The essential unity of language arts programs: Its pedagogical implications
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As administrators of language arts programs, we are all painfully aware of the multiplicity of our calling. We must train new faculty and, what is worse, retrain old ones. We must keep up with the explosion of knowledge in the area of composition and rhetoric, and we must apply that knowledge to our programs in practical ways. Also, for most of us, with the job comes a host of small decisions, each of which can be time-consuming, agonizing, and petty all at once, e.g., "Who will teach the 7:30 a.m. class?" "Does Ricardo Baconawa's 'English Grammar' class taken at the University of the Philippines in 1974 satisfy our freshman English requirement?" "Can Sherry Stevens retake the qualifying test she failed by one point because her aunt died and she had to go to Boston and flew all night to get back for the test and really could do better?" The list of problems and decisions goes on and on.

In fact, I am afraid that all too often these small questions get the better of us and we lose sight of the larger overall purpose of any language program as we attempt to create a fail-safe system for dealing with every individual situation. We are so busy preparing for the exceptions that we forget about the rule. When as writing program administrators we get lost among the thousand little problems, the programs we administer are exposed to what I think is one of the most serious and least-discussed ills besetting language arts programs: conceptual fragmentation. Unfortunately, even if each individual element in a program is fine-tuned and its problems systematically held at bay, or even eliminated, the overall program will still suffer from a lack of continuity if each course bears no functional or conceptual relationship to other courses or to the overall goal of the program. Exclusive focus on individual courses results in a fragmented program much weaker than the potential value of the individual courses taken together. Rather than adding to each other, individual courses in a fragmented program actually subtract from each other, because of their contradictory premises, methods, and materials.

To combat this fragmentation, I would like to identify what seem to me to be four very common types of courses into which our programs typically fall, and then suggest some specific ways, both theoretical and practical, to unite these units into a larger whole.

Basic Reading. We all administer courses or parts of courses that are concerned with the process of interpreting a series of written symbols on a page into a total message, including denotative content or theme, authorial tone, and the projected image of the intended audience. Reading, we teach our students, is an

active process in which the reader forms expectations and then verifies or modifies these expectations through further reading. Readers seek a consistent whole in what they read, something unified in mechanics, tone, and content. Where readers note apparent inconsistencies, they form a hypothesis of a larger consistency, and verify or modify it through further reading.

Basic Writing. We all administer courses or parts of courses in writing, composition, or rhetoric, each of which is concerned with the basic process by which a writer generates a topic, either from some internal pressure or through a response to some external pressure, selects and orders details relevant to the response the author feels impelled to make to the pressure, and carefully polishes the text until its words and sentences together most perfectly represent and communicate his or her response.

Literature. Most of us administer courses or parts of courses concerned with the study of literature. Usually these courses combine basic reading (understanding literary texts) and basic writing (preparing critical articles). In other words, in a literary class students are simply reading and writing respectively two rather specialized language products: creation in language of an imaginative and self-contained world bearing no necessary or absolute relationship to the "real" or everyday world, and commentary on that created world.

Practical Writing. Most of us administer courses or parts of courses, such as business English and technical writing, which are concerned with writing on the job for very mundane but necessary ends, such as writing memos, sales reports, lab reports, etc. This kind of writing, like basic writing and critical writing about literature, involves generating an overt message and patiently looking for the clearest and most economical means of stating the message to the intended audience.

If we have a general education program in which these four types of courses remain conceptually unrelated, I fear that from the student's point of view the whole thing starts to look like a nonlinear series of randomly placed hurdles that must be cleared or otherwise gotten around or out of the way before they attain the overall goal of getting out of school. My question is, can we provide any conceptual unity to this collection of courses, and, if so, can this theoretical unity be manifested in specific teaching methodologies which will reinforce each other from class to class throughout the student's career in the language arts and beyond? To answer this question, I would like to identify what I consider the common theoretical ground of all the courses I have discussed above and then describe three specific teaching methodologies we can use in all these courses.

The theoretical ground of all the courses which we as language program administrators supervise is that all lasting language products are the result of conscious, consistent, and purposeful choices by their creators, whether essayists, novelists, business executives, scientists, or whatever. The ability to control these choices, i.e., to create a language product, is the result of one's being literate—a person's overall awareness of the resources of language, and ability to use them to achieve a predetermined end. As the particular goal differs, so the exact language resources required to achieve that goal will differ. But the ability to see the goal and sense the language most appropriate to the goal is the essence of being literate, and therefore it is the essence of what should be taught in every course we administer.

If we accept this basic theory underpinning all the language arts, we can refer to it as we define the specific language skills sought in our various courses. Because our courses would then be based on a common theoretical framework, certain teaching methodologies based on that framework should fit very naturally into them. It ssems to me that there are three such methodologies, which I think apply to every type of course we are concerned with.

1. Thesis and Support. Language products are the result of many conscious decisions on matters of individual words and sentences which build toward a total, predetermined effect. It follows that whether reading or writing, we should be able to find in an essay, a poem, or a business proposal, patterns of relatively abstract theses related to relatively concrete supporting material. Each language product will of course have its own end, and thus its own means of support. Nonetheless, the relationship between thesis and support is quite consistent from essay to poem to business proposal. In each, the creator has certain intentions, the establishment of which implies certain supporting methods and materials. Thus, a businessperson makes a careful market analysis (supporting material) and writes a proposal to open a French restaurant on North University Avenue (thesis). In exactly the same relationship, Charles Dickens invents the story of Stephen Blackpool (supporting material) to point out the evils of uncontrolled industrialism (thesis).

2. Expectation and Fulfillment. The term "thesis and support" refers only to the end product as a whole, and can not therefore account for the process we go through as we read or write a language product. Neither reader nor writer is fully aware of all the theses and supporting materials at the beginning of reading or writing. Hence, both readers and writers work through a system of expectation and fulfillment. A title, a metre, a thesis statement, and a salutation at the head of a letter, each sets up certain expectations. These expectations will not be the same for everyone, but generally those with similar background will feel similar expectations. AS we read, we refine our expectations until they satisfactorily account for every observed detail in the language product. Whatever the goal, the writer sets up a system of expectations to lead the reader to that goal. This applies as precisely to a collection agency's attempt to get a check back by return mail as it does to Maria's letter to Malvolio. If the desire is to shock or to be comic, the expectations set up may be purposefully violated, but this tactic does not change the fact that the writer, in creating a desired effect, is playing on the reader's expectations—in this case the shock or humor of seeing the expectation violated. Introductions, transitions, characters' names, and report abstracts can all be approached meaningfully through examinations of expectation and fulfillment.

3. The Idea of Order. Language products use words, sentences, and paragraphs in an order that is inherent in the goals and methods of the product itself, and in the expectations that are aroused in the reader. This order manifests itself as the conscious process of discovery by writer and reader alike of logical patterns which

will unite thesis and support in a way that will lead to the desired effect. All logic, which is simply a set of rules for orderly thinking, is based on the possible relationships between abstract thesis and concrete support inherent in any given proposition. To place equipment and materials first in a pineapple upside-down cake recipe is logically identical to Marvell's flattering his coy mistress before propositioning her. Thus, the five-paragraph essay is as logical and appropriate to the impromptu university essay exam as the heroic couplet is to the reasoning of "The Essay on Man," and as inside address, salutation, body, and complimentary close are to a business letter. Each *could* be written in a different order, or in a different manner, but they simply would not work the same way any more, or have the same meaning.

To the extent that program administrators can focus all four types of courses in language arts programs (basic reading, basic writing, literature, and practical writing) with these three theoretical concepts (thesis and support, expectation and fulfillment, and the idea of order), the individual components of our programs will reinforce each other. This conceptual unity will provide a soil, furthermore, in which each individual course can flower.