writing those papers, they revert to the common school experience--giving back the teacher's ideas--and the old feelings rise up in them, when they hadn't made themselves familiar with the actualities behind the ideas they were peddling. Unlike those few professional writers who write exposition powerfully, in most school writing students feel no ego satisfaction. Their work earns them no money. They won't lose their jobs if the writing is poor. If they're given a D or an F, they can always sign up for another section of the writing class. They know they're not writing for twenty other people, or hundreds or thousands, but for one--the teacher. It's wrong, this artificial, inhuman communication situation. It won't work. It never has worked. In the May, 1893, Atlantic Monthly, J. J. Greenough reflected upon "the great outcry. . . about the inability of the students admitted to Harvard College to write English clearly and correctly." He said the schools were requiring frequent written exercises that were corrected and commented on by the teacher, and asked, "With all this practice in writing, why do we not obtain better results?"

In the mirror I saw Lois's story about the "funnies" bringing about results in her peers. We have a way to go before the mirror shows powerful expository writing being read in writing classes. To bring that about we must put our students in situations where they feel a need to report, explain, or summarize.

Right now, I'm remembering Lois's paper. It made that room in Michigan shake like San Francisco.

Although retired from teaching, Ken Macrorie frequently conducts conferences and seminars for people interested in writing. His recently completed manuscript Searching Writing is to be published by Hayden Book Co. in the first half of 1980.

TEACHING WRITING WHILE TEACHING SOMETHING ELSE

Peter Elbow

We all teach writing, whether we are biology teachers or economics teachers or whatever. Or else we don't--in which case we make it harder for our students to write well. It turns out we can teach writing without taking any time away from biology or economics. I propose here thirteen ways of doing so. Most of them emphasize writing as process more than as product.

When the teacher insists on dealing with only the end product of writing, she is in effect teaching her students to focus their attention on the writing as if it were a pane of glass in the classroom window. Imagine the help, the relief, if she were to ask the students to focus through the glass to the scene beyond and simply forget about the writing. Those questions, which so often hamstring students who treat writing only as a product, will fade in importance: Did the writing communicate? What does the reader think of my writing? What does he think of me?

To accomplish this shift in focus, the teacher must structure writing activities which require (A) WRITING-AS-INPUT and (B) WRITING-AS-A-WAY-TO-GET-ANOTHER-JOB-DONE instead of and in addition to (C) WRITING-AS-COMMUNICATION.

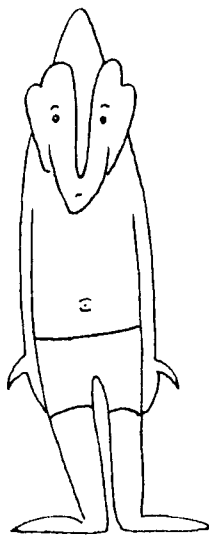
(A) WRITING-AS-INPUT

WRITING-AS-INPUT isn't for others. It is only for the writer. It's not even for the writer as a product that she must evaluate; it is for her as a process. She can happily throw the writing away because the reason for doing it is to help her understand something she did not understand before. The four suggestions below are designed to give students experience in this process.

1) Whenever there is a bunch of input--a lecture or a lot of reading--have stu-

dents engage in 10 minutes or more of writing to help assimilate that input. Students will get much more out of any lecture if the lecture is 10 minutes shorter, note-taking is discouraged, and the last 10 minutes are explicitly devoted to writing. Follow the writing with a "question period." Students will have more and better questions after digesting some implications of their free writing. Also, they will not need notes as much because they will remember ideas and conclusions which they have worked out for themselves.

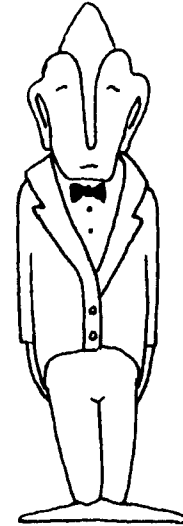
2) Similarly, try starting a discussion with a 10-minute freewriting. One reason so many discussions are tiresome and useless is because students haven't yet assimilated the reading, or the lecture, or some previous experience enough to have a meaty interchange. They have nothing to say. A free writing at the beginning of the discussion can help students chew over the material and reach some exploratory conclusions they are interested in sharing.



SIMPLE SYNTACK

In addition there are three easily recognizable benefits of an opening 10-minute freewriting. First, it gets people warmed up, gets their minds--and to some degree, their bodies--turning over. Second, for even the best students a

discussion is liable to involve doing two things at once: sharing what they think with others and also figuring out what they think for themselves. The 10-minute

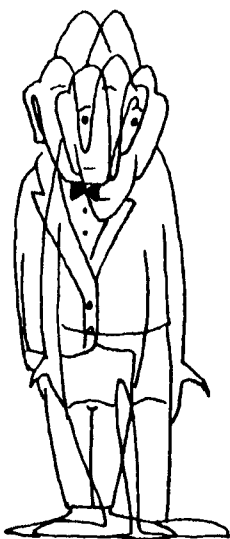


CORRECT SYNTACK

freewriting separates the two processes and gives the student the necessary privacy to work out what his own point of view is liable to be. After that is done, it is not so hard to share it. Third, there is a special value in sitting and writing in the same room with others. Even though there is no communicating going on during the 10 or 20 minutes of writing (a criticism some would level), it often puts people in the position of having something to communicate--a position they weren't in before.

3) Have 5 or 10 minutes free writing after a hard question, before anyone responds aloud. The writing gives students a chance to jot things down, collect their thoughts, get to a safer position for responding without fear of being caught saying something silly. This writing often means that everyone benefits from interacting with the question, and, therefore, everyone is liable to carry something away--not just the person who answered under normal conditions. Consider the benefits of this technique when the question asked is hard personally rather than conceptually. Such a question might be, "Can

anyone think of an example from her own life of X causing Y?" After playing with answers on paper, one isn't so threatened by them; one can see them in perspective; and, if necessary, one can edit out a smidgen here and there. The result is that one has control over the response and is often quite willing to share it.



GARBLED SYNTAX

4) Use free writing at the end of the seminar or discussion. The object here is for people to reach some closure, some conclusion, so that they actually carry away with them some of the benefit of the discussion. Students benefit more from their individually worked out inferences than the nice ones we want to work out for them. Something pleases me, in addition, about the symbolism of ending on a note of privacy and separation, each person drawing her own conclusions and then going home.

Remember, however, that this must be free writing. It musn't be judged, evaluated, handed in, or even shared (unless a student chooses to read some of what he wrote as part of an ensuing discussion.) Emphasize that students should not try to produce a good or sharable product but rather use the writing process to explore their own perceptions. But, do press students to keep the pencil moving even if it means writing gibberish or simply describing what they don't understand or

what they feel about the matter at hand. The benefits of the process are lost if the student sits there chewing the pencil or staring off into space.

**(B) WRITING-AS-A-WAY-
TO-GET-ANOTHER-JOB-DONE**

The activities suggested as WRITING-AS-A-WAY-TO-GET-ANOTHER-JOB-DONE require writing to accomplish another necessary task. The tasks are part of the life of every student, although they are often not facilitated by a student's writing. Everyone can think of countless reasons why it is needless or artificial or unfair to write when she could talk. To use these activities requires the exercise of substantial authority.

5) A lot of time will be saved if a student writes a statement of why she wants to join a program (course) and what information she needs to make a sound decision regarding the program (course). There will still be an interview in most cases, but the interview will be shorter and based on what the student has written. The student will think more about what she wants and what are her qualifications.

6) In the same vein, a student may write a statement of why she wishes to leave a program (course).

7) At the beginning of a seminar or course, it is helpful for the teacher and students to write rough, informal pieces telling what they want from the course, what they suspect it will be like, what they cannot tolerate, what it takes to maintain commitment, what are their special requests, and what special strengths they can offer. If these rough pieces are shared, everyone can estimate how much conflict there is likely to be because of differing needs and expectations and think about what changes, if any, need to be made.

8) Employers and schools need to know more about a student's work than a teacher can tell; therefore, self-evaluations are essential. This writing isn't so

much evaluated as writing but as to whether or not it works in the two most critical ways: Does it satisfy the writer? And, does it have the desired effect on the transcript reader? In truth, self-evaluations exert a noticeable benefit on student writing: students learn to say what is true in a forceful, clear way in their own voices.

9) But, our evaluation system is pointed mostly at transcripts. They tend to be written at the end of programs and for the benefit of transcript readers. An equally important job that needs to be done with words is writing evaluations before programs or courses are finished for the benefit of the participants--the student, other students, and the teacher. It is very helpful when students write informal self-evaluations and program evaluations periodically during a course--rougher, more exploratory, more risk-taking than they can afford in a transcript. The goal is not to try to say the right thing but rather to discover, empirically, what happens to be in your head. A first draft is often best. It definitely helps if they are shared with the teacher and perhaps with other students.

10) Yet another task requires content dissemination. Each student might be asked to read one book that no one else reads or do some interviewing or other kind of research and share the results in writing. Writing is necessary so that the results can be read out of class and not take too much time.

None of these writings should be graded or judged as writing but rather as ways to get something done. The question always needs to be, "Did it work?" In other words, do the class members now have possession of the research?

(C) WRITING-AS-COMMUNICATION

Although the emphasis in this piece has been on process-writing, I do have several suggestions on the end-product--the essay.

11) Two or three short papers produce more learning and improvement than one long one--even if the total time spent is the same. There is a limit to how much any single paper can be improved, no matter how hard one works on it or how many drafts one puts it through. The student learns more if he gets reinforcement for the strengths of the paper, gets feedback on no more than two important recurrent problems, and then is invited to call it a day on that paper and write a different one.

12) It is especially bad when there is only a term paper due at the end. This means feedback is treated only as evaluation and is entirely wasted as feedback that can help in future writing. If it really does make sense to have a term paper due at the end, make sure that the student has already received feedback on an earlier draft--from you and from other students--so that what comes in at the end represents learning and improvement. On the final draft, the student should receive credit for improvement.

13) It does not follow necessarily that if you require a piece of writing you have to read it. You can require students to turn out a short paper every other week, require that one or more other students give feedback to each paper, and frankly admit that you'll collect the stack of them once or twice a quarter and read only half of each student's writing although you will look through it all to be sure it was done and that feedback was seriously given. Students need help in learning to treat writing as a transaction between peers and colleagues, instead of only treating it as something given to teachers. Student writing suffers from the fact that its only audience is teachers with whom students have such convoluted authority relationships.

If students do plenty of WRITING-AS-INPUT and WRITING-AS-A-WAY-TO-GET-ANOTHER-JOB-DONE, they do not have such a hard time with WRITING-AS-COMMUNICATION. When they learn to trust and enjoy the writing

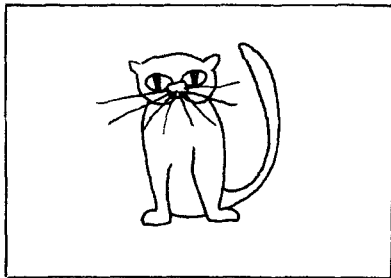
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In the Library

Henry Baron

The madness of Ken Macrorie and Peter Elbow has been with us a while now. For surely there is madness in their methods, though not all in the profession agree that such madness is divinely rather than diabolically inspired.

The true-blue traditionalist teacher of composition is likely to suspect the latter, for it is his/her beliefs and

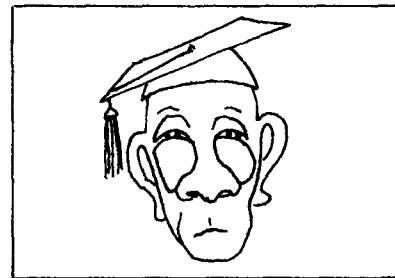


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practices that are especially challenged and upset. Neither Macrorie nor Elbow accepts the hallowed think-write tradition. Instead, carefully planned and executed writing must give way to "free writing," which is something like a verbal cloud burst, intense and concentrated, and, indeed, the necessary incipient force toward the shaping of more honest, and more powerful writing. Such an emphasis also rejects the more traditional materials and methods: a textbook full of prescriptions and proscriptions, explanations, definitions, and the inevitable exercises; assignments on impersonal subjects specified by the teacher, turned in on the due date by the students, eventually returned by the teacher who, if diligent, has contributed his/her emendations, injunctions, incriminations, or, if less than diligent, just a letter grade; after which, the next chapter of the textbook is studied, dealing perhaps with yet another method of paragraph development--and thus the cycle repeats itself all over again. Both Macrorie's Third Way and Elbow's teacherless class challenge and reject many of the underlying assumptions which govern this kind of composition teaching.

Macrorie, after years of blindness as he calls it, discovered the Third Way and gave it extensive promotion through the publication of his book Uptaught. What he discovered essentially was that students' writing tended to come alive when they wrote non-stop for short periods on personal subjects of their own choice. That turned his teaching around and led him to view education as neither a parroting process nor as limitless, unguided experimentation, but rather as requiring an environment in which students "are given real choices," in which they "operate with freedom and discipline," in which they are "encouraged to learn the way of experts."

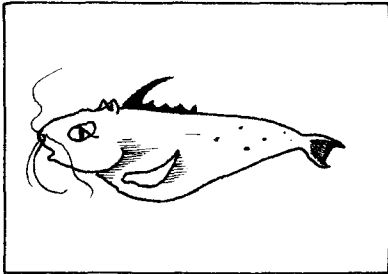
Uptaught is Macrorie's manifesto of that insight. It's a smorgasbord of fragments, like journal entries, that often sting with vitriol and ring with conviction. For in Uptaught Macrorie is an angry man, often with himself and his blind alliance for too long with an academic system that has, in his view, robbed students of their humanity. In many ways Uptaught is more an anti-Establishment tract than a book about writing, though Macrorie sees a direct connection between the academic institution that enslaves and writing that fails. A thoughtful reader will often be annoyed when Macrorie succumbs to hyperbole and occasionally even descends to disparaging



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other reputable, professional writers who have failed to see his light. But the many questionable assertions and some rather trite and trivial snippets sprinkled throughout Uptaught should not obscure the most important fact about this unconventional book: it raises some

fundamental questions about the teaching and the process of writing, and it has significantly altered the teaching of those who have taken Macrorie's Third Way seriously.



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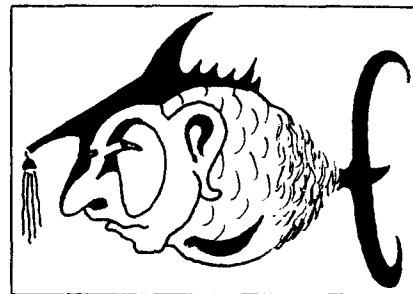
The Third Way

The Third Way means absolutely free writing at the beginning of a semester, later changing to assigned, planned, focused writing, "with freedom enough within each assignment to allow the student to find what counts for him. But discipline enough to insure that it usually also counts for the teacher" (p. 179). The Third Way also means exposing much writing to the whole class for response and critical analysis. For Macrorie, to teach the Third Way "is to set up an arrangement which allows the majority of students in a class to find their own powers and to increase them" (p. 88).

In Uptaught Macrorie boasts that students, following the new way, easily and naturally connect their class work to their outside experiences; A Vulnerable Teacher records that students often fail to make any connections at all. Hence Macrorie is still a somewhat disillusioned, if not an angry man; he believes that to be vulnerable means introducing one's real feelings and thoughts and experiences into the classroom; it means making personal connections. What others might denounce as subjective distractions or affective fallacies, Macrorie values as growth in truthfulness and depth of experience and insight. For students who resist or

reject personal vulnerability, the Third Way fails and fails badly.

A Vulnerable Teacher is not a satisfying book--not so much because more than half of it constitutes a loosely connected assortment of student writing, much of it less than powerful, but more because it lacks the verve and spirit of Uptaught. And ultimately it has little to teach us, for in the face of many a teaching disaster, Macrorie's usual stance is one of chagrined helplessness. Classes succeed or fail according to differences in student spirit. Still, it is true: Macrorie's faith, though tested and shaken, emerges intact by the end of the book. It remains, he says, the essential goal of his work "to open up and strengthen people who possess strengths. At the moment my challenge is to find ways of getting students to talk again. I will do that. They and I will find how to create new climates in which we will all grow" (p. 183).



ENGLISH

Macrorie's Approach to Teaching Writing

Macrorie's new approach to the teaching of writing is most concretely expressed in Writing To Be Read and Telling Writing. The first is intended as a high school text, the second for use in college; yet the two are virtually identical. These books feature extensive student and professional writing as models, both positive and negative. (In fact, less than half the books' prose is written by Macrorie himself.) The obvious point is that students learn not from rules but from observing the practice of others.

Though the chapters follow no apparent sequential design, any serious student using either text will learn much about writing and will do much writing, all the while enjoying both stimulation and challenge. Students will learn to eschew the dreadful disease of Engfish (a term Macrorie uses to designate the phony, pretentious, bloated, feel-nothing, say-nothing dead language of academia) and its derivatives like Whoery, Whichery, Thatery, Namery, Explainery, It-Ache and Is-ness. They will be challenged to write forcefully and truthfully in a variety of kinds, such as personal narratives, articles, reports, critiques, editorials, and dialogues; they will work on tightening and sharpening; they will practice the uses of irony, repetition, and parallel structure; and they will vary style, control sound, find angle, and maintain flow. To all of those activities will accrue all of the other skills that can make good writing better.

Much of this writing and rewriting will be exposed to the process of group discussion and response, which one chapter explains in very helpful detail. In the revised edition of Telling Writing, Macrorie has added an excellent section, titled "Suggestions for Teachers," which describes the thirteen points that make up the core of his writing program. More modest now than in Uptaught, Macrorie no longer proclaims the Third Way as the way to truth and life in writing, at the same time he more effectively persuades us that his way merits our thoughtful attention.

These texts are perhaps most useful for advanced students in high school and college, particularly those in creative writing. Macrorie emphasizes personal, informal, imaginative though disciplined writing--writing that is not merely clear, cogent, and coherent, but also full of feeling, likely to engage readers' interest. His books demonstrate that many Third Way students have obviously succeeded.

Peter Elbow Dismisses the Teacher

If Macrorie seems radical, Peter Elbow is more so. In his one book, Writing Without Teachers, Elbow advocates going further than eliminating conventional texts and methods: he would also dismiss the teacher. Instead he would have a group of seven to twelve people who commit themselves to meeting regularly for at least ten weeks, writing regularly, and submitting much of that writing to group members for their subjective reaction to its effect.

Elbow shares Macrorie's enthusiasm for free writing. But he pushes the concept much further, both in theory and application. A piece of writing is like an organism, going through several stages of development and growth, till it finally emerges with a clearly identifiable design, a "center of gravity," a life of its own, authentic and complete. If the writing is of a long text, the process would move through four one-hour stages: three 45-minute periods of rapid or "free" writing without editing interruptions; three 15-minute periods for reviewing the writing and uncovering a movement toward a main assertion; one last 45-minute period for more careful development of that main assertion; and a final 15-minute period for revising and editing. The text would then be exposed to group response, after which it would likely undergo more of what Elbow stresses as tough and ruthless editing.

Do Macrorie and Elbow make a difference? If my students are a valid sample, they do. Many for the first time begin to think about and practice writing as more than merely academic exercise. Many discover for the first time that they have memorable things to say and can learn to say them memorably. Many, indeed, experience a newly-found sense of freedom as writers.

If there is madness in the methods of Macrorie and Elbow, perhaps many of us as teachers and writers could profit from a little such madness, whatever the source of its inspiration.

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At the Bar

THE NON-THREATENING APPROACH

Susanna Defever

Pro

Writing reveals the writer. It is a highly personal action, and, to many students, a threatening one. Teaching students how to write has been the subject for discussions, analyses, theories, workshops, and countless books. Yet we remain plagued by the uneasy knowledge that illiteracy, once confined primarily

Peter Elbow and Ken Macrorie approach the problem by encouraging student-centered, self-revealing activities for the purpose of discovery and exploration before writing.

to the uneducated, can be found in recognizable form on all levels of education.

Peter Elbow and Kenneth Macrorie approach the problem by encouraging student-centered, self-revealing activities for the purpose of discovery and exploration before writing. The prewriting approach can alleviate threatening fears and stimulate learning. It can reveal writing to the writer.

It was in the 1960's that the significance of prewriting experiences began to be emphasized. During a speech to two-year college English teachers in the mid-sixties, Dr. Clinton S. Burhans, MSU, spoke of the benefits of prewriting, especially for students who do not like to write, who find writing difficult, who think it is unimportant for them or just dull routine. There and in his book, The Would-Be Writer, he stressed "freeing the student from what too often seem to be conditioned responses to writing assignments." Today, almost fifteen years later, prewriting activities are still used with notable results. Discovery by design leads to writing with rewards.

Prewriting discovery sessions identify the student as the center in his writing,

THE NEED FOR DIVERSE APPROACHES

Stephen A. Bernhardt

Con

I have no difficulties with the pedagogical suggestions of Ken Macrorie or Peter Elbow. Free writing exercises can help procrastinators and agonizingly careful self-editors get something on the page, a beginning at least. This kind of help can be extended by appealing to the developing writer's sense of honesty, by instilling confidence in pursuit of a personal voice and thus discouraging vague, boring, Engfishy prose. Directing writing to an audience of peers for comments and suggestions helps writers hear their voices and perceive the effects of their writing on others. My quarrel is not with teachers who choose to use these methods, but with those who choose them to the exclusion of other sound methods.

Teachers of composition cannot be reminded too frequently of the individual nature of writing--each student is different and no single method will meet the needs of all. Though freewriting gets the juices flowing in some, for others it is a waste of time. Certainly there are writers whose anxiety about producing "perfect" copy prevents them from producing any at all. For other writers, however, the problem is not an overactive self-editor, but confusion about what is expected on an assignment, an unclear notion of the audience, a lack of something to say, or an absence of motivation. Still other writers can't begin because they don't know where they are going. A sense of structure may get these students underway with confidence: an outline, a list of major points, or a broad and extremely general sense of the divisions of a piece. Freewriting exercises help only some students solve the varied problems of producing a sufficient quantity of acceptable prose within a reasonable amount of time.

Not only is freewriting supposed to get writers underway; it is also meant to help them discover both what it is they want to say and a personal, honest voice for saying it. All of Macrorie's examples of Telling Writing feature a