

***Idiom*, The Journal of the V.A.T.E., Conference Issue, August 1970**

The following four papers were presented at the opening general session of the 1970 VATE Conference, and take as their general linking theme developments in English teaching in England and America. The Dartmouth Seminar of 1966 to which the speakers refer was an historic Anglo-American occasion bringing together experts in various fields of English to discuss problems of teaching it.

In 1969 Dr. Ian Hansen and Dr. Brian Sureties attended the Manchester Conference of the National Association for the Teaching of English (U.K.), and Mrs. Esta de Fossard and Mr. Laurie Arter taught in the U.S.A. as Fulbright Exchange Scholars.

Included in this issue of *Idiom* also are some comments which some members submitted at VATE's request after the Conference.

Dr. Brian Sureties, Senior Lecturer in Method of English, Monash University.

I think I should start by explaining that when Dr. Hansen and I met a few weeks ago to talk over a joint approach on this occasion we found ourselves thinking around very much the same topics in the same way, disturbed by the same tendencies, asking the same questions, concerned to preserve the same values, moved in much the same way on the whole by our look at English education last year, although, except for the Manchester Conference, we had almost no experiences in common. And since we had that talk I have been to the Tasmanian Conference and I was struck once again by the way many people were troubled by the same problems. The speakers before me in Hobart often touched on issues that I wanted to raise myself, so often in fact that when my turn came I was able to borrow Henry Schoenheimer's joke about the means of identifying the last speaker at the Conference: he is the one who sits at the end of the row, re-reading his notes and crossing bits out. Today, however, Dr. Hansen has very kindly let me go first and I am very grateful to him because his contribution will have a sharpness and challenge which will be largely missing in what I have to say. We both felt that we should be echoing each other if we allowed ourselves to cover the same ground and so we have taken two related but separable aims. I am going to start in true teacher fashion with five minutes revision of the issues raised at the Dartmouth Seminar and I am going to spend the rest of my time talking rather generally about the teaching of English in the post-Dartmouth era. Then Dr. Hansen will talk in a much more specific way, about the content of English and its effect on the pupil in this period since the Dartmouth Conference. Our paths will cross I expect but at least this gives us each a distinct territory. We both felt that we did not want to add much to the joint account we wrote of the Manchester Conference in 1969 and which we contributed to *English in Australia* last year, even though this so obviously took as its starting point the work done at Dartmouth, but if anyone wants to bring that into discussion later, we should be pleased to take up any issues you want to raise. I'll start therefore by going back to the Dartmouth Conference itself, and to the two accounts of it which are easily available, Herbert Muller's *The Uses of English* and John Dixon's *Growth Through English*. And as you will see from the note on the back of your programme the conference held at Dartmouth College in 1966 was attended by 'Literary scholars, linguistic scientists and experienced teachers who met to discuss the problems English as a school subject was facing on

both sides of the Atlantic.' Never before, I think, have so many leaders in the field got together in this way.

Now it is not particularly easy to pick out the main lines of thought that emerged from the conference, or to map out the areas where substantial agreement was achieved—after all it was a conference and not a policy making gathering—but a measure of agreement did emerge and on the English side at any rate I discovered that many people were prepared to assume a great measure of agreement, supporting of course their own forceful views on how English ought to be taught. But I want first of all to mention an observation from Muller, part of which has been widely quoted, though I am largely concerned, with the last sentence. He says this:

The British and Americans could also understand one another readily just because, as another speaker observed, they had passed one another in mid-Atlantic. The Americans were upholding the traditional British ideal of intellectual discipline; the British were clamouring for the individual freedom that Americans had always prized in theory; but at bottom all wanted both discipline and freedom—the best of both worlds. Still, they came at the best by different approaches. The British translated the question 'What is English?' into the operational question 'What should an English teacher do?'

This is one attitude that the English delegates did seem to share. I think it is one that is now characteristic of English thinking about the teaching of English, the idea that English unlike most other subjects has no fixed content and that the things children do in English periods can't be described in terms of facts mastered or skills achieved, (except in a very indirect sense). I'll go along with this if we are thinking of a content which consists of traditional prescriptive grammar and its attendant rules and drills and so on because there is no evidence at all as far as I know that we really learn the rules of language that way. These activities therefore get no support from either party in the debate—either on the English or the American side. Nor do the even less meaningful procedures which replaced them—the books of exercises which consisted in filling in blanks, and similar activities which did nothing except encourage, in my view, a crudity of response and discourage a true sensitivity to language.

But ... I think that very often in English thinking much more than this is being quietly thrown overboard. And John Dixon, whom we will come to in a moment, explicitly rejects the whole of what he calls the 'cultural heritage' approach to English. About this and about what has taken its place Dr. Hansen will, I know, have quite a lot to say so I won't elaborate on it here. Instead I should like to consider what happens when the teacher discards the old melancholy routine of drills and skills, and finds himself with no content to lean on in the sense that other teachers have a content. And this is where the question asked by Muller really becomes crucial—What is the role of the English teacher? And I would like to look at this question in the light of what seems to be the thinking in England which has piloted the Dartmouth Conference. Frank Whitehead, (you'll know of his very thoughtful and useful book *The Disappearing Dais*, published incidentally in 1966, the year of the Dartmouth Conference) is not given to over-statement but he is prepared to say this: 'and if we find it hard to say whether lessons of this kind are "teaching English" or "educating for living" that surely is just as it should be.' John Dixon last year at Manchester said that his aim was "to look at the whole of living experience'. He wanted to 'bring the whole of the culture of the neighbourhood into the English classroom'. In his book *Growth Through English* he says '... our subject is experience, whenever language is needed to penetrate and bring it into new and satisfying order'.

'Teaching about life', dealing with the whole of living experience, seem to me to be very large plans for the teacher of English to make. Overwhelming ones in fact. But I won't rule them out because there is a sense in which I agree with them. As David Daiches said in his review of *Growth Through English* 'What a wonderful and God-like role to assign to the teacher!' and more soberly 'How many people who go in for English teaching could under any circumstances be trained to fulfil this role adequately?' How many people indeed, inside or outside the teaching profession? And David Daiches comes to this conclusion, 'The central problem is not the teaching of the children but the training of the teachers.'

In the light of this it might be useful to look at John Dixon's own proposals for teacher education. (By the way I tend to quote John Dixon and shall continue to do so simply because his book is, for a very influential school of thought in Britain, the 'received text' of the Dartmouth Seminar.) He says, and I think that the order of his priorities is as interesting as his terminology:

Clearly, students who intend to teach the subject need wide experience in drama, and particularly improvised drama, continuing experience and encouragement in imaginative writing, a confident grounding in the purposive talk which arises from group learning in an English Workshop.

May I say it again? I think you can hear the 'italics' in my voice, 'Drama', 'improvised', 'imaginative writing', 'confident grounding in purposive talk that arises from group learning in an English workshop'. And he goes on:

Teachers without this experience, who would never think of writing a poem, flinch at the idea of acting and rarely enter a discussion of the profounder human issues in every day experience—are themselves deprived and are likely in tum to limit the experience of their pupils.

The key to his thinking here is expressed quite clearly in his next chapter. It's an idea being voiced more and more strongly these days and it usually involves accepting the fact that literacy as we have understood it for centuries, is of declining importance. I had better give it to you in Dixon's exact words again so that I am not accused of distorting his message. He says this:

What we ask of English in schools is broadly related to a phase in our culture. Thus modern industrial society has recently moved strongly towards a discussion culture under the influence of air transport, the telephone, two-way radio and television. Maybe general democratization of a society means an inevitable growth of discussion in committees, departmental meetings, tribunals, conferences ... seminars.

It is true that he is aware of the dangers—the difficulty of sustaining rational analysis or of achieving exact thought without traditional literacy. And he does want children to become literate. He means it in a very real sense but there is no doubt which objective comes first. 'We have to accept,' he says, 'the fact that in terms of the media of communication, popular culture is already dominated by the audio-visual, the uses of which will spread. By the 1980's two-way television and telephone reference libraries on video or sound tape may well be wide-spread' and so on.

In other words his panaceas for the education of teachers of English, and the education of children in the English classroom are pretty well the same: discussion, drama, the opportunities for both these activities offered by the mass media. The model is the workshop situation, very flexible, very fluid—learning by doing and more important, learning by interaction. But before I go on to say anything about this in practice I'll just mention the other requirements that Dixon stresses for teacher education. He wants a much more intellectually demanding study of language among all teachers. He wants a much greater degree of personal involvement. This is implicit in almost everything that he says. He wants much more interchange of news, and views and opinions. I think we'll all agree with that. And he adds to this some rather vague suggestions which seem to imply that teachers of English should not only know a good deal of psychology and sociology but should have undertaken some actual investigation in this area.

Now as one of the things I am here to do is to report my observations on teaching in England, how does all this square with the actual practice of teachers in the United Kingdom at present? I'm afraid that what I say now is going to be very impressionistic; to say anything at all I'll have to generalize a very great deal and I think you will understand this. No one could present a balanced picture in the space of twenty minutes of so but I will try to be fair without constantly qualifying what I have to say.

I think a lot of teachers are taking seriously the role assigned to them by this school of thought. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that they are finding it useful as a methodology. Let us look at this business of 'teaching about life'. A number of schools I visited make use of a kind of field-study approach to English. Pupils go out in ones and twos to conduct on the spot investigations often with a tape recorder in their hands. These investigations are collectively devised beforehand. They go out to search libraries, to conduct interviews, record individual impressions, observations and so on. They come back to school to write up, or discuss, or perhaps collate, and mutually appraise their contributions to the whole project. Now as far as I was able to judge, children motivated in this way did write more and probably more accurately and carefully than those for whom the classroom had to supply the whole motivation. Most of the children I saw taking part in schemes of this sort were not, admittedly, either the highly intelligent or the very 'difficult'. They were children whose linguistic background and opportunities were poor. I've not seen anything comparable done in a selective school, either State or independent. And whether this sort of thing is, in fact, a worthwhile activity for pupils who are, linguistically speaking, more fortunate, is another question.

In many classrooms discussion is becoming the touchstone of good teaching. I'm not talking here, and I would like to make the distinction very clear, about what the linguists are coming to call 'rehearsal': the need before formulating ideas positively in speech or writing to engage in a period of language activity which is essentially conversational in the sense that it is tentative, exploratory, mutually stimulating and so on. I think all teachers should have accepted this idea by now; but many teachers seem to be going beyond this in Britain. Dixon in fact says that 'talk is central'. And this is the logical outcome I suppose if you put personal experience and growth at the very centre of your programme, not as a means but as the end of English teaching—your ultimate goal (and this is essentially what Dixon does). As far as 'involve-ment' is concerned; many teachers I saw in Britain gave up a very great deal of their time in extra curricular activities: visits, camps and school journeys, theatre parties and excursions, informal week-ends with the

children. You name it. In some schools they followed each other with bewildering rapidity and bewildering profusion, and all of course offered splendid first hand experiences on which the English programme could draw for motivation. I met teachers who were prepared to give up very large parts of their time in this way. But—I seem to be using the word a lot, and I hope I am not being unfair about this—many of them seemed to me to compensate by a degree of relaxation in the classroom which few of us would feel able to accept. I don't merely mean being casual and informal (which I personally heartily approve). I mean a relaxation of expectations from the children: a loss of a sense of urgency, a loss of interest in accuracy, (whether it was accuracy of observation or whatever you like), a loss of concern for clarity; perhaps they were always busy planning the next excursion, or talking about the last one. I'm not being cynical about this because the reason seems to be simply that many teachers in England, at least in urban England, look upon their job as a social and remedial one first and foremost, and an educational one only secondarily. I think the circumstances perhaps have forced this on them. It is in turn because, at worst, the problems in English schools exceed those in Australian schools ten-fold, if these things are measurable. Of course not all schools are like that by any means. The selective school, for example, and many others pursue their much more limited objectives—very effectively I believe in many cases—as they have done for many years now.

And mentioning the selective schools reminds me of one element in all this that must not be over-looked. Cutting across all these ideas is the current controversy about comprehensiveness - an argument that arouses much stronger feelings in Britain than here. This is, I think, because the move towards comprehensiveness is being fought out, not so much on educational grounds, as on questions of social and political ideology—the belief, for example, that all children should share the same educational experiences irrespective of social background and differing abilities with the aim, that is, of producing 'one society'. Obviously there are compromise situations, the multi-lateral school is one. But on the whole the new theorists in the field of English do seem to envisage a situation—perhaps that is too weak—I think they definitely say that we must have a situation in which all children share common experiences.

Muller in his account of the Dartmouth Seminar says:

On the basic issue of streaming or grouping a seminar reached startling consensus ... The study group unanimously condemned the practice in their report ... And in the general discussion of their report by the seminar almost all who spoke up supported it. They called for heterogeneous schools and classes, or in other words more democracy in the classroom.

I can't pursue the educational logic of this here but you will see what this means in terms of teaching technique and teaching practice, and the demands made on the competence required of the teacher—demands, incidentally, which seem to grow greater and more insistent the more the teacher is told that he must retreat into the background and that he must foster individual growth. It's rather paradoxical that it should be so but I am sure it is so. And alongside this increasing pressure on the teacher, runs the contrary notion that there should be no pressure or very little pressure on the pupils. The teacher must make the running and he mustn't expect his pupils to come too much of the way to meet him. This notion, certainly, has entered the popular consciousness. I am reminded of the American college boy, (this is a true story I believe), who failed in English and went to his lecturer to complain. He thought he should have done quite well.

The lecturer said, 'But you didn't do any work! You wrote hardly anything on your paper'. The college boy thought about this for a moment and then he said, 'Well in that case you failed to motivate me'. I think that is relevant somewhere here.

May I sum up this very inadequate survey of a complex topic by referring again to the three 'models' of English teaching explored by the Dartmouth Seminar. The first, concentrating on the skills of expression, was rejected. The second, the 'cultural heritage' approach, focusing on literature, also got rather mauled and John Dixon throws that out too. The third model which he says is currently accepted, focuses on personal growth. Let me use his own words once more as he gives speech the primary place in education, (rather than writing that is) and demotes literature (which is in future to be secondary and instrumental only). He says, 'By re-emphasising the text the heritage model confirmed the average teacher in his attention to the written word as against the spoken word. It confirmed him too in presenting experience (in fictions) to his pupils rather than drawing from them their experience of reality and the self'. 'Drawing from them their experience of reality and the self'. This, it seems, is to be the core, not only of the child's English education in school, but also I suspect of the preparation of the teacher of English.

And, having brought these two together, I am going to spend my last few minutes in this session drawing from my own 'experience of reality', to offer you my own opinions of this tendency.

To begin with, I will go along with those teachers in England who find that this is a useful methodology, well in keeping with the spirit of the times and with adolescent attitudes. It has its limitations of course, but often it is very useful, especially with less-able pupils. But, for the majority I think, only as a lead-in to things which I see as of greater importance.

Beyond that, the philosophy of the movement seems to beg so many questions that I can't make much sense of it. Whatever do we mean by the words 'reality' and 'self' when used in the way they are in the quotation I used just now? I agree with David Daiches when he says 'If we use the study of the language and literature at school primarily to encourage "personal growth" rather than to train in a skill or to communicate knowledge about a heritage' (and it is Dixon's view, and apparently that of the majority of the Dartmouth Conference, that it should be so used)"this means that the teacher must have certain social and ethical standards continuously in mind as he conducts his educative dialogue with his pupils.' And he then says 'Do we not also need more reflection on the ethical assumptions underlying much that Dixon advocates?' And I agree with Daiches emphatically when he says '... when we use such a term as "spiritual growth" outside any specific religious or philosophical context we ought to know exactly what we are talking about.'

More specifically I am unhappy about three elements in the new programme. First I am unhappy about the egocentric thinking I believe it encourages. "What do I feel about this?' 'Let's explore my reaction.' 'How interesting are my sym-pathies in this case?' Of course it is not intended to be like that. And in a sense what I say is something of a parody. 'Exploration of reality'—whatever that may be—is one of the aims, but it always comes back, it seems, to my experience. If logically followed out I believe that this philosophy could lead to a greater degree of self-centredness and self-interest than we have at present. The protagonist of the programme would cry out in protest,

of course, but it is at least arguable that what C. S. Lewis called the 'poison of subjectivism' is at work in all this.

Second I am unhappy about the way this doctrine is a logical development of the 'progressive orthodoxy' which now occupies, perhaps increasingly, a number of places of influence in our educational structure. Dixon in his last sentences (and this is my last quotation from him) says:

'English will be pulled in two different directions, and in resolving the tension we may gain a new clarification of our work. Is a new model for education struggling to emerge, just at the point when we have spelt out for ourselves the fuller implications of a model based on personal growth? Very well', he goes on, 'the limits of the present model will be reached, that is certain, and thus a new model will be needed to transcend its descriptive power—and in so doing to redirect our attention to life as it really is.'

Presumably, (and this is the only way I can interpret it), one model succeeds another, each valid or 'true' for a time, whatever 'validity' or 'truth' may mean in such a philosophy. Does it mean for example, that you can hold off and mark time until your own favourite, the cultural heritage approach or whatever, comes around again? Or is the only respectable thing to do to plunge into the eternal flux, committing ourselves to nothing but the fact and necessity of change itself? I won't develop that one because what I am querying is the whole weight of the Dewey tradition—and we would need a long time to talk about that.

Lastly I am not happy about the easy throwing off of the 'cultural heritage' approach. Often of course this has been used to justify some very arid and unrealistic teaching, but I am reminded of the words of a colleague who is by common consent one of the most delightful teachers, warm, human, unauthoritarian and open minded. But of this school of thought he says;

'When it comes to evaluation, my students' opinions are irrelevant. If they can tell me' (he is of course talking at the University level, but the same applies all the way up and down the scale) 'If they can tell me exactly and in adequate language what Plato meant by his theory of forms or if they really understand what Wittenstein was saying about language, or if they can show me that they really know what T.S. Eliot was getting at in the Four Quartets, then I know all I want to know, because if they can do these things I'm sure that they will have opinions of their own. You can't pursue a subject at this depth without. If they don't know these things,' he says, 'let them keep their opinions on those topics in check until they have some real knowledge on which to base them.'

I don't think he follows his own advice too rigidly—no good teacher does—but I think what he says contains an important truth. I am going to close on that note with two lines from Pascal.

He says, 'It is vain, O men, that you seek within yourselves the cure for your miseries. All your insight only leads you to the knowledge that it is not in yourselves that you will discover the true and the good.'

Dr. Ian Hansen, Senior Lecturer in Method of English, University of Melbourne.

English in schools is really only about two hundred years old. There is perhaps a case to be made out for 1764 as the date on which English arrived, for that was the year in which Joseph Priestley

'the father of Modern Chemistry', published a long essay entitled 'On a Course of Liberal Education for Civil and Active Life'. Priestley (and his influence among the dissenting academies of the mid-Eighteenth Century was great) argues forcibly for the inclusion in the curriculum of English as a subject in its own right, 'a competent knowledge of (it) being both useful and ornamental'. There was language-study. "England was involved in all the miseries of a Civil War. Charles I was ambitious and fond of arbitrary power". Connect these two sentences.' How familiar that task sounds to us, but it dates from 1767. There was literature-study: Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Dryden, and living authors, Akenside, Sterne and Cowper. And your seventeen-year-old in the mid-Nineteenth Century wrote monthly essays of some 2,500 words on topics such as 'The Character of Demosthenes', 'On the respect due to antiquity' and 'On the peculiarity of mathematical evidence'.

When most of us were at school we had a ruled and columned exercise book, something of the size of foolscap sheets laid sideways, in which we divided sentences not, like Gaul, into three parts, but into as many as a dozen parts, clauses, adjuncts, phrases, subject-words, auxiliary verbs and so on. We read Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, Thackeray, Sir Walter Scott and Dickens and filled pages with dictated notes on *Ozymandias*, *Vanity Fair* and *The Merchant of Venice*. The great things in literature study were beauty and truth: who of our generation was not told this was all he needed to know? Our course-books had titles like *A Study of Standard English* and *A Preliminary English Course*.

What are our books entitled today? *Impact. Conflict*. A far cry from *A Study of Standard English*. Even the titles are a reflection of the moral climate of the mid-twentieth century. *Things Being Various*, to use the title of another text, it does not really matter how, when or if we make up our minds. Dr. Sureties has already quoted John Dixon's aim to bring 'the whole of the culture of the neighbourhood into the English classroom'. One has some sympathy with this view. Only a fortnight ago I was seated in the back of a class-room of Form IV girls. I could see traces of eye-shadow, I could see nail varnish, I could see photographs of pop-singers on the covers of exercise books. But the task before the girls was to group, into three, synonyms or near-synonyms from a list of some sixty words, voyage, passage, tour, victim, dupe, gull and so on. This, of course, is frightful. These young women, their faces, some of them, already bearing the shadows of adulthood, find English utterly irrelevant. One has, I say, some sympathy with Dixon's view. But what from 'the whole of the culture of the neighbourhood', has found its way into the English classroom? Television, of course, may not be denied. A reputable publisher can see a market for the scripts of television plays, and into classrooms (into classrooms I have visited) go sets of an anthology of *Z-Cars* scripts. John Hopkins' *A Place of Safety* is included; in one scene a staring-eyed immigrant trembles in his cell as he confides to the impassive Barlow, 'I find this anger in me—hatred. Deep in me—and I am afraid of it. The man—hunted me—shouted at me—cursed me. Not the first man to curse—but he hunted me. Like an animal—and I turned—like an animal'. There is truth here, certainly, but of a rather grubby kind, and no beauty. *Impact. Conflict*.

The *Connexions* series of topic books appeared last year: titles and sub-titles include *Behind the Scene: The function of the pop scene in young people's lives*; *Out of Your Mind: Drugs, their use, effects and impact on society* and *The Individual: Human nature, genetic and environmental influences, aggression, deviants, crime*. In *The Lawbreakers* there are six photographs of vicious riots, seven photographs of sordid prison interiors and one of ... an Approved School boy beaten

in 1968 for smoking. In *The Language of Prejudice* there is a full page given to an advertising hoarding with the legend 'Billy's Back': there is beside it 'A personal message from Billy Graham: There is going on in the world today a quiet, bloodless revolution. It has no fanfare, no newspaper coverage, no propaganda: yet it is changing the course of thousands of lives. It is restoring purpose and meaning to life as men of all races and nationalities are finding peace with God'. Under the message is an elderly man carrying a banner 'Christ Jesus came into the World to save sinners'. On the facing page on the right, the direction the eye moves in, is a lapel badge, 'Dylan is God', and a group of mat-haired pop-singers bearing their trade-name 'The New Messiahs'. *Impact. Conflict.*

It will not have escaped any of you that current English. courses or topic books have less and less text and more and more decoration: visuals are the thing. One may even use books of photographs in the classroom; the format is photograph and tempting questions: 'How is this man feeling? What is he saying? Who is the other man? Where is this taking place? What sort of houses are in the street? What is likely to happen next?' In one well-known book of this kind there are twenty photographs in all: sixteen of them or 80 per cent of the book's material deal with death, sorrow, war, poverty, loneliness, terror and fear. *Impact. Conflict.*

There are anthologies of 'tough verse for kids': this is not tough in the sense that T.S. Eliot and some of Dylan Thomas is tough, but tough in the sense that it is written by Liverpool longhairs and Bronx beats, written about slimy dock-piles and abortion and rape. A current poetry anthology for 15-year-olds has as its sections 'War', 'Death', 'Betrayal', 'Sorrow' and 'Fear'. 'The whole culture of the neighbourhood', Dixon calls it. But Dixon is wrong: he has confused his terms. As Dr. Sureties has said, teachers are encouraged 'to look on their job as a social ... one first and an educational one only secondly': Dixon means, only he does not seem to know it, 'the whole sub-culture of the neighbourhood'. Life is not all probation officers and pot and rubbish dumps and grimy washing.

What has happened in our English class-rooms? How is it that this sub-culture of violence and tawdriness has assumed such a place? Why is it that class-room motivation now seems to spring from gutters and littered back-yards? There are, I think, two explanations, the first the more obvious one. It is simply that it is easier to shock than to delight. Show a class a coloured photograph from *Life* magazine of a Vietnamese woman holding the torn and burnt body of a small child, and the reaction is swift and immediate. *Impact. Conflict.* The whole experience is physical: there is revulsion at the gore hanging from that tiny, limp leg. And the class identifies, at least at first, with the physicality of the situation. So classes identify with the physicality of the fearful immigrant's sweat in the *Z Cars* story, with the team of prisoners scrubbing out cells, with the Czech crowds clambering over Russian tanks. For since the world has become so physical, so animal, this is reality.

The second explanation is more difficult to state. By now you can have no doubts as to which side of the fence (and there is a fence, make no mistake about that) Dr. Sureties and I speak from. Nevertheless it is quite conceivable that we encouraged this approach, he and I and others like us. We have been for a long time anxious to liberate our pupils from the tyranny of lifeless English studies. Recently I was reminded by a Melbourne academic of how he and his peers used to watch me compose poems on the blackboard, and, of how they then were set to writing their own poems on the given model: that was nearly twenty years ago. Why did I enthuse over *Deaths and*

Entrances by an exciting Welshman who had not yet appeared in school anthologies? I did it because I wanted to stretch those boys, I wanted them to have weekly, daily bonuses. They already had their normal share-issue: they could spell, they could discuss the strengths and weaknesses of characterisation in a novel, they could construct paragraphs, they could use semi-colons with unerring accuracy. Boys from semi-illiterate homes had already left school at fourteen: I was left with boys from homes with at least some pretensions to cultivation and elegance. I could therefore afford the luxury of poetry writing and seemingly interminable debates, because these boys were in the mainstream of a great literary tradition, of the Wordsworths, Keats, and Shelleys, the Thackerays, Scotts and Dickens that I myself had been in at school. In a very real sense they brought the great tradition with them. This kind of claim, incidentally, would not have gone down well at the Dartmouth Seminar. Said Muller, 'Glyn Lewis could sound like a voice crying in the wilderness as he alone kept insisting on the claims of our heritage, repeating the elementary truth that the unique literary works are also products of a cultural tradition'. But to return to my classes of twenty years ago. They were already literate and quite able to recreate experience in writing and even to codify and assess emotional response to both literature and inter-personal relationships.

Now consider the young people in our schools today. The educational climate is such that more and more of the teenage population are being encouraged to stay at school longer. A great number of these have no great tradition to bring with them: they clutch under their arms as it were the vital statistics of the Carlton Football Club, the intrigues of *Hogan's Heroes* and a comic strip presentation of the voyage of Cook's Endeavour. We can no longer tax them with the literary world, except insofar as we piously offer them twenty titles to nod to in a wide Reading Course. Therefore we put before them (as if in some extraordinary way it were easier) those exciting aspects of creative English that we used to use as icing on the cake. We peel off the marzipan, put it on a plate, and remove the cake itself that has matured over a long period. What I am saying is this: a great number of our pupils bring only a sub-culture with them. If we are to teach English 'from where the child is', then we have, in most cases, only a sub-culture to teach from. Even the conservatives at the Dartmouth Seminar applauded the concern shown over disadvantaged children, and the need to respect all that these children bring from the traditions of their sub-culture, but they saw there is a need as well to respect the great tradition and the great culture, which are superior to the little ones. Muller reporting again:

So far as possible, teachers should make these available to the disadvantaged children, give them a greater, richer world to grow up in ... all children need some sense of community in a divided society, sense of unity in a heterogeneous society, just as the nation needs a basically united people. They need to realise that 'each new generation is not a new people: we are what we are because we are able to share in a past, in a common heritage, not simply because of our ability to communicate in the present or share the excitement of innovation.'

Current practice, however, is to build on what a child already has. If he can't spell, you tell him that doesn't matter, so long as the springs of his very being can be seen welling to the surface. In the LATE's well known discussion pamphlet *Assessing Compositions*, the examples of pupils' work are headed by a short piece by a fifteen-year-old boy about his leaving home to join the navy. On the printed page it is almost indecipherable: it is couched in words that look as if they are part of some Outer Space code. Read it aloud several times, however, and meaning begins to come through. This is John Dixon's point, 'talk is central'. But this boy is not talking, here, he is writing

or trying to write. Nevertheless, in two university Departments of Education in Britain last year, I heard lecturers applauding this particular example of a pupil's work. You can hear what he is trying to say, they commented: you can feel the anguish of his leave taking, you can sense the brave front the boy is putting on, you can appreciate the moving qualities of this experience. The young teachers-to-be nodded and mumbled assent. No-one said the passage was semi-illiterate, no-one said it was gibberish. This boy had nothing to work from. He had been allowed to get away with one solecism after another for years. And his number is increasing in our schools. And the number will go on increasing as long as *Impact* and *Conflict* keep out *A Study of Standard English*.

In other places and at other times I have written and talked about the moral responsibilities of teachers of English. Wherever I stand, as a practising teacher or an external examiner or a university lecturer, I find myself visited by dreams of young people unable to cope with experience because no-one has taught them (yes, taught them) how to transcend experience by reducing it to felicitous written expression. 'How do I know what I want to say until I've seen what I've written?'

Let me then examine the fairly widespread practice of encouraging creative writing. There is no need to remind you of that seminal book of Sir Alec Clegg's on children's writing. He makes clearly the point that we used to maim the imagination of young people by asking them to write about such intolerable abstractions as 'Fashion' and 'Courage' (let alone young Master Wellbeloved's 'On the peculiarity of mathematical evidence'). Writing should be fresh, and what is fresher than a child's own immediate experience? This needed to be said of course. Victorian children, like Elizabethan, Jacobean and Georgian children, were only adults writ small: they had no real business of their own, or at least were not expected to give voice to it in adult company (which meant, in one important instance, to schoolmaster or schoolmistress).

We began therefore to ask pupils to describe the houses they lived in, friends they liked, acquaintances they didn't like, and, above all, what they did during the holidays. But soon these topics became as stifling in their own way as 'Fashion' and 'Courage' had been. Through the 1950's the freshness of children's writing faded again. Writing became as stilted as the polysyllabic posturings of the 1930's. But in the early 1960's two books received wide acceptance and began to inform classroom teaching. One was (obviously) David Holbrook's *English for Maturity*: here came in truth a prophet, rightly, so rightly, stressing the personal nature of English. *English for Maturity* has done more for the teaching of English in schools than any other single book, and the real validity of its thesis is to be found in its call to teachers to look hard at the children in classrooms. Persons ought to be part of the whole communication complex: we must know our children as well as our subject, since in a very real sense the children are the subject. The point needs no labouring: obviously when we know our children, we are driven to consider them in the design of our courses of study, in our whole attitude of mind, spirit and approach to English. There are more things to teenage experience than going on holidays to write about them back at school, and now we can rid ourselves of those accounts of outings that ended with the obligatory 'we returned home tired but happy' syndrome. Teenage experience is immediate, teenage experience is never till now.

The second important document was the Newson Commissions's *Half our Future*. Suddenly we were told, in the second sentence of the report, in fact, that we were not educating half of the

children in our schools. Attention was focussed on the less privileged, the disadvantaged child. Teachers of English in particular came to acknowledge that they had been deficient: they had all but ignored fifty per cent of their responsibilities. We must agree, however, that we were quick to attempt to make amends and by the time of the Dartmouth Seminar in 1966 we had massed our forces and planned our assault upon the fortress of our own devising. The forces were easily rallied: there were thousands of teachers who, a little timidly perhaps, had become dissatisfied with what they were doing in their classrooms and were now ready to overhaul the content of English studies. And in the mid 1960's the first wave of the younger generation of teachers was ready, fired with a social zeal to better the lot of the disadvantaged. What of the plan of campaign itself? It was already to hand. Its slogan was 'English is personal'.

The disadvantaged child has nothing but himself and this is therefore where we will begin. For this is reality. Vacant allotments piled with junk are real. Policemen making enquiries are real. Punch-ups on street comers are real. Last year I actually saw skinheads and Hell's Angels split a classroom down the centre: one persuasion always sat in the two rows near the corridor wall and the other took the two rows near the window. This is reality. Dr. Sureties has already alluded to the dangers inherent in this as a philosophical base for the teaching of English. For to write about or talk about this kind of reality is to write and talk about oneself. What is really important about a poem is what the individual thinks about it, and if this individual doesn't think much of the poem on a first reading, then the poem is out, finished with. It is a frightening kind of egocentricity, becoming more and more apparent in our schools: boys and girls with a sneer sweep aside whatever is not seen as immediately relevant. What is not lightly dismissed is the grim, the sickening and the outrageous. We as teachers must keep the young people engaged, and we can best do this by discussing war, revolution, authority, freedom, fashions, make-up, censorship, road accidents and gangs. Newspapers and magazines provide our raw material. But it will always come back to what I think about authority, what I believe revolution to be. In the flush of post-Dartmouth enthusiasm appeared a 'course-book' or anthology of prose and verse called (I have used the phrase already) *Never Till Now*: three of the book's six sections are called *I am old enough, I want to stand on my own feet* and *I am my one touchstone*. All three are acceptable notions, I know, and well worth exploring in speech and writing, but I am anxious because I find this self-centred material in texts and classrooms over and over again. It is difficult for me not to believe this is a kind of cult.

The most meaningful writing experience (to pupils, at least) is now that which touches themselves first. They become the focus of the world. Those of us who have teenage children of our own know this only too well: how often at the meal table we find ourselves reading penny lectures on awareness of others, how often we have to point out that other people have feelings, too. I don't lay all the responsibility for this attitude at the doors of our English classrooms: there are other enormous pressures on young people, pressures from the commercial world, taking advantage of the teenage market, pressures from the mass media that tell them they are very special people. But I do blame teachers of English for cashing in on this rather cheap confidence-trick. Pursued to its logical limit, this emphasis will lead to a greater degree of self-interest than we know even now. Hear Dr. Sureties' Pascal again:

It is vain ... that you seek within yourselves the cure for your miseries. All your insight only leads you to the knowledge that it is not in yourselves that you will discover the true and the good.

Yet we must accept this current emphasis for the purposes of argument this morning. We must ask ourselves what sort of writing this new climate is producing. Often a well meaning teacher is delighted when a member of the class, confronted by a written task, wonders whether it would be permissible to write a poem rather than a descriptive essay. Who is fooling whom? Why would a fifteen-year-old rather write a poem?

- Either (1) he has considerable experience in writing verse
(2) he finds the topic lends itself to terse language
(3) he feels he can crystallise his ideas in brief rather than at length
Or (1) he finds three hundred words too many to spin out over a topic that doesn't interest him
(2) he calculates a poem will cost him only some twenty free verse lines with perhaps a total of eighty words.
(3) he knows his teacher thinks teenage verse is very meaningful

Too many of us are selling our young people short. We accept a poem on a dog-eared, ink-blotted scrap of paper as though it was engraved on a Mosaic tablet. For too long teachers have been accepting the untidy and the shoddy because it has come forward in the name of creativity. This is a denial of our responsibilities towards the disadvantaged (for we are still talking of the disadvantaged). We are letting them off the hook. I would not deny for one moment that the personal emphasis and the encouragement of verse writing have not done a great deal for a great number of our young people.

These approaches have involved them in English in a way that perhaps nothing else could have done. That they have been able to say something from a background of laconic near-inarticulateness is a kind of gay success. But the value of what they say is lessened if it is couched in terms that are in themselves primitive. We, they, have a right to demand that ten years at school should stand for something. I'm afraid our eyes are often on the development of personality rather than on the mastery of writing skills, on present achievement rather than on future rewards, on *Impact* and *Conflict* rather than on *A Study of Standard English*.

But so far and, I might say, almost inevitably, the emphasis of the last thirteen minutes has been upon the non-literary child rather than on the literary one. We have been so concerned in the last seven or eight years with the disadvantaged child, driven to this concern by the pleas of Holbrook, Newsom, Dixon and others, that we have forgotten the other half of our future. So exciting was this new conception of teaching English that it swept all before it. What was essentially a rear-guard remedial action became the main thrust, the vanguard. Therefore, even though a girl could cope quite easily with the Bronte's and Jane Austen, she had to make do in schooltime with Peacock paperbacks. In the area of literature study, perhaps, this is not terribly serious, since the able child, the omniverous reader, is never confined by prescriptions or recommendations. In the area of written expression, however, I believe, the able child has suffered. He has been denied the rigors of *A Study of Standard English*.

Assessment of written work is so subjective and relative. I believe many of us, now so familiar with the gropings in language of the less able, are too inclined to accept almost anything the able child submits. We wink an eye at the misused colon because our other sets seem never to have heard of a colon: we fail to point out that a paragraph is lacking a clear topic sentence because our other sets never make paragraph divisions anyway. We are so exhausted being creative with the less able we tend to let the able fend for themselves, as though they can do without our expert guidance. An English teacher who ought to be better known in Australia than he is is J.H. Walsh, regular contributor to and, until recently, editor of *The Use of English* periodical, author of *Teaching English* (pub. 1965) and co-author of *Fields of Experience* (pub. 1968). I have watched John Walsh teach; he is an uncompromising teacher. He is one of a number in England at the present time who is disturbed by the imbalance I have just alluded to. In the Denys Thompson symposium, *Directions in the Teaching of English*, which appeared last year, Walsh has this to say.

There is the danger that, in rightly throwing overboard 'good English' for the vast majority, the teacher may throw with it all attempts to foster such desirable qualities as appropriateness and felicity of expression. Greater still is the danger of too much reliance on spontaneity. (This means, of course, in the terms of this present essay of mine, too much Impact, Conflict, Never Till Now.) The doctrine that expression should 'come as a result of emotion rather than as a result of thought'—itself based upon a popular misunderstanding of the way in which an artist goes to work—is of little use to the teacher who would train a young writer. Even for children of modest ability, the hope for the future lies less in spontaneous writing than in writing that follows a period of preparation—the sort of preparation which, by means of reflection and friendly exchanges, puts mind and heart into working accord. Where school children are concerned, writing, like conversing, is a social act, in the sense that it is addressed to one particular person. The quality of the writing will always be a good deal determined by the quality of the teacher!

It now remains for me to gather up the threads of this paper. We have glanced at a number of current English text-books and tried to see reasons for their appearance; we have glanced at one aspect of current practice and tried to see reasons again. The rationale of it all seems to be the individual response. Tradition or general acceptance is often suspect: an extension of this may be found in the ironical observation of E.S. Turner 'that any poem which conveys the same meaning to more than twelve people, or to more than two critics, must be accounted an artistic failure!' Finally, it may be claimed that in English in schools that which was peripheral has become central. The individual response is the thing. Sydney Bolt tells us where he stands when he entitles his book on teaching English *The Right Response*.

Ours is a generation of labels. Perhaps the best known is revolution or revolutionary. Prior to World War II the word had about it an abhorrence: revolting meant disgusting (remember in *1066 and All That* the king killed himself when he learned that his sons were revolting?) In science in the sixteenth century and in politics in the eighteenth, revolution meant an upset in the current order of things and a return to what was known before. Later, revolution, as in the American, French and Russian meant a radical upsetting of present ways with the idea of establishing a new order. Now, for young people and for those of us who work with them, revolution means a permanent revolution, an openness to new possibilities, unhampered by old visions: neophilia, if you like. This preoccupation with the new has a momentum of a kind that carries us from fashion

to fashion. I recall a T.V. documentary last year on the maxi-coat, in which in deadly seriousness the glamorous proprietor of a mod gear shop in the King's Road said, 'Well, really, they're just like the Edwardian or the Victorian styles, so, you see, they're quite new and that's their appeal'. Unless one is in this forward surging thing, one is just left behind: one makes no progress. The progressives are the men and women of the moment.

From the Dartmouth Seminar progressives returned to their own places encouraged and sustained, and for three or four years enjoyed great success, even adulation. English begins where the child is, English is involvement with journeys and theatre visits, English is co-operation, English is exploration. Soon, sociological rather than educational premises came to support classroom practice. But by the time of the N.A.T.E. Manchester Conference of 1969 a number of university lecturers, heads of school English departments and the more contemplative of teachers were beginning to ask how much longer the subject of English would have a life of its own, were beginning to wonder whether the current product was worth the price they had paid for it. Of course it is almost impossible completely to dissociate movements in a specific school subject from movements in general educational thought and practice. The Manchester restlessness came at the time of the celebrated Cox and Dyson *Black Papers*. The whole business of liberalising curriculum was called into question: in the main, the *Black Papers* were claiming an alarming decline in 'standards'. It's a good, old-fashioned word, 'standards', if you like—and therefore ill-chosen by the *Black Papers* writers, if they hoped to convert the progressives. If we can stand apart from the politics of education, if we can somehow come to terms with the elitism-egalitarianism debate, if we can believe that there is no one kind of school that is best for all children, but only the best kind of school for a particular child, if we, in a word, are given a breathing-space to think for ourselves, we must admit to some misgivings. The image of English teacher as swinger does not commend itself universally. We don't want our revolution to take us back to the 1930's, but to keep us open-minded: of course we want to move forward in our approach to English. Possibly the most painful lesson mankind has ever learnt throughout civilisation is that there is no short cut. I don't want to regress in my teaching, I want to go on. But I believe that progress is too important to be left to the progressives.

Mr. Laurie Arter, Peninsula Church of England Grammar School.

I was very pleased to receive a chance to go to the United States because I thought that it would be a great opportunity to learn something about exciting and new approaches to teaching English. I would admit to seeing a number of exciting new methods of presenting the subject but I didn't really consider that they illustrated new approaches in terms of any philosophy of teaching. I may be wrong in my definition but I would like to stick to it. I thought that the Americans were far more creative and imaginative in the way they conducted lessons but the courses offered (I am speaking only of where I was) were fairly traditional. Perhaps this absence of any philosophy of teaching English was due to a couple of things. First, I was sent to the Mid-West which is considered to be one of the quieter areas of the United States. And it was just that—'a town of cows, colleges and contentment' as the motto read. Very conservative in outlook. People were generally of Norwegian origin and Lutheran beliefs, very solid Republicans, corn farmers where the old way seemed to die hard. I couldn't help comparing the sorts of things that were offered as curriculum with the sort of things which were offered by a friend teaching in Connecticut, who

said, 'I always start the year in twelfth grade English by having my kids read *The Magus*'. Had I suggested that in Minnesota they probably would have run me out of town!

I attended a couple of conferences, one on teacher training which revealed the same sorts of problems that we have here, and another of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English. This was so huge that I got little out of it except tired legs from standing ovations, numerous cups of coffee, miles and miles of book displays and so many options to choose from that one didn't know where to start! I went to one interesting session on new approaches to creative writing but, on thinking about it later, there was little that was really new. My observations, therefore, are based primarily on what I saw at Northfield High School and a few other schools that I visited. I am sure you will realise that it is impossible to generalise about American methods and approaches because it is such a vast country, and education being locally controlled varies tremendously from one place to another.

My first impression of Northfield was that its school day was extremely rigid. I taught twelfth grade English which, theoretically, is the equivalent of Matriculation and found the presentation of the subject far too structured. We had five hours of English per week which were five hours of structured class time. I was to be in the classroom all the time. I was discouraged from sending students to the library. Not being able to leave them alone at all was rather irritating as I am used to setting people to work and then going away, but the Principal was constantly concerned that something was going to happen in the corridors! All the trouble in American schools seems to happen in the corridors, and as the Principal dreaded being sued by somebody we kept everyone in check, as much as possible! The twelfth grade curriculum was traditional: we taught aspects of functional literacy such as semantics, research paper writing, persuasive speaking and argument, and in literature we taught various themes: the ideas of tragedy, satire, some thematic topics like 'Man and War', 'Man is imperfect' (which I never quite got to the bottom of) and 'Man will prevail'. Whilst these were glossy sounding themes, we studied the usual texts: *Oedipus*, *Macbeth*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Animal Farm*, *Pygmalion* and others. We also read a scattering of poetry which was worked into the units, and numerous pieces from droves of anthologies. Most of these, to my disgust, presented abridged pieces, so that if, for instance, we wanted to look at Swift's *A Modest Proposal* we got little bits and pieces of it. The eleventh grade curriculum was a little more satisfying but very American: American literature, some interesting units on dialects, and the development of American humour mainly through a film course. In the tenth grade I was never quite sure of what they did, although the teaching struck me as being more vigorous and vital if one could judge from the noise coming from the room and the sorts of things they were doing. But there was not much new in terms of course content.

But what did impress me were the methods of presenting material. They were much more creative and imaginative than those I had used in the past, one reason being that teachers had so many things in their favour in terms of audio-visual equipment and resource centres. We had our own TV studio equipped for putting drama, discussion and lectures on video tape, and if you didn't like the result you did it again. Much of this was done by the students. I didn't see this as a new approach: a different and exciting method, perhaps, but not much new philosophy behind it. Activities of this sort varied in quality—some, like those based on poetry, were very good, others were poor. Students were able to write poetry, which is nothing new, but they could produce it, and if you've seen American production, it rubs off on the children: it was a maze of lights, music,

sound effects, slides and dances which added up to some fairly impressive poetry production, which was all very enjoyable and worthwhile.

To reinforce this whole business of poetry we invited a poet who stayed for a week, an [African-American] poet which was the more interesting because we had only fifteen students [of colour] in the school, some of whom were rather militant, and the experience livened up proceedings considerably. All this 'doing' was very good, I suppose, and was much easier to achieve than it is here because of the wide range of audio-visual materials on hand. 'Doing' and 'saying' were the key words for everybody and they became the key words for me too, so that often we drifted away from what was laid down in this rather traditional course.

However, I thought that in the 'doing' and 'saying', something was lost, on the same lines that Dr. Sureties suggested this morning. We just didn't write, or we didn't like to write at all. I was amazed. I believe that it is one of the responsibilities of an English teacher to develop some writing skills in the people he teaches, and yet this was played down, even within the traditional framework. I would set written exercises, I would try to improve the techniques of writing, to show how to describe something or how to argue about something, but the students regarded this as 'busy work', and busy work just wasn't on. They found it hard to see how any emphasis on writing could help them; instead we got some tremendous persuasive speeches and some very vigorous discussions on decisions that the Student Council made. On paper both imagination and technique were lacking. Some of the slower students felt it rather strange that suddenly somebody was interested in teaching coherent expression of ideas, and they were much more responsive than the average and brighter students. Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but I believe there is a vital need for improving communication skills and for abiding by some of the language disciplines that Dr. Hansen outlined earlier this morning.

Teaching literature presented problems. The great cry of the students was for everything to be relevant to them, right now, living in the United States, and this was pretty hard to meet. They were so impatient or apathetic about works of established authors that it got to the point where it was terribly difficult to do anything with them. *Macbeth* didn't affect them at all. *Oedipus* was a lost cause; *Death of a Salesman*, which I felt might be a little closer to home, didn't impinge on their present lives and so they weren't interested. We get back to the idea of egocentricity. The students weren't interested in hearing of the experiences of other people, or working outwards from literature; they wanted to work with something in tune with their ideas. At times I felt I was not teaching English but running a sociology class or social studies lesson or general discussion. While I could listen to and sympathize with their attitudes, I felt at times that the subject in its own right was losing ground. Students couldn't relate to things easily, and if they couldn't, they wouldn't. Perhaps they would relate to some poorly produced TV programme about the conflict between the younger and the older generations, but they would talk about it from their point of view only. As for getting them to go beyond that, to try to grasp something by looking at the experiences of established playwrights or authors, this was very hard to do. We often ended up talking about masses of student attitudes, prejudices and experiences, many of which were deep-rooted and unshakeable in this conservative area.

I had a chance to look at some new methods of presenting English. One proposal was that it should be offered as an ungraded elective subject in the last three years of high school, the only

prescription being a compulsory course in linguistics and composition. If students had interests in various fields of literature they could follow them. I often felt that this was being suggested because some teachers who were better in some fields than others wanted to push their own barrows for a semester course and then start all over again. Maybe I'm cynical.

Another interesting proposal which we thought about introducing was modular scheduling. Many teachers felt that this would make best use of the talent and time available, although I noticed in some states people had abandoned it. Briefly the idea is that you divide the day into a number of modules of a certain length, say twenty minutes, and you offer the subject in terms of time and group size: e.g. one three-module session of one hour; then a large group lecture, then three two-module sessions of forty minutes, and the rest of the day given to independent study. Emphasis was placed on developing the students' ability to study independently, and on presenting the subject most efficiently by team teaching. I saw schools operating on this system with varying degrees of success. Many teachers were concerned that they would merely be using gimmicks and developing attitudes rather than teaching a subject. Others felt they couldn't operate in a situation where the members of the team have to be completely honest and frank with each other. I had the feeling that modular scheduling could open up some interesting avenues in offering new things to do and new ways of presenting material if it were done properly; unfortunately I didn't see it being done very well anywhere.

I was impressed by American teachers as concerned people. Perhaps from what I have said this impression won't come across but they were willing and keen to sit down and talk it out and decide what they were going to do. Equally refreshing, I found that teachers would come together from all levels—university, secondary and elementary—without a conflict of interest.

It was a strange experience teaching in the United States. In trying to present a traditional curriculum by means of some new and imaginative methods, it was often difficult to keep the aims of teaching English in view. If centring work around the individual is a new approach, we did that at Northfield. If talking is a new approach, we did a lot of talking. If developing attitudes is a new approach, we did that too. But I still don't think that these things are really new: we've been doing them for a long time and some of us doing them well.

Mrs. Esta de Fossard, Lauriston Girls' School

I am not quite sure having listened to our two speakers this morning whether to stand up and cheer or burst into tears. Perhaps that is the feminine in me. For many years now, and as a student of Dr. Hansen, something has been niggling in the back of my mind which pronounces itself in a question: What is wrong with being right? And for far too many years I have had people from places like, with all due respect, Moreland High School, suggesting that every pupil who ever comes in front of a teacher is intellectually underprivileged. It has been my extreme privilege to deal most of my teaching life with children who come from intellectually privileged homes and who demand of their teachers the highest and greatest intellectual skill. I have in fact been told that in teaching my students I have been doing something, if not wrong, possibly obscene. I have spent many years teaching private students, students who come to me from a classroom saying 'For God's sake teach me what I am supposed to do', There are far too many students in our schools who sit in front of their teachers and do not know, from the day they go in to the day they

go out, what in the name of all tarnation this is about. 'Teach me to write an essay'. 'Teach me to write a sentence that will say what is in my mind'. 'Teach me how to think'. And do you know what I have discovered? It is possible to teach people without destroying them entirely. And I was so thrilled to see these learned gentlemen coming around to this persuasion at long last!

It has begun to creep into the literature which is seeping into the magazines that maybe it is a nice thing to teach people something. The recent report which came from the Curriculum Advisory Board suggested ever so tentatively that maybe people will enjoy poetry more if we teach them something about how to enjoy it. That suggestion I would care to venture will be blazened forth in large letters before another two years have gone past. I rather wonder what on earth is going to happen to all the unfortunate teachers of English who were taught not to teach. How are we going to instruct these people? Do we no longer require teachers of English to even know the basics of the structure of their language. I raised this question at Monash recently and was informed, very bluntly, that the Education Department has decreed that grammar of any sort, nasty words like adjectives and so on, will no longer be taught in our schools. I do not see that we should simply follow slavishly this suggestion. I, and I bet an awful lot of you, thoroughly enjoyed learning grammar. Some of you didn't. Similarly some of you enjoy football on your television sets every night. I do not. Are we to say that one is necessarily right and the other necessarily wrong? It seems that if the criterion for teaching English is to be, as has been suggested, enjoyment, then we are denying colossal enjoyment to some of our students who thoroughly enjoy semantics. And we are denying them at least the chance of finding out. I am not here, however, to perpetrate the teaching of grammar. I am here to suggest what I think was suggested by both Dr. Sureties and Dr. Hansen, that we have to face up to the fact that there is no longer one way to teach English to all students.

It was certainly my experience in America that this is so, and my experiences in some way follow through Mr. Arter's. In other ways I think they were diametrically opposed. I too was posted to the Mid-West—Cincinnati, Ohio—to a small school, Sycamore High School with eleven hundred students and more ... students [of colour] than Mr. Arter had. And at Sycamore it wasn't so much a fear of things happening in the corridor, they actually did happen which was rather more exciting. Some of the sorts of feelings that Mr. Arter mentioned—the feelings of teachers and the faculty being terrified of what their students were going to do—are not the fault of education but of what perhaps might be a slight misinterpretation by the American people as a whole of the meaning of the word 'freedom'. They are just beginning to realise the horrible proximity between 'freedom' and 'anarchy'. And there is a grave danger in allowing people too much freedom.

I found, as Mr. Arter did, that there is a lot of traditional teaching. I was asked to teach fourth form (tenth grade) children sentence diagraming, which is the same as grammatical analysis. I, of course, poor twisted, demented soul that I am, adored analysis when I was at school but that we will allow was a mental aberration on my part. I could not and after a while I would not teach sentence diagraming to the weaker students. It seemed ultimately that the teaching of any form of structured grammar to the low classes was totally irrelevant. They couldn't understand it and they lost all love for their language entirely. The middle class, which of course is always the difficult one, (What do you do with an 'average' person?) struggled with the grammar if they had to. The top class loved it and had no problems with it at all. So therefore it was totally useless to

them because it offered no challenge and they learned very little from it. But they thoroughly enjoyed doing it. What do you do in situations like this?

The weakest class I found responded superbly to a quarter of the school year being devoted to the study of a newspaper. There was one boy in my class ... by the name of Victor who had his claws into 'the establishment' good and proper! Victor's English was poor on paper, but he was the ... spokesman in the school although only a fourth form student. He was belligerent but there was a good slice of Martin Luther King buried in there somewhere too. Victor decided, having read articles and letters in the newspapers that what he wanted to do was write to the newspaper. He had never wanted to be able to write before. I found that this class responded, above all, to English which taught them the sorts of things that were going to be useful: how to write a business letter; how to make telephone calls and sound as if you meant something; how to respond. We divided the class up many times into interview groups. They would write letters applying for a job, then we would have a little judging panel to decide which person was going to get the job. And they learned themselves that the letter which was most neatly written was the one which most impressed and this type of thing was to them most valuable. From this type of approach Sycamore High School has evolved a system of teaching in its sixth form year, which I find most stimulating, and which would be worthy of investigation in Australian schools. It's to some degree what Mr. Arter was talking about—splitting the subjects up. In the senior year there are often twelve courses in English. Now the idea of this is that by the time a student comes to his senior year he should, if he has been properly taught, see for himself his weaknesses and understand for himself the things he really wants to know. Most of these were semester courses, in other words half the year on one thing and half on another. But they were fairly intense. They covered such things as spelling; vocabulary and the history of the language; the writing of themes, which was akin to essays, but stressed the exposition of a particular idea; American literature; world literature; business English; creative writing, which for some reason those who set Matriculation papers in our country deem something that no-one in their right senses would ever touch; oral English, which was the business of giving a talk and discussing intelligently in the spoken language; research writing, slightly different from theme writing in that it taught a great deal more about where to go for information, how to approach people for information and how to collate all that had been gathered; drama and speech, either as one or as two separate subjects; and, surprisingly well attended for the benefit of the hisses in our audience, a course in semantics—grammar. This not only taught, if you like, a basic approach to grammar but also investigated in a fascinating way comparative grammars, different types of approaches that both English and other languages could take through the teaching of grammar.

These were some of the twelve courses that were offered to sixth form students in this particular school. This worked very well. You tended to find when the scheme was first introduced that the non-thinking student went for the easiest course. But on the whole by the sixth form year they did know what their weaknesses were and where they wanted them to be put right. I guess you've had students who come in last year of school and say 'Gosh, I wish someone had taught me to spell. I realise now, when I'm looking for a job or when I'm going on to something that I'm embarrassed about my spelling'. Well, I run what you might call a spelling clinic on one morning a week before school for the benefit of those who do want to learn to spell. There are similar handwriting clinics and things which we organize from time to time for people who want to put right the weaknesses they see in themselves. In a system such as ours the question inevitably

arises 'How do you examine this?' and the answer inevitably is 'You don't', the point being that if the child really wants to learn this because he recognizes his own weakness there is no need to examine him. He has learned.

The other extremely interesting experience that I had while in the United States was to go to a school in Cincinnati, Walnut Hills High School, a school for the above average student. Now I am not stressing the above average because I happen to teach in an above average school, but I think it has been clear in the past years that a great deal of work has been done for the underprivileged child. And this is as it should be. But as Dr. Hansen remarked we are leaving out those other students and Walnut Hills High School was a high school established for just this reason. Those students had to be recommended by their teacher and by the school counsellor who has watched the child's development right through his schooling. While a student is there, if his ability is such he may study the normal school subjects in some areas and proceed to second or third year college level with others. I spent a magnificent afternoon with these students. I remember most particularly a seminar on Hamlet. Sitting in the back of my room were two...boys who were the most profoundly thinking young people I suppose it has ever been my pleasure to meet. The point was not that these two were particularly more blessed with intellect than all sorts of other people in the world, but that they had been given the opportunity to stretch their intellect just as far as possible. I look at my own classes very often (we don't stream our classes) and wonder what I am losing, not only with the weaker students who I spend hours of lunch times and before school with, but with the very bright student who has never been asked to ask all of herself. Walnut Hills I think is a perfect answer: 'Go as far as you like my friend, and if you outstrip your teacher, marvellous, teach the teacher something.' They sit in very informal groups: what our friend Mr. Schoenheimer calls 'Those bloody desks' have been done away with completely. You can sit and discuss informally, which I think is absolutely right because you must offer your bright students the chance of being extended as far as they like.

I had a magnificent principal at Sycamore High School, a most outstanding and sensitive man, very aware indeed of the type of problem facing American school children and American teachers. And he very nicely said to me 'I'd like you to teach these children the way you would teach at home' and I said 'Does that mean classroom discipline and all?' and he said, 'Yes. Classroom discipline and all.' So this meant that my students had to stand up when they came into the room and stay standing until everyone was there and then they sat down. Old fashioned, mid-Victorian, square, hideous, the lot, but it is the most magnificent way in the world of starting a lesson because everybody wants to get on with the job even if they are just sick of standing. They'll get there and they'll stand and they'll quickly sit down. As they filed past my door they filled my rubbish bin with their chewing gum! The interesting thing was that the children enjoyed this discipline. I pointed out that I couldn't read writing in pencil and that I had a much greater respect for their ability than they obviously had and I invited them to write in pen. There was the usual performance but they wrote in pen. They also learned to present their work neatly. It seems to me a strange contradiction of terms that somebody who is particularly bright should be particularly untidy. Why cannot one express oneself attractively and still be a reasonably tidy person? Well, the discipline point was an interesting one and I think this picks up again what our two learned friends said earlier: this business of having a feeling for something, of wanting to know what it is about, respect for the better way, respect for yourself, respect for other people. But how on earth can you respect other people when you don't respect yourself?

I remember another student who recently called me up on the telephone at five o'clock in the morning from America to tell me that she had just had her poetry published. Peggy, her name was. Peggy was impossible. Peggy had three times been put out of school. Peggy couldn't spell, still can't spell. But she is a sensitive and feeling person who writes the most beautiful poetry and just recently some of her poetry has been published in a student anthology. Now you see the difficulty we are up against. I do not suggest for one moment that everybody must be taught the formal rules of grammar and spelling. Peggy has to have her work edited. I don't think she will ever learn to spell. But perhaps it doesn't matter. The point that I have come around to, and I am perhaps exploring more and more, is that whether in the old conservative way or in the newer free way, we should not be saying that this form or that form is right but finding the individual answer, for the individual child.

It seems to me that the job of the English teacher is not to be a psychologist. Do we really want to finish up with an Education Department full of Jean Brodies? And this is what happens, I think, when a teacher thinks he has a mission to save the souls of the children in front of him. No, it is not his job to be a psychologist. Perhaps ultimately the job of the English teacher is to offer each child life and to offer it to him more abundantly.