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College English, Vol. 53, No. 6. (Oct., 1991), pp. 631-646.

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Tue Jun 19 14:30:30 2007

Joseph Harris

After Dartmouth: Growth and Conflict in English

How are reading and writing defined and valued in the study of English? How are those activities then represented in the classroom? And how and why might those definitions and representations be changed? These questions seem particularly pressing at a time when academic debates over the canon and curriculum, literacy and skills, have suddenly become matters of public controversy, and especially when the most visible answers to them have been calls for English teachers to get "back to the basics," make students more "culturally literate," and pass down and preserve the legacy of high western culture. The problem, then, is how to respond to this conservative recasting of our goals in the classroom. How can we argue for teaching reading and writing as something other than a set of functional skills, for thinking about culture as more than a set of revered texts?

To help form such a response I want to look back at another attempt to rethink the aims and methods of English teaching: the Dartmouth Seminar, which ran for three weeks in the late summer of 1966, and which brought together some 50 leading teachers and scholars from America and Britain. Their meeting at Dartmouth had been organized by MLA, NCTE, and NATE, and funded by the Carnegie Corporation; its aim was to define English as a school subject and to outline the ways it might be best taught. The participants, in fact, proved unable to agree on much in either theory or practice, but this did not much limit their impact on the work of many teachers then and since—for whom Dartmouth has symbolized a kind of Copernican shift from a view of English as something one *learns about* to a sense of it as something one *does*. After Dartmouth, that is, one could imagine English not simply as a patchwork of literary texts, figures, and periods (*The Fairie Queen*, Swinburne, the eighteenth century) but as the study of how language in all its forms is put to use—from gossip to tragedies to advertising to the talk of schoolchildren. An old model of teaching centered on the transmission of skills (composition) and knowledge (literature) gave way to a "growth model" focusing on the experiences of students and how these are shaped by their uses of language.

Or that at least is the heroic view of Dartmouth—one that can be traced in large part to John Dixon's eloquent, influential, and highly skewed report on the

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seminar, *Growth Through English*, published in 1967 and reprinted twice afterwards. Dixon was himself a leading British growth theorist, and his report offered less an account of what was argued at Dartmouth than a brief for a particular view of teaching. His aim was to draw from the seminar "such ideas as are directly relevant to my own work in class" (xi), and so he made little attempt to account for the subject-centered views held by many Americans at the seminar, except to suggest that they were perhaps a necessary step toward his own position. The result was an articulate and contentious book, but one that tended to report Dixon's own views as the findings of the seminar—and so in its pages Dartmouth began to seem less a debate than the starting point of a new consensus about the aims and methods of English teaching. (The seminar also commissioned an account of its work by an American, Herbert Muller, who tried far more than Dixon to give due credit to the full range of conflicting views at Dartmouth, and perhaps for this very reason ended up writing a tepid report called *The Uses of English*.)

A number of other international conferences on English teaching have followed Dartmouth—at York, England in 1972, at Sydney, Australia in 1980, and at East Lansing, Michigan in 1984—but none have had its impact. Many of the leading speakers at these conferences were among the participants at Dartmouth, and so many of the themes and ideas of these meetings have often seemed mere reworkings of those first articulated there. Most recently, the 1987 English Coalition Conference at Wye billed itself as a kind of all-American successor to Dartmouth, and its report shows that most thinking about teaching has changed little since 1966. As Wayne Booth, a participant at both Dartmouth and Wye, remarks in an otherwise enthusiastic foreword to the Coalition Report, "There was nothing radically new in this enterprise" (x).

But while they continue to shape the kinds of talk about teaching that go on at conferences and in journals, the Dartmouth ideas seem to have failed to have much practical effect on what actually goes on in many English classrooms. Rather, the day-to-day work of most teachers, in both America and Britain, from preschool to the university, seems to have continued on after Dartmouth much as it had before—marching lockstep to the demands of fixed school curriculums, standardized tests, and calls for improved skills and increased cultural unity. And, in any case, most of the actual recommendations of the Dartmouth seminar were remarkably vague—statements it is hard to imagine anyone disagreeing with and thus equally hard to imagine anyone acting on: "[t]he wisdom of providing young people at all ages with significant opportunities for the creative uses of language"; "[t]he significance of rich literary experiences in the educative process," and so on (see Shugrue 73–74 for a full list). The few recommendations that were more pointed—like those against tracking and standardized testing—have been for the most part ignored.

Even still, most comments about Dartmouth have been nostalgic. Despite its lack of practical effect on teaching, Dartmouth has often been invoked as showing what, in a better time and world, work in English *could* be. An antinomian streak colors this talk, as institutional politics and academic vanity are cast as the real blocks to reform in teaching. By 1974, for instance, James Squire and

James Britton were to remark that "the impact of the Dartmouth ideas—perhaps the Dartmouth ideal" was to be found not in programs but "in the enterprise of individuals, in the new insights of young teachers" (x). Similarly, in his 1974 *Tradition and Reform*, Arthur Applebee described the growth model as the "better alternative" among current approaches to teaching, yet admitted that most American teachers stuck to traditional, subject-centered views of their work (228–32). A few years later, in 1979, Robert Parker argued that the reforms suggested at Dartmouth never stood a chance of competing against the federally funded programs of the 1960s Project English. Writing in the same issue of the *English Journal*, Ken Kantor suggested more simply that the ideas of Dartmouth were too "romantic" and "revolutionary" to be widely accepted. And more recently, in 1988, Sharon Hamilton-Wieler worried that we seem left now with only "empty echoes of Dartmouth," as students and teachers once again bow to the pressures of uniform tests and curriculums.

There is truth in all these comments, and my aim here is not to defend the dreariness of much schooling from its critics. But I think that such views make the lessons of Dartmouth seem more simple than they are. Many seminar participants were unconvinced by the arguments for the growth model, fearing that a kind of loose talk about "feelings" and "responses" would displace the serious study of language and literature, a view well shown in Wayne O'Neil's acerbic conference report in the *Harvard Educational Review*, in which he concluded that the seminar "misconceived what it is that needs doing and along the way wasted a good deal of public (Carnegie) money" (365). And since then the growth model has drawn critics from both the left and right. For instance, as early as 1971, Ann Berthoff was to accuse the growth theorists of neglecting the social uses of language in favor of an almost total (and in the end trivializing) interest in personal expression. Many others have followed Berthoff in making this charge, most recently James Berlin in 1987 and Peter Griffith in 1988. And in 1980, working from a very different set of concerns, David Allen anticipated the recent attacks on the schools by conservatives like E. D. Hirsch and Allan Bloom when he argued that the ideas of Dartmouth had led to a devaluing of the claims of the larger culture.

This ongoing debate echoes tensions present at Dartmouth itself. One finds in the papers and books that came out of the seminar not a unified sense of what English is and how it should be taught, but rather a series of conflicts and tensions much like those that divide us now. Rather than read Dartmouth as the scene of a heroic shift in the theory and practice of teaching, then, I want to look at it as a moment in which the conflicts that define English studies were dramatized with unusual clarity. In looking at the issues that divided the seminar, we can begin to map out some of the contested terms and ideas that structure our work in English today.

The plan of the seminar had been to begin by bringing all the participants together to address the question: "What is English?" Once having defined their subject, they were then to split into separate study groups and working parties that would take on particular issues in teaching—questions of tracking, testing, curriculum, and the like. The hope seems to have been to give some clear shape

to what many thought an almost formless subject of instruction. This did not occur. In the first paper given at the seminar, Albert Kitzhaber invoked the familiar triad of language, literature, and composition in order to define the subject matter of English. The problem, as Kitzhaber saw it, was how to bring these three concerns together. His aim was to form a view of English as "an organized body of knowledge with an integrity of its own" ("What" 12). What was needed, he argued, was a definition that did not "[turn] out to be but the lengthened shadow of a specialist's personal interest," but that instead collected the various facets of English into a single coherent subject of study (16).

Speaking in response to Kitzhaber, James Britton next argued that one cannot define English by determining its proper subject matter. Rather, one must first ask what the function of English is in the curriculum and in the lives of students. For Britton, the key question was not: "What is the subject matter of English?"—but rather: "What do we want students and teachers to be doing?" His answer was to define English as that space in the curriculum where students are encouraged to use language in more complex and expressive ways. They were to learn to do so through reading, writing, and talking about issues related to their own personal experiences, making the English lesson

> the integrating area for all public knowledge. My mother used to make jam tarts and she used to roll out the pastry and I remember this very well—I can still feel what it is like to do it, although I have never done it since. She used to roll out the pastry and then she took a glass and cut out a jam tart, then cut out another jam tart. Well we have cut out geography, and we have cut out history, and we have cut out science. What do we cut out for English? I suggest that we don't. I suggest that is what is left. That is the rest of it. ("Response" 12)

This opening exchange between Kitzhaber and Britton set up a conflict between what were soon known as the American and British positions at Dartmouth, though in fact there were strong differences of view among the participants from each country. Kitzhaber and the Americans were most concerned with defining English as an *academic discipline*, a body of knowledge. Such an approach, as Britton noted, suggests that the real focus of work in English is something "out there," some kind of information to be gained or set of skills to be mastered ("Response" 5–6). Britton and the British looked instead at English as a *teaching subject*—that is, as a loosely shared set of classroom practices, concerns, and activities. If the American hero was the scholar, the British hero was the teacher.

This conflict between the American and British positions was expressed clearly in the ways they chose to describe their work. The actual jobs held by most of the participants at Dartmouth seem to have had very much in common. Most worked in university departments of English or education and were also involved with forming school curricula or training schoolteachers. Yet by and large the Americans identified themselves as *scholars* and the British as classroom *teachers*. John Dixon was to state this opposition quite bluntly in his "Conference Report," arguing that while there "will be a tendency for the university professor to dominate the work of the schools . . . where there is any

strength in the school tradition of English teaching, that tendency can be overcome" (367).

The two positions can be seen as differing responses to what Jurgen Habermas has called a "legitimation crisis." Habermas has argued that a profession needs to justify its work to both an audience of experts and the public at large. Since these groups have differing needs and interests, the work of professionals will often seem to be pulled in two directions at once. And so, on the one hand, there is a continuing need to legitimize English as an academic field with its own specialized subject and methods of study. On the other hand, English has long been valued precisely because it seems more than yet another specialized area of concern, because it offers a place where different kinds of knowledge can be brought together and related to personal experience. Britton's jam tart metaphor puts the problem nicely: the importance of English lies in its ability to connect separate kinds of learning and experience, but in doing this it can seem stretched thin, with little substance of its own. One can view the American position at Dartmouth, then, as an attempt to justify the study of English to other university experts, and the British position as trying to place such work in relation to the needs and concerns of students. I have already suggested that another way of stating this conflict is in terms of the troubled relations between research and teaching. My point here is that this conflict cannot be resolved simply through admonitions to do both well or to have one inform the other, since research and teaching address competing needs and audiences.

For the Americans at Dartmouth, the task at hand seemed one of defining and consolidating the subject matter of English. As a former president of NCTE and chair of CCCC, Kitzhaber had long argued for the need to ground classroom practices in formal research on writing and learning, and his 1963 *Themes, Theories, and Therapy* was the first book-length study of composition teaching in American colleges. In his opening talk at Dartmouth, Kitzhaber derided what he called "progressive" attempts to turn the English classroom into a "catch-all" space for discussing whatever happened to be on the minds of teachers or students. Citing Northrop Frye in *Design for Learning*, he argued against confusing "educational and social functions," and insisted that our "subject matter must be defined more clearly than it has in the past" so that we can then "[bring] forward a 'New English' to take its place alongside the 'New Mathematics' and the 'New Science' now being taught in many United States schools" (12–13).

This appeal to the Sputnik-inspired New Math and New Science is revealing. Many of the Americans at Dartmouth were involved with the attempts of the federally funded Project English to design a sequenced curriculum for the study of language and literature from kindergarten to college. Project English had been inspired by the success of the National Defense Education Act programs in science and math, and the case for its funding made by a 1961 NCTE report ominously called *The National Interest and the Teaching of English*, which argued for more "focused" and "articulated" teaching in the place of the current "hodgepodge" of activities that made up many English lessons. The theory of education driving the work of Project English had been stated at the 1959 Woods

Hole Conference—whose principal aim, as its chair Jerome Bruner reported in *The Process of Education*, had been "to examine the fundamental processes involved in imparting to young students the substance and method of science" (vi). This stress on process was salutary. Students were to learn science by doing it, not merely by reading about it, and in this Bruner held much in common with the British at Dartmouth. But his thinking also led to a two-step theory of education, in which one first defined "the substance and method" of a subject before looking for the "processes involved in imparting" it. The problem of teaching could then, as Bruner himself put it, be turned into simply "one of representing the structure of [a] subject in terms of the child's way of viewing things. The task can be thought of as one of translation" (33). The scholar discovers the structure of his subject; the teacher transmits that structure to students.

Another effect of Woods Hole was to make teaching less general and more disciplinary. Bruner had argued that "the foundations of any subject may be taught to anybody in some form," and so the point of teaching at even the earliest grades came to be seen as introducing students to the rudiments of subjects that some would later go on to study at more advanced levels (33). The curriculum, that is, was thought of less as a plan of study for the "whole child" and more as a loose amalgam of separate skills and disciplines. It followed that the content of most teaching should then be determined by "subject specialists," usually university scholars. The work of Project English was planned in this top-down fashion, as was the Dartmouth Seminar, with its opening attempt to define English as a subject before considering issues in its teaching. In setting up the first two legs of their tripod subject, Project English scholars had turned to Chomskian linguistics and the archetypal criticism of Northrop Frye. A number of conflicting attempts were also made to establish a similar base for the teaching of writing, as a revived interest in classical rhetoric competed with approaches drawing on behavioral psychology and the new "generative" rhetorics of Francis Christensen.

Linked to these attempts to define the "substance and method" of the field was the call of the 1958 Basic Issues Conference to reconceptualize English as a "fundamental liberal discipline"—which it then went on to define as "a core of experience, a body of knowledge, and a set of specific skills to be attained" by students (13). Funded by the Ford Foundation, this conference was made up almost entirely of scholars and teachers from elite colleges and prep schools. Their report sketched an Arnoldian view of English as the study of "the best thought and expression of [the students'] own time and the cultural heritage which is rightfully theirs," and fretted repeatedly that the "civilizing value" of literature was being "watered down" by misguided attempts to make its study relevant to students raised on the mass media and preoccupied with their future careers (3–4). The progressive theories of John Dewey had softened and corrupted teaching, the report argued, turning many English classes into "ad hoc training in how to write a letter, how to give a radio speech, manners, dating, telephoning, vocational guidance" (4). There was to be no more of that. "We must distinguish between the passing and the permanent," intoned still another re-

port, this one sponsored by the College Entrance Examination Board in 1965 and gravely titled *Freedom and Discipline in English* (3). The CEEB went on to argue, following cliché with threat, "that the scope of the English program be defined as the study of language, literature, and composition . . . and that matters not clearly related to such study be excluded from it" (13).

Project English, The Basic Issues, *The National Interest, Freedom and Discipline*. Together they voiced a remarkable consensus over the need both to "preserve the humanistic tradition" and to formalize its study. And so many of the Americans who came to Dartmouth believed that the question "What is English?" could be answered (or ought to be answered) in much the same way one might go about responding to a question like "What is organic chemistry?"—that is, by first defining a subject matter and then pointing to a set of principles for use in its study. Wayne O'Neil was again to sum up this view of English in his report on Dartmouth, arguing that "schools in their talk ought to be organized around . . . areas of knowledge" and that the "data" of literary studies were too ill-defined to support a coherent plan of teaching (365–66). For O'Neil and many other Americans, the best model for the study of English was a discipline like linguistics, with its clearly defined subject matter and methods of inquiry.

This subject-based curriculum came under sharp attack at Dartmouth. Many of the British seminar participants had studied at Cambridge with F. R. Leavis—whose hand could be felt in their insistence on the value of lived experience and on the importance of language in bringing order to that experience. Still others, particularly James Britton and his colleagues at the University of London, had been influenced by movements in the teaching of drawing and painting that saw each child "as an artist in his or her characteristic and un-adult fashion" ("Spectator" 59). Both groups had fashioned an approach to teaching that took the work of students as seriously as that of poets or novelists. Denys Thompson, for instance, argued against creating a "pseudo-content" for English when its real subject could be found in the learner. Frank Whitehead warned against letting "teaching about literary forms and techniques" stand in the place of helping students come to their own terms with the books they read (qtd. in Squire 62). And John Dixon rejected "overarching theory" in favor of starting "from detailed experience in the classroom" ("Conference Report" 369). All in some way echoed Leavis's concern, voiced in his 1943 sketch for an "English School," that literature not be reduced to yet another three-hour examination subject but that its study instead serve as the starting point of an ongoing criticism of life and culture.

One of the most striking features of this British position was a renewed interest in personal and expressive forms of talk and writing. The growth theorists especially argued for an acceptance of the individual's own language or dialect, with a resulting de-emphasis on teaching correct or standard forms. The content or focus of most English lessons was not to be the forms of language but lived experience, as shown either in literature or in the writings of students. Language was not so much to be studied as used. Growth in skill was expected to occur in an incidental fashion, not through direct training in stylistic or grammatical exer-

cises (mocked by Britton and Dixon as "dummy runs") but as a natural outcome of meaningful practice in writing and reading. The English lesson was to be less about literature than in it. Students were encouraged to do in their own way what poets did—"bring a new, simplifying order to the complexity of life" (Dixon, *Growth* 27–28).

Growth Through English is itself one of the best examples of the extraordinary range and flexibility of this approach to teaching. Dixon's focus throughout is on "the border country between scholarship and the intuitive understandings of observant and sympathetic teachers," as he draws together ideas from criticism, psychology, and poetry and then links them to close readings of the writings of schoolchildren in order to form a teachable theory of language in use (27). He is thus able to suggest that the same sort of attention one might give to the poetry of T. S. Eliot could also be brought to the reading of something like a fourth-grader's journal in science lab, since poem and journal alike are uses of language to give shape to experience. The result is a view of doing English that, at its best, brings together the work of artist, critic, teacher, and student.

Much as many of the Americans at Dartmouth were reacting against a vision of their past (which saw the teaching of English as having degenerated into a content-less pandering to the wants of the "whole child"), so too the growth model had been proposed in response to a view of how English had once been taught in Britain. At the start of *Growth Through English*, Dixon argues that past teaching in his country had either emphasized rote training in the functional skills of reading and writing or centered on building a sense of national unity through appeals to the greatness of English literature. Both approaches tended to represent English in terms of a certain content—either skills or literature—to be transmitted. Language learning was thus presented to a schoolchild as a passive acquiring of information that was largely unrelated to the other parts of her life and study. The aim of the growth model, in contrast, was to build on the child's previous mastery of language, to develop her ability to shape experience into words, to connect disparate events and ideas (1–4). What was needed to make work in English more pointed and coherent, then, was not a more complete understanding of the structure of literature or linguistics but a better grasp of how one learned to make full and expressive use of language.

Not all of the British at Dartmouth wholly agreed with this, as became clear in the years after the seminar when a number of scholars associated with Cambridge attacked what they saw as the devaluing of literature by the London growth theorists. Their argument was, in effect, that there was more to the "cultural heritage" model of teaching than Dixon and Britton were willing to allow (for examples, see Lewis; Whitehead "Stunting the Growth"; Holbrook *English for Meaning*). Part of what was at stake can be seen in how the meanings of *growth* differ from those of *maturity*—the term valorized by Leavis and applied to teaching by Frank Whitehead and David Holbrook. To be mature is to adapt oneself to the demands of society; the term suggests compromise in ways growth does not. In arguing for the personal growth of the student against the acculturative goals of most schooling, Dixon, Britton, and their colleagues implied that the two were often in conflict. Where Leavis had made a higher order of ex-

perience ("fine living") the aim of study in English, they centered their work in talk about the ordinary experiences of schoolchildren.

Linked to this was a valuing of precisely those "social functions" that Kitzhaber and Frye had wanted to bracket away from the formal study of English. Thus the irony of Dartmouth was that the British were reacting against almost precisely the view of English that the Americans were trying to achieve. In turn, many of the Americans at the seminar balked at the ideas of growth theory because they seemed so much like the very kind of progressive schooling that they had built their own sense of English against.

And so from the start Dartmouth pitted two conflicting views of English against each other. In its talk about the teaching of literature, for instance, there was, in the diplomatic words of a seminar working party report, "disagreement . . . over how much knowledge [the student] should have about literary forms" (Squire 61). Benjamin DeMott put the issue more bluntly when he complained of how hard it was to shake most of his American colleagues "out of the vacuum of taste and genre talk" (38). In general, it might be said that the Americans argued for the teaching of *literature* while the British wanted to focus instead on the *responses* of students to their reading. Similarly, while almost all of the participants argued against making a fetish of "good grammar," many Americans believed that the forms of standard written English could and ought to be taught explicitly, while the British felt that such issues were of marginal concern and should not be the focus of teaching at any level. "Leave their language alone!" was said to be a frequent cry of the British at Dartmouth, and David Mackay summed up their stance pretty well when he quipped that "to prescribe is no answer at all when what one is finally required to do is produce" (30). On the other hand, Albert Markwardt spoke for many Americans when he argued that, given a choice between taking a "stand against" incorrect usage, "ignoring" it, or "treating" it, his "preference would be for the latter" (19).

Many of the most influential advocates of the growth model proved to be Americans, including Benjamin DeMott, James Miller, James Squire, and especially James Moffett—whose 1968 *Teaching the Universe of Discourse* powerfully shaped the teaching of writing in American colleges. But the political and intellectual conflicts between the two factions were too sharp for ready compromise at Dartmouth. At least one American, Wayne O'Neil, dismissed the British as "Sensitive People . . . pretty much turned off by coherent and rational discussion, turned on by feelings and Lawrence," and it seems a good guess that others felt the same (361). And the attitude of the British toward many of the Americans, with their Project English charts and exercises and diagrams, is suggested in an anecdote told by Miller:

> One of the dramatic moments of the conference came during a heated exchange on the teaching of linguistic grammar, which the Americans haltingly and hesitatingly defended while the British clucked and deplored. One of the more arrogantly aggressive of the Englishmen rose in all of his aristocratic bearing, walked over to a table and plucked off a page of junior high Project English materials that was covered with strange hieroglyphics, the cabalistic formulae of Chomsky's transformational or generative grammar. Holding this unreadable and baffling page aloft, the Englishman said in the meticulous accents of his controlled rage (I quote in approx-

> imation only, from a fading memory): "I would not carry this material into any classroom at any level of the curriculum. It represents an affront to the mind and an insult to the imagination; it is beneath contempt and beyond discussion." There followed a stunned silence; present among us Americans were the makers, supporters, or approvers of those materials. But there were none among us willing or able to explain those occult and arcane equations, or to demonstrate how seventh or eighth graders might be lured into curiosity about them, or to show how they benefited once they had mastered the esoterics of their formulation. Silence begat silence, and a shift of focus; and the raw and painful moment was gradually soothed over by the steady flow of talk. (105)

There is more to this moment, I think, than a simple conflict of styles and personalities (though there is surely that, too). Rather, I see it as a point where two opposing ideas of English—one centered on a loyalty to a certain kind of knowledge, the other rooted in a certain view of the classroom—met head on and found that they seemed to be talking about different subjects. The Americans tried to define the subject matter of English apart from the ways it is taught; the British saw the work of teachers and students as an intrinsic part of what that subject was. The first view saw English in terms of the thing to be studied—literature, criticism, theory, rhetoric, and so forth. The second looked at English much more loosely as a set of teaching moves, practices, and concerns. Unfortunately, the result of their confrontation seems to have been not negotiation but withdrawal into separate camps, and since Dartmouth their conflict has been less resolved than continually displaced.

In *Professing Literature*, Gerald Graff traces much of the growth of English as a field to its tendency to assimilate rather than confront dissenting views and methods. A result is that many departments end up as odd confederacies of new critics, deconstructionists, compositionists, new historicists, feminists, film theorists, and the like—with none of these "specialists" having much reason or occasion to speak with any of the others. My sense is that the dissenting view of English articulated at Dartmouth has been co-opted in a similar way. Many of the concerns and methods of the growth model have been accepted as parts of an almost official pedagogy. Talk about the writing process, uses of freewriting and drafting, work in small groups, and the like are now a common part of undergraduate study in English—or at least in composition—throughout the country. Yet at the same time these concerns and practices have become accepted, they have also been marginalized as dealing simply with matters of teaching. Some room is made for colleagues with particular zeal for such issues and techniques—research in composition gains some legitimacy; MLA adds a Division on the Teaching of Writing to its epic catalogue of interest groups—but otherwise the bulk of the work in most English departments continues on pretty much as it did before. What might have become a way of rethinking the goals of English studies has been appropriated as simply a new set of teaching methods.

There were also important ways in which the growth theorists failed to challenge the mainstream thinking of the profession and thus helped to assure their own marginalizing. While in their own work Britton, Dixon, and Moffett all made use of wide and eclectic reading, each presented himself as a teacher rather than a scholar, and none had much to say about post-secondary school-

ing. In thus rooting their work firmly in the schoolroom but not in the graduate seminar, they in effect ceded the high ground to the scholars. Their view of literature was of a familiar Leavisite sort—it dealt with the uniquely human, it was distinguished from other uses of language by its unity of form and expression, and so on. And they seemed almost wholly unaware of mass culture. In thus offering a model of teaching that failed to contest traditional notions of literature, criticism, or culture, the growth theorists ended up reinscribing the split between teaching and research. They did not so much argue against the scholars' view of English as to say they were not interested in it. And so the relations between activities like teaching high school English or freshman composition and writing a dissertation on Milton or following the intricacies of critical theory have stayed as obscure as ever. We have yet to find ways not only to have our teaching better informed by theory but to make our theories more responsive to the scene of teaching.

Growth theory most often pictured that scene as a place where students wrote and talked about personal experience. "Our subject is experience," wrote Dixon, "wherever language is needed to penetrate and bring it into a new and satisfying order" (*Growth* 114), while Britton insisted that "the area in which language operates in English lessons is personal experience" ("Response" 11). In practice, this usually seems to have meant getting students to write or talk about things that happened to them *outside* of school, and then asking them to reflect on their responses to those events. *Experience*, that is, was seen as taking place on a kind of immediate, felt, Lawrencian level. Students seem far less often to have been asked to write about *intellectual* experiences. Rather, their work was seen as more like that of a poet or novelist (one who writes about "life") than that of the critic or theorist (one who writes about books and ideas).

All of which left hanging the questions of when, how, and why a teacher might intervene in her students' uses of language. There would be some cruelty involved in asking a student to write about an important moment in her life, to reveal some usually hidden part of herself to the class or teacher, and then to immediately question what she has to say about that event. Thus growth theorists tended to depict the teacher as almost always supportive and nurturing, as working with rather than challenging what her students have to say. When an open conflict of views or aims arose in the classroom, this was almost always cast as a failure of some sort. And so, for instance, Peter Griffith has noted how a student who resists her teacher's urging to change her reading of a poem is likely to be seen as showing not her strength as a reader but her recalcitrance as a pupil (204). Yet it could be argued that no real change or learning can take place without such conflicts, that there are times when a teacher must take on the role of an adversary as well as collaborator, must work against the habitual or intuitive moves and interpretings of her students in order to push them toward a new view of an event or text. And of course we also need somehow to show students that they can argue against our own readings—however open or liberal they may seem to us—of events, classrooms, and texts. The growth model made it hard to imagine how such conflicts might be allowed (or perhaps even encouraged) to occur.

Rather, schools and teachers tended to be seen as getting in the way of growth that would otherwise occur naturally. The task of the teacher, then, was simply to assist with this natural process of growth, largely through being a sympathetic listener and reader and through setting up an environment (a "climate for learning," as Torbe and Medway put it) in which students are given frequent chances to use language in different and meaningful ways. "I recognize again and again," Dixon commented, "how prone the teacher is to use his language to dominate and constrict. Learners are born free, but are everywhere in chains" (*Perspective of the Seventies* 111). A similarly romantic view of the child as a "free learner" was implied in Britton's view of intimate and expressive speech—talk that is "as free as possible from outside demands, whether those of a task or an audience"—as a key source of most real learning (*Development* 82). The aim of the growth theorists was thus to get rid of as much of the restrictive apparatus of the school as they could—by having students read, write, and talk about subjects of real concern to them, and by having their teacher not so much judge as respond to their work.

And so Britton and Moffett both elaborated schemes of teaching that began by having students use language in informal and expressive ways and then gradually led them towards more abstract and public kinds of discourse. Such teaching rested on the belief that children gain control over words in constant and predictable ways. Evidence for this belief was drawn in turn from a diverse set of authorities—most importantly Piaget, but also Vygotsky, Sapir, Bruner, Bernstein, and Labov. It might be argued, then, that growth theorists did not so much shift from a subject- to student-based pedagogy as change the subject they used for a base. For while they were skeptical of grounding the teaching of English on the structure of literature or linguistics, their own work drew most heavily on the insights of developmental psychology. In a sense, they traded Chomsky and Frye for Piaget, and replaced the study of language forms with psycholinguistics as a new base for the English curriculum.

Because the growth they hoped for was thought to be natural, it was also assumed to be authentic. Students would learn to write as themselves, not simply as the products of their schooling. As Moffett argued in *Teaching the Universe of Discourse:*

> The primary dimension of growth seems to be a movement from the center of the self outward. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the self enlarges, assimilating the world to itself and accommodating itself to the world, as Piaget puts it. The detailed forms which this movement takes are various and often paradoxical. In moving outward from himself, the child becomes more himself. The teacher's art is to move with this movement. (59)

The question of where this sense of self came from in the first place was not seriously addressed. Schooling does impose certain views and languages on students. But the growth model suggested that if the impositions of school were lessened, then a student could somehow become more authentically "herself"—as if that sense of self were not also being contested and determined by countless other voices, institutions, and practices in the culture. Growth theory tended to phrase the issue as a simple opposition: are students doing their "own"

work or not? But one can see the problem more in terms of competing influences. The languages of school, that is, can be seen not as simply muting the voice of the individual but as intersecting with the many other voices—of family, religion, class, gender, nation, neighborhood, ethnicity, work, entertainment, and the like—from which one forms a sense of self.

In coming to a university, students often confront discourses that draw on and make use of conventions, commonplaces, values, and beliefs that differ from (and sometimes conflict with) those they already know or hold. For instance, how does a working class student enter into a discourse that rejects many of the beliefs and aphorisms of his culture, that tells him statements like "look out for number one" or "work hard and you'll get ahead" just won't do, that he must somehow learn to do more than simply restate what his parents or teachers or friends have already told him? Or how does a devout Christian find a place to speak within the aggressively skeptical and secular terms of most criticism? In order to do university work such students must come to terms with a set of conflicting demands and allegiances. Metaphors of growth gloss over such conflicts and differences, and thus offer a limited view of what is at stake (and what can be gained) in learning to read and write at a university.

Yet for all this it needs to be said that in many ways the aims of the growth theorists were radical ones. The idea of personal growth proved a powerful if flawed tool in contesting the sort of top-down disciplinary view of teaching found in the "structural curricula" of Project English. It also helped democratize the view of English offered by Leavis and Cambridge. And by their own example the growth theorists—Dixon, Britton, Moffett—proved that one can do English not only by studying literature or criticism but also by looking seriously at the talk and writing of students.

One reason why recent conservative attacks on teaching have met with success is that they have claimed to provide students access to power—usually in some form of "cultural literacy"—that an emphasis on individual growth and expression cannot offer. In responding to these claims, we need to do more than simply reaffirm the importance of such growth and expression. We need to look at how our work with students is shaped by and responds to pressures outside our classrooms, and try to show how growth, when it does occur, is the result not of some natural or spontaneous process but of a complex negotiation between competing demands and discourses. Identity rises out of identification; we define who we are through whom we choose to stand with and against.

In extending the work of the growth theorists, then, we need to talk about language not simply as a form of expression but also as a form of action—to study how it gets used to advance causes, to argue competing definitions of the self and world, to form groups and alliances, and to resist the claims of opposing views and factions. We need, that is, to show how personal and social uses of language are rarely discreet but are rather almost always intertwined. And so much interesting work now done in the tradition of Dartmouth has begun to move away from metaphors of growth while continuing to study the work of students. This emerging view of English centers on images of difference and change and gives rise to a sort of teaching that freely admits to the conflicts between our

own discourses, those of the university, and those which students bring with them to class. Rather than seeing the goal of study in English as helping students further develop certain skills they already have as writers and readers, such a view instead pictures our work as centering on finding and making differences in the ways they use language. In doing so, we may be able to help students achieve a different sort of textual power than that offered them by Hirsch, Bennett, and the like—one they can use not merely to meet but to question the demands their society makes upon them.

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