

THE WRITING PROGRAM

THEORY

The program that follows offers a departure from the traditional "method" of teaching writing. It has been developed over the past seven years to overcome the gaps, omissions and oversimplification of the present system and, at the same time, to offer the student a more meaningful as well as a more challenging approach to the problem of thinking and writing.

The Need for Change

The program makes its initial departure from the traditional method on the question of emphasis. The traditional method, as exemplified by current texts, devotes ninety-eight per cent of its effort to grammar and the mechanics of English with the remaining two per cent making what may be considered at best a superficial, fragmentary examination of the thinking that underlies ideas and writing. Grammar and mechanics have nothing to do with conceiving ideas and, in fact, only become necessary after the idea has been formulated - their application is a last step in the process not a first. It is for this reason that even the study of mechanics is purely academic to many students because their own thinking has not advanced to the point where much that is taught is useful to them. The student, for example, who habitually thinks in simple relationships sees little sense in the uses of the colon, subordinating conjunctions, or relative clauses and he never will until his own thinking can be complicated to where his own ideas necessitate their use.

The worst feature of the remaining space that the traditional text does devote to thinking is that it treats this vital process as a

generality and omits or oversimplifies phases of the process that are essential to a maximum development of ideas. In brief, the traditional method asks the student to do this:

"Sit down in a comfortable chair with paper and pencil in hand and think! Think of anything that might be worth going into your theme and make a list. After about ten or fifteen minutes of concentrating, arrange your list into an outline. This is your plan; now you are ready to write."

There are variations to this, of course; but, in the main, this is the substance that characterizes the approach to the problem from the sixth grade through high school. If this were a generalization culminating a detailed examination of what is involved in the evolution of thinking into writing it would be a different story, but it is not. The student has been given no objective toward which to think that will expose any subject's fundamental nature in terms of his own experience. Certainly, "think of anything" is no answer to this. While "worth" is mentioned, no evaluative criteria or methods of test which would separate the essential from the trivial have been established. The whole intricate problem of recall through which the individual gets at, and makes use of, his experience is omitted even though recall provides the basis of all ideas and is a determining factor in the creative potential of the individual. The most glaring void occurs with the completion of the outline and the statement "now you are ready to write". Left unexplained is the whole complex problem of translating the fragmentary outline into free flowing, effective prose. The problems of synthesis and interpretation which underlie this translation somehow are never broached - especially in relation to the student's own outline.

I-1b

In short, the traditional method does not isolate the problem areas of thinking nor does it advance disciplines or methods to overcome these problems. Furthermore, the traditional method does not treat the evolution of thinking into writing as a continuous process in which each phase of thinking supplies the essential base on which the next phase functions. It does not start at the beginning nor does it carry through to the problems of conceptualization.

This anemic broth on which our young minds are fed is fortified with two supplementary approaches which are equally ineffective: the use of examples created by masters in the art of communication, and motivation. In the case of examples, there is simply not enough exposed in them to illuminate the process that led to their creation. Any such selections, for example, do not indicate how the elements that comprise the ideas were assembled out of experience, what was eliminated, what the basis of selection was or why the synthesis and interpretation took the form it did. It is difficult to see how the student can be made to see how the "cake" is baked by asking him to eat it. Furthermore, even granting that principles may be illustrated through these examples, each selection would portray a different aspect of the total thought process with the result that a thoroughly disorganized approach would be forthcoming. It would not indicate how ideas begin, nor the sequential development that leads to the final product. These selections provide the objective but not the means of achieving it. The second approach, motivation, also has its limitations. While creating the desire to write is of the utmost importance, it can only lead the student to the problem. Motivation by itself provides the student with no means of fulfilling the great expectation he may have for the initial vague,

fragmentary, or partially conceived concept that he wishes to communicate. It may be said here that the only really sustaining motivation comes from success in the writing itself. This success begins to occur when the student is shown how what is vague can be endowed with form and definition; how what is fragmentary can be brought into connected relationship; and how what is partially conceived may evolve into the unity of a total concept expressing insight and awareness revealing his own experience. The traditional method provides none of these insights.

The traditional method supplies the student with little that he needs to know in order to think and communicate effectively. It does not face the problem that thinking underlies the formation of ideas and hence writing. It treats thinking as a generality and expects the student, who is in no position either in terms of experience or knowledge, to develop the specifics of this, the most complex activity in which man engages. Worst of all, it then proceeds to grade the student's writing on a basis of things that have not been taught. The student is marked down for underdevelopment in ideas, but where in the system is he shown how to achieve full development? The student is marked down for using generalities without the necessary support, but where is the analytical process taught that develops this support? The student is marked down for oversimplification in the structure of his ideas, but where is he taught how to increase the complexity of relationships that arise out of the elements of his own experience? It was with these inadequacies and inequities in mind that the following program was devised.

Objectives

The purpose of this writing program is to develop in our students the ability to conceive and express ideas that are clear, valid, original and reflective of the highest possible level of maturity. It is a basic premise of the program that these characteristics in ideas seldom occur by accident but, rather, are the product of concepts and mental processes that lead to the structure of ideas having those qualities. It would seem obvious, for example, that the writer has little chance of clearly expressing ideas unless he has in mind a concept of clarity against which to measure the relationships he wishes to communicate. Such a concept imposes on the writer a two fold task: he must pursue the substance of the idea until the relationship is clearly defined in his own mind; and, secondly, he must see how the idea may be constructed in writing so as to create a parallel meaning in the reader's mind. This example highlights the three fold objective of the program: 1) to inculcate a clear understanding of the requirements imposed on the structure of ideas by clarity, validity, originality and maturity and thus provide the criteria for self-evaluation; 2) to provide an insight into the disciplines and methods of search and recall which underlie and therefore hold the potential out of which these characteristics in ideas may be achieved; and 3) to advance methods of synthesis and interpretation through which the disciplines of search imposed in establishing the base for ideas may be translated into ideas with the desired characteristics.

The Nature of the Problem

The core of the problem in the teaching of writing lies in the zone of interaction between experience and mental processes from which

ideas develop. As most subjects for writing start in the mind as vague, fragmentary or loosely held complexes the problem resolves itself to the way this interaction can be made to endow vagueness with form, to bring the fragmentary to completeness and to reduce the loosely held to definitive relationship. Each aspect is essential in the writer's understanding before an idea may be effectively communicated. Clarity, validity, originality and maturity, which are the end products, arise out of the way this interaction takes place. They become objectives and condition the developmental process itself. In other words, the writer must have a concept of the meaning of these characteristics as they establish the objectives for thinking and then must understand methods or mental disciplines through which ideas may be evoked from experience which meet the requirements of these characteristics.

Of the two elements creating this interaction, experience must be considered the more constant and, hence, least subject to alteration of change as a means of improving ideas. There is no way in which the whole intricate complex of experience may be rapidly enlarged so as to significantly influence the potential nature of ideas that may be evoked from it. A broadening of experience and the consequent improvement in ideas that may result must await the inexorable march of time.

On the other hand, a clarification of the objectives of thinking or a new method of search and recall which makes fuller use of existing experience or a method of synthesis through which a context of greater clarity may be achieved can directly and immediately alter the nature of ideas achieved. It is for this reason that the primary emphasis in the program has been placed on the development of mental disciplines that affect the growth of ideas by making more pertinent and more extensive use of existing experience. At the same time, the

program anticipates that experience is steadily increasing in complexity due to maturation and advances method which in itself is capable of containing and utilizing subsequent growth.

The teaching of writing must inevitably come to grips, then, with the dynamic line of contact where experience and mental processes interact with a primary emphasis on mental disciplines; because, it is out of that interaction that ideas develop. It should be clear that the nature of the mental disciplines that are applied in that interaction condition in every way the nature of the ideas that are produced. This area is as complex as the whole chaos of the individual's experience and as intricate as the working of the human mind. To try to oversimplify it or to ignore it, as is the case in the traditional method, is to belie the very nature of the problem itself. This program, therefore, does not propose to try to make it simple but rather to give the process which starts with this interaction and ends in writing, enough definition to make it understandable. The program establishes the characteristics of clarity, validity, originality and maturity in ideas as the objectives and then advances sequences of mental disciplines which can logically be supported as leading to those objectives.

In developing these disciplines, an initial breakdown has been made into a logical approach on the one hand and an intuitive approach on the other. That these two are in many ways interdependent and parts of a larger overall process is taken for granted, but each represents an essentially different emphasis in the approach to thinking and the formation of ideas. By the same token, it can be seen that each underlies different types of writing or within a given type each performs a function unique to itself. As set up in the program, the purpose is to separate these processes of thinking so that they may be seen for what they are

and then to re-orient them into one overall process. See attached diagram.

The Logical Approach

The logical approach is defined as an orderly, systematic, purposeful way of developing ideas subject to specific guides and cautions which control order, connection and balance.

In this approach, the overall process is divided into phases—each of which contributes the essential base on which the next phase functions; and, hence, each materially conditions the functional potential of the next stage as well as the ultimate nature of ideas produced.

These phases involve:

- A sense of direction in thinking
- Disciplines of recall and search
- Disciplines of synthesis
- Disciplines of interpretation

Failure in any one of these areas can only result in the failure of the whole process in fulfilling the innate potential of the individual.

Each of these areas poses specific problems and the necessity of defined method if the potential of each is to be fully exploited.

Sense of Direction in Thinking

A sense of direction in thinking derives its importance from the relationship of context to meaning. Any subject derives its meaning from the totality of the context in which it is developed. This totality of context becomes the writer's basis of understanding and thus the source of his ideas. The basic directions of thinking, then, should provide avenues of approach which will embrace the whole of the subject's nature, in short:

- The origin
- The conditioning causes that have made it what it is
- The elements of its essential nature
- Its effects or influences

Viewed in this total context a balanced appraisal of the subject's meaning or any aspect of it is possible - limited only by the extent of experience. To omit any part of this context is to open the possibility of superficiality, bias or distortion with attendant effects on validity and maturity in ideas. These initial avenues of approach provide objectives for thinking, negate the meaningless gyrations of random thinking and, at the same time, provide criteria against which the writer may evaluate what he does know about the subject and, of equal importance, the cautions inherent in the awareness of what is not known.

Disciplines of
Search and Recall

The above directions of thinking have been made an integral part of the two logical disciplines of recall: Analysis and Projection. Each of these disciplines represents an essentially different mental perspective and produces different but related bodies of recall. Analysis seeks to develop the elements that go into the subject and make it what it is; namely, origin, conditioning causes and elements of essential nature. Projection seeks the determination and definition of the elements of effect that radiate from the subject. These disciplines of recall are first treated as separate entities so that their potential as instruments for bringing to light components of the subject's makeup may be fully exploited. Later, they are combined into a single integrated process in which cause may be used to determine effect and effect may be used to expose cause.

These disciplines of recall have a three fold purpose: 1) to provide the writer with an understanding of how to arrive at elements that are fundamental to the subject's meaning; 2) to provide methodology for extending these fundamentals in depth to where implication is clear or to where they manifest themselves in the life situation; and 3) to alert the writer to the potential of a multiplicity of reaction as the

above extension takes places which gives breadth of definition to the basic substance of ideas. Inherent in this analytical and projective method are these lesser disciplines:

The search for fundamentals. This is an evaluative process that leads to elements of origin, cause, essential nature, or effect on which the subject depends for its meaning. These elements begin the definition of the subject and influence the validity of the whole development.

Logical Extension. This is a process that uses what is known to move the development out from the fundamentals toward what has not been recalled. It uses one level of thought to find the next. In effect it is a means of developing the transitional bridges that link the general to the particulars or, conversely, the particulars to the general. Movement both ways is essential in achieving definition. The development of this discipline influences every aspect of ideas: clarity, in that connection and relationship are essential objectives of the process; validity, in that it invokes supporting or defining elements at each level of subordination; originality, in that it offers clear lines for extending ideas beyond the obvious; and maturity, in that it more clearly defines implication in depth.

The Search for Parallels and Similarities. As logical extension is pursued through successive levels of subordination, the search shifts to a consideration of parallel or associated factors at each level of the extension. These associated elements at each level clarify and add the dimension of

breadth to the extension. In effect, these elements define the scope and nature of what is meant at each previous level of thought and become, in fact, the meaning behind meaning. They allow the writer to define what he means in the more general area by a spread of particulars at the next level of subordination. This lateral spread of defining elements provides a base for clarity by giving definition to the more general levels; validity, by developing a breadth of supporting elements at each level; originality, by introducing the potential of lateral definition beyond the obvious; and maturity, by opening the possibility of greater complexity.

The Search for Opposites and Alternates. As logical extension and the search for parallels moves outward toward definition of the subject the possibility of opposites and alternates must be born in mind if a realistic appraisal of the subject's meaning is to be made. They balance the positive with the negative, the pro with the con and the black with the white. These elements do not preclude opinion or judgement but they establish the base on which valid evaluation may be made. A consideration of only one side of a subject's makeup must lead to saccharinism in the writing on the one hand or biased or distorted judgement on the other. The exposure of these elements of opposite or alternate nature in the analysis provide the base for tempered evaluation which is a characteristic of intellectual maturity.

These lesser disciplines of recall offer the writer a means of constantly shifting his perspective of the subject, but, at the same

time, maintaining unity of purpose, i.e., the creation of a total context from which the subject's fullest meaning may be extracted. Each shift of perspective acts as a stimulus in provoking recall from a different aspect of experience. This capitalizes on and uses the innate capability of the human mind to react and to keep reacting as long as new stimuli are forthcoming. It is a method that literally feeds on itself and grows accordingly. These basic shifts in perspective are a sequence in which each provides the potential for the next step:

The writer is asked to consider his subject in terms of a total context involving origin, conditioning causes, elements of essential nature, and effects or influences.

He is then asked to shift the focus of attention to what is fundamental in each of these areas, i.e., those elements in these areas without which the subject would lose a significant part of its meaning.

These fundamentals then become points of entry through which the focus shifts to an extension that uncovers supporting elements.

This extension is bolstered by concurrent shifts into the development of parallels and similarities wherein the extension leads to parallels and the parallels lead to further extensions in a steady movement toward definition.

As extensional and parallel development takes place, each level achieved opens the potential of significant opposite or alternate considerations.

The blight of versatility in idea formation is a paucity of reaction to a subject which can only result in fragmentary, stunted, distorted or superficial concepts. Knowledge, experience or impression not recalled and made the basis of ideas is useless in that it cannot serve in the synthesis of ideas themselves. The mind cannot work in a vacuum - the more that is produced through recall, the more the writer's creative potential is increased provided confusion can be eliminated. The sequence outlined above offers a means of getting below the "top" of the mind and developing a far greater reaction to the subject in terms of pertinence and multiplicity. This ability to shift perspective in relation to the subject and thus evoke different aspects of the subject's meaning is an attribute of the lively, facile mind; when controlled and directed toward specific understanding, it becomes an attribute of the educated mind; and when the latter is coupled with interpretative understanding, it becomes an attribute of the creative mind. This program concerns itself with this progression with the disciplines of recall as the first step.

The unique feature of writing is that these shifts do not have to be rapid. In many cases, a slower or more deliberate mind may achieve a comparable qualitative result given the time and a knowledge of objectives and procedure. Similarly, the students who "think" without a clear understanding of objectives and method have an untapped potential - the limits of which can only be guessed at. It is they who comprise by far the greater number and consequently the most significant challenge. We cannot skim the few good writers off the top and claim them as the product of our teaching if, at the same time, we fail to reach the others.

New Form of Outlining

The theoretical points enumerated above would be hard to get over to the student writer in the abstract. For that reason, a new form of outlining has been devised (See Analytical and Projective Diagram) which embodies all of the principles that have been set forth and presents them in "visible" fashion.

From the standpoint of recall the diagram has these advantages over the traditional outline:

The diagram in itself poses the problem.

Like any principle, it offers relationship devoid of substance which can contain any subject.

It suggests definitive form in relation to the subject which has not yet been endowed with form.

It offers objectives and lines of pursuit.

It points the way toward greater complexity and offers the means of controlling that complexity.

The purpose of the disciplines of recall, however, is not only to extract the greatest reaction from experience in terms of pertinence and multiplicity but also to anticipate the next stage in the evolution of thinking into writing: Synthesis. As the principle problems of synthesis involve evaluation, arrangement and the development of relationship, it can be seen that the arrangement of the diagram itself facilitates all of these problems in the following ways:

By placing the subject in the center of the development it is possible to evaluate any component at any level in relation to it and the levels of subordination that make the inclusion of the component possible in a connected, related way.

It isolates the elements at each level of subordination which must be evaluated in relation to each other if forward movement, connection and unity are to be achieved:

The fundamentals are seen in close relationship to the subject unencumbered with subordinate elements. It is their arrangement that will determine the broad flow of the composition.

The supporting elements are seen by themselves in close relationship to each fundamental. Their arrangement sets up the flow within each fundamental area. Etc.

As ideas are relationships, the principal ideas must evolve out of the principal elements on the diagram, i.e., the subject, each fundamental and the supporting elements.

Because these have been extracted and are shown in close proximity, their relationship and significance in the formation of principal ideas is more readily demonstrated.

The lines of connection between the subject and the details are clearly discernible through levels of subordination thus making it possible to create the context in which the subject is seen as a manifestation of the particular, or, conversely, wherein the particulars are seen as a reflection of the subject as a generality. Movement both ways is essential in bringing ideas to definition.

The analytical and projective diagram does in fact offer the writer a preview of the substance of his whole idea in partial relationship based on levels of subordination. What remains is the arrangement of the elements at each level in terms of their inter-relationship and the problem of using the relationships thus exposed as the basis of ideas.

NOTE: This state in the development corresponds to the position in the traditional method where the student has done his "thinking" and has produced his random list pertaining to his subject. This list has been produced without a sense of direction, objectives, a consideration of validity or totality of context. There has been no search for fundamentality in content nor have the elements been carried to definition and the list does not begin to set up the sequences that underlie ideas. The list has recorded the trivial with the fundamental, the concrete with the abstract and the beginning with the end. As everything on the

list represents only a first impression or a first level of recall, it reflects only the "top" of the subject's meaning which is hardly representative of innate potential. It is a duplication of the chaos of experience - not a clarification of it which compounds the problem as subjects get more extensive or complex. The traditional method has offered the writer little with which to exploit either his experience or his mental capabilities. Furthermore, it has established no criteria against which the writer may evaluate his knowledge of the subject and thus condition or restrict his judgement of it. It is difficult to see how this all important initial phase of thinking in the traditional approach may be supported as establishing the base for clarity, validity, originality or maturity in ideas and writing.

Synthesis

Synthesis concerns the very nature of ideas, i.e., the manner in which the elements brought to light through recall may be brought into relationships that delineate meaning. Synthesis breaks down into two areas- one concerning evaluation and arrangement; and, the second, the actual composition of ideas in various degrees of complexity from the sequences thus developed.

Organizational Synthesis. This phase of synthesis establishes the basic framework for connection, transition and forward movement in ideas. The diagram has arranged the elements in levels of subordination but arrangement within each level has not taken place. In the case of fundamentals, for example, while they are all co-ordinate as essential elements of the subject's meaning, they are not equal to each other. It is this disparity in the value of fundamental to fundamental that offers the possibility of arrangement that will affect forward movement,

connection and facile transition between the principal units of the composition. They are not equal, for example, in one or more of the following senses and hence may be arranged accordingly:

In terms of chronology
 In order of precedence
 In degree of complexity
 In terms of general or specific nature
 In degree of interest
 In dramatic value

These sequential orders, of course, do not only apply to the fundamentals which control the broad flow of the composition but to the arrangement of the supporting elements and details as well. Organizational synthesis evaluates the elements at each level and arranges them in sequences through the simple expedient of numbering and lettering: the fundamentals with Roman numerals the supporting elements with capital letters and the details with Arabic numerals.. This can be done without moving a single element on the diagram and yet a total sequence running through and including each element may be created.

NOTE: This phase in the development parallels the stage in the traditional method where the outline has been completed and the student has been told, "This is your plan - now you are ready to write". Left unexplained is the whole difficult task of translating the fragmentary outline into vivid, effective prose. Although the traditional approach holds that the outline is important to the orderly development of ideas, the problem of conceptualizing from the fragments of the outline is conveniently avoided. The writer is given no insight into how the outline itself serves as the basis of principal ideas and how the formation of these ideas determines the manner in which the whole development takes place. This void in the process could only be tolerated if the assumption is made that the writer on the secondary level knows what

ideas are, how they are brought to a point of definition, how this definition controls subsequent development and creates the obligations of interpretation. Is this assumption justified? How could it be when the writer at this level has not been exposed to any system of logic or dialectics and has not been introduced to the sense of general semantics? The student cannot wait for these studies to begin at some higher level in order to shape his ideas - his problem is immediate. The writer has his outline in front of him- it reflects his experience, none other, and it is this with which he must work. The principles, concepts and methods of logic, dialectics and semantics must be applied as the fragments of his outline are translated into ideas if the result is to be clarity, validity, originality and maturity in his conceptualization. Principles and methods of conceptualizing which reflect these understandings and are applicable to his development must be taught if the result is to be other than chance; yet, it is at this juncture in the evolution of thinking into writing that one looks in vain for answers in the traditional method.