

1 Theory and Research

Literature and composition are both essential parts of the secondary language arts and English curricula. Too often, though, they have been separated rather than integrated within these curricula. Classroom instruction is often planned around discrete units of each: a literature unit, followed by a language or composition unit, followed by a literature unit, and so forth. Elective programs may have compounded the problem as well. A glance at typical offerings in elective programs suggests the separation of composition and literature: Composition I, Elements of Writing, Literature of the Midwest, and Major British Writers. Commenting on this separation, Anthony R. Petrosky explains,

As a result of separate instruction and assessment of progress in reading, literature, and composition, curricula in language are fragmented to the point where literature is often kept out of reading, and composition instruction seldom includes reading or study of literary works, except as models of writing (1982, 19).

Although there are few texts devoted entirely to writing about literature, most composition texts and literature anthologies commonly used at the secondary level fall short of thoroughly integrating literature and composition instruction. Because of their comprehensive nature, composition texts can provide only very general, generic instruction concerning writing about literature. Space limitations normally allow these texts to devote only one or two chapters—if any—to the subject. In a like manner, most literature anthologies merely assign writing, usually in the form of discussion or reaction questions which follow selections, and occasionally provide models of professional criticism which students are to imitate. At best such textbooks explain what students are to do in these assignments, but this is little preparation if students lack the skills necessary to interpret and write about literature.

A logical means of reducing this fragmentation within the secondary English curricula is to find ways in which literature and composition instruction can complement one another. The theory and research presented in this booklet explore the relationship between literature and composition and suggest ways of designing instruction so that students write effectively about the literature they read.

Assessment of Student Response to Literature

Evidence for the need to combine instruction in reading and writing is abundant. Most prominent, though, are the results of the 1979–80 National Assessment of Educational Progress in reading and literature, *Reading, Thinking, and Writing* (1981). This study, which primarily focused on literature, measured student performance on a wide range of multiple-choice and writing tasks. The study assessed the skills of more than 100,000 nine-, thirteen-, and seventeen-year-olds, comprising socioeconomic and geographic variations representative of the United States. The results indicate that American schools "have been reasonably successful" in teaching students to comprehend at the literal and lower inference levels and to arrive at what the report calls "preliminary interpretations." Older students were better at these skills, and by age seventeen most could express their initial ideas and judgments, especially when these were concerned with personal reactions to what they read. However, the results strongly indicate the general inability of students to read critically or to support or explain their interpretations and responses to literature in any but the most superficial ways. Students at all levels "do not appear," says the report, "to have learned how to look for evidence for their judgments" (1981, 2). In addition, "students seem satisfied with their initial interpretations and seem genuinely puzzled at requests to explain or defend their points of view" (1981, 2). Even older students who did provide more evidence to

support their interpretations than younger students, wrote responses that were "superficial and limited," and the overwhelming majority of students "lacked strategies for analyzing or evaluating" what they read.

What is perhaps most indicative of the weaknesses of secondary students is that between 1970 and 1980 both thirteen- and seventeen-year-olds have become less likely even to try to interpret what they read and more likely simply to make unexplained and unelaborated value judgments. The report describes this finding in a most unsettling fashion. The change, the authors say, may be characterized by saying that during the seventies "17-year-olds' papers became somewhat more like 13-year-olds' papers" (1981, 3). In brief, over the last ten years, student skills in analyzing and writing about literature have seriously declined. In fact, the authors of the report say that the schools "have failed to teach more than 5 to 10 percent to move beyond their initial reading of a text" (1981, 2). Clearly, the results seem to indicate that new ways must be found to teach students the skills and strategies which will enable them to write effectively about the literature they read.

Rationale for Teaching Writing about Literature

If the results of the NAEP assessment of reading and literature suggest the need to combine instruction in literature and composition, the assumptions behind the study provide an even stronger imperative. As Judith A. Langer notes, the NAEP measured student performance from the "rich perspective" of "reading, reasoning, responding, and writing as integral parts of the 'literate' tradition" (1982, 336). It is from this "literate" stance that the NAEP authors argue that the skills students learn in studying and writing about literature are important for reasons beyond the secondary school. The report says that academic and vocational postsecondary education, as well as the business world, "require careful reading and strong skills in analysis, interpretation, and explanation" (1981, 5). Also, they point to the fast growing "information business" as an area in which students with these skills will have a "personal advantage," and the report argues that these skills will become increasingly important as the "information explosion continues." In addition, the authors believe that these skills "will be increasingly important at personal and social levels" in helping individuals and society find "what we value" and "what will make our lives worth living" (1981, 5). The report concludes by stating that "the habits of disciplined reading, analysis, interpretation, and discourse" (1981, 5) are important because they help

ensure a society of intellectually strong and vital individuals.

Combining instruction in literature and composition in the context suggested by the NAEP report may also fulfill other important needs of the individual. Consider first Louise Rosenblatt's most important reason for having adolescents read literature:

There is an even broader need that literature fulfills, particularly for the adolescent reader. Much that in life itself might seem disorganized and meaningless takes on order and significance when it comes under the organizing and vitalizing influence of the artist. The youth senses in himself new and unsuspected emotion impulses. He sees the adults about him acting in inexplicable ways. In literature he meets emotions, situations, people, presented in significant patterns. He is shown a causal relationship between actions, he finds approval given to certain kinds of personalities and behavior rather than to others, he finds molds into which to pour his own nebulous emotions. In short, he often finds meaning attached to what otherwise would be for him merely brute facts (1968, 42).

The question left unanswered in her statement is how combining instruction in literature and composition might help a young reader "find meaning" out of chaos. Petrosky explains,

Although Rosenblatt does not herself assert this point, writing about reading is one of the best ways to get students to unravel their transactions so that we [teachers] can see how they understand and, in the process, help them learn to elaborate, clarify, and illustrate their responses to the associations and prior knowledge that inform them (1982, 24).

In other words, having students write about what they read is one way teachers can help students turn "brute facts" into "meaning."

Petrosky carries his argument even further. After relating research and theory of reading and literature to research and theory in composition, he concludes that "our comprehension of texts, whether they are literary or not, is more an act of composition—for understanding is composing—than of information retrieval, and that the best possible representation of our understandings of texts begins with certain kinds of compositions, not multiple-choice tests or written free responses" (1982, 19). James R. Squire also concludes that comprehending what is read and writing about what is read are inextricably linked. Like Petrosky, Squire relates research in reading

comprehension with that of composing. He argues that teaching students to compose and comprehend are "what the teaching of the higher thought processes is all about" (1983, 582).

The NAEP report identifies current practices in teaching and testing as important reasons why students have difficulties in reading, interpreting, analyzing, and writing about literature. For example, the report indicates that teachers continue to utilize traditional patterns of "whole-class teaching and recitation." This pattern involves moving "quickly from student to student so that many students can be involved without any one student dominating." The result of this pattern is "teacher dominated questioning in which brief comments from individual students are solicited and extended discussion is deliberately curtailed" (1981, 2). Students, therefore, have "little opportunity to learn to formulate extended and detailed interpretations" (1981, 2). In addition, the NAEP observes that the relatively short responses encouraged by this methodology parallel "the multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank formats that dominate standardized and teacher-developed tests" (1981, 2). The problem, again, is that "when doing well in most school contexts requires little beyond short responses, it is not surprising that students fail to develop more comprehensive thinking and analytic skills" (1981, 2).

Studies by Taba (1955), Hoetker (1968), Squire and Applebee (1968), Purves (1981), and Applebee (1981) confirm the analysis made by the NAEP and suggest that for at least the last thirty years the teaching of literature has relied on lecture, recitation, and shortanswer discussions, which may preclude students' engaging in the kind of extended inquiry necessary if they are to interpret, analyze, and write about the literature they read. Purves reports that students do very little writing about literature and that "teachers tend to teach in a lecture or lecture-recitation mode." When Applebee examined writing in the secondary schools in 1980, an examination that included 259 observations of ninth- and eleventh-grade students in two high schools, he found that only ten percent of the lesson time in English classes was devoted to writing that required students to provide at least a paragraph.

The NAEP report makes a number of suggestions about how instruction might be enhanced to help students master the skills which the assessment indicates they lack. The report found a positive correlation between students' interest or engagement in passages and the degree of elaboration in written responses. Therefore, instruction should be designed in ways that

ensure student interest and engagement since this will improve the likelihood of student learning. In addition, the report calls for the creation of more situations which "require students to explain and defend their opinions at some length" (1981, 4). This should include "discussion activities in which students have to contend with the immediate demands of an audience, and extensive writing, in which longer segments of text must be organized and related to one another" (1981, 4). Also, the report asserts that "students need to be shown a variety of problem-solving and critical thinking strategies. Instruction in such skills should be systematic rather than accidental, as part of the curriculum in English" (1981, 4). The report underscores the need for small group discussions in order "to provide each student with opportunities to state and defend interpretations and opinions" (1981, 5). In emphasizing the most consistent weakness found in the assessment of reading and literature, that of students' apparent lack of systematic approaches to tasks which required analysis of a text, the authors make these recommendations: students need "to learn a variety of ways of analyzing a text in order to find evidence for judgments," (1981, 5) and to be given opportunities "to write at some length" in response to various texts and writing situations in order to practice applying "alternative approaches."

The results of the Purves (1981) and Applebee (1981) studies underscore the recommendations made by the NAEP; in fact, both researchers echo some of the same recommendations. To improve instruction, Purves suggests that the schools "become places where the language and reading of children are stretched, where a variety of experiences is made available, where lectures are replaced by questioning, and where individualized instruction is replaced by small group work" (1981, 106). From the classroom visits made in his study, Applebee highlights the characteristics of the "better" and "best" lessons that he observed. In these lessons students are "actively involved in teacher-designed tasks"; their "own experiences are freely incorporated into class discussions"; and they are "enthusiastic about their work." In addition, "the teacher encourages students to explore and discover and seldom dominates the class," and "writing is viewed as a means of learning and emerges naturally out of other activities" (1981, 104-5). In the most effective lessons Applebee observed, students "would work together to solve problems posed by the teacher; this forced students both to articulate their solutions more clearly and to defend them in the face of opposing opinions. . . ."

When writing assignments followed such lessons, they were treated by the students as a way to continue an activity in which they had become deeply involved" (1981, 105).

What Is Basic to Interpreting Literature?

How can we implement the recommendations made by the NAEP, Purves, and Applebee? In reflecting on how to engage students in interpreting literature and defending their ideas in writing, we must first ask, What is involved in understanding literature? Logic tells us that students' writing about a literary work will not be very meaningful if they do not understand the work they are trying to write about. What does a reader have to know or be able to do in order to understand a literary work?

Textbooks, handbooks, and curriculum guides often suggest that understanding literature involves understanding certain literary terms. The tenth-grade textbook *Question and Form in Literature* (Miller et al. 1982) presents the following list: alliteration, allusion, analogy, assonance, blank verse, cacophony/euphony, characterization, connotation/denotation, consonance, figurative language, foreshadowing, free verse, imagery, irony, lyric, metaphor, mood, narrative poetry, onomatopoeia, paradox, personification, plot, point of view, protagonist/antagonist, rhyme, rhythm, satire, setting, stereotype, style, symbol, theme, and tone. When faced with a list of these thirty-six terms, teachers may find it difficult to know where to begin. (The twelfth-grade text contains 160 terms.) Many of the terms are quite problematic. For example, *Question and Form in Literature* defines *theme* in this way: "Theme differs from the subject of a literary work in that it involves a statement or opinion about that subject" (1982, 599). Another literature text presents a thematic unit in which all of the works involve the "theme of reflections" (Rashkis and Bennett 1981). If a student were asked the theme of "Flowers for Algernon" (one of the selections in the thematic unit), would "reflection" be a satisfactory response? Would that response indicate a student's ability to analyze theme? Does identifying "reflections" as a "theme" require the same skills as explaining the author's opinion about "reflection"? Are the same skills involved in determining the theme of a fable when a moral is explicitly stated at the end as in determining the theme of a work when it is implied and never directly stated? Do these exhaustive lists of terms represent basic skills involved in interpreting literature? Are skills taxonomically related; in other words, are there some skills that must be mastered before others can be learned?

Recognizing the importance of questions like these in arriving at a framework for instruction in literature, many researchers and textbook editors have attempted to define the skills basic to comprehension of literature and have hypothesized various skill hierarchies. Yet, most of these hypotheses have not been substantiated by empirical testing. "A Taxonomy of Skills in Reading and Interpreting Fiction" (Hillocks and Ludlow 1984) is the only taxonomy to date strongly supported by empirical evidence. The dearth of empirical research on skill hierarchies is pointed out in Rosenshine's review of studies related to two issues: "whether there are distinct reading comprehension skills and whether there is evidence of a skill hierarchy" (1980, 535). He reports that "experimental studies were not found on these issues" (1980, 535) and that "the most ardent proponent of unique reading comprehension skills, Frederick Davis [1972], does not believe that his research has produced evidence in favor of a hierarchical skills theory" (1980, 545). In addition, Rosenshine states, "In the 1968 NSSE yearbook on reading instruction, two authors, Wittick [1968] and Robinson [1968], noted the lack of research on learning sequences" (1980, 545). In an analysis of four sequential questioning hierarchies (developed by Bloom, Sanders, Taba, and Herber), Christenbury and Kelly (1983) found no evidence to support the contention that the cognitive sophistication required to deal effectively with one identified level is superior to that required to deal with the levels below it or inferior to that required to deal with the levels above it. They also criticize the levels of these hierarchies as being "arbitrary," "overlapping," and "ambiguous."

The skill levels defined by Hillocks and Ludlow (1984) differ from those posited by Davis (1968, 1972) and the other researchers mentioned above. Hillocks and Ludlow's skill levels are clearly defined, and there is strong evidence of their hierarchical and taxonomical relationship. In coresearch with Bernard McCabe and J. E. McCampbell (1971) and independently (1980), Hillocks has identified seven skill types and corresponding question types. Below is his explanation of the seven levels from simplest to most complex. The skill types are not meant to be exhaustive but represent key skills which Hillocks indicates are of apparent concern to reading experts, teachers of literature, and literary critics. The first three skill types are literal level skills. They require identification of information which appears explicitly in the text. The next four skill types are inferential level skills which require generalizations about relationships which are not stated in the text. The questions illustrating each of the skill levels are based on Chapter 1 of *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck. These questions comprise one of the four question sets examined in Hillocks and Ludlow's study.

Literal Level of Comprehension

1. Basic Stated Information—Identifying frequently stated information which presents some condition crucial to the story. Example: What happened to Coyotito?
2. Key Detail—Identifying a detail which appears at some key juncture of the plot and which bears a causal relationship to what happens. Example: Where did Coyotito sleep?
3. Stated Relationship—Identifying a statement which explains the relationship between at least two pieces of information in the text. Example: What was the beggars' reason for following Kino and Juana to the doctor's house?

Inferential Level of Comprehension

4. Simple Implied Relationship—Inferring the relationship between two pieces of information usually closely juxtaposed in the text. Example: What were Kino's feelings about the pearls he offers the doctor? Explain how you know.
5. Complex Implied Relationship—Inferring the relationship(s) among many pieces of information spread throughout large parts of the text. A question of this type might concern, for example, the causes of character change. This would involve relating details of personality before and after a change and inferring the causes of the change from the same details and interceding events. Example: In this chapter, Kino appears at home and in town. He feels and acts differently in these two places. Part of the difference is the result of what happened to Coyotito. Part is the result of other things. a) What are the differences between the way Kino acts and feels at home and in town? b) Apart from what happened to Coyotito, explain the causes of those differences.
6. Author's Generalization—Inferring a generalization about the world outside the work from the fabric of the work as a whole. These questions demand a statement of what the work suggests about human nature or the human condition as it exists outside the text. Example: What comment or generalization does this chapter make on the way "civilization" influences human behavior and attitudes? Give evidence from the story to support your answer.
7. Structural Generalization—Generalizing about how parts of the work operate together to achieve certain effects. To belong properly to this category, a question must first require the reader to generalize about the arrangement of certain parts of a work. Second, it must require an explanation of how those parts work in

achieving certain effects. Example: Steinbeck presents a group of beggars in the story. a) Explain what purpose they serve in relationship to the first eleven paragraphs of the story. b) Present evidence from the story to support your answer.

In designing questions for these skill types it is important to note that a question must be classified as a skill type in conjunction with the text from which it is derived. For example, if *The Pearl* contained explicit statements telling how and why Kino acted differently at home and in town, question five above could *not* be classified as a complex implied relationship question. For the same reason, for a fable with an explicitly stated moral, a question that asks what the fable shows about human nature could not be considered an author's generalization question if a literal statement of the moral provides a satisfactory answer to the question.

In Hillocks and Ludlow's study, sets of questions, including the one above, for four different stories were administered to students from ninth grade to graduate school. The number of students responding to each question set ranged from seventy-seven to one hundred twenty-seven. Student scores were analyzed to determine hierarchical and taxonomical relationships of items on the individual tests using a form of the Rasch psychometric model known as the ordered categories model (Wright and Masters 1982; Wright, Masters, and Ludlow 1981), which considers partial and full credit. The results of the statistical analysis strongly support the hypotheses of the study: that the items are hierarchical and taxonomically related to each other. In other words, the question types are arranged from easiest to most complex, and the question types are taxonomical—readers will tend not to be able to answer question seven if they could not answer question six, or not to be able to answer questions five, six, or seven if they could not answer question four, and so forth.

One question that arises from these results is how the skill levels identified and defined by Hillocks differ from those of other researchers such as Davis (1968, 1972). Davis (1968) identifies the following distinguishable skills: "recalling word meanings; finding answers to questions answered explicitly or in paraphrase; drawing inferences from the content; recognizing a writer's purpose, attitude, tone, and mood; and following the structure of a passage" (Rosenshine 1980, 541). The results of Hillocks and Ludlow's study may help reveal problems in classifying skill levels in this way. In most fictional works, recognizing a writer's purpose (if that is the same as an author's generalization) involves drawing inferences. Therefore, these two skills, drawing inferences and recognizing a writer's purpose, in Davis's system of classification may overlap and, therefore, not be hierarchical. Hillocks and Ludlow's study suggests that in interpreting fiction there are at

least four distinct skill levels of inference making, and in Davis's system inference making is handled as one skill type distinct from interpreting writer's purpose. These problems in identifying skill types may be the reason there is no evidence in Davis's work of a skill hierarchy.

Hillocks's taxonomy helps us identify some of the complex skills involved in interpreting fiction and has other important implications for designing instruction to help students master these skills. The results of Hillocks and Ludlow's study indicate the need to work hierarchically in helping students understand literature at higher levels. The teacher can use the question types to construct inventories to evaluate the skills of individual students and classes. After determining at what level students can work comfortably in interpreting literature in general, the teacher can design instruction to guide them in dealing with the next higher levels. Working hierarchically is necessary. For example, if we want students to understand the author's generalizations in a given work, we need to be sure that they first understand the lower level relationships (Hillocks and Ludlow 1983). But Hillocks warns that working at two or more levels above student competence is likely to result in failure to comprehend and hostility toward literature. Although this taxonomy admittedly does not include all possible types of questions, it provides a basis for the teacher to evaluate specific questions in study guides and composition assignments to determine what level of skill is required. Also it provides a framework for developing discussion questions and composition assignments appropriate for the level of a particular class.

Christenbury and Kelly are wary of questioning hierarchies because of the way "many questioning schemata have been abused and have become prescriptions rather than suggestions or guidelines" (1983, 5). We are not suggesting that working hierarchically means the teacher must adhere to an inflexible list of questions and suppress any responses that do not follow a prescribed pattern. In an advanced class in which students have exhibited facility with lower level questions, the teacher might skip literal level questioning altogether unless a problem involving literal understanding were to arise. In other cases, if students bring up a high-level question early in a discussion, there is certainly nothing wrong with pursuing students' responses (but if students are confused, the best strategy may be to use lower level questions to guide students toward the higher level questions). Furthermore, discussion could flow from inferential level to literal level if, in analyzing how a character changes, a student questions another's account of "what happens in the story." Most importantly, the taxonomy serves as a framework to help the teacher determine how to proceed in designing instructional activities to guide students in interpreting literature at higher levels.

If a teacher asks high level questions without adequately preparing students for these levels of interpre-

tation, it is not very likely that sophisticated discussion will take place. As a result, the teacher may resort to a pattern of recitation and lecture. Luka (1983) suggests how this situation might arise. He observed that when teachers asked high level questions, they received inadequate responses or most often no responses from students and then resorted to explaining the answers themselves. When students are not able to respond to high level questions, the tendency of teachers seems to be to lecture, thereby making the high level interpretations themselves or to ask only literal level questions that students will be able to answer more readily. In this situation, it would not be at all surprising to find students having difficulty interpreting literature.

Writing to Express Interpretations

Although Hillocks's question sets were not used to evaluate writing ability per se, the questions at levels five, six, and seven are typical of composition assignments often given to students. Questions at these levels are complex enough to generate lengthy compositions. For Hillocks and Ludlow's study, good answers for, say, a complex implied relationship question usually ranged from two to five sentences. The following is an answer to the question about how and why Kino acts and feels differently at home and in town. In the study this answer was rated as "good." (Answers were rated either "wrong," "partly right," or "good.")

At home Kino feels comfortable, secure, and peaceful (that is until the scorpion stings Coyotito). In town he is nervous and afraid. The difference is caused by the bad way the townspeople have treated his race. They treat his race like animals. He is afraid of their power over his people but also angry that they have this power.

What is needed to expand this kind of response into an effective essay? Toulmin's (1958) analysis of argumentation helps answer this question. A response to a complex implied relationship, author's generalization, or structural generalization question is an argument in the sense that the writer is attempting to convince a reader that his conclusions about the text are accurate. Toulmin identifies three basic parts of an effective argument—claim, data, and warrant. The *claim* is the conclusion that is advanced; the *data* are the evidences; and the *warrant* is the explanation of why the data justify the claim or, in other words, authorization for the "leap" from the data to the claim.

An analysis of the above answer in Toulmin's terms reveals that it is basically a series of claims that could be elaborated with data and warrant(s). An effective composition on this question would perhaps begin with the ideas presented in the above answer as a series of claims to be argued (the "thesis"), and the body of the composition would present evidence and

warrants for each of the claims. For the first claim, for instance, "At home Kino feels comfortable, secure, and peaceful," evidence might include quotations from the novel such as, "Kino heard the little splash of morning waves on the beach. It was very good—Kino closed his eyes again to listen to his music." At another point, the novel states that as Juana ate her breakfast, "Kino sighed with satisfaction." The music or family song Kino hears at home is described as "an aching chord that caught the throat, saying this is safety, this is warmth, this is the *Whole*."

This kind of analysis reveals some skills in addition to those suggested by the taxonomy that students need in order to write effective essays interpreting complex implied relationships, author's generalizations, and structural generalizations. They must identify each of their claims, find supporting evidence for each, organize their evidence, smoothly incorporate evidence in their papers, and explain how the evidence justifies the claims. As the NAEP and our experience in the classroom suggest, students have difficulty with these skills. Furthermore, being able to answer successfully a level five, six, or seven question in a short paragraph such as the one above for *The Pearl* does not automatically mean that the student can write an effective persuasive essay on the question. Students may be able to make insightful claims but not be able to support those claims in a composition.

Often students use virtually no data at all, presenting claim after claim in their compositions without any support. This makes the paper very weak even though some of the claims may be insightful. The NAEP reports that very few students at any age explained their initial ideas and judgments through reference to the text. Sometimes students state a claim (x), then present an extended summary of what happens in the short story or novel, and conclude with the idea "all of this shows x." In this case they lose the focus of their argument with much irrelevant detail. Students developing their papers in this fashion need to learn how to select and use appropriate evidence.

One of the greatest difficulties, even for competent writers, is providing warrants. They assume that the leap from data to claim is obvious and that it is, therefore, not necessary to elaborate on the connection between the two. In some cases the relationship may be obvious, but often it is not. For example, the student might use as evidence of Kino's fear in town the fact that he removes his hat when he knocks at the door of the doctor's house. Without a warrant explaining why the writer concludes that removing his hat shows fear, the reader may not be convinced by this evidence. He may conclude the action shows respect or good upbringing instead of fear.

The differences between a good answer to a complex implied relationship question in the taxonomy study and a good composition of literary analysis suggest that while reading and writing may be "reflections of the same cognitive process," (Squire 1983, 582) they also require a shift in focus for the student.

Reading and responding to literature require students to focus on a topic (What do they know?), but writing a persuasive composition requires students to focus on a goal (What do they want to do with what they know?). In Squire's terms, the learner is *reconstructing* the structure and meaning of another writer in comprehending; whereas, the learner is *constructing* meaning and developing ideas in composing. Flower and Hayes seem to agree with this concept of construction, "In composing, writers often work from the bottom of a tree [hierarchy] to more inclusive steps" (1977, 460). However, Flower and Hayes identify a problem at this point, "But readers [of analytic prose] understand best when they have an overview, when they can see an idea structure from the top down" (1977, 460). It is not enough then for the writer to *know* something from reading. The effective writer is aware of this shift in focus from what he knows to what he does with what he knows. He is aware of this difference between the manner in which he privately constructs a conclusion and the manner in which it is best presented to a reader who has not been privy to his thought processes.

These combined requirements for writing about literature—reconstructing an author's meaning, developing one's own ideas, and then refocusing those ideas for another reader—can quickly lead to what E. D. Hirsch, Jr. identifies as cognitive overload for the student. Hirsch tells us that cognitive overload

. . . is based on the established truth that our cognitive faculties are very strictly limited in the number of things that we can pay attention to when we perform a complex task. . . . We can and do perform tasks that have many more than ten or twelve aspects, but we cannot do this if all the aspects are unfamiliar ones which require attention simultaneously (1982, 45).

In terms of writing, Hirsch asserts that "having to pay attention to so many things at once degrades *every* aspect of performance so that highly intelligent adults can produce writing that is virtually unintelligible" (1982, 47). Of course, we can see how this applies even more to the junior high or high school student who is just beginning to make literary inferences and is just beginning to write analytical, persuasive papers. Very few—if any—of the complex skills required for these tasks are automatic for him or her.

Hirsch sees two ways to reduce cognitive overload: either make certain aspects of the task automatic or subdivide the task itself. In his article, Hirsch's solution to cognitive overload, primarily for younger students, is to automate certain scribal conventions such

as spelling and penmanship which are present in every piece of writing.

Hirsch's argument of cognitive overload is convincing, but its implications can be taken much further than spelling and penmanship. If teaching composition is a matter of skill acquisition, as Hirsch asserts, then the skills of literary analysis, as defined by Hillocks's taxonomy, and the skills of argumentation, as defined by Toulmin, seem to be good places to start in designing instruction for teaching writing about literature. Having students practice reading and writing skills, through activities which gradually and sequentially add new skills to the students' repertoire, may help reduce cognitive overload.

This view seems to argue against the approach of teaching writing primarily through the analysis of models. If students analyze a model of a literary composition, they are looking at a finished product. Students are approaching the piece as readers not as writers, and they are not able to practice the various skills required to create a similar piece. As Flower and Hayes identify the problem,

This gap between the textbook and the experience is a problem composition must face. Because the act of writing is a complex cognitive skill, not a body of knowledge, teaching writers to analyze the product often fails to intervene at a meaningful stage in the writer's performance. Such teaching leaves a gap because it has little to say about the techniques and thinking process of writing as a student (or anyone else) experiences it (1977, 450).

Principles of Sequencing and Activity Design

In the Practice section, we try to alleviate this gap by providing a sequence of activities to help students develop the thinking processes essential for writing about literature. The NAEP findings suggest that in interpreting literature most secondary students can make some simple, initial inferences. For this reason, the sequence of activities in the Practice section deals with the first three inferential levels defined by Hillocks in his taxonomy: simple implied relationships, complex implied relationships, and author's generalization. The activities are divided into three sequences which reflect the three inferential skill levels of the hierarchy: "Supporting an Interpretation," with activities that have students practicing simple inference skills; "Explicating Implied Relationships," with activities that have students practicing complex inference skills; and "Analyzing Author's Generalizations," with activities that have students making generalizations

about the author's view of the world outside the work.

These three sequences and the three levels of inferential understanding with which they deal are not meant to be an exhaustive approach to literature. For instance, they do not deal with the highest level of Hillocks's taxonomy, structural generalization. Yet, these three levels of inferential skills seem basic to understanding and interpreting fiction; furthermore, they seem to be at a meaningful stage of the secondary reader's developmental performance.

In terms of writing skills, the activities in each of the three sequences of the Practice section are designed to help students refocus their understanding of literature and turn it into a piece of analytic, persuasive writing. In each sequence, students practice drawing conclusions, collecting evidence to support their conclusions, evaluating their evidence, and articulating the relationship between their evidence and their conclusions.

In addition to the overall arrangement of activities from less to more sophisticated reading and writing skills, the Practice section also reflects several other principles of sequencing. For instance, each of the three sequences begins with an introductory activity. Generally, these early activities are nonliterary in nature, involving short scenarios, surveys, or role playing. They are designed to elicit students' opinions and knowledge and to introduce some of the key concepts on which the literature will focus. They are also meant to enhance purposeful reading and increase comprehension as students compare and refine their own ideas with respect to the literature once they begin reading (Johannessen, Kahn, and Walter 1984). For example, in the "Romantic Love/Marriage Survey" activity, which begins the "Analyzing Author's Generalization" sequence, students respond to a list of statements (including some clichés) about love and solicit others' opinions as well. Students and others are asked to agree or disagree with statements such as "Love is blind," or "Physical attraction must precede true love." After tabulating responses in class, students can see how their opinions differ from or are similar to others'. Later in the sequence of activities, students read a series of poems concerning love or marriage, and they draw conclusions about the poets' generalizations. In discussion, the teacher can refer to the "Romantic Love/Marriage Survey" and ask students whether they think individual poets would agree or disagree with certain statements on the survey. Students' opinions, of course, will have to be buttressed with specific references to the literary work. At this point, students may also begin to refine their own initial ideas as they take into account the poets' generalizations about love, which often challenge the clichés.

A recent pilot study provides empirical evidence suggesting that when students participate in introductory activities such as these, they achieve higher levels of comprehension than when they do not participate in

these activities before reading. Kern found that students who participated in introductory scenario activities (similar to the "Ranking Scenarios" activity in the first sequence in the Practice section) before reading short stories achieved significantly greater comprehension scores ($p < .01$ and $p < .0005$) from the simple inference through the structural generalization levels than students who did not participate in these activities before reading the same stories. Kern's study suggests that such introductory activities "do help students make inferences and generalizations with greater precision" (1983, 31).

The activities within each sequence are also designed to reflect more structure at the beginning than at the end. This design gives students more support when they are unfamiliar with a skill. As students gain experience with the skills, the activities become more open-ended in nature. This movement from more to less structure is also linked with another principle of sequencing, a movement from teacher-directed activities in which the teacher provides more material or more input to student-independent activities in which students initiate discussion and generate their own material. This independence, of course, is the goal of all instruction. Because students have mastered skills independently and sequentially, they are able to perform tasks without cognitive overload. For instance, in the first sequence, "Supporting an Interpretation," students make a choice between one of two interpretations: either Atticus is or he is not characterized as a good parent in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Then they are given "examples" to evaluate and asked to improve the weak ones. By the final writing assignment, however, students must generate their own evidence to support their conclusions about whether another character in the novel is a good parent.

This kind of instructional sequence does not ask students to "write about something in the novel you find interesting or meaningful," "write about your feelings and reactions while reading," or "write about what the novel means to you." We are not suggesting that these kinds of assignments have no place in instruction, but there is little in this type of assignment to ensure that students go beyond a simple literal level of reading or support their conclusions with specific evidence. A writer could explain, for instance, that he liked the suspense at the end and could not put the book down or that he really hated Bob Ewell because he was so filthy and disgusting or that the novel showed what it was like to grow up in the South. But students may not know, as the NAEP report suggests, how to turn these kinds of initial responses into meaningful essays of interpretation. Beginning with more structure, as in this first sequence, may help students learn to make interpretations at progressively higher levels and support their interpretations effectively so that they will later be able to write successfully in response to more open-ended topics. In systematically leading to more independence, this kind

of structuring may ultimately result in greater, rather than less, freedom for students. As Dewey explains, "Freedom is power to act and to execute independent of external tutelage. It signifies mastery capable of independent exercise, emancipated from the leading strings of others, not mere unhindered external operation" (1933, 87).

The principles of sequencing a series of activities should ideally be reflected in the design of a single activity. The activity may begin with simpler materials, teacher direction, and structure. However, by the end of the activity, students should be working with less structure and increasing independence on a more sophisticated level of performance. For example, in one activity, "Romantic Love/ Marriage Fables," students begin their analysis of author's generalization in teacher-led discussion guided by a specific set of questions. The next step is student led as the class analyzes additional fables in small groups without direct teacher involvement. Finally, students work individually in writing an analysis of a fable not yet discussed.

All this mention of "practice," however, should not be equated with the notion of "rote" exercise. To ensure that students acquire the skills they need, the activities cannot be simple, pedantic exercises. To maximize its effectiveness in the classroom, each activity must elicit students' opinions and involvement. At whatever level, the activities must require critical thinking from the students. Students must be involved in problem-solving situations for which there are no transparent answers so that they practice explaining and defending their positions.

Many theorists and researchers conclude that environments in which students actively participate in explaining and defending their interpretations of literature are more conducive to learning than the lecture-recitation classroom (Taba 1955; Rosenblatt 1968; Squire and Applebee 1968; Applebee 1981; NAEP 1981; and Purves 1981). Teachers, too, often indicate that they would welcome more student interaction in discussions. So why the pervasiveness of teacher dominance and low levels of student interaction? According to Rosenblatt (1968), this lack of interaction with the text and other readers develops in part as a result of structuring questions for students ahead of time before seeing their reactions to a text rather than deriving questions from the initial responses and feelings students have as they are reading or after reading a text. Her method for achieving a lively discussion is to remove some of the traditional structures and allow students to express their ideas and reactions freely. She suggests beginning discussion with a question such as "How did the selection make you feel?" or "How did you react as you read?"

Creating a lively discussion in which all students actively respond to each other in sophisticated analysis of literature is a goal we share with Rosenblatt. Applebee praises Rosenblatt's goal of "helping the

student reflect upon and thus refine his responses" but points out that Rosenblatt has "few examples of how this would be done" and that the examples of sophisticated discussion that she offers "implied quite a high level of initial response" (1974, 157). If students do not have skills necessary for interpreting implied relationships or generalizations, then discussion of their "feelings" and "reactions" may remain at a simplistic level of likes and dislikes related to the text and based on little understanding of it. In this case, removing "structure" and "freeing" students to express their ideas may not result in lively or sophisticated discussion.

As our own experience and the studies of classroom practices cited above confirm, getting good class or small group discussions going is very difficult. The physical problems alone—large class sizes and small rooms—can be quite taxing. Students are often reluctant to talk in a classroom filled with their peers. We have found that designing and sequencing instruction in the ways we describe helps overcome, or at least minimize, these problems. A classroom example may illustrate our point (Kahn, Walter, and Johannessen 1984). After students finished reading the short story "Paul's Case" by Willa Cather, we tried to begin discussion by asking students, "How did you react to Paul as you were reading the story?" Our high school students tended to respond with unspecific and unelaborated responses such as "He's weird," or "He's really out of it," or "He's a real loser." Probing students' reactions by asking them why they had these impressions failed to move them beyond a few references to Paul's peculiar habits. Only a few students responded, and there was virtually no interaction among students.

In contrast, students became actively involved, and their analyses of Paul's character were much more sophisticated and specific after they worked on the "Literary Characters' Values Profile" (Figure 9). This result is concurrent with observations from a study by Nancy B. Lester. Lester's study involved adult readers and a value ranking system much more involved and elaborate than our own. However, she concludes, "for these occasions [when the student may have been too close to or too distant from the character], and for these readers, a value analysis could provide a way for them to discuss a text without feeling uncomfortable if their values are involved or feeling inadequate if they have never had experiences similar to those provided in the text" (1982, 336).

In our activity students were given a sheet with a list of twenty-two possible values such as acceptance, achievement, aesthetics, altruism, autonomy, creativity, physical appearance, pleasure, and wealth. Individually, they ranked the values in order from most important to Paul to least important to Paul. Later, in small groups, students compared their individual rankings and defended their choice of rankings by citing evidence from the story. One student was sure Paul valued physical appearance most, "After all, look

at the fancy stuff he wore at the dean's hearing—the coat with the velvet collar, the opal stick pin, and the red carnation. And, then, what does he do the first thing in New York? He buys *silk underwear!*" A second student held out for wealth as a top value and cited Paul's conclusion, "It says right on page 178 that 'money was everything.' You can't make a stronger statement than that." A third student in the group mentioned acceptance as a value and offered the idea that Paul seemed to want acceptance by the opera star whom he followed to the hotel. Another group member, though, doubted this and seemed to remember contrary evidence in the story. After searching for a few moments, the passage in question came to light: "He had no especial desire to meet or to know any of these people; all he demanded was the right to look on and conjecture, to watch the pageant. The mere stage properties were all he contended for." "Buttressed with this quote, the same group member volunteered, "Really, don't you think this could be used as evidence for physical appearance? It seems as if Paul only cares about appearance and never reality."

The students participating in the "Literary Characters' Values Profile" activity are reacting to Paul and his personality, but the structure of this activity has given them a specific vocabulary and point of reference for doing so. Instead of casting about in their minds for one or two options, the students have many values to weigh and from which to select. They may still be right in initially labeling Paul "a loser," but they are aware now that he appears this way to them due to his inability to distinguish appearance from reality. As Lester notes, having readers analyze a character's values "provides a key to elusive meaning. It enables students to see that meaning in a text is accessible to them as well as to the teacher, and that their responses are the first steps to disclosing that 'hidden meaning'" (1982, 336).

Students become engaged in this problem-solving activity because there is no obvious answer. In fact, good cases can be made for several top value choices. Ranking the values individually constitutes a vested interest for students. As they begin discussion in groups, controversy arises. Students begin to look for evidence from the text because they want to explain and defend their positions. They are less likely to accept uncritically any answer that is given. Furthermore, small group work helps students to search for the best answers independently because they cannot look to the teacher for constant confirmation of the "correct" answer.

The classroom activity immediately following the "Literary Characters' Values Profile" involves student debates. Students are divided into small groups again to take sides on the question, "Why does Paul commit suicide?" In preparing for the debates, students use their opinions of what Paul does and does not value to defend their positions. While discussion in this debate activity is more open-ended than in the "Literary Characters' Values Profile," students are prepared by

the previous activity so that they are able to handle the new demands of the debate. Again, there is no readily apparent answer; students must utilize critical thinking and problem solving skills. The debate formalizes students' needs to explain and defend their positions. It also makes abundantly clear the immediate demands of audience. Discussions become heated as students debate whether Paul committed suicide because he lost touch with reality or because he valued wealth and did not have it or because he did not value morality and honesty. They become so heated in fact that they sometimes stop to admonish each other, "Hey, remember it's only a story!"

Activities of this kind may help create the instructional environment advocated by Applebee (1981) and the NAEP report (1981) because they encourage students to elaborate and defend their interpretations. As students become involved in disagreements with each other about Paul's values, they develop an "audience" in addition to the teacher. A writing assignment that asks them to argue their viewpoint about what Paul values most or why he committed suicide may provide a natural follow-up to the class debates. The purpose in writing is to try to resolve a problem with which the class has been wrestling. The student has a purpose for writing beyond simply showing the teacher what he knows about "Paul's Case." When he knows his paper will be shared with each work as a whole and evaluated by classmates, as well as the teacher, he

may be more likely while writing to consider classmates' objections to his own theory about Paul and ways to refute these arguments in order to make his case stronger. Writing assignments, which grow out of actual problems and questions students have debated in class and which are read and evaluated in class by peers, may become a means for students to express their interpretations to fellow readers and writers rather than artificial exercises.

The activities explained in the Practice section are intended to serve as a model for activity design and sequencing that teachers can follow in creating materials to meet the needs and interests of their own students. We present the activities as they would be used with specific literary works in order to illustrate clearly the procedures and classroom dynamics. We have attempted to choose literary works or authors that are widely used in secondary English curricula, that represent various genres, and that encompass a range of levels of sophistication. The sequences are designed to help students interpret literature at higher levels and write effective compositions expressing their interpretations. We are not suggesting that the activities we present comprise a complete instructional unit for the literature included. We would expect them to be part of the instruction (such as study guides, vocabulary activities, audio-visual presentations, role playing, student productions, projects, and so forth), designed to guide students in understanding each work as a whole