INFORMATION TO USERS

This reproduction was made from a copy of a manuscript sent to us for publication and microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this manuscript, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted. Pages in any manuscript may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. Manuscripts may not always be complete. When it is not possible to obtain missing pages, a note appears to indicate this.

2. When copyrighted materials are removed from the manuscript, a note appears to indicate this.

3. Oversize materials (maps, drawings, and charts) are photographed by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each oversize page is also filmed as one exposure and is available, for an additional charge, as a standard 35mm slide or in black and white paper format.*

4. Most photographs reproduce acceptably on positive microfilm or microfiche but lack clarity on xerographic copies made from the microfilm. For an additional charge, all photographs are available in black and white standard 35mm slide format.*

*For more information about black and white slides or enlarged paper reproductions, please contact the Dissertations Customer Services Department.
PLEASE NOTE:

In all cases this material has been filmed in the best possible way from the available copy. Problems encountered with this document have been identified here with a check mark √.

1. Glossy photographs or pages ______
2. Colored illustrations, paper or print ______
3. Photographs with dark background ______
4. Illustrations are poor copy ______
5. Pages with black marks, not original copy ______
6. Print shows through as there is text on both sides of page ______
7. Indistinct, broken or small print on several pages ______
8. Print exceeds margin requirements ______
9. Tightly bound copy with print lost in spine ______
10. Computer printout pages with indistinct print ______
11. Page(s) _______ lacking when material received, and not available from school or author.
12. Page(s) _______ seem to be missing in numbering only as text follows.
13. Two pages numbered ______. Text follows.
14. Curling and wrinkled pages ______
15. Dissertation contains pages with print at a slant, filmed as received √
16. Other _____________________________________________________________

University Microfilms International
TOWARD RECONCEPTUALIZING TEACHER
TRAINING IN COMPOSITION: AN
ETHNOGRAPHIC ACCOUNT AND THEORETICAL APPRAISAL

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of the Ohio State University

By

John Aber, B.A., M.A.

* * * *

The Ohio State University
1986

Dissertation Committee:
Donald R. Bateman
Daniel Barnes
Robert Bargar

Approved by
Donald R. Bateman
Adviser
College of Education
Department of Educational
Theory and Practice
Copyright © by

John Aber

1986
To Denise, Don, Nancy, and Pat--

four good teachers
April 15, 1951 ................ Born—Newark, Ohio

1973 ........................... B.A., Otterbein College

1973-1975 ...................... Training Specialist, Starlight School Sheltered Workshop, Newark, Ohio

1975-1976 ...................... Actor, Los Angeles, California

1976-1977 ...................... English and Drama Teacher, Madison High School, Guernsey County, Ohio


1980-1983 ...................... Writing Tutor, The Ohio State University Writing Skills Lab

1981 ........................... M.A., The Ohio State University

1983-1984 ...................... Writing Instructor, Columbus Technical Institute Columbus, Ohio

1984-1985 ...................... County School System Language Arts Coordinator, Ohio

1985-Present ................... Assistant Professor of Humanities, College of Mount St. Joseph, Cincinnati, Ohio
FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: English Education

Rhetoric and Composition
Human Development
Qualitative Research
Curriculum Theory
Literary Criticism
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>AN INTRODUCTION: ON BECOMING A RESEARCHER OF TEACHER IN-SERVICE SESSIONS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assuming a Role as a Curriculum Consultant and Ethnographer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Search for Theory and Method</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Theoretical Framework for Viewing the In-Service Sessions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finding Informants, Collecting Data, and Analyzing Information</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Scope and Limitations of the Fieldwork</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>AN OVERVIEW OF THE IN-SERVICE SESSIONS</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowles’ Visits to Tappan County</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Basic Contradictions of the In-Service Sessions: Threads--and Shreds--of Significance</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>SIMPLICITY VS. COMPLEXITY: WHY DON'T YOU TELL US WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT?</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>FREEDOM VS. CONTROL: GRADED COURSES OF STUDY, COMPOSITION COMPETENCY, AND THE COMPOSING PROCESS</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>CHANGE VS. STAGNATION: PRE-Writing, OUTLINING, AND OTHER COMPLEXITIES OF COMPOSING</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI.</td>
<td>BROAD IMPACT VS. SPECIFIC CONCERNS: BUT WHAT DO I DO WITH MY KIDS?</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII.</td>
<td>TOWARD RECONCEPTUALIZING TEACHER IN-SERVICE PROGRAMS IN COMPOSING</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The First Pattern</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Second Pattern</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Basically, this work is a narrative that attempts to capture what happened during a series of teacher in-service sessions held during a particular school year in one of Ohio's largest county school districts. As such, it is a study of actual teachers, administrators, students, and consultants. Needless to say, certain ethical issues are raised by a study of this sort. These issues are highly complex, and it is not my purpose to fully explore them here. I do, however, feel an obligation to stress what measures were taken to mask the identities of the people I studied. After all, the ethics of social research demand one basic requirement: Those who are being researched should in no way be hurt by the research itself.

To insure the anonymity of all involved in this study, two measures were taken:

1) The names of all schools, school districts, and geographical locations were changed. There is no Timberwood High School; Tappan County will not be found on any map; and no one in this study lived in Alabama.
2) Fictitious names were assigned to all people referred to in this study. No one I know is named Alfred Knowles, and Nick Wise does not work in any school district I am aware of.

Of course, some who know me personally are aware of where this study was conducted. This fact, though, should not prevent my informants from remaining anonymous, for those who know me personally have never met my informants and have never heard their real names. In addition, I should point out that none of my colleagues and acquaintances are aware of Tappan County's location. To put it simply, there has never been any reason to tell them.

Beyond the issue of ensuring anonymity for my informants, one other ethical concern needs to be mentioned: On some occasions several of my informants were not aware that they were actually participating in a research project. I am certain that some of my colleagues would view my failure to always fully disclose my researcher role an ethical weakness. There are, however, many social theorists who maintain that researchers must occasionally refrain from revealing their role if they are to capture the meaning of a given situation in all its complexity. I tend to agree with the latter view for reasons that I hope will become clear in the first chapter of this work. But in any case, all I can ultimately do is allow my readers to decide for themselves whether my informants were treated fairly. So far, the informants who
are familiar with this study have told me they see no ethical problems with my research strategies. I can only hope that the majority of my readers will agree with their view.

J.A.
CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION: ON BECOMING A RESEARCHER OF
TEACHER IN-SERVICE SESSIONS

Assuming a Role as a Curriculum Consultant and Ethnographer

I was a little confused, a bit disoriented, but very happy. After four years as a full-time graduate student and part-time composition instructor, I had been hired as a language arts curriculum consultant by one of the largest county school systems in Ohio. No longer would I spend my days reading thick volumes on the philosophy of education. No longer would I attend seminars and analyze the epistemological assumptions that guide linguists' views of language learning. And no longer could I walk down the street, knock on a friend's door, and discuss how difficult life as a graduate student can be. Needless to say, I approached my new life with much hope, but also with a tinge of trepidation.

Jack Morgan, the head of the search committee that hired me and the boss I would be answering to, attempted to clarify my duties as the new Tappan County language arts consultant.
"Composition is a top priority with our curriculum directors, John. And we'll be looking to you for leadership in that area." I tugged at the knot in my necktie and tried to listen carefully to Jack's words. That was not easy, though. It was a sweltering day in early August, and my office had no air-conditioning. My armpits were dripping with sweat; my tie felt like a tourniquet. Although it was my first day on the job and I was eager to impress my new boss, I muttered a few silent curses about my predicament. After all, I had never before worn a tie to work, and my suit jacket was not very comfortable, either. I felt the sweat seep through its seams as Jack continued.

"You'll be responsible for four major projects this year, John. We need you to train teachers in composition competency testing for one thing. And you'll be leading a committee of teachers as they revise our grammar and composition courses of study. Textbooks are something to work on, too. Our twelve districts want to adopt new ones in composition. But for now, you'll need to organize our big writing project that's going to happen throughout the year. Marge will tell you all about it. We've hired Dr. Alfred Knowles from Alabama to teach our teachers the writing process, and we've got to get this thing off the ground."

My preoccupation with the heat and with my clothes vanished. A year-long writing project—that was something I
knew I could immerse myself in. Perhaps working for the public schools would not be as tedious as I was led to believe by my graduate school friends.

I wanted to question Jack at length about the nature of this project, but the time he had allotted for our meeting had expired. As he dashed off to confer with several other newly hired consultants, he told me not to worry and mentioned that Marge, my predecessor, would be in the next day to tell me all I needed to know.

The next morning, Marge greeted me from the chair behind my desk as I entered my office. Evidently, Marge still felt it was her desk. Making a small motion toward a chair across the room, she rummaged through my file drawers for a few minutes before she spoke.

"Good luck this year, John. You're going to need it." She chuckled to herself then tossed a bulging file folder in my lap. "This is the Knowles file, John. Jack wants you to get on it right away. He's flying up from Alabama next week. Did Jack tell you?"

No, Jack had not told me. And I soon learned there was more than a little Jack had failed to mention.

As Marge described how the Knowles writing project had been planned the year before, I began to grasp the complexity, depth, and scope of what lay ahead. Twenty-six major sessions with Alfred Knowles had been scheduled for
Tappan County teachers, and I was responsible for organizing and coordinating all of them.

Interspersing her conversation with comments about how happy she was to be leaving the Tappan County Office, Marge tried to ease my apprehension about handling such a major project in addition to my regular duties. "Don't worry, John. It'll all fall into place." She must have uttered these words twenty times that day. Somehow, she managed to make the task sound simple enough, stressing that I just needed to think in terms of little details that required attention early in the school year. But as I filled a legal pad with these details, it was difficult to bury those apprehensions I felt. Knowles' schedule in itself was formidable.

On August 16th, Knowles was to speak to a selected group of teacher-leaders about his plans for the upcoming year. A month later, on September 19th, he would address an audience of 300 teachers and administrators at what was billed as a kick-off motivational banquet. The bulk of his visits, though, would occur from October through April. In each of these months, except December, Knowles would conduct four separate in-services for English and language arts teachers. These were to be called dinner meetings, for they would be held at a Tappan County banquet facility that would serve meals to the teachers after Knowles' presentations. Since these monthly gatherings would be held in the evening,
Knowles' days would be left open, leaving him time to visit teachers' classrooms to demonstrate the teaching technique he might stress during a given week.

Lining up the banquet hall, arranging for catering, organizing Knowles' classroom visits, and sending out flyers and memos to promote the project--these were just a few of the tasks I had to begin working on. As thoughts about how I would complete these chores flitted through my brain, my curiosity soon was aroused. Who is this Knowles fellow, I wondered. Why had he been chosen to do all of this work for the Tappan County Schools? After all, he would receive $425.00 for each day (or part thereof) worked, a hefty salary for a teacher of writing. If it had been James Moffett or Ken Macrorie, the idea would have made more sense. But Alfred Knowles? Needless to say, I was eager to meet this person and find out about his approach to writing instruction. Fortunately, my wait would be short. As Marge had mentioned, Knowles was flying to Tappan County that next week. That did not give me much time to prepare for his visit.

The next few days were hectic to say the least. Marge left after one day to join her husband in a distant city, and I was left alone to juggle the four major projects I had been given. Before long, much unfamiliar jargon reverberated in my head: Graded courses of study, state mandates, needs assessment, competency testing, and pupil performance
objectives were just a few of the terms I had to learn and then use to guide committees of teachers through what was called the Tappan County curriculum cycle.

My most pressing concern, however, was Knowles and the presentation he would give on August 16th. During the previous year, Marge had scheduled this presentation to coincide with a three-day series of sessions involving a hand-picked group of English and language arts teachers. This group was charged with the task of writing what the Ohio Department of Education terms pupil performance objectives (otherwise known as PPOs). The teachers were to write these PPOs under my leadership for two days, relating them to the composition skills listed in the Tappan County course of study. Then, they would spend a day listening to Knowles chart his plans for the year-long writing project. Because this group was, to paraphrase Marge, experienced in teaching composition, and carefully selected by administrators for their dedication, they were also to help Knowles in his planning by providing him with advice and suggestions.

Except for the high school English teachers, who tended to complain about the drudgery of PPO writing, the first two sessions ran smoothly, and nearly everyone seemed eager to work with Knowles the next day. During the week that preceded the meetings, I had conferred with Knowles by telephone. We discussed what he would say, and he assured me that he would lead a stimulating, day-long discussion about
the critical need for collaborative planning as the school year approached.

Knowles flew in the night before his scheduled appearance, and I met him in the bar of his hotel. Immediately, I was struck by his boyish, handsome appearance: He was tan, lean, and had a smile that could have easily landed him starring roles in mouth-wash commercials. Stupidly, I had assumed he would be a white-haired old fellow in frayed tweeds. My stereotyped preconceptions could not have been further from the mark, and I was beginning to understand why he might be in high demand as writing consultant for English and language teachers, an occupation that has its share of women (and men for that matter) who can be easily bored with in-service presentations.

In spite of my biased (and perhaps somewhat sexist) initial judgement concerning possible reasons for Knowles' success, he was an extremely intelligent and articulate man. He regaled me for almost an hour with anecdotes about famous composition specialists, sprinkling his stories with information about his own research and teaching. Although I was not particularly impressed with his background as a proponent of sentence-combining techniques, Knowles was thoroughly grounded in current composition theory. When I left him that night, I was convinced he would do an outstanding job with the teachers he would meet the next day.
My optimism vanished, however, as soon as I saw Knowles at work. Instead of discussing the complexities of composing as he had promised, he simply scrawled on the chalkboard the word process. Instead of eliciting advice from the teachers, he simply described to them the five steps of writing he would deal with during the year. And instead of using several hours as we had planned, he finished his discussion in forty-five minutes. I was puzzled. He was personable enough with the teachers, bantering with those who knew him. (It became apparent that Knowles knew several Tappan County teachers as a result of a class he had taught for a local university several years before.) But there was not much substance to his talk, at least from my perspective.

At the time, I did not quite realize it, but I had already begun to assume the role of researcher in addition to my regular duties as a full-time curriculum consultant. For when I went home that night, I began to jot down some questions that would lead me to write this study.

Taken verbatim from my notes, these were the questions I posed:

- Why is it that Knowles talks one way to me and an entirely different way when talking to teachers? It seems he does not want to share his knowledge with teachers as he does with me.

- Why is it that Knowles says he will do one thing (e.g., plan collaboratively) and then
do just the opposite (e.g., talk to teachers without asking for suggestions)?

- Why is it teachers seemed eager to talk with Knowles yet remained surprisingly quiet during the meetings?

- Will teachers willingly attend all of the planned in-services in an effort to improve their teaching, or will they attend because their administrators expect them to—or perhaps to simply spend time with their friends and colleagues (one high school teacher mentioned this possibility)? In other words, do these in-services stand a chance to affect classroom practice?

- Why do administrators want to spend such a large sum of money (approximately $40,000 including fees, travel expenses, meals, and facilities) on one man when it appears that he has little that is new or fresh to say? Knowles' process does not seem to differ that much from what Aristotle said over two-thousand years ago about rhetorical strategies.

- Are teachers and administrators in agreement about the goals of this project? Why have some
administrators, Jack Morgan among them, said this project will help teachers conform to the same curriculum, whereas several teachers have mentioned that using Knowles' techniques will free them to be creative with their students?

When I finished writing, I realized I had not even begun to consider other questions that were just as important as these. These other questions, however, dealt with myself and my relationship to what I proposed to study—and the very nature of the research questions themselves.

First of all, I knew that in my role as a Tappan County Office employee, I could not openly question a project that my superiors had helped develop and whole-heartedly supported. This reality was especially telling considering I was a new employee and not yet a trusted member of the Tappan County public school community. But on the other hand, I also knew that as a coordinator and organizer of the writing in-services, I would be expected to attend all of Knowles' presentations, to observe him in classrooms, and to display concern about how the project might affect teachers, students, and administrators.

A. Richard King, an educational anthropologist who has broad experience in schools as a participant-observer-researcher, emphasizes that teachers can become effective researchers for similar reasons (400). As I began to formulate my plans, I saw no reason why I could not use
King's ideas and exploit my natural role as a curious, helpful, teacher-consultant to gather information about the course these in-services might take.

But as I have mentioned, I had already begun to question the nature and design of the entire project itself. Later on I will explain exactly why I assumed this critical stance, but for now I simply want to explore how my situation and viewpoint affected my beginning attempts to conduct this research.

I knew, as Harry Wolcott points out, that "the role of participant and the role of observer are essentially complementary and mutually exclusive" (7). In other words, it is a maxim among field workers that the better one observes, the poorer one will function as a bona fide participant. Under other circumstances, this notion could have worked against me. Fortunately, though, my assigned role was to be a participant who need not actually participate. I might introduce Knowles at a meeting, greet teachers as they entered the banquet room, even participate in writing activities that Knowles might assign; but none of these functions could keep me from leaving the room to take notes while Knowles spoke, or from tape recording a session to capture the off-hand comments teachers might make.

I mention these role considerations here in connection with my critical stance because it was, I felt, essential that I not become known as some kind of
acamedic-researcher. To be blunt, I was afraid. For if it became widely known that I was gathering data for my own use, it might also become known that I was going to use that data to mount a critique—and perhaps a radical appraisal—of the Knowles writing in-services and, by connection, of my new-found employer.

As I write these pages almost a year after I began to think about such issues, I realize that I probably had little idea then about what I would eventually do with the data I hoped to gather. Nonetheless, I did know that my views concerning writing instruction and education in general did not seem to coincide with Knowles' views or with the approach of the Tappan County School System. So from a purely practical standpoint, it was prudent to not risk revealing those views by openly revealing myself as an inquirer.

Of course, many anthropologists and sociologists would maintain that in order to acquire as much data as possible about a social context, researchers need to openly admit their intentions when first entering a setting. That way, for instance, they are free to ask the probing questions expected of researchers—questions that might otherwise arouse suspicion among informants if asked by a person who should be attending to his own business. Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss stress this point in Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology, a book widely read in graduate schools throughout the country (62-63).
Furthermore, researchers with similar views would maintain that studies of social actions need to be conducted by researchers who control their biases and preconceived notions in order for the meaning of a given social context to emerge from the actors who actually comprise that context. Stephen Wilson summarizes this position quite well when he states that "inquiry seeks to discover the meaning structures of the participants in whatever forms they are expressed (255)."

As I thought further about my role, I wondered whether I could answer the objections of people like Wilson, Schatzman, and Strauss. But finally, I decided not to worry too much about such objections. My special situation would have to keep me underground, at least for a while. (That position did change, however, as the year progressed.) And the inherently critical nature of my original research questions did not bother me too much, either. They did not need to get in the way of discovering, say, what Knowles believed about teachers' intelligence, nor would they necessarily prevent me from finding out how Knowles interacted with teachers and students in classrooms. On the contrary, by beginning my research with questions about the contradictions I saw, I was actually providing myself with places to begin probing, as well as a conceptual framework from which to work. After all, viewing these composition in-services as a puzzle
riddled with contradictions was a conceptual framework, or at
the very least a position from which one could develop.

A Search for Theory and Method

As the September 19th motivational kick-off banquet
approached, I began to discover in precise terms what Knowles
and district administrators had planned. All teachers who
had anything to do with teaching English and/or language arts
were invited to the September banquet. As Jack Morgan
explained it to me, Knowles would create enthusiasm and
interest in the composition project by speaking to as many
teachers as possible before the actual in-services began in
October. In plain language, the September banquet was a
recruiting strategy. Once their teachers had heard Knowles
speak, the curriculum directors from each county district
would simply sign them up for the year’s session.

The sessions themselves were to deal with six aspects of
Knowles’ writing process. Below is a paraphrase of what
Knowles proposed to do, taken from a memo sent me in early
September. The steps were labelled making the process work:

October: Prewriting--skills needed to generate ideas for
writing will be demonstrated and explained.

November: Drafting--ways of increasing students’ fluency
with pen and paper will be discussed.
January: Rewriting and Revising—ways of guiding students toward expanding and changing their drafts will be demonstrated.

February: Inserting Skills Practice Into the Process—sentence-combining techniques will be stressed as well as slotting and substituting exercises.

March: Editing and Proofreading—tips on how students can find their errors will be shared and illustrated.

April: Publishing—ways students can share their writing with others will be explained.

In addition to learning about the basic content and structure of these sessions, I also began to understand why Knowles had been hired in the first place. Marge related this information to me during several telephone conversations we had the week of September first.

Even though the Tappan County Schools are comprised of twelve different districts, some of these exert more influence than others over decision-making at the county office, either because of their large size or their influential administrators. Southwest, Marge told me, was one of the influential districts. At its helm as curriculum director was Freda Smith, a former county office curriculum coordinator who had recently written her Ph.D. dissertation on the use of sentence-combining techniques in elementary schools. While conducting her research, she had conferred
frequently with Alfred Knowles, whose own dissertation had dealt with a similar topic. According to Marge, Freda and Alfred had developed a friendship, and eventually Freda became convinced that he would be an excellent composition specialist for her teachers to work with.

Obviously, Freda Smith's friendship with Alfred Knowles was not enough in itself to convince administrators to commit themselves to a project of this magnitude. But as Marge and several other county office consultants pointed out, Smith's influence was vast. Many years as a county office coordinator, a Ph.D. in language arts education, and close friendships with Marge and the county superintendent--perhaps all these pieces of her background help explain why Smith's views were highly respected and followed. Beyond her background, however, Smith possessed plenty of assertiveness. As Jack Morgan said many times, "What Freda wants, Freda gets."

Given these facts about Smith, it is not surprising that her recommendation to hire Knowles was unanimously accepted by county administrators. Besides, six of her teachers from Southwest had taken the class Knowles had taught in Tappan County two years before, and their positive evaluations of him certainly buttressed Smith's recommendation.

Although school administrators and teachers continually complain about the lack of money available for schools, funding this writing project presented very few problems.
Once Smith garnered support for hiring Knowles, she and Marge simply applied for an Excellence Grant through the Ohio Department of Education. The grant was approved in a matter of weeks, and $44,847.53 was given the Tappan County Schools. Restrictions on the use of this money were few. The only major state requirement was that it be used exclusively for teacher development in the academic area of English composition.

Beyond this stipulation, the Department of Education simply wanted to know the objectives Tappan County hoped to meet as a result of the in-service sessions. These objectives were explicitly stated by Marge and Freda when they wrote the grant:

1. To develop awareness and skills in the teaching of writing as a process.
2. To develop skills in conducting and sequencing prewriting techniques.
3. To develop skills in teaching the revision process.
4. To develop and correlate writing skills to the process of writing.
5. To develop skills for conducting editing and proofreading groups.
6. To implement the writing process with students.
7. To develop techniques for assessing student writing.
8. To provide for increased student achievement in specific writing skills area.
Implicit in these objectives was the idea that teacher and student behavior would change as a result of Knowles' presentations. In fact, Marge directly stated that "most of our teachers just aren't teaching writing at all. We want to fix that." In addition to the underlying assumption that classroom practice could indeed be changed, at least two other unstated objectives underpinned those that were actually written. The first dealt with the issue of competency based education; the other addressed the concept that all teachers should strictly adhere to the same curriculum guide when they plan their lessons. In other words, it was not accidental that Knowles' writing project was planned to coincide with the implementation of composition competency testing and with the adoption of a new county wide composition course of study.

Frank Downing, a long-time friend of Freda's and also a curriculum director in an influential district, talked with me in early September about his hopes for the upcoming year. His views seemed to epitomize what other administrators were beginning to tell me. According to Frank, teachers had had free reign in their classrooms for far too long. For instance, he simply did not like it that some of his English teachers stressed journal writing, whereas others taught from Warriner's Grammar and Composition. And he liked even less the idea that many teachers spent weeks lecturing their students on Beowulf and MacBeth, assigning their students
very little writing—if any. In his mind, competency testing in composition coupled with a new composition curriculum built around the writing process model would help his teachers see that they all needed to teach writing—and teach it in the same way. In many ways, the design of Knowles’ in-services meshed well with the competency test developed by Tappan County teachers and with the new curriculum, too. Fran liked this isomorphic fit as did several other curriculum directors, including Freda. In their view, Knowles would reinforce what was already being put in place: competency testing that would ensure that all composition students would be judged by the same criteria—and lists of curricular skills that would ensure each teacher taught to these criteria.

Frank, Freda, and the other curriculum directors who were exponents of this view were obviously well-intentioned. Writing as process—they saw this approach to composition instruction as a way for students to become effective writers. But on another level, their emphasis on quickly orienting as many teachers as possible to an unfamiliar way of teaching pointed toward other intentions.

In Education and Power, Michael Apple points out that such overriding concern about curricular form and teacher training is often rooted in the intention to excercise technical control over teacher behavior—and may actually deskill a given faculty by handing it a pre-ordained set of
teaching techniques that deny the organic, creative, and idiosyncratic qualities of effective classroom practice (135-164). Tappan County administrators did not, I believe, have such issues consciously on their minds as they planned the Knowles’ in-services. But as the September 19th meeting approached, Apple’s concept helped shape much of my thinking. Sparking this thinking was a comment a teacher made during a planning session for a language arts curriculum committee meeting on September 18th. "I’m glad Knowles is coming. I need to learn some creative things to do with writing." Comparing what she said to the "free reign" assertions of Frank Downing forced me to reflect on Apple’s ideas. In fact, the contradiction between what Frank seemed to be saying and what the teachers seemed to be anticipating stuck with me the entire evening of September 19th. And it sticks with me still as I think about that night and the way I chose to begin gathering data for this study.

A Theoretical Framework for Viewing the In-Service Sessions

As Gunner Myrdal asserts in his book Objectivity in Social Research, "a disinterested social science has never existed and . . . can never exist" (55). In fact, Myrdal vigorously emphasizes this point, arguing that those who would pretend to hide the world view implicit in their research are practicing little more than "naive empiricism" that attempts to achieve a "psuedo-objective" tone in the futile effort to mask whatever moral and political valuations
may be guiding a given research project (9, 74, 75). What Myrdal posits is clear: objective research and detached analysis of data are impossibilities, especially when people are the object of study. In other words, studies of social contexts are not, and can never be, neutral. Myrdal’s argument culminates with this admonition to researchers: "Exposé the valuations to full light, make them conscious, specific, and explicit and permit them to determine the theoretical research" (56).

In this section, I will try to follow Myrdal’s advice by describing the theoretical framework that led me to cast my research questions in terms of the contradictions I saw. And in describing this framework, I may also be able to explain why I assumed a critical stance toward the writing in-services I began to study. Perhaps this task can best be accomplished by defining and viewing the term critical stance in relation to other approaches I could have taken. A working definition of this term is important. For my stance, as much as anything else, guided my thinking throughout the entire series of Knowles’ workshops, and (to use Myrdal’s ideas once again) determined the shape of my research and the direction my analysis of these in-services would take.

On one level, it should not be too difficult to illustrate the idea of a critical stance. Let us return for a moment to the contradiction I saw between the expectations of Frank Downing and those of certain teachers as they looked
toward the September 19th meeting. If I had viewed this contradiction as normal by taking for granted that teachers and administrators will not share the same view concerning teacher in-service, my stance would not have been critical at all. And in all likelihood, I would never have been led to ask why such contradictions exist in the first place.

Accepting schools as they are changes nothing. This approach, often simply called being practical, is a popular one among teachers and curriculum specialists. Curriculum scholars, such as Michael Apple (Ideology and Curriculum 125) and Henry Giroux (Ideology and Culture 9-11), might use other terminology and call such acceptance of the status quo an engineering approach to education guided by the technical rationality prevalent in the corporate structure of our culture. But whatever we label this view, and no matter how understandable it might be, such approaches to education often lead to little more than surface tampering with curriculum guides and petty squabbles about textbook selection, activity that is essentially reactionary in its orientation and behaviorist in its epistemological assumptions--the very antithesis of a critical approach.

Taking this example of viewing contradictions a step further, I could have noted what an administrator said, compared these comments to what a teacher said, and then struggled to discover the meaning system each brings to a given situation. Such an approach might have enabled me to
thoroughly explore the life-world of a particular teacher or curriculum director. To a large extent, I did make an effort in this direction. But such an approach would not have been critical, either. Rather it is closer to the methods developed by cultural anthropologists, often called a phenomenological or interpretive way of viewing social behavior. The major strength of this method lies in its ability to uncover the actor's viewpoint as he or she, say, attends an in-service to be trained in the teaching of writing. Obviously, it is important to have some feeling for how a teacher might understand such in-services. And as I have already mentioned, I tried to do that as I observed and analyzed the Knowles' sessions. But such a method of understanding a teacher's or administrator's viewpoint has extreme limitations precisely because of its strength. For once phenomenological researchers have immersed themselves in a setting, bracketed their preconceived notions, searched the language systems and life patterns of informants, and performed an *epoche* in an effort to arrive at understanding, those researchers are almost forced to accept the understanding of their informants as valid. If I had sought to use such phenomenological techniques exclusively, I would have been stuck with many different "valid" realities to deal with. Scholars such as Walter Feinberg and Eric Bredo believe that this problem stems from the "relativism implicit in the interpretive approach" (172). Madan Sarup
echoes this view, stating that "if we believe that different accounts are equally valid, we have no basis for making a choice" (Marxism and Ed. 93).

Choices. These were made by Tappan County administrators as plans were made for the Knowles' in-services. And choices were also made by Tappan County teachers as they listened to Knowles in August and as they made plans to attend the September 19th meeting. And choices were what I wanted to make as I began to consciously formulate a plan that might enable me to appraise what affect the Knowles in-services would have on classroom practice in Tappan County. For as the September 19th meeting approached, I already knew that I wanted to do more than simply describe these in-services sessions. Instead, I wanted to use these sessions as a springboard for theoretical reflection about why teacher in-service in writing instruction may or may not change the way writing is taught in schools. After all, change was purportedly what the curriculum directors sought from this in-service effort in the first place. To mount an appraisal, I needed a theory--a perceptual lens of sorts--that could enable me to view teacher in-service as more than a reified set of taken-for-granted social relations separate from the lived experiences of real teachers, students, and administrators. And I also needed a theory that could help me do more than simply reach an understanding of the participants' meaning systems.
Otherwise, I would have no basis for judging the validity of those systems when trying to decide if, say, the in-services indeed accomplished their purpose. If, for instance, certain teachers ended up believing the in-services failed, whereas certain administrators believed them to be a success, which view would I believe as I mounted my analysis? Some phenomenological theorists, Nelson Goodman among them, argue that there is no such thing as a single reality to be believed. Multiple realities—Goodman stresses than these are what need to be uncovered when conducting research (129-136).

But when it comes to changing school practice, or changing any social institution for that matter, one is ultimately forced to take a stand, to say this is what needs to be done. To paraphrase Karl Marx, the crucial aspect of studying social relations goes far beyond a mere understanding of those relations—the question is how can we change our material conditions in order to make the world a more humane place in which to live and work.

My perspective, then, was not neutral as I walked into the banquet hall on the evening of September 19th. My reading of Myrdal had already told me that such neutrality was an impossibility anyway. My posture was rooted in what Henry Giroux calls "the political and moral imperative that things must change" (interview 3 June 1985). For Giroux, such a view is the very essence of a critical stance toward curriculum development. Giroux's ideas owe a great debt to
Jurgen Habermas, the European philosopher and critical theorist who posits that the emancipatory interest needs to be paramount whenever we view people struggling to learn new tasks and integrate these into their lives. In other words, several kinds of questions can be asked when we look at people in such situations: we can seek to find how learning can help us predict and control people's behavior; we can ask how such learning will help people get along in their lives; or we can ask how certain learning will help people grow and develop as they seek to free themselves from an often oppressive, alienating educational system that is controlled by subtle, yet strong, power relations—relations that can systematically distort the underlying intent of programs like teacher in-services.

This last question is informed by Habermas' notion of the emancipatory interest. And it is exactly the sort of question that undergirded the original research questions I posed in August and shaped what I call my critical stance toward the Knowles' sessions. These questions were, it will be recalled, cast in terms of contradictions. Thinking in such terms can be a powerful heuristic tool for understanding what John Forester describes as the "structural settings of power, status, and possible domination in which any interaction takes place" (235).

It is not my intention to suggest that either Freda Smith or Frank Downing purposely tried to dominate Tappan
County teachers by hiring Alfred Knowles to conduct training sessions in the writing process. But the fact remains that both possessed immense power and status within the administrative hierarchy of Tappan County. And it is also true that they seemed to perceive the intent of the in-services differently than many teachers did. A contradiction like this one is precisely what I planned to explore in order to unravel the social dynamics that may have led to misunderstandings—and mismatched motives—between teachers, consultants, and curriculum directors.

The patterns I sought to explore, then, were relationships, dialectical contradictory relationships between, say, the public and private pronouncements of Knowles as he told administrators one thing, teachers another, and me something else. Other relationships interested me, too. For instance, the relationship between what is actually known about the complex nature of composing and Knowles' publicly shared knowledge of the writing process—this was often uppermost on my mind as I watched Knowles at work. And as I have already indicated, I was also concerned with the political power and influence of certain administrators and the relationship this had to why the in-services were conceived in the first place, and to the teachers' attitudes towards Knowles and his writing process.
To use slightly different terms, my critical approach made it possible for me to question why certain qualities of Knowles' in-services were explicitly acknowledged, while others were suppressed. Making a situation problematic—this is what Giroux called questioning of this sort (Ideology and Culture 9). And it was not difficult to make the September 19th kick-off banquet problematic.

Three-hundred-fifty people, almost all of them English and language art teachers, attended this meeting. Knowles spoke and led discussion about writing for approximately two hours and thirty minutes, stopping only for a ten-minute break after the first eighty minutes. At break time, after Knowles had discussed his five-step writing process, I noticed that many teachers decided to leave. In fact, it appeared that over one-third of the teachers had better things to do than listen to Knowles and then eat the dinner that had been catered for the occasion. From my position in the back of the room, it was easy for me to follow several clusters of high school teachers to the door and try to find out why they were leaving. Since they knew I was a county office consultant and the coordinator of the writing in-service, they were naturally hesitant to be completely candid at first. But one outspoken teacher that I had met in August told me quite bluntly that she was bored with Knowles and that she had "heard it all before" in August. Francine, another high school teacher, said that Knowles was
"patronizing and condescending." She simply was not going to stay--a free meal notwithstanding.

I happened to know that these teachers (and several others I talked with and overheard) were extremely interested in writing instruction. In fact, several days before Francine had talked with me at length about the rhetorical strategies she was trying to get her students to use. Then, it struck me. The very teachers who in theory should have benefited the most from a composition workshop--the very teachers who were struggling everyday with the difficulties of teaching writing--they were the ones who seemed to like Knowles the least. (Elementary teachers, who for the most part have never studied English or rhetoric, seemed to be more accepting of Knowles' presentation that evening.)

The contradiction inherent in the high school teachers' disenchantment was something I wanted to exploit. That very evening, I decided I would focus my research on their relationship to the writing in-services. Not only did the contradiction I saw demand analysis, but also they seemed more willing to talk with me and share their feelings than teachers from any other grade level. Perhaps this willingness stemmed from their knowing of my own background as a high school English teacher. But no matter why some of these teachers seemed willing to trust me, I felt impelled to use those I could get closest to as a primary source of information.
Besides, what happened a week later showed me just how problematic the high school teachers' relationship to the writing project was. Speaking before a curriculum directors' meeting on September 26th, Freda Smith stressed how successful the September 19th meeting had been, especially among her high school English teachers. Why, I wondered, had she not acknowledged that many of her high school teachers had left the meeting half-way through from an apparent lack of interest? Was she explicitly expressing one view while deliberately suppressing another? I was almost certain she was, for she saw over one-hundred teachers leave the meeting early. In fact, I watched her as she watched them leave. The situation was, to use Giroux's term, very problematic.

Finding Informants, Collecting Data, and Analyzing Information

Although my study of the Knowles' in-services actually began early in August of 1984, when I first became employed by the Tappan County Schools, my methods and approaches to uncovering information that might help explain the contradictions I have discussed changed and evolved as the school year progressed. For instance, during the August PPO-writing meeting at which Knowles appeared, my approach was somewhat tentative and scattershot. I may have selected certain comments Knowles made that puzzled me, and I may have had these puzzles in mind as I observed teachers listening to
Knowles speak. But I had not yet become familiar enough with the teachers, administration, and consultants involved to begin focusing my efforts on certain people that later became primary informants.

As I have already indicated, the September 19th meeting was crucial to my efforts at finding some of these informants. Francine, the outspoken high school teacher who felt Knowles to be condescending, sparked my interest immediately. Not only was she willing and able to speak her mind, she was also in a position of leadership at her local high school and at the county-wide level, too. For instance, she chaired her high school's English curriculum committee and had been chosen by county administrators to serve on the PPO writing team. In addition, she had taught in Tappan County for eleven years and knew the inner-workings of the county office from having worked there as a consultant for several summers. Beyond these important considerations, she was also more than willing to stop at the local taverns for a drink after meetings.

This willingness, I felt, was to my advantage, for I would be able to hear her views in informal settings as well as in the formal atmosphere of the in-services she would attend. (Despite her disenchantment with Knowles on September 19th, she told me she would attend his in-services "to see what was going on.")
Often informants were chosen for other reasons as the series of in-services unfolded. One teacher, Kathryn Scott, became a focus of my interest because she was in many ways the opposite of Francine. Kathryn was rather timid and self-effacing during most meetings, letting others challenge the importance of lesson plans or question a point raised by Knowles. I thought it was important that I not pick informants who possessed similar personalities. But I also focused attention on Kathryn because I knew I could get to know her in more than one setting (just as I could with Francine). Early in September I had been scheduled to visit Kathryn's school many times throughout the academic year to work on curriculum. Thus I knew I could get to know the Kathryn who attended meetings and also the Kathryn who had to deal with six classes of junior English each day.

Often, one informant I had gotten to know quite well would lead me to another. After I had talked with Kathryn several times, she told me of a teacher she worked with who had just finished an M.A. in American literature and who was "fascinating" to talk with. Soon, I became acquainted with Gail Smith, a personable woman in her mid-forties who had formed definite views about writing instruction based on her study of Thoreau. Gail, too, could be observed in different settings. Not only did she attend several of the Knowles' in-services, but she also worked with me to develop a new syllabus for her honors English classes.
Further on, I will describe other informants whose insight helped me a great deal as I attempted to describe and analyze the Knowles’ sessions. But first, let me pause here and specifically list some of the qualities I looked for in selecting informants. Early in the school year, I had just a vague notion of what I was looking for. But after several months, I became more systematic and more conscious of method, and these criteria began to guide my data collection strategies by early October.

1. I wanted most of my informants to be high school teachers, for these were the ones who seemed to trust me the most and also the ones who seemed from the onset of the Knowles meetings to be consciously searching for alternative teaching strategies to use in writing class. In addition, it will be recalled, the high school teachers puzzled me the most because they seemed to be the least receptive to Knowles, the very person who could have provided them with the strategies they sought.

2. I sought out teachers who displayed an interest in the teaching of writing. If, I reasoned, a teacher was exclusively concerned with Chaucer or Shakespeare, she would not be willing to explore how Knowles’ writing process was influencing her classroom practice.
3. As much as possible, I tried to find teachers with whom I could develop a rapport. In other words, I believed that teachers like Francine and Kathryn, who both proved to share with me an interest in literature, music, and film, would be the most likely to be candid with me in voicing their thoughts.

4. For purely logistical reasons, I sought out teachers that I would have access to at a variety of times and in a variety of settings. The amount of information that would result in observing and talking with someone like Francine at school, at curriculum meetings, and after class over a drink would provide me with detail that might not otherwise be captured.

5. To a large extent, I wanted to find teachers who had taught in Tappan County for at least several years. Their knowledge of the county office, their own local schools, and the personalities who shaped the policies and structure of these organizations could prove quite useful in trying to make sense of my new surroundings.

6. Finally, I needed informants who would actually attend some of the Knowles' in-services. This criterion was initially met by many teachers
although their number dwindled as the school year progressed.

Needless to say, the teachers themselves were not--indeed could not be--my only informants. Various county office personnel such as Jack Morgan, my boss, and Nick Wise, Tappan County's assistant superintendent, would provide me with a wealth of information about the background of the Knowles' project and the way in which it would be perceived by the curriculum directors with whom they continually kept in contact. I also talked frequently with many curriculum directors in order to understand their views of Knowles and how they felt he was affecting their teachers' instructional strategies. Because of her influence and vested interest in the success of the writing in-services, I paid particular attention to what Freda Smith of Southwest had to say. Luckily for me, she was not reticent in airing her opinions. As a result, I not only learned a great deal from her directly, but I also heard her views as they were interpreted by others she talked with.

One person Freda continually talked with was Knowles himself. And I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge how cooperative Knowles was in sharing with me much that he heard from Freda and others directly involved in his in-service project. In many ways, Knowles was my most valuable informant throughout the course of the year. We spent endless hours together. And whether we were planning a day's
activities during breakfast, or simply mulling over an in-service session in the bar of his hotel, I always found Knowles quite candid in sharing why he presented an idea in a certain way or why he happened to feel a certain teacher's students were inept writers.

Perhaps I should also add here that I not only talked with Knowles frequently about his feelings and attitudes towards teachers, students, administrators, and his writing process itself, but I also had ample opportunity to observe him working with students in teachers' classrooms and to listen to him as he spoke at the in-service sessions. It was relatively easy, therefore, to continually compare, say, his personal beliefs about writing and teaching to the actual way he espoused these beliefs to students, teachers, and administrators during his public presentations. In other words, Knowles was much more than an informant to me as I gathered information about the impact of his work. He was actually a permeating presence that I continually had to analyze in relation to the high school English teachers who listened to him, the administrators who paid his fees, and the students who tried out his numerous composing techniques. And, of course, important to me, too, was Knowles' relationship to the step-by-step composing process that he believed any teacher could teach and any student could learn. In a sense, one word could sum up all that I hoped to study. And that word was Knowles.
But no matter who I was focusing on at a particular time, I tried to use several different techniques as I collected information. At first, I simply wrote down what I saw and heard as a particular in-service meeting or classroom demonstration unfolded. Such recording was relatively easy and extremely unobtrusive. For instance, during an in-service meeting, I was expected to attend carefully to what Knowles said. And I am certain that most, if not all, in-service participants thought I was taking notes just as a student would do during a teacher's lecture. Often, however, I actually recorded what Clifford Geertz described as "extremely small matters" that can be crucial to an understanding of social contexts (21). Some evenings, snippets of teachers' conversations and their offhand comments would receive more space in my notebook than what Knowles was saying about sentence structure or peer editing. By the same token, I often followed Knowles into a classroom to spend most of my time describing the facial expressions and body positions of the students and teachers he was addressing.

In addition to direct observation coupled with on-site recording at the in-service sessions, in classrooms, or in administrators' offices, I also spent a great deal of time jotting down informal conversations. If a teacher called me on the telephone to inquire about a point Knowles might have made, I immediately opened my notebook and scrawled down the
views of that teacher. There were times, of course, when it was impossible to listen and write simultaneously. Bar conversations after an in-service were summarized from memory in my notebook after I had gotten home. Similarly, many talks with teachers in the hallway or in the cafeteria were not recorded at the time they occurred. Usually, though, I had time to jot down whatever cogent comments were made when I arrived back at my office.

During the first few months of my study, I tried to use the tape recorder sparingly. For reasons previously discussed, I did not want to make my role as researcher too apparent at first. And few people arouse more suspicion than a person who continually sticks a microphone in someone's face during what otherwise would be an every day conversation. I did, however, take a tape recorder to two in-services, telling those few who asked about it that I was recording Knowles' talk for absent teachers. In this way, I was able to carefully listen to much that I might have otherwise missed during these particular sessions.

Near the end of the school year, I did tape record extended, open-ended, conversations-as-interviews with nine teachers I had become close to and interested in. Based on recurring themes I had found in these teachers' actions and conversations, the interviews were open-ended to the extent that I did not pre-impose a specific set of questions to ask each of them. My interviewing strategies were, nonetheless,
well-thought-out as I questioned and probed in an effort to have these teachers explicate certain contradictions I saw in their behavior and to theorize about contradictions they had observed during the entire Knowles project itself. In this regard, I followed the advice of Schatzman and Strauss who suggest that the most effective interviewing is often conducted after a long period of less formal data-gathering techniques (71). Results of these questioning strategies will, by the way, be detailed in the next chapter of this study.

The interviewing strategies I have briefly described typify my basic approach in all of my data collection techniques: I attempted to let the meaning emerge from my informants without pre-imposing my understanding onto them. As much as possible, for instance, I attempted to use the terminology of my informants when talking with them and to explore this language until it was clear to me what it meant. (The terms grammar and good students immediately come to mind in this regard.) But at the same time, I continually did project my own meaning system onto my informants by continually thinking in terms of the contradictory actions—and antagonistic power relations—that I purposely searched for. Here is a simple example: Many teachers saw no contradiction at all between the way they spoke of good students in the classroom and the way they spoke of good students to me. As it often happened "good students"
addressed as such in class turned out to be "bad kids" when they were referred to outside of class. Such contradictions are not in themselves bad, but they were usually present. And it was not until I pointed some of these out to certain teachers that they became conscious of them. The upshot of what I am getting at can be cast in straightforward language: My own behavior as an inquirer was in itself contradictory precisely because I strove to impose the meaning system of my critical approach while also striving to use the phenomenological methods of anthropologists like Geertz. Of course, such contradictions are more the rule than the exception. Even Geertz himself is continually imposing his own theory of culture on any people he happens to study.

Abraham Kaplan reminds us that "we do not make proper observations by stripping ourselves of theory--which is impossible in any case--but rather by making use of the theories appropriate to the observational context" (133). My critical approach, predicated on the idea that school practice must change, seemed to fit well the study of in-services geared toward changing teacher behavior. Similarly, my use of phenomenological methods seemed appropriate in trying to uncover the meaning systems participants brought to the in-services with them. As I look back on my effort to understand and appraise the Knowles' in-services, I now see that the basic contradiction in my
approach was actually a strong unity of two views that helped forge my method into coherent patterns of inquiry—patterns that evolved slowly yet ultimately emerged as a dialectical design capable of capturing the essence of the in-services and useful in judging their success, and failure.

Some of the patterns I used to uncover information fall under the rubric of triangulation, a term often used by Egon Guba and others interested in qualitative research. Triangulation, according to Guba, involves such procedures as using different data collection techniques at different times, from different sources (87). Basically, the purpose of these efforts is to match different views against one another in order to double-check the credibility and reliability of different viewpoints and often of contradictory information. To the extent that I observed and questioned many different informants over a year's time, asking many of them about each other's views, I practiced the triangulation Guba describes. In addition, choosing teachers with different personalities, discussing the in-services with administrators, students, and teachers, and observing participants' actions in different settings—all of these methods, too, helped achieve a large degree of triangulation.

But as I have mentioned earlier, my method of inquiry changed and evolved as the year progressed. For instance, I may have known that I wanted to triangulate by getting at different participants' viewpoints, but I did not know how or
when I would accomplish this task until certain participants became my confidants and began leading me toward posing certain kinds of questions and toward situating myself at a particular table during Knowles' talks. (By the way, I eventually told many of my confidants of my role as a researcher.) Such help from my informants and confidants often resulted in changes in focus throughout the year. If, say, a particular teacher displayed an unusual amount of antagonism or indifference toward Knowles, I would pay particular attention to her at that given time. At other times, of course, I would focus on Knowles himself, especially when what he was doing or saying was particularly puzzling to me. And sometimes, I simply focused my attention on the hand-outs Knowles had prepared for teachers, especially during those weeks when he was not in Tappan County.

But perhaps my method and focus changed most abruptly when I began to actually see in November and January what I had sensed would happen as far back as the September 19th meeting: The high school teachers were losing interest in Knowles. In fact, if attendance at the in-services was any indication, most English teachers had lost interest entirely.

It was when I sensed what appeared to be the imminent failure of these sessions that I began to reflect on what was occurring in a more analytic way than I had before.
Until November, I kept busy simply trying to describe and make some sense of the entire Knowles project. But once I actually saw how little impact Knowles was having on the teachers I was observing, I began to view the in-services in terms of how they might have been conducted. What if? That was a question I began to ask. The analytical tools I used to develop answers to this question were basically two: The dynamic, interactionist view of language learning developed by Soviet psychological theorists and the liberatory pedagogical techniques developed by Paulo Freire to teach literacy to the disenfranchised and oppressed in the third-world.

By using these two theoretical frameworks, I was actually developing what Donald Sanders and other educational researchers have termed a biographical design—a design that fits the life and history of the researcher. For instance, I have spent the past several years studying the work of L. S. Vygostsky and other Soviet psychologists. Their view of language development in general—and writing development in particular—has largely become my own view. Thus it seemed only fitting that I use that view to analyze what Knowles was telling Tappan County teachers. Writing development according to the Soviet perspective, is a continuously unfolding historical-cultural process, shaped by a person's concrete position in society. Using this idea, it seems to follow that the development of those who teach
writing is also governed by this same historical-cultural process. As the in-services progressed, fewer and fewer high school English teachers appeared at Knowles' monthly meeting. From my Soviet perspective, I began to wonder whether this lack of interest was in some part due to the fact that Knowles never tried to uncover, never tried to understand, the history or culture of the teachers he addressed. Not once, for example, did Knowles draw on the experiences teachers may have had with in-services in the past. Nor did he use situations from the daily life of classroom teachers to make his presentations more meaningful. In a sense, Knowles seemed to divorce the content of his talks from the daily lives of teachers much as some teachers often divorce the writing assignments they pose from the daily lives of their students.

In addition to using Soviet psychology to analyze and appraise the writing in-services, I also turned to the work of Paulo Freire to answer the what if questions that kept occurring to me as I collected information. Freire's work, too, contributed to the biographical design of this study. For his thinking has profoundly influenced the way I have worked with my own students for the past several years. Much like the views of Soviet theorists, Freire's ideas about learning presuppose that those who would teach must connect with, and understand, the lives of their students.
Otherwise, Freire asserts, the teacher will often be met with little more than "silence and indifference" from a given group of students (Pedagogy of the Oppressed 109). To say that the indifference toward Knowles was present would be an understatement, considering that at one in-service just six teachers attended (originally, fifty-seven were scheduled to attend). Silence. That was also evident at many of the sessions. In fact, teachers seldom addressed Knowles directly, choosing instead to either keep quiet or whisper their comments to each other. How much of this behavior, I wondered, was due to Knowles pre-packaged instructional program that could not deal with the felt-needs of individual teachers?

Actually, then, my data collection turned out to be a springboard for theoretical reflection and appraisal, rather than a goal in and of itself. For the more Soviet psychology and Freirian pedagogy illuminated the analysis of my observations, the more I wanted to use this analysis to theorize about how in-services like the one Knowles presented might become more productive than they often are.

But perhaps I am telling too much too soon. Let me end this section by stressing that my research design and method evolved slowly in a triadic pattern—a pattern woven from my host-coordinator-participant role in the in-services, my position as a student of Soviet psychology, and my adherence to the pedagogical theory of Freire. These three aspects of
my life in themselves form a triad. But on another level, the triad to which I refer is comprised of these elements:

1. My initial critical stance toward the composition in-services which led me to begin posing the questions about them in the first place.

2. My use of ethnographic techniques to uncover the meaning the participants gave to the entire composition project.

3. My use of an analytic framework to appraise the impact of the composition project—a framework rooted in the study of individuals and groups who are engaged in a socio-culture-historical process through which they continually create their own learning and their own world.

The Scope and Limitations of the Fieldwork

It should be clear by now that I am not attempting to verify any theory in the fieldwork portion of this study. I simply believe, for instance, that the Soviet view of writing development and the Freirian approach to pedagogy provide sound theoretical frameworks through which to view the way a series of composition in-services was conducted. Besides, the total number of teachers I ultimately studied in depth was just nine. It would be ridiculous to pretend to use the hypothetico-deductive model of verification research when so few teachers were involved in this study. (I did, of course, observe many more than nine teachers, but because of time
considerations and problems of access, I was forced to choose
a relatively small number to follow-up on and interview.)
Nine teachers--or fifty-nine for that matter--cannot be truly
representative of any particular "class" or "kind" of in-
services participation, nor can any generalizable findings
spring from such a small sample of informants.

But few, if any, qualitative researchers believe that
their findings need to be generalizable. This position makes
sense. Qualitative studies of educational settings and
traditional experimental methods differ radically in
approach. They simply do not share the same purpose.
Whereas traditional quantitative methods use positivistic
science to seek universal laws (or "claims to know"),
qualitative methods are geared toward building a body of
"systematically acquired data that present the facts of the
educating process" (Sanders 354). In fact, educational
researchers such as Donald Sanders assert that most studies
of educational settings have dwelt far too much on the
verification of hypotheses when they should have been
concerned with discovering what actually happens to teachers,
students, and administrators as they labor in and out of
schools. As a result, these studies lack the very thing that
could make them more "scientific": "an agreed upon
'figuration of facts' about the schooling process" (354).

This argument can easily be applied to the study of
teaching composition. For even though many studies have been
conducted in high school writing classes, almost all of these have been experiments geared toward verifying the value of certain pedagogical techniques. We still know very little about what good writers actually do to create good writing, and we know even less about how English teachers can be encouraged to nurture such writing. Furthermore, we know almost nothing about the kinds of social interactions English teachers might have to engage in to learn about teaching composition effectively. If there is any truth at all to Mina Shaughnessy's assertion that "writing is a social act," (83) it would seem there is a real need to begin discovering a "figuration of facts" about the social relations that influence the way writing is taught in schools. We may not be able to generalize from these facts, but we definitely need to build a corpus of knowledge about English teachers' responses to composition training, and we must begin building it now. For at a time when 70 percent of the public believes writing should be a top priority in schools, we face an extremely disturbing fact: Most high school students simply do not want to write (cited in Edelsberg 263).

What follows in the next chapter will, I hope, make a contribution toward building a figuration of facts about the way a certain group of teachers responded to a series of composition in-services during one particular school year. If, however, I suggest that my findings will have any deep significance for school personnel, I would probably be lying.
At best, any conclusions I draw as I describe the in-services and their impact on teachers will be somewhat conjectural. After all, as I have already stressed, my study is a fairly narrow one: Not only am I dealing with a relatively small group of teachers who are not necessarily representative of any other class or kind, I am also limiting myself by confining my description of the Knowles project to one portion of this work and by then using it to theoretically reflect on what happened and what might have happened. But even though I have decided to explore a small slice of a very large context, the relatively narrow scope of this study does not bother me too much in itself. Many researchers have successfully probed into the school experience of relatively few people and then used their data to appraise an educational program. (Gail McCutcheon's study of Mr. Clement's fourth grade comes to mind in this regard.)

What does concern me, though, is that I had to confront much conflicting and ambiguous information as I observed and talked with my informants. Considering, however, that I purposely sought out contradictions and ambiguities, I am not too concerned about the inferential leaps I made in order to find consistent patterns of meaning to analyze and appraise. In any case, one prominent composition theorist has pointed out that "certainty is not the same thing as validity, and knowledge of ambiguity is not necessarily ambiguous knowledge" (Hirsch ix). I hope my readers keep this in mind
as they ponder the many contradictory meanings teachers, students, and administrators brought to bear on the Knowles' composition in-services.
CHAPTER II
AN OVERVIEW OF THE IN-SERVICE SESSIONS

Knowles’ Visits to Tappan County

Before describing what occurred during Knowles’ many visits to Tappan County and some of the patterns of meaning that emerged as a result of these visits, perhaps I should first detail the way the in-service sessions were set up and also explain how Knowles’ classroom appearances were arranged. In the previous chapter, I briefly mentioned the basic information Knowles planned to convey during his monthly presentations, but such concerns as where they were held and exactly who was supposed to attend are essential to an understanding of this composition project.

Because 232 teachers representing all grade levels and all twelve Tappan County school districts were originally scheduled to participate, holding the in-services during the school day was an impossibility. Therefore, Marge and Freda decided that early evening sessions would be a good approach. Since all county teachers were finished with their daily classes by 3:15, it was decided that Knowles would meet with them in a central location beginning at 4:00 in the afternoon. His presentation would run for approximately two hours. Then, there would be a short break, followed
by dinner. Inducing teachers to give up an evening a month to attend an in-service session could, of course, be more than a little difficult. As Michaeline Chance-Reay has stressed in a recent study of English teacher in-services, for many teachers, such sessions, even when held during regular school hours, are little more than "arbitrary impositions of irrelevant . . . training" (11). So as an inducement to attend and be trained, teachers were to be given a free meal after every in-service at one of the better restaurants in Tappan County. Several administrators, Jack Morgan among them, seemed to think that simply holding evening sessions at the restaurant would attract many teachers who otherwise might not attend. As soon as I arrived in Tappan County in August of 1984, I was charged with the task of finding a suitable facility. After several dozen calls to various restaurant managers, I finally settled on the Blue Moon. Not only did this restaurant have an established reputation in Tappan County, it was also centrally located within a thirty minute drive from all county schools. Besides, Midge, the co-owner of the Blue Moon, was willing to be quite flexible in her menu-planning. In fact, she offered to create special dishes so that none of those attending in-services would have to eat the same meal more than once. In addition, the Blue Moon had two private banquet rooms that would separate the teachers from the noise and chatter of the regular dinner crowd. Many administrators
I talked with also liked the comfortable bar at the Blue Moon. It was tucked away in a quiet corner of the restaurant and conducive to "pleasant conversation for the teachers after dinner." At least that is how Freda Smith described it when I asked her about the suitability of several county restaurants.

Once the location of the in-services was announced, shortly after the September 19th meeting, the next major task was finding enough teachers to attend Knowles' presentations. Since fifty-six teachers from four different grade levels were slated to participate, the curriculum directors had a lot of recruiting to do. Surprisingly enough, however, a week before the first scheduled in-service (or "dinner meeting" as they were beginning to be called), I had in my possession lists containing the names of 232 teachers who had agreed to attend. But perhaps I should not have been too surprised at this positive response. After all, Jack Morgan mentioned to me that many of the teachers initially recruited were approached precisely because of their willingness to involve themselves in such projects. In fact, department chairs and teachers immersed in curriculum development headed the original list of participants. Furthermore, many teachers are simply afraid of the consequences of not attending in-services. "They (principals and other administrators) hold it against you if you don't go"
(Chance-Reay, 97). That is how one teacher put it when asked why she attended such meetings.

But whatever a particular teacher's reasons were for wanting to attend, it looked as if the Blue Moon's banquet room would be full each evening Knowles was scheduled to speak. I sent this little chart to each teacher showing how many would attend each meeting and the dates on which the in-services fell:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Number Attending</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary (K-3)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Monday, October 8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monday, November 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monday, January 7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monday, February 11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monday, March 18th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Monday, April 15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate (4-6)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Tuesday, October 9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday, November 13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday, January 8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday, February 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday, March 19th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuesday, April 16th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School (7-9)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Wednesday, October 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wednesday, November 14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wednesday, January 9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wednesday, February 13th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wednesday, March 20th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wednesday, April 17th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School (10-12)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Thursday, October 11th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thursday, November 15th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thursday, January 10th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thursday, February 14th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thursday, March 21st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thursday, April 18th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can easily be seen from this chart, these in-services were to be an ongoing effort. By having Knowles visit Tappan
County throughout the school year, administrators hoped to stress the importance of composition and show that teachers should think about writing all year long and adjust their classroom practice continually as they implemented the five-step writing process with their students.

My role as host-coordinator at the Blue Moon was a relatively simple one: I greeted teachers as they entered the banquet room, gave them any hand-outs Knowles might have prepared for them, and had them sign an attendance sheet that was to be shared with all administrators. Besides these duties, I did keep the coffee pots filled during Knowles' talk, and I always collected an evaluation sheet on Knowles that teachers filled out for me. But for the most part, I was free to observe and listen to Knowles and the teachers as the in-service was conducted.

In addition to meeting with teachers every Monday through Thursday evening for six months, Knowles spent his days visiting teachers' classrooms in order to demonstrate the various teaching techniques he would be discussing during the evening meetings. Each of the twelve county districts could use Knowles in its classrooms for two days during the course of the school year. Thus all would share his expertise equally. Approximately ten days before Knowles was to arrive in Tappan County, during a given month, curriculum directors from the districts he would be visiting that week would send me a schedule for Knowles to follow in
their schools. This schedule, sent me in early March, typifies the kind of day Knowles would spend with teachers and students:

March 20, 1985--Dr. Alfred Knowles' Schedule

Westridge Local Schools

**Westridge High School:** 8:00 to 10:00 (room 215)
Joe Kraft's classes

**Westridge Elementary:** 10:15 to 11:15 (room 10)
Terri Nixon's classes

**Crown Middle School:** 12:25 to 1:55 (room 10)
Jerry Franklin's classes

**Kennedy Elementary:** 2:00 to 3:30 (room 20)
Frank Jones' classes

To say that Knowles had hectic days during his visits would be an understatement. As the above schedule indicates, on March 20th, Knowles would have only an hour break from the time he left his hotel at 7:15 a.m. until the time he left the Blue Moon at approximately 7:30 p.m. (The drive from Westridge to the Blue Moon took thirty minutes in itself.)

On Mondays I would often drive Knowles to the school myself, taking the opportunity to observe his work with students and teachers. For instance, on March 20th I got the chance to watch Knowles interact with two of Joe Kraft's English classes. And even though I often talked with students and teachers myself about composing strategies, I usually had plenty of time to observe. In many ways, my role in a school was like my role at the Blue Moon. I would
introduce Knowles to principals, greet the teachers we were visiting, and then watch Knowles at work, continually jotting down what I saw.

But whether watching a student doodle in Joe Kraft's class, fixing the overhead projector before one of the Knowles presentations, or drinking wine with a teacher in the bar of the Blue Moon, I did try to do more than simply observe and write. As I have already pointed out, I tried to search for strands of meaning and threads of significance that might shed light on the puzzles and contradictions that confronted me. What follows is a descriptive account of that search.

The Basic Contradictions of the In-Service Sessions: Threads—and Shreds—of Significance

Looking back now on the data I collected, I find that four major contradictory patterns emerged from the Knowles writing project. Threads of significance, strands of meaning, problematic puzzlers—these are just several of the ways I have so far referred to these patterns. The term themes might do just as well. And perhaps Clifford Geertz might simply call them systematized interpretations of the second and third order (15). (When studying social behavior, one is always making interpretations of other interpretations.) I have added still another term: shreds. This too, is an apt way of getting at my meaning. For anytime the complexity of life is reduced to the linearity of
prose, all that is left are incomplete, inexact pieces of meaning, ripped from the rich context in which it was created.

But no matter how I label these contradictions and despite my protestations that an inscribed depiction of them will be incomplete, the four patterns that emerged throughout the course of the 1984-1985 year still evoke such strong images in my brain that I often feel as if I am back at the Blue Moon, staring at the lists of kernel sentences Knowles would often place on his overhead projector as the teachers silently sipped coffee, averting their eyes from the screen in an effort to politely avoid completing another sentence-combining "skills practice."

This particular image provides a glimpse of one of the first patterns that began to emerge as the in-services progressed: The teachers seemed uncomfortable with, and almost indifferent to, any information Knowles conveyed when it was not thoroughly explained in all its complexity. The contradiction here is obvious. The high school teachers yearned for Knowles to explore an idea in depth and to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of what he asked teachers and students to do. Yet throughout the year, Knowles steadfastly refused to deal with such complexity, preferring instead to practice a sort of "don't tell them too much, or they won't be able to handle it" approach. Simply put, the teachers needed complexity, whereas Knowles needed
simplicity. For instance, Knowles never did discuss (or even mention) transformational grammar. And in neglecting to do so, he ignored many of the theoretical arguments used by educationists to support the teaching of sentence-combining to composition students.

The second major pattern I discovered also pertains to what teachers seemed to need. As I have pointed out earlier in this work, the preoccupation of certain curriculum directors with controlling teacher behavior was in direct conflict with what some teachers called a need for creative freedom in the classroom. This contradictory pattern persisted throughout the school year, evincing itself in many forms. For instance, Knowles was asked in March by administrators to directly connect part of his next presentation to the composition-competency-testing rubrics that were being used in all districts to assess student writing. When he began to discuss these rubrics in front of the teachers, he was met with some loud resistance. "Why am I supposed to isolate stuff like organization and intent?" one teacher asked. "I’m tired of feeling like I’m supposed to teach to some test with all these vague rubrics."

Comments like this are seemed to typify a pattern that can be straightforwardly labelled: **Most teachers needed freedom, whereas many administrators needed control.**

The third major pattern that emerged was perhaps partly caused by the first two, although I can make no claim to be
able to establish a direct causal relationship. But in any case this pattern concerns the basic goal that administrators had in mind when the Knowles in-services were first conceived—the goal of changing the classroom practice of teachers. From my visits to classrooms throughout the school year and from the information provided by my informants, it appeared that few, if any, high school teachers changed the way they taught writing. In other words, exposure to Knowles' writing process seemed to have no affect on the teaching strategies used by Tappan County English teachers. Of course, a few surface changes may have sprung from Kowles' efforts. For instance, one teacher began to use the term pre-writing when she asked her class to write outlines. But such changes in teacher vocabulary did not seem to substantially alter what students were expected to do as they wrote in English class. Again, the contradictory nature of this pattern is obvious: Administrators expected change, whereas teachers simply continued to do what they had always done.

The fourth pattern that emerged seemed to spring from the very nature of teacher in-service itself and the way such teacher developed programs are viewed by those who designed them and by those who actually attend them. In many ways, then, the first three patterns are deeply interwoven into the fourth. The very idea of what an in-service is and should be is deeply embedded in the psyches of all school personnel,
affecting the impact of all such projects. And as more than one teacher pointed out, there is a long-standing tradition in most districts that often helps undermine in-service sessions: Administrators try to be helpful (and to spend money wisely) by presenting an in-service that might appeal to as many teachers as possible; teachers attend the presentation hopeful that what they will hear will help them deal with their particular students. As a result of the wide applicability the administrator hopes for as opposed to the specific concerns of individual teachers, "in-services just don't work."

That is how one teacher put it when I questioned her after Knowles' last session. She continued by saying that "teachers would rather do their own work instead of listening to some guy talk about something that has nothing to do with their own students and problems."

The crux of the fourth pattern can be found in this teacher's assertion. Administrators and Knowles were trying to be as helpful as possible to as many teachers as possible by showing the broad application the writing process approach had for all teachers. But the teachers were not too interested in that. What about my third period class? How can I get them to want to write? These were the kinds of questions the teachers wanted answers to and the very questions they felt were not being addressed. Once again, the contradictory nature of a particular pattern is apparent:
Administrators and Knowles needed to think in terms of broad impact, whereas the teachers needed help with the small matters and specific concerns of classroom life.

Now that I have presented a brief overview of the four basic contradictory patterns that emerged from my study, it is time to detail the events and actions that led me to find them. Certainly, the original research questions I posed after first meeting Knowles focused my attention on certain puzzles. But it is in the small patterns of behavior I mentioned earlier that I have tried to ground my findings. However, Eric Fromm reminds us that "even a single act of behavior cannot be fully described. One could write pages of description of the Mona Lisa's smile, and still the pictured smile would not have been caught in words" (To Have or to Be 88). I am reemphasizing here the limitations of language only as a way of stressing the humility with which I approach what lies ahead. There is, nonetheless, a strength in language. It is, after all, the most powerful tool we have for generating meaning and for mediating our behavior. Perhaps my point is simply this: Language itself is a contradiction. Its strength is unsurpassed for abstracting meaning from a situation, yet many of our strongest feelings cannot be expressed in words. This is just one more contradiction I will have to deal with in the pages that follow. And deal with it I must, for I know, to paraphrase T. S. Eliot, that I gotta use words when I talk to you.
CHAPTER III

SIMPLICITY VS. COMPLEXITY: WHY DON'T YOU TELL US WHAT YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT?

Joe Kraft's first period English class met in Westridge High's old biology lab. At 8:00 a.m., I perched myself on a stool behind the sink taps that rose from the old black lab table. Knowles, dressed in a grey flannel suit with cowboy boots, stood in front of the table, conferring with Joe. They were discussing how Joe's ninth graders might begin to use a comparison-contrast organizational pattern to write about some essays they had been reading. I half-listened to Joe ask about what state of the writing process his kids should be in now that they were trying to reorganize their papers. Knowles said he would get the kids to revise today by focusing specifically on how a paper could have structure.

But most of my attention was focused on the twenty-eight tenth-graders as they jabbed and poked each other on the way to their desks. Immediately, I could see why Joe was concerned about organization. From all indications, this class was pretty unorganized. It was a hot morning for late March, and several boys fought each other for the right to open the windows. "Leave it alone, Brian, you idiot, you
don't know how to work it." A fat, pimply-faced boy wearing a sleeveless Motley Crue T-shirt rammed Brian into a desk and pried open the window nearly breaking the glass. Several girls seated directly in front of me whispered to each other as they waited for class to begin. "Did you get anything written?" one of them asked another.

"No, no time. And I didn't know what he wanted anyway."

"I didn't either," another girl said as she fanned herself by holding her face close to her Harcourt-Brace anthology, deftly flipping its pages with her thumb.

Five minutes after the bell rang, Joe brought his class to order and introduced Alfred Knowles to his students.

"Dr. Knowles is from Alabama, and he's here to talk to us about our writing. He's come a long way, so I'd appreciate it if you'd give him your complete attention. You're all good writers when you want to be. And Dr. Knowles has the know-how to make you even better."

Several students had already interrupted Joe with various derogatory comments about writing. The fat kid was the loudest, saying that he for one didn't like to write.

"Sometimes, these kids are impossible," Joe whispered to me as he leaned against the side of the lab table, staring down at his blue Warringer's Grammar which was opened to the section dealing with subordinate clauses.

"I write for a living," Knowles began, holding up a copy of an eighth-grade composition book he had co-authored. This
comment seemed to pique the class’ interest. Knowles continued to talk, pointing out that his book was not written quickly and stressing that he had revised it several times. To reinforce the idea of revision, he showed the class a tattered spiral notebook that was full of almost unreadable scrawlings. Saying that this notebook had been the rough draft for his book, Knowles started questioning the class about the changes they make after they write something. After about fifteen seconds of silence one kid mumbled something about spelling and punctuation. Knowles called that correcting and wrote it on the board. Above correcting, he then wrote think, rough draft, add or subtract.

"It’s vitally important to add or take away and reorganize before you start correcting," Knowles said, adding that one way of revising and reorganizing involved looking for things that are alike and different in a paper’s subject matter. Then, he asked the class to get out the drafts they had been working on and to look for likenesses and differences. No one could find any for a few minutes. Finally, though, one boy told Knowles love was a lot like growing up. "Great idea!" Knowles said, trying to be encouraging. But the boy had nothing more to say.

"Let’s pair up and look for likenesses and differences in each other’s papers," Knowles suggested. "Try to get your partner to put all the likeness he can find together, so you can put some of those in a single paragraph."
Desks scraped the floor; friends waved and called to each other. It took about three minutes for everyone to find an appropriate partner. Knowles himself paired up with the boy who was writing about love. I listened to two girls talk to each other about their finger nails for a few minutes. Soon, the bell rang and the students dashed into the hallway. Knowles was still talking and writing with his partner back in the corner of the room. Joe, who had been walking around looking over his students' shoulders, walked up to me and shrugged his shoulders.

"How can you get them to revise when they don't want to write in the first place?" We both pondered his question as we watched his second period class enter the room.

Knowles and I discussed revision strategies later that same day in the bar of the Blue Moon after he talked with teachers during an in-service session that dealt with editing techniques. During that session, Knowles had handed out reams of what he called revision checklists that listed the kinds of problems and errors kids should look for in their papers. Knowles looked tired as he loosened his tie and sipped his St. Pauli Girl beer. He had every reason to be tired, for he had just talked for two hours, explaining over and over again how kids could learn to find their own errors to a group of teachers that were quite skeptical of this approach.
"How can my kids find mistakes if they don't know what they're looking for?" One teacher had asked Knowles this question three times during the course of the session. And her attitude seemed to epitomize the way most of the teachers felt. "My kids can't do that; they don't even know what a comma's for." I overheard an older teacher whisper this comment to a colleague as Knowles read aloud from one of his checklists. At times, Knowles had become visibly impatient with the teachers. In fact, at one point during his talk he turned and asked one noisy cluster of teachers to keep quiet and listen to what he was saying.

Knowles had interspersed his revision check list speech with lots of anecdotes about students he knew from Alabama who could correct all their mistakes once they had "gotten the hang of it." But the teachers I had listened to during the session seemed unimpressed with Knowles' stories of student success.

"I'd like to meet some of these kids Dr. Knowles talks about," a young male teacher from Southwest said as he headed for his car after the session.

I fingered the stem of my wine glass and began to ask Knowles about his anecdotal style. Frankly, I was curious about why he had brushed aside the teachers' concerns, choosing to plunge ahead with his stories and check lists. Flashing me a dimpled grin, Knowles was quick to agree with me.
"I didn't tell them all there is to know about revision and editing, John," he began. "You just can't do that. They don't want to hear it."

For the next forty-five minutes, Alfred Knowles explained to me the reasons behind his approach to in-service presentations. "You've got to entertain them, John, keep them smiling if you can. Then, you can throw in a little information once in a while. If you try it any other way, you're going to lose a lot of teachers who don't want to think about theory or anything else."

Alfred went on to relate how he got his start in the educational consulting business. Learning across the table, he folded his hands in a prayer-like position and told me what a struggle it had been for him when he first approached public school administrators. "Don't scare them off with your expertise, John. Keep quiet and listen. That's the way to get along with curriculum directors and teachers, too."

As Alfred continued, he told of losing one opportunity after another because he had said too much when going after a consulting job. Finally, a "good ole boy" administrator from Alabama had pulled Alfred aside one day and warned him to keep things simple.

"After I took his advice, I started making a living at this." Alfred looked toward the waitress and ordered another beer.
Nowhere had Knowles' anecdotal style and keep-things-simple approach been more evident that in the library of North Tappan high school that previous November. The combined junior English classes of Francine Bennet and Penny West had assembled in this large and musty old room at 2:00 in the afternoon. There were many conflicts in Knowles' schedule that day, so both teachers had decided to put their classes together in the library; otherwise Knowles would not have had time to work with both sets of students.

"I've written a little story I want to read you all," Knowles began. "We all have had an experience in our lives that we'd like to share with others, haven't we? What I've got is an experience I want to share with you."

Unaccustomed to their different classroom, unfamiliar teacher, and new classmates, many students eyed each other with puzzled stares as Knowles spoke. One girl gazed intently at a large Reading Is Fun poster that hung behind the librarian's desk. It had grabbed my attention, too, for it was the only bright decorative object on the cracked, pea-green library walls.

Francine and Penny stood next to each other beside the current periodical rack, their eyes continually darting back and forth from Knowles to their students. It was as if they were watching McEnroe play Connors in the championship match at Wimbledon. In the meantime, Knowles had begun reading aloud from his tattered spiral notebook. What he read
described an accident that had happened to him when he had been eight years old. As the story unfolded, the students learned that Knowles' older brother, a somewhat domineering kid, had goaded Knowles into using a wooden slat from a refrigerator carton as a make-shift diving board. Max, the older brother, had placed one end of the slat on the front porch, allowing the other end to jet out over Mother's flower bed. As Max stood on the porch-end of the slat, he watched Alfred bounce up and down on the other end.

"Thwang, thwang, thwang. CRACK." Knowles read. "And as I lay in Mom's crushed flowers, I began to cry. Max ran into the house to hide, and I sat there in the dirt watching my white gym shorts get redder and redder." There, the story ended.

"That's gross," one girl said loudly as she grimaced and looked toward Francine to gauge her teacher's reaction. "Is he talking about blood or what?" a boy asked me.

I shrugged my shoulders and watched Knowles start to draw circles on the portable chalk board. After he had drawn several circles and the fifty kids had quieted down a bit, Knowles asked them if there was anything in his story that he would like to know more about.

"How about my brother?" Knowles prodded. "Do any of you have a brother like mine? Did I describe him well enough for you?"
After a lengthy silence, a boy in a football jersey said that he'd like to know just how mean Knowles' brother really was. Then the boy laughed and told the girl next to him that the brother could not have been too mean or he would have beaten Alfred with the slat instead of running into the house.

"Good," said Knowles. "Let me circle the part where I describe my brother, so I'll know to add more information about him." Knowles then asked the students what they saw on the chalkboard. No one answered, so he answered his own question. "They're circles, aren't they?"

The girl who had made the "that's gross" comment rolled her eyes toward the ceiling. Francine and Penny had quit looking at their students and were whispering to each other. They had moved from the periodical rack and now were stationed next to the door at the front of the room. Penny was making circular motions with her index finger as she talked to Francine.

By this time, thirteen minutes of the period had passed, and Knowles seemed to sense that he had better ask the students to write something soon if there was to be time for them to do some circling themselves.

"I want you all to spend ten minutes writing about an incident you'd like to share with your classmates. Just write quickly, and don't worry about mistakes. Can you do that?" Knowles' eyes scanned the room, searching for nods of
approval. He then announced that he would spend the next ten minutes adding information about his brother to the piece he had written. "Get out a sheet of paper and write as fast as you can. Then pair up with someone and have them circle parts they want to know more about." Concluding his instructions with these words, Knowles reopened his spiral notebook and began to write.

"Just try to get something down on paper while Dr. Knowles writes." Francine was now addressing the class. "I'll help you get an idea if you can't think of one."

Francine, Penny, and I walked around the room, talking with students who seemed to be having difficulty. I spent five minutes with a skinny blonde girl who could not get started. Finally, we decided that she could write about how her mother had taught her to cook dinner for her family. I asked her what she remembered most about this experience. "I used to burn everything," she said. After another minute of discussion, she began to write about some spaghetti she had burned once when she had let the water boil for too long.

Soon, the ten-minute time limit had expired, and Knowles looked up from his notebook. "Pair up now and read each other's papers. Use a pencil to circle what you'd like to hear more about." Knowles reemphasized his instructions by pointing to the circles he had drawn on his own paper.

Since many students had not written very much, it did not take long for the students to read their partner's work.
As I listened to the eight students seated around the library table next to me, I heard lots of talk about not having enough time to write. No one that I could see had placed any circles on a paper.

Knowles soon asked for volunteers to read what they had circled. No one volunteered, so Knowles began calling on students at random. After three students said that they could not find anything to circle, Knowles told the class about a third-grader he had seen that morning who had written about her cat having kittens. This particular student had then added information to her story that detailed what each kitten looked like.

"That's what I want you to work toward," Knowles said. "Try to do what the third-grader did. But first try to just write about what you're interested in and get something down." He wrote Get It Down on the chalkboard and spent the five minutes of remaining class time reading what he had just written about his brother Max.

In a two-hour interview I conducted with Francine late in the school year, she reflected for a while on what happened that November day.

"The first thing we have to think about is building a rapport with our students when we teach writing," she told me. "Kids, especially teenagers, have so much going on in their lives—hates, depressions, loves. We've got to find out about what's going on with them before they'll ever
really write anything for us." As Francine continued she asserted that Knowles' efforts with her students failed miserably because he made no effort to show her students he cared about them.

"He came in with a simple process he was going to pre-impose, a model laid in concrete," Francine maintained. "He spent very little time trying to deal with how hard it is for my students to write in class and why they don't want to critique each other's writing when they do write. The fact is that they don't want to do these things because they see no reason to. Telling cute stories about Alabama and talking about what third-graders do just didn't make it with my kids."

Francine sounded almost apologetic when she told me what she said to Knowles about his work with her students. "I did say something to him. I probably offended him, but I said very politely that maybe you didn't have time to build a rapport--things didn't go very well."

Penny, a veteran teacher with twelve years of experience, also talked with me about her impressions of Knowles' teaching. "The whole thing just bombed," she told me, adding that she had had big hopes for Knowles at the beginning of the school year.

"He just didn't tell my kids or me enough," Penny continued, banging the table where we sat to emphasize her point. "It's really hard for me to put my finger on it. But
it seemed like he just jumped in and started doing his process. My kids and I both need more rationale. Dr. Knowles just didn't say here's what we're going to do, and here's why we're doing it."

Penny seemed convinced that Knowles' inability to articulate his rationale confused her students. "The day he came to work with our kids, he wasn't dealing with dummies. Francine and I both have accelerated, advanced kids. And he talked down to them, John. The kids were just not relating to him at all. Francine and I looked around. You could just see the looks on their faces—as if they were saying who the heck is this guy, and what is he doing here, and who does he think we are little kids or what?"

Connie Post, who taught seniors at Vicksburg Local, was perhaps even more blunt than either Penny or Francine concerning her disappointment with Knowles' approach. In fact, she actually committed herself to paper, writing me an angry letter about the in-services that she asked me to share with Jack Martin and Knowles himself. The letter was dated February 1, 1985. Obviously, Connie had reflected for several months about the value of the in-services before dropping her letter in the mail.

Connie began by criticizing Knowles for a memo he had sent teachers that contained a "multiplicity of errors." She saw "enormous irony" in these errors, considering that proofreading was a major component of Knowles' writing
process. But she soon dismissed these matter of mechanics and began focusing on the substance of the in-services themselves: "Most disappointing to me," she wrote, "is that these seminars are not exciting, enriching experiences, either from a personal or a professional perspective."

Continuing to vent her feelings, Connie maintained that Knowles had offered the Vicksburg English faculty "little useful advice for our classrooms." Her letter culminated with the argument that Knowles needed to be much more "sophisticated" in his approach, especially when addressing high school teachers who already possessed a solid grounding in teaching composition. Having earned an M.A. in English education from a local state university, Connie herself was certainly a teacher who was fairly well-read in the areas of rhetoric and composition. From talking with her several times during the fall, I knew that she was familiar with Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations as well as the advice contained in Aristotle's Rhetoric.

After I received her letter in early February, I made a point of becoming better acquainted with Connie. And before long, we began to develop a fairly strong friendship. By mid-April, she had called my office several times just to chat about her students, the books she was reading, and the movies she had gone to see. As I got to know her, her point about Knowles' lack of sophistication began to make a great deal of sense to me. Here was a woman who not only knew some
composition theory, but also was conversant with the plays of Shakespeare, the films of Bergman, and the novels of Atwood. She was obviously used to dealing with complex ideas of a very high order.

In an hour-long interview I taped with her in early June, Connie elaborated on the notion of sophistication that she had mentioned in her February letter. "One of the things that frustrated me so much, John, was that this was one of the few times that curriculum directors had worked together like this on a major project. I was really looking forward to it. I didn't enter it with a bad attitude—I really wanted to learn something. And boy did I ever feel that Knowles was repetitious. He presented, honestly, maybe fifteen minutes worth of something of any value at all, in two hours."

Essentially, Connie not only felt that Knowles dealt with the same ideas over and over again in each in-service, but also throughout the school year.

I'm not that slow, John," she said. "Once we had heard Knowles' speech in September, there was just no point in hearing the same things again and again every time we'd go to the Blue Moon."

It did not appear that Connie actually objected to the idea that writing could be taught in a way similar to what Knowles proposed. Instead, what seemed to bother her most was Knowles' inability to go beyond the simplistic idea that
one specific step in the writing process should always follow another in lock-step fashion.

"I don't have any objections to some aspects of the process. They can be very useful. But once you understand the idea of process, it's very, very hard to sit there and listen to that over and over again. Pre-writing, revising, editing--these are all well and good, but they don't always fit a particular student's style, nor do they always come in a certain order when you're writing about lots of different things. Dr. Knowles just never acknowledged any of this, and many of us just ended up getting bored with the whole thing. There aren't just a few of us malcontents. Many others I talked to felt the same way."

When Connie paused for a moment, I asked her what kind of complexity and substance was lacking in the Knowles' inservices. She thought hard for a few seconds and replied in this way:

"I'm not sure what I would have preferred, John. It's just that what he was saying was nothing new. It wasn't an innovative theory or anything. And somehow, I felt that in meetings that lasted so long, there ought to be something more, something new. As things went along, I didn't feel it was time well spent."

Karen Graham, a teacher of Advanced Placement English from Lincoln Local, echoed Connie's views when we talked one March day in the lounge of Lincoln High. I had noticed that
Karen had stopped attending the in-services, and I was curious about why she had dropped out of the project. She had seemed extremely enthusiastic about Knowles at the beginning of the school year.

"I just lost interest, I guess," Karen said as she sprinkled pepper on the pasty-looking macaroni and cheese she was having for lunch.

"Novice teachers may be getting something from Dr. Knowles, but those of us who’ve taught for a while expected something new and different. I know I did."

Mentioning her college-bound seniors, Karen continued by pointing out that she had to help her students think critically about what they were writing. "Dr. Knowles just never addressed this issue." Karen said, shoving her cafeteria tray to the center of the table. "His presentations were just too canned and simplistic to be of much help to me."

For a few minutes, she talked about what her students could already do and about what they needed help with. "My kids can write and rewrite until they have a perfect paragraph. The problem is that they have trouble saying something in that paragraph. Fluency isn’t a problem with them and neither is revising or proofreading. What is a problem is getting them to think about the significance of what they’ve said. The don’t see any reason to do that, and
that's what I need help with. Dr. Knowles' process just wasn't helping me with this."

It was not, however, just veteran teachers such as Karen, Penny, and Francine who felt a need for Knowles to deal with the complexities of the composing process. Joe Kraft, whose classroom I had visited in March, was (to use Karen's term) a novice teacher. In fact, he had possessed just two years of classroom experience when the 1984-1985 school term had begun.

I had many opportunities to talk with Joe during my tenure as the Tappan County Language Arts Consultant. Early in the school year when I had visited Westridge High to train teachers in composition competency testing, Joe had gone out of his way to ingratiate himself with me. After my training session, Joe had taken me aside to discuss his recent visit to the Breadloaf writing conference, held each summer in New England. There, he had discussed writing with James Moffett, John Irving, and Peter Elbow. Joe, who aspired to be a novelist, was eager to tell me what he had learned from these men. Throughout the school year, he continued to discuss writing with me, occasionally inviting me out for a drink to sound me out about his latest story ideas.

Joe was certainly a trusted informant when I questioned him at length one afternoon in June about the Knowles writing in-services. And one of the first questions I posed was
related to Karen's observation that novice teachers may have gained more useful information from Knowles than the veteran teachers did.

"What Knowles did is make a lot of money," Joe began. "He deserved it, of course. I know he worked hard the weeks he was here. But his ideas were no panacea. And compared to what I've heard at places like Breadloaf, he was damned superficial."

I stopped Joe as soon as he said the word superficial and asked him to elaborate. We were sitting in my office, and his eyes scanned the bookshelf that stood next to my desk. Spotting Knowles' eighth grade composition text, Joe pointed to it and began his reply.

"There's stuff in his book there, John, stuff on how students can publish their writing. You know, he talks about book days, and display cases, and bulletin boards. Well, that's all right. But remember the meeting in April when he talked to us about publishing at the Blue Moon? He said exactly the same thing that's in his textbook. That's what I mean by superficial."

"What else could he have done? What would have been less superficial?" I asked.

Joe hedged for a minute by saying that Knowles was a well-intentioned person and that it was difficult to appeal to so many different teachers.

"I think Dr. Knowles had a tough job and probably did
all he could," Joe continued to look toward my bookshelf as he spoke. "But when you've got high school teachers gathered to hear about student publishing, you don't want to talk to them about book fairs and display cases. Most teachers don't have time for those things. I mean the issue is getting kids to care enough about what they write to want to share it with somebody else. Putting what kids write on a bulletin board or covering it with a cute cover and putting it on a table doesn't make the writing any better or the kids care about it more. That's what I'm interested in, and the entire year Dr. Knowles acted like our kids already care. They just don't, and for him to suggest they do and say let's all share our writing, kids, that's all just pretty superficial to me."

On numerous occasions during the school year, I had discussed the concerns of teachers like Joe and Connie with Knowles and with curriculum directors from the local school districts. As early as November, it was evident to all concerned with the project that many high school teachers were not responding well to Knowles' approach. In fact, the attendance report sent to all administrators after the November session has caused a great deal of concern, for it showed that just twenty high school teachers appeared at the Blue Moon on the evening of November 15th. This number fell far short of the fifty-six originally slated to attend.

Freda Smith, Southwest's curriculum director, was particularly concerned with the dwindling attendance. All
seven members of her high school English faculty had signed up for Knowles' sessions back in September, but just one of them had managed to attend the November meeting. Considering that she was restructuring her district's composition curriculum to reflect Knowles' process approach, Freda's concern was understandable. As she had told me many times, she was counting on Knowles to show her high school teachers exactly what to do as they tried out process-oriented teaching techniques with their students. On one level, she seemed to view her teachers' poor response to Knowles as a rejection of her curricular goals. In early December, she discussed this issue and others with me during an hour-long telephone conversation. She had just been looking over the November attendance report, and her displeasure with what she saw was apparent as soon as I picked up the phone.

"What can we do to improve attendance at Alfred's meetings, John?" Freda asked. "I'm looking at the attendance sheet you sent me, and I don't like what I see. My high school folks just aren't showing up. I can't believe they're rejecting the writing process we've all worked so hard to encourage."

I replied to Freda by explaining to her what I had already been sensing: many high school teachers simply did not relate well to Knowles' anecdotal style and atheoretical advice.
"He's doing a good job handing out teaching tips," I continued. "But several teachers have told me they need him to grapple with more theory and substance."

For some reason, Freda did not seem to think that her teachers wanted to deal with theoretical issues. Instead, she pointed out that high school teachers already felt they "know all there is to know."

"What they need more than anything else is more practical classroom tips, don't you think?" Freda asked. "Have you talked with Alfred about all this?"

Indeed, I had talked with Alfred about the failure of high school teachers to attend his meetings in greater numbers. He was naturally concerned about poor attendance as much as anyone else. After all, he was the one who looked bad when few teachers showed up to hear his presentation.

Interestingly enough, Alfred's views concerning the high school teachers' poor response were similar to Freda's. As a matter of fact, every time we discussed the Thursday night high school group, Alfred would simply shrug his shoulders and say something about their know-it-all attitude.

"I've had this same problem with secondary teachers before." Alfred told me one day as we were driving to the Blue Moon.

It was a bitterly cold February afternoon, and I could see Alfred's breath turn into ice crystals on the windshield as he spoke. "You know how they are. They've read a lot of
novels, and they have a bit of an elitist attitude. All we
 can do is keep encouraging those who are showing up. They're
 the ones who are willing to try new ideas."

Several weeks later, I was visiting Gail Smith, a
teacher from Timberwood Local who had asked me to help her
prepare a course outline for her junior honors English class.
After we had discussed approaches to Thoreau and Hawthorne, I
questioned her about Knowles and her response to his in-
services. She had attended the first three meetings but had
been absent form the Blue Moon since November. Since she
seemed to typify the well-read English teacher who, according
to Knowles, might have an elitist attitude toward in-
services, I was particularly interested in discovering what
she thought of the comments Knowles had made a few weeks
before.

"The trouble with these in-services is that everybody
blames everybody else for their failure." Gail spoke with
conviction, and her eyes stared directly into mine as she
spewed out more than a little anger and frustration.

"Dr. Knowles is probably a good person, but he doesn't
believe us when we tell him we need more from him. Instead,
he tells you that we think we're too smart. It's a classic
case of blaming the victim if you ask me. And the
administrators who set these things up are even worse. They
hire somebody they think is safe, hoping he'll get us to do
what they want. And when we don't respond to the same old
crap, they act as if we're too stupid to appreciate what they're doing for us. If administrators think they can tell us how to teach by hiring consultants, they're the ones who are acting stupidly."

I asked Gail if she would attend the Knowles' in-services more often if she felt he would give her more rationale for using the techniques.

"Maybe," she replied. "I would like more intellectual stimulation from him. But really I'm feeling a little rebellious this year, and I just don't want to go to any more in-services that are going to tell me what to do. I've got enough of that to contend with right here at school with a principal that's crazy over lesson plans."

Before long, Gail said she had to rush home to cook dinner for her children. I watched her load her Literary Guild book bag with folders full of student papers. And as I walked her to her car, I marvelled at the energy she possessed. She had already dealt with 150 children that day. Now, she was hurrying home to deal with three more. It was no wonder, I thought, that she might resent having additional demands placed on her at school--demands to attend in-services, demands to write new course outlines, and demands to detail in her lesson plans how she was going to teach the writing process to her students. In her life as a teacher, mother, and part-time graduate student, there was "almost no time to do what's important to me." It was no wonder that
she wanted to maintain a strong sense of autonomy as a teacher in charge of her own classroom. And it was no wonder that she might feel her autonomy threatened by anyone who had the audacity to tell her how to teach her students.
CHAPTER IV

FREEDOM VS. CONTROL: GRADED COURSES OF STUDY, COMPOSITION COMPETENCY, AND THE COMPOSING PROCESS

It was a Tuesday morning in early March when Nick Wise, Tappan County's Assistant Superintendent, called me and asked me to come to his office to discuss the Alfred Knowles in-services. During our short phone conversation, he mentioned that he had been hearing some "unfavorable feedback" about Knowles from local school district administrators. Grabbing my briefcase and some files containing information on the in-services, I hurried over to Nick's office.

Normally, Nick was an amiable man whose face was perpetually creased from smiling. But as I entered his office, I could tell that he was in no mood to smile on this particular morning. He greeted me with a terse "have a chair, John" and stared at some notes he had scribbled on a legal pad. Jack Morgan, my immediate superior, was already seated in front of Nick's large mahogany desk. He, too, did not appear in the mood for friendly banter. Following Nick's lead, he mumbled a good morning and gazed at a legal pad of his own that was positioned on his lap. Sitting down next to Jack, I opened my briefcase and focused my eyes on the
photographs of Nick's smiling children that were displayed on the long credenza at the rear of the office.

When Nick finally spoke, he asked me a pointed question that caught me by surprise. "Do you perceive Dr. Knowles as trying to do what our curriculum directors want him to do?"

Before I had the chance to reply, Nick began answering for me by detailing what he had heard from various local administrators. They were concerned, it seemed, about what Nick called a "lack of correlation and articulation" between the in-service meetings and the new composition competency testing program that was being implemented in most Tappan County school districts. Soon, Jack spoke up, adding that curriculum directors had told him that Knowles also needed to directly address the new composition graded course of study that had recently been developed by a large committee of Tappan County teachers.

"I've talked with Alfred about these concerns," Nick said, "and he assured me that he would try to deal with them when he visits us next time. Would you follow through on this and work with him?"

I briefly defended Knowles, stressing that the ideas discussed in the in-services were directly related to both competency testing and the graded course of study. Both Nick and Jack said they knew that Knowles was doing his best, but certain curriculum directors simply wanted these issues dealt with more specifically.
Nick ended our meeting by saying that he was not asking Knowles to change his style. "Many teachers like what Dr. Knowles is doing," Nick pointed out. "But, well, certain curriculum directors feel their teachers need to see how what they're expected to teach is related to our testing program and curriculum cycle. Maybe this'll help boost attendance, too, especially among our secondary people."

Back in my own office a few minutes later, I placed a call to Knowles in Alabama. In front of me were copies of the analytic categories that teachers were using to evaluate student competence in composition and a draft of the new composition graded course of study. Knowles' wife answered the phone, telling me that Alfred was busy with his horses. In a few minutes, though, Alfred's voice greeted me. "I hope it's important, John. I was in the middle of castrating an Arabian." Alfred chortled for a second and then paused, waiting for me to reply.

Stifling an urge to inquire about horse castration techniques, I began to relate what had just been discussed in my meeting with Nick and Jack. Alfred did not seem at all surprised by what I told him. It appeared that Nick had indeed already apprised Alfred of the curriculum directors' concerns.

"Relax, John. We're already dealing with these issues." Alfred's voice resonated with control and precision as he continued. "Frank Downing talked with me, John, and so has
Freda Smith and Nick. What you heard this morning is nothing new."

The upshot of Alfred's point was simple: For months, administrators had been asking Alfred to deal directly with testing and curricular issues at his in-service meetings. And for months, Alfred had been assuring them that he was doing just that. "Don't worry, John. Next time, I'll just say a little more about these things. That'll keep everyone happy. We've been doing what they want all along, but curriculum directors have a need to see things laid out in black and white. I don't think there's a real problem."

At this point, I stopped Alfred and stressed that Nick and Jack had seemed very upset during our meeting. "If there isn't a problem, I wonder why everything was so grim this morning." I was genuinely seeking any insight Alfred might have to offer.

"Get used to it, John," Alfred replied. "You're right there in Tappan County, and I'm here in Alabama. When someone's a little unhappy you're the one who'll hear about it. Don't take it personally. It'll be all right." After dispensing this bit of advice, Alfred hung up the telephone, leaving behind the problems of Tappan County and returning to the problems of his horses.

That afternoon, I learned from Jack that a phone call he had received from Cynthia Gorsuch, the curriculum director at Hamilton Local Schools, had precipitated our morning meeting.
Like Freda Smith, Cynthia worked for one of the largest and most influential districts in Tappan County. "Cynthia has several secondary people who are disenchanted with Alfred," Jack said. "I conferred with Nick about her concerns, and he thought it best that we talk things over. Nick has a lot of respect for Cynthia."

As our conversation progressed, I questioned Jack about the exact nature of Cynthia's concerns. He was, however, more than a little evasive. "Why don't you give Cynthia a call yourself?" Jack suggested. "I'm sure she'll be able to clarify things. All I know is that she seemed upset with what Dr. Knowles is doing."

Near the end of the work day, I followed Jack's suggestion. After waiting on hold for several minutes, I heard Cynthia's twangy, high-pitched voice on the line. "How you doing, John? What's up?" I quickly began telling her about what I had learned from Jack earlier that day. But it did not take long for Cynthia to interrupt me.

"Christ, John," she complained. "I can't say anything to Jack--he always gets so bent out of shape. I'm not upset with anybody. It's just that my teachers have so damned much to do this year. They're doing the competency testing, the graded course of study, and these workshops with Dr. Knowles. I just want to make sure that we tie everything together, so nobody gets confused. My teachers are going crazy. I mean they've got to be shown and told what they're
supposed to do with this writing thing. We don't need a bunch of teachers going off in a lot of different directions."

For Cynthia, "tying everything together" meant that Knowles ought to bring copies of the competency test and graded course of study with him to his in-service sessions and refer to them explicitly throughout his evening presentations. "We got to get in gear so everybody knows when to do what when they teach the writing process," Cynthia added before ending our telephone conversation. And judging from the sentiments that Alfred had heard expressed by Frank Downing and Freda Smith, Cynthia was not alone in her desire for uniform, centralized testing procedures and writing curricula that could be integrated into Knowles' sessions.

The documents that embodied these administrators' hopes for centralized control over the teaching of writing were fairly simple in design. The competency test, for instance, used an analytic, criterion-referenced scale to judge students' abilities in seven pre-selected categories that had been deemed important to good writing by a group of Tappan County teachers and administrators. Here is a list of the categories used to evaluate the writing of high school students:
1. **Intent:** This category refers to a sense of purpose appropriate to the topic on which the student is writing.

2. **Ideas:** This category stresses creativity and originality.

3. **Organization:** Basically, this category is concerned with a student's ability to write a strong introduction, body, and conclusion.

4. **Word Choice:** A student's ability to use a variety of words is judged under this category.

5. **Use of Sentences:** This category refers to the variety of sentence patterns.

6. **Mechanics:** Correct capitalization and punctuation are stressed here.

7. **Usage and Spelling:** A student's ability to avoid slang, to use clear pronoun reference, and to display correct subject/verb agreement are gauged under this category. Of course, misspelled words are taken into account here also.

The testing procedure itself, as it was practiced by most Tappan County districts, was as straightforward as these categories. Every fall, students were assigned a topic (or prompt as some called it) to write about in class. The student papers were then collected and read by the teacher-evaluators who assigned each student a numerical score in each of the seven categories. In this way, all student
writers were numerically ranked according to how well they
spelled, how well they chose their words, and so forth. If
students were judged poor in a given area, they would receive
a one. A two signified a below average performance; three
and four were reserved for good and outstanding efforts,
respectively. After the scores were tallied and the students
ranked, those who received a three or below in a given
category were to be singled out by their teachers and given
special help (intervention and remediation were words often
used by administrators to describe this helping process).

Linked to this testing procedure by administrative fiat
was the composition graded course of study. Essentially,
this document contained a lengthy list of composition skills
that pre-specified what students should be learning about
writing at a given grade level. For instance, the list
prescribed plenty of self-expressive writing for fifth
graders, whereas eleventh graders were to be composing
expository prose. (These modes, by the way, corresponded
with the kind of writing students were expected to compose
during the competency test.)

The course of study by no means confined itself to these
matters, however. Punctuation, usage, point-of-view,
organizational patterns—all of these (and more) were listed
in an effort to show teachers exactly when they should teach
what.
Perhaps Frank Downing, the curriculum director from Vicksburg Local, typified the administrative stance toward this document. During many conversations I had with him during the course of the school-year, he continually emphasized that teachers should know the course of study by rote. ('Sleep and eat with it' were words he sometimes used.) Then, according to Frank, they would be able to instantly pinpoint what skill to teach a particular student who was facing the upcoming competency test or who might simply be having problems with writing. The problems, of course, would be diagnosed after looking at a student's test results. In other words, the course of study and competency test were linked in an unending series of causal chains: Teachers were to use the course of study to determine the grade-level skills needed to do well on the test; then, they were to use the test to determine what skills needed to be taught. Presumably, this process would continue until all Tappan County students were deemed competent enough in all skill areas to graduate from high school. Since students were to be tested every year, being judged competent on any given test would apparently do little to halt this teach-test-teach procedure. After all, teachers and students alike always had the next test and its attendant skills to worry about.

As early as September, I had learned just how important the competency test and course of study were in
administration plans to control what was occurring in the classroom.

It was at that time, for instance, that Frank Downing had told me how a strong, centralized curriculum and testing program could help end the "free reign" that many teachers had had in devising their pedagogical strategies. And Freda Smith, as I have already mentioned, had echoed Frank's concerns throughout the year, often calling me and other county office personnel to voice her views. Not until March, however, did I fully begin to appreciate the extreme need many administrators possessed—some seemed to feel it was their responsibility to control almost all aspects of classroom life. The somber meeting with Nick and Jack had given me an inkling of how many people felt, and so had my telephone conversation with Cynthia Gorsuch. But it was a conversation with Susan Hughes, one of Cynthia's English teachers from Lincoln Local, that began to heighten my awareness of how teachers were responding to administrators' demands for strict control over curricular matters.

Two days after talking with Cynthia, I stopped at Lincoln High School to deliver some composition texts that Susan wanted to examine. Arriving several moments before Susan's free period, I stood at the rear of her classroom and watched her work with her students until the bell rang. She was pointing her finger toward some sentences she had written on the chalkboard, stressing how easy it was to combine these
short, separate phrasings into one long sentence. Her students sat at rapt attention, their eyes focused on the board. Susan was short and pale, with a clump of unruly dark hair. But her bright plaid dress had been carefully picked from the pages of a Carroll Reed catalogue, and her strong voice warmed the room with its good natured, self-effacing laughter. It was clear that this tiny woman with the unruly hair was in total control of her classroom. And judging from the way students bunched around her after class, it was also clear that she was well liked.

After the last of her straggling students had slammed the classroom door, Susan expelled a long breath and turned toward me. Flashing me an impish half-grin, she dropped into the chair behind her desk, pulled off her loafers, and wiggled her toes. "Well, John, what brings you to the halls of Lincoln High? Bringing me more edicts to follow?" Her hand patted a copy of the composition course of study that lay on the corner of her desk. I pushed aside a pile of S. E. Hinton novels and sat down on an old library table that was positioned behind Susan's desk.

"I'm only half-kidding, you know ... about these edicts," Susan said.

I asked her to elaborate, thinking that she wanted someone to listen to her for a while. I was right. For the next twenty minutes, Susan vented her feelings about a wide range of concerns. Most of the time, though, she addressed
the county-wide emphasis on writing instruction and the way she saw it evolving. She was more than a little unhappy with the situation to say the least. For instance, high school teachers are usually reluctant to criticize their colleagues, especially in front of those they do not work with on a day-to-day basis. But at one point, Susan complained about her department chair. According to Susan, this woman was continually "butting in" by placing endless reams of handouts in the English teachers' mailboxes—handouts that contained lists of sentence-combining exercises and various sentence-revision strategies. "She's got this thing for sentence structure," Susan said. "Students score a little low on the sentence variety part of the competency test, and she goes crazy with all this stuff," Susan motioned toward the sentence activity that was still on the chalkboard.

She was fairly quick, however, to overlook her department chair's transgressions and to focus her indignation on Lincoln High's principal. "Bill's doing a lot of this," Susan maintained, referring to her long-time principal who was a former English teacher himself. As Susan continued, she mentioned that Bill had begun sitting in on bi-weekly English Department meetings in order to stress the importance of composition skills to his teachers. "Bill's okay in lots of ways, John," Susan said. "But his idea of teaching writing is to show kids what they did wrong. He's really into this sentence stuff, pushing it all the time."
Glancing toward the textbooks I had brought, Susan laughed. "Those grammar books you've got—Bill asked me to ask you for them."

After talking openly for a while, Susan began to wonder whether she should have been so candid. "Cynthia runs a pretty tight ship," Susan hesitated, then continued. "You know, airing dirty linen and all that. That's a no-no here in Lincoln." Having said that much, Susan, an eight-year veteran at Lincoln, reflected for a moment on Cynthia's first year as a curriculum director. "Maybe she'll calm down in a year or two," Susan said. "But now, watch out. She's got us all coding our lesson plans to the course of study, and we've got to give them to Bill every week. I'm not used to all this." Susan waved at the chalkboard once again. "Teaching writing is tough enough without everybody thinking they're an expert and telling you what to do."

Before I left, I asked Susan how the Knowles in-services had affected her. Her attendance had been erratic, and I wanted her honest opinion. "It's all part of the same thing, I guess Susan glanced at the clock to see how long she had." before her next class. "What he says is okay, but it's just one more person telling us what to do." I stopped Susan for a moment and told her of Cynthia's recent comments to Jack and me. "You mean she wants Dr. Knowles to do more?" Susan winced and then began flipping through the pages of her lesson plan book.
Later in the school year, another teacher voiced views somewhat similar to Susan's. Early in June, I took my tape recorder and a supply of questions to Edith Snouffer's house. Edith, in her thirty-fifth year of teaching at Greene Township High School, had quite a vantage point from which to view the effectiveness of policies and programs emanating from Tappan County administrative offices. As she once told me, she had seen "dozens" of principals, superintendents, and curriculum directors come and go during her long career as an English teacher. Of particular interest to me was her insight into the motives that guided the actions of Nick Wise, Jack Morgan, and Freda Smith. Edith had known each of these people when they were teachers themselves. In fact, Nick had once taught in a classroom across the hall from Edith's, and he had also served as her principal. Unlike many teachers who seemed to view administrators as distant, detached bureaucrats, Edith knew many of them quite intimately.

I began my interview with Edith by asking her for her basic impressions of the in-services. Overall, she seemed to have enjoyed the sessions, saying that she always found it "very nice to get together with other teachers." As far as Knowles himself was concerned, Edith called him "quite harmless." Pressed to elaborate on this comment, she mentioned that many of her colleagues found the in-services threatening, but she had not. "Many of my friends at Greene
felt their autonomy threatened a bit," Edith said. "Everyone saw the testing coming and the new course of study, and they felt it was too much." Prodding her a little, I asked her why she was not threatened. "I value my autonomy too much to let some nice little man from Alabama worry me," she stated.

Edith had little to say about the content of Knowles' sessions. (She had been one of the few to attend most of them.) She did mention, however, that she enjoyed Knowles' use of metaphor. "His comparing the following of his writing process to following a strict diet was clever," Edith said, adding that Knowles did not mean his comparison to sound as prescriptive as it did. "I suppose many folks say his attitude is condescending," Edith continued. "But I simply tried to enjoy the meetings for what they were . . . gatherings of people interested in the same thing."

Soon, our conversation drifted to Edith's views of teaching writing. "So many intangible factors make a good writer," she maintained. "The important thing is for teachers to feel free to experiment, to try out new things." I pointed out to Edith that we were once again addressing the issue of autonomy. "Don't you think that what Nick Wise and Freda Smith want is the opposite of teacher autonomy?" I asked.

Edith squeezed the juice of a lemon slice into a glass of iced tea and looked at me with a twisted, puzzled smile.
"That's an interesting point," she said. "Nick has always been one to organize things to death and Freda is even worse." After talking about the woes of being an administrator for a minute, Edith stopped abruptly and looked at me for a moment. "I'd like to answer your question, John," she said, "but it's all so complicated." Edith paused for a moment, toyed with her wedding ring, then continued.

"Administrators like Nick and Freda feel their job is to control us as if we were children. They'd never admit that, so they do things indirectly. They hire outside consultants and write curriculum as if they were writing laws."

Edith paused again, and I asked her if the laws and consultants bothered her. "Sometimes," she said, "I know they bothered many of the teachers this year. We don't need to feel so much pressure to conform." Finally, I asked Edith what she did when the pressure was too great and her autonomy too heavily threatened. "It's simple," she replied. "I close my door and pretend to go along."

On the evening of March twenty-first, Edith Snouffer, along with eight other Tappan County English teachers, sat at a large rectangular table in the banquet room at the Blue Moon Restaurant. This was the evening on which Alfred Knowles was to integrate his ideas about the course of study and competency test into his presentation. Very few teachers, however, would hear what he had to say. Attendance at the meetings had reached its lowest level. Still, I was
watching Knowles with deep interest to learn how he would deal with the curricular issues that were of such importance to many administrators.

But as his presentation unfolded, Knowles did not seem to be changing his style in the least. He began by telling a story about a student who had misbehaved in class. "I blew in his ear and massaged his arm," Knowles said. "That got him going with his writing." Expecting to elicit a laugh from this story, Knowles smiled and looked at the teachers. "What would you have done if the kid had punched you?" one teacher asked. Nobody was laughing.

Deciding to dispense with the anecdotes, Knowles soon began talking about the evaluation of student writing. He held up a textbook that he had co-authored and pointed to a page labelled CHECKPOINTS. On it were pre-written responses that a teacher could use to tell students how well they had written a given composition. Each response fell under a category that a teacher might deem important in judging a student paper. For instance, under the category "organization" was this response: "Beginning and ending need work."

Knowles read aloud from this page for a minute and then pointed out how his categories corresponded quite well to the competency testing rubrics used in Tappan County. "Your new course of study has sections dealing with these, too," Knowles added. It was at this point that Bill Schmidt, a
colleague of Joe Kraft's from Westridge High, began questioning the validity of the competency test. Some of his comments have already been described earlier in this work. But one bears repeating: "I'm tired of feeling like I'm supposed to teach to some test," he complained. This statement sparked some lively discussion that lasted several minutes. Three other teachers immediately spoke up and supported Bill's view. Art Miller, one of Frank Downing's teachers from Vicksburg Local, denounced what he termed the "test mentality" that seemed to be pervading Tappan County schools. Another teacher quickly agreed with Art, stressing that "things are so cut-and-dried . . . there's no room to be creative anymore." Edith Snouffer spoke up, too, arguing that "curriculum and tests leave me little time for teaching." Knowles listened to all of these comments attentively, nodding his head and furrowing his brow in a show of concern. It did not take him long, however, to steer the course of the discussion in another direction. "These are issues you may need to take up with your school principal," Knowles said. "We have to find successful ways of grading, though, don't you think?" With that question, he directed the teachers' attention to a hand-out entitled "The Vocabulary of Evaluation." Art looked at me and whispered, "Just when things get interesting . . . another hand-out." Nothing more was said that evening about curriculum or competency tests. Instead, we spent most of our time
discussing effective ways to mark student papers and to encourage revision. For dinner that night, we had stuffed pork chops. Most of the teachers ate in silence, and what conversation there was focused on the pork chop stuffing, a thick paste laden with oregano, onion and garlic.

A few days later, I saw Art Miller in front of one of the stores at the local shopping mall. We exchanged a quick greeting, and Art asked if he could buy me a cup of coffee. Soon, we were sitting at a small formica-topped table in a Burger King near the mall’s main entrance. "About the other night," Art said. "I hope I didn’t say anything to offend you." Art was evidently referring to his comments about the "test mentality" he disliked. "I know your job in the county office is to promote this stuff," Art continued. "I didn’t mean anything against you." After assuring him that his comments had not bothered me, I asked him if he was having problems with the competency testing procedure. "No, no problems," Art replied. "But there’s so damn much of it. It never ends." Art then described some of the difficulties he was having with policies recently instituted in Vicksburg by Frank Downing. What appeared to plague Art the most was Frank’s insistence that teachers adopt new texts that would be directly correlated to the competency test. "Even if we could find these books, who’d want to use them?" Art tapped the table with his plastic coffee stirer. "Frank’s a good administrator, don’t get me wrong," Art said, "but he just
doesn't listen some times. We've told him that high school teachers especially have to be flexible. He nods his head and then does what he wants."

I asked Art what sort of book he would like to use to teach writing. "None," Art said immediately. "And Frank can't deal with that. It's like he doesn't trust us to come up with our own ideas."

Before we left the table, our conversation shifted to Knowles. Art seemed to like Knowles' personality, but he was not convinced of the value of the in-services. "It's just too step-by-step, John, just like everything else in our district. You need some structures to work with, sure, but you've also got to have room to maneuver."
CHAPTER V

CHANGE VS. STAGNATION: PRE-WRITING, OUTLINING
AND OTHER COMPLEXITIES OF COMPOSING

During the first several weeks of the school year, I was asked by several curriculum directors to conduct brief in-service presentations on the writing process for selected groups of teachers. One such group was comprised of twelve high school English teachers from Southwest, Freda Smith's district. When Freda called to invite me to speak to this group, she explained what she wanted me to do in precise terms. I was told, for instance, to discuss writing activities in simple language and to relate what I said to what Alfred Knowles would discuss in his upcoming dinner meetings. In other words, I was to briefly explain pre-writing, drafting, editing, and the other phases of Knowles' process. "This is all new to them, John," Freda reminded me. "They need to be shown what the writing process is, as opposed to their product approach."

On a hot morning in late September, I walked into room 212 at Southwest High and tried my best to comply with Freda's request. I had lugged with me reams of hand-outs, many of them copies of papers that students had written while enrolled in classes I had taught. Teachers at an in-service
meeting can be a skeptical audience, and I wanted to be certain that this group would view me as an experienced teacher—not as a bureaucrat from the county office who was unfamiliar with the realities of classroom life. Evidently, I was a credible speaker that day, for most of the teachers I addressed responded enthusiastically throughout the session. One woman, Jenny Bonham—a teacher of junior and senior English—seemed especially impressed with my comments on ways to help students find reasons for writing. In fact, she interrupted me several times to tell me how helpful my ideas were.

After our meeting ended, Jenny asked me to visit one of her classes. She was interested, she said, in having me watch her students work with their writing. Then, I might be able to explore with her different ways of motivating them. "Freda keeps telling us to change our approach and require more writing," she said. "But I'm at a loss to know what approach to take sometimes."

Entering Jenny's classroom an hour later, I found I was on familiar turf. Portraits of Melville, Shakespeare, Whitman, and other famous writers lined the room above the chalkboard. And on a small table in the far corner of the room stood a balsa-wood model of the Globe Theatre. Thirty-one students filled the rows of desks directly in front of Jenny. Their literature anthologies were opened to a short story written by Jack London entitled, "A Piece of Steak."
Seven students were reading silently to themselves, and the rest were listening to Jenny discuss strategies for writing about the story. "There are several qualities of these characters we can use to write about them," Jenny said. Then, she began listing words on the chalkboard. Among them were "age," "family status," and "experience." "Now, I want all of you to make an outline of your own," she announced. "Any questions? Okay, have this for tomorrow." Jenny then proceeded to introduce another story from the anthology. After hearing an explanation of tone for twenty minutes, the students shut their books, and shuffled from the classroom at the sound of the bell. Between classes, Jenny apologized to me for not spending more time on writing during her class. "There's so much to cover," she said. "But at least we got some ideas for an essay." I encouraged her to continue helping her students generate ideas. "I'll see you at Dr. Knowles' workshop," Jenny said, glancing at the students who were filing into her room. "We'll talk more then."

Jenny kept her promise and attended Alfred Knowles first in-service session on the evening of October 11th. Attending also were thirty other high school teachers; this group would be the largest to appear at one of Knowles' high school sessions during the entire school year.

Knowles' topic that evening was directly related to what Jenny and I had discussed several weeks earlier at Southwest High: "Let's get started tonight by looking at ways for your
students to get ideas for their writing," Knowles began. Many teachers took notes as Knowles launched into a presentation on pre-writing techniques. Much time was spent on what was termed fluency. Defining fluency as the ability to put words on paper without concern for organization or grammatical correctness, Knowles continually scrawled tersely phrased slogans on the overhead projector's transparent film. "Write quickly," "Don't stop," "Let your pen catch up with your mind"—these were just several phrases Knowles used to impress upon teachers how important it was for their students to quickly generate a draft that could later be re-written and proofread. "This may be quite a change for some of you," Knowles said at one point. "Grammar and precision are important, but they must come later when students have something to revise."

For thirty minutes, Knowles asked the teachers to quickly draft several different paragraphs on several different topics. He wanted them to experience first-hand the technique he had been discussing. "Don't think; write quickly," Knowles admonished after asking everyone to describe a memorable person. Many teachers obeyed Knowles' command, but a majority of them struggled to keep their pens moving. Jenny and her colleagues from Southwest were among those having difficulty. "Jeeze, I don't know what to say," Jenny whispered to a man on her right. "I don't either," he said. "I can't do this." His pen was motionless, poised in
his fingers as if permanently stuck a quarter-inch above his blank white paper.

Near the end of the session, several teachers questioned the use of such methods with high school students. "My kids don't even know what verbs are yet," complained one. "How can they write like this and not even know what words they're using?" Several teachers close to me whispered to each other in agreement with this observation. "We teach a lot of literature," another said, "but this'd be great if we had the time." Almost everyone had begun talking at once by this time. Attempting to quiet his audience, Knowles asked if anybody was hungry. "I don't think any of you should alter what already works for you," he continued. "Just try these techniques when you have the time; I think you'll be surprised at the results . . . what're we having to eat?"

While the Blue Moon staff set the tables for dinner, Knowles mentioned to me that teacher skepticism was normal when he first introduced his ideas. "Change is tough for them but once they get going, it'll be easy."

Two months later, however, changing past practice still proved difficult for many of the teachers I talked with. One afternoon in December, Barbara Burke, a tenth grade English teacher from the Tappan Heights School District, discussed with me the difficulties she was experiencing. Barbara had attended the first two in-service sessions, and Knowles had visited her classroom in November to demonstrate his teaching
techniques. But despite this steady exposure to Alfred Knowles' writing process, Barbara found herself hesitant to implement what she had learned. "I like Dr. Knowles," she told me. "His ideas have a lot of merit, but I feel so guilty whenever I leave the kids alone to write." The faculty lounge where we sat was comfortably furnished with overstuffed couches, and Barbara half-reclined on one as we spoke. The paperback novels I had come to deliver to her rested unnoticed on my briefcase as we continued to explore her view of teaching writing.

"My kids are very immature," Barbara said. "Most of them can't handle the idea of just writing down whatever enters their mind." She was obviously referring to Knowles' "write quickly" method for developing fluency. "Besides, whenever I tell them to write on their own, they can't keep their little mouths shut." Barbara smiled and shook her head as she confessed this problem with classroom discipline.

Soon, Barbara mentioned that she had to pick her kids up at the baby-sitter's. But before she left, she referred once again to the guilt she often felt when trying Knowles' ideas. "Maybe I'm not creative enough, John," she said, "but when I'm sitting there not saying anything ... just watching them struggle, I feel like I'm not doing my job."

Another teacher with similar difficulties was Kathryn Scott from Timberwood High School. Like Barbara Burke, she often maintained that her students were too immature to draft
their ideas quickly and independently. "My kids crave structure," she once told me. "They seem to do better when I give them five specific things to put in their paragraphs." After hearing this comment, I reminded her that Knowles himself often gave students ideas to write about. "That's different," Kathryn reminded me. "He never works with the average and slow kids I've got." I quickly pointed out that Knowles seemed to have success with students who had been tracked into average classes. In a way, I suppose I was trying to show Kathryn that she may have been making excuses for herself. But she hurled back at me a rejoinder of her own: "My kids don't have much confidence in themselves. They need to know what a topic sentences is before anything else."

This conversation, like several others I had with Kathryn during the school year, occurred right after she had met with her sixth class of the day. One afternoon in November, several days after Knowles had delivered a presentation dealing with peer revision techniques for student writers, I noticed that Kathryn's desk was covered with unusually large piles of corrected papers. I took this opportunity to ask Kathryn if she ever required her students to edit each other's work. "I tried it once," Kathryn replied, "and things didn't work . . . they were all pretty confused." Since she looked extremely tired that day, I did not pursue the issue further. But near the end of the school
year, I interviewed Kathryn for approximately ninety minutes. I had a chance then to ask her exactly how her teaching had changed as a result of the Knowles writing project.

"My first reaction to in-services is 'no way, nobody's going to tell me what to do,'" Kathryn admitted, "and I know a lot of us feel that way." I chuckled a minute at this admission, but Kathryn's mood was quite serious. "Teachers are treated like low-class secretarial help sometimes, and I resent it." Kathryn's brown eyes stared at my tape recorder as she spoke. "I didn't do much with the writing process thing at all," Kathryn said. "I'm not proud to admit it; that's just the way it went." At my urging, Kathryn finally tried to summarize why she did not use Knowles' ideas. "Alfred Knowles was okay," she insisted. "But our administrators wanted so much this year, and we were left hanging there in between, not really knowing what to do."

In sharp contrast to Kathryn, many curriculum directors appeared to have a precise idea of what they needed to do to encourage new ways of teaching writing in their districts. And for the most part, their plans centered on increased in-service training for their teachers, training that would continue to reinforce Knowles' techniques for years to come and truly change their teachers' approach to composition.

This view was made clear to me one morning at a curriculum director's breakfast-meeting held at the local Perkin's Pancake House. These meetings were monthly
gatherings, and I was seated in my usual place. Directly across from me at the long table was Freda Smith, and to my right were Frank Downing and Jack Morgan. After we had eaten our grapefruit, Freda looked at Jack and asked him what plans he had for continuing on during the next school year with additional teacher training in composition. "We need some follow-up," Freda said, "Don't you think so Jack?"

Frank immediately interjected his thoughts, saying that additional teacher training was imperative. "We've got a good start this year," Frank added. "Things are happening, but we can't let it drop." Jack agreed with Frank's opinion and said that we all should begin our planning as soon as possible. I mentioned that I would work with Alfred Knowles in order to get his ideas for future training, and soon, the entire table was listening to our conversation. "Count me in on that," Cynthia Gorsuch yelled to Jack. Five other curriculum directors quickly expressed interest in Freda's plan, too. By the time we were ready to address our agenda during the formal portion of our meeting, the curriculum directors had reached consensus. Jack rose to announce that we would all coordinate our efforts to ensure that regular in-services for writing teachers would continue as long as there was a need for them. Everyone seemed happy with this announcement. But especially pleased was Freda, who had clapped her hands in delight after Jack spoke. As the rest of the morning's business began to be discussed, Freda leaned
toward me and whispered, "We need this; the teachers are off
to a good start, but it'll take a big push for everything to
fall into place."

I am not certain whether Freda's teachers at Southwest
High felt pushed, but it was apparent by April that none of
them were the least bit interested in attending the Knowles
presentations. Freda may have believed that her teachers had
begun to practice Knowles' techniques, but no one from
Southwest appeared at the Blue Moon for the April 18th
meeting.

Nonetheless, Knowles adhered to his schedule and
visited several classrooms at Southwest High on April 17th, a
Wednesday morning. I accompanied him on his visit and
observed him at work in three separate classrooms. With each
group, Knowles' approach was essentially the same.
Explaining to the students that they were going to practice
pre-writing and drafting skills, Knowles wrote three words on
the chalkboard: BEHAVIORS, INTERIOR, EXTERIOR. These words,
he stressed, could be used to begin a description of a
character they had encountered in the literature they were
reading. In one class, the students had been reading "The
Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Using this character as an
example, Knowles wrote "obeys wife" under BEHAVIORS,
"compliant" under EXTERIOR, and "needs freedom" under
INTERIOR. "Make a jot-list of your own on a character you've
read about," Knowles then said. Finally, after fifteen
minutes of jotting, the students were permitted to write. At this point, Knowles used several slogans to urge the students on. "Write quickly" and "don't stop" were the ones he relied on most that morning. Unfortunately, in each class the bell rang before most students could write more than five or six lines.

After the third class adjourned, I talked with four students who had seemed particularly interested in writing the character descriptions that Knowles had just asked for. Even though it was lunch time, they seemed willing to forget their hunger for the moment and answer my questions.

My first question dealt with their apparent eagerness to write the character descriptions. "It's fun to write when you've got time to do it," a small, out-going blonde girl offered this comment. "I don't really like writing much," added another, "but it's okay sometimes." I asked this student what it was he didn't like about writing. He looked at his friends for a second with a slight smirk on his face, "The usual things," he said, "You know, commas and spelling and things like that." The other three agreed that emphasis on these facets of writing bothered them. "You know, it's like you're always worrying if you've got it right," the blonde girl said.

I nodded my head in sympathy for their plight and asked if they did very much writing in their classes. A third student, a tall dark-haired boy wearing a Southwest baseball
shirt, spoke up. "In English class we do some," he said, "about one essay a month." The fourth student, a quiet skinny girl with braces on her teeth, had yet to say much, so I addressed my next question to her, asking about the kind of writing she did in English class. "We do a lot on literature," she said, "on plots and stories, telling what we think."

"Outlines is what I hate about it," the dark-haired boy said. "I mean by the time you do all that there's nothing else to do."

By this time, the students seemed eager to leave. Perhaps they were thinking about their position in the lunch line. But before I let them go, I inquired about any changes they may have noticed in the way writing was approached by their teacher. "We do about the same thing every year," the blonde girl said, "You know, we read stories for a while then we do grammar." I stopped her immediately and asked what she meant by grammar. "Verbs and infinitives, you know, things in the grammar book," she replied. The skinny girl mentioned that they had worked in groups once or twice in the fall. "That was a little different," she said, "but we don't do that very much any more."

During our drive back to the Blue Moon from Southwest, I told Knowles what the students had said. "Kids are pretty perceptive, aren't they?" he said. "Some of those teachers have been in the same rut for years." As we pulled into the
Blue Moon's parking lot, our car swerved slightly and a large box of hand-outs fell onto the floor of the back seat. "Don't worry, I'll pick them up," said Knowles. "I'm not sure who will look at them anyway."

Later in the week, on Friday afternoon, I met Francine Bennet for a drink at a little bar down the street from North Tappan High School. Flipping on my tape recorder, I told her how dismal attendance had been that week at the Blue Moon, and I wondered aloud why she had not shown up for the last dinner meeting. Knowles and I had decided to make the final week of meetings special by having the Blue Moon serve the teachers mounds of shrimp, crab, and other delicacies in addition to the regular dinner. Despite the low attendance throughout the year, I was genuinely surprised at the poor turn-out for the final meeting.

"I've told you all year that everybody's busy and fed up," Francine said. "A couple of shrimp and some crab meat isn't going to change anything." I gazed at the rows of liquor bottles that were neatly arranged on a tiered platform behind the bar. "John, don't worry about it," Francine said. "It's not your fault that people didn't show up."

"What will change things?" I asked. "I realize shrimp won't do it. But we put a monumental effort into this thing, and everybody's still doing what they've always done."

Francine sipped her chablis and thought for a few seconds. "Teachers are like anybody else," she said. "They
get a pattern set up, and they stay with it. The people I work with never even throw away their old tests."

A month later, I thought of Francine's words during a visit to Westridge High School. I was spending the day administering reading tests to groups of ninth-graders. But scheduling had presented some difficulties, and I was forced to continually wait for the student groups to be released from their classes before I could give them the test. During one such waiting period, I encountered a very angry Joe Kraft in the faculty lounge. Evidently, one of his students had broken into his file cabinet and had taken his only copy of an examination he was to give the next day. "Damn kids," he complained, "now I've got to make out a whole new test." Like Francine had said, many teachers had difficulty doing something new.

Some teachers made an attempt, though. Several days after my visit to Westridge, I journeyed to Southwest to administer the same ninth-grade reading tests. On my way to the testing site, I passed by Jenny Bonham's classroom. Her door was ajar, and I could hear that she was asking her students to do some writing about *Huckleberry Finn*. Pausing in the hallway, I listened intently to learn how Jenny might present this assignment. "I want us to do some pre-writing on Huckleberry," Jenny said. Then, she referred to several of Huck's character traits that had already been written on the board. "He lies, cheats, and breaks the law of his
time," Jenny pointed out. "Would you call Huckleberry a
good person?" None of the students responded to this
question. "Well, try some pre-writing of your own on this
topic," Jenny said, "and be sure to number what you get in
order of importance."
CHAPTER VI

BROAD IMPACT VS. SPECIFIC CONCERNS:

BUT WHAT DO I DO WITH MY KIDS?

Early in the school year, shortly after Knowles' September 19th presentation, a high school English teacher from the Vicksburg district, Janet White, wrote me a short note. In it, she emphasized that she was looking forward to attending the composition in-services. But she also expressed some doubts. Her major concern centered on the way many of her students were behaving in class. "I want to do this writing process the right way," she wrote, "but my students are jittery this year and having trouble understanding the material. I can't afford to skip anything, and I don't see how I'll have time to fit all of this writing into our schedule." After reading this comment, I immediately telephoned Janet to ask her how I could help her feel more comfortable about the writing project. We exchanged pleasantries for a few minutes. Then, she told me this: "I'll come and listen to what Dr. Knowles has to say, but I wish he'd come and show me what to do with my kids. I've got a bad bunch this year."

Janet's feelings seemed to reflect a concern common to many other teachers—a concern that would come to my
attention many times throughout the school year. To put it simply, many teachers could not generate much interest in a series of writing workshops that had, in their view, little connection to the day-to-day problems they were experiencing with their students.

Freda Smith, Frank Downing and other administrators who helped conceive and initiate the writing project seemed genuinely concerned about helping students. In fact, Freda and her colleagues often spoke of how important it was to bolster student achievement. "The idea is to help as many kids as possible," Freda told me when I first asked her what she hoped Knowles would accomplish. Frank Downing often spoke in similar terms, once telling me that Knowles needed to saturate Tappan County with his ideas in order to reach as many students as possible. School principals, too, emphasized how important it was to keep the students' interests in mind. "The kids themselves are forgotten too often," one principal said after hearing Knowles' September presentation. "It's about time we had programs like this that can have such a strong impact on so many kids."

But despite these expressions of concern for students, few people in administrative control of the writing project ever mentioned particular students and their problems, and no one ever referred to Janet White's "jittery" group. Of course, administrators are responsible for the overall operation of buildings and districts. Out of necessity, most
are far removed from the daily realities of classroom life. The fact remains, however, that administrators are also responsible for structuring the way in-service sessions will function. And even though the Knowles' effort incorporated visits to actual classrooms, the attention that would be given to the individual problems of students in those classrooms was not enough—at least not enough to suit the needs of Janet White and those like her.

From the very first meeting at the Blue Moon, it was evident that the Knowles project was geared toward reaching large numbers of students and not equipped to handle the specific concerns of individual teachers. For instance, Knowles spent a large amount of time that evening pointing out that all students could benefit from drafting their ideas quickly, without monitoring their spelling, punctuation, or mechanics. After Knowles had asked the teachers to begin doing some of this drafting themselves, one teacher asked if this technique was appropriate for advanced students. "My kids already write fairly fluently." she said. "Their problem is that they always use I and you. Won't this quick writing just encourage this problem?"

Knowles responded by saying that most students would benefit from letting their words flow onto the paper quickly, no matter how advanced they might be. "Try it," he said, "the kids can always go back and control their language later." The teacher who had asked the question said no more
to Knowles. She did, however, turn to a colleague seated next to her and mumble that it may already be "too late" for her students.

At another point in the evening, Knowles displayed a young child's writing on the overhead projector to show that drafting quickly could even draw remarkable language from students who have seldom had the chance to write. One day a pretty bird found a twenty dollar bell on the beach. This was how the young child's passage began. "Isn't that wonderful?" asked Knowles. "And just think she's only in second grade." But several teachers seated near the rear of the room were unimpressed. "God, that's the way my seniors write," whispered one. Another laughed and added, "What is all this grade school stuff?"

The next afternoon Jack Morgan called me into his office and shut the door behind us. He clutched a wad of papers in his hand and placed it in the middle of his desk before he spoke. "I received several calls about last night's meeting with Dr. Knowles," Jack said. His face was flushed and closely matched the color of his pink shirt. "Some teachers weren't happy, John," he continued. "Many seemed to feel he was not addressing the concerns of high school teachers." Then, he asked what I thought of Knowles' presentation. I pointed out that Knowles used some samples of young children's writing because he believed that what helps elementary students can also help those in high school. Jack
replied that he realized a wide range of students could be helped with similar techniques. "Just apprise Alfred of the teachers' concerns," Jack then said. "Maybe he can gear his talks to specific grade levels a little more."

Jack would not tell me which particular teachers had complained. But near the end of October, I discussed the issues the complaints had raised with Mary Kay Smith, a teacher from Vicksburg High School. "Some of the teachers were bothered by Dr. Knowles' approach," she said. "I was a little." Mary Kay was grading a stack of papers in her room during our conversation. As she continued to talk, she pulled one of the papers from the stack and showed it to me. "Look at that," she said, referring to the numerous errors she had marked. I quickly scanned it and saw that the student was having difficulty writing about The Light In The Forest. "My kids are headed for college soon, and I can't let them write essays like this," Mary Kay removed the paper from my hand as she continued. "This is full of vague, meaningless generalities and gobbledygook. What am I supposed to do with thirty kids like this? Let them do what they want?"

As our conversation progressed, Mary Kay maintained that she needed help with teaching basic organization and style. "Elementary kids may need to have fun as they learn about writing, but my kids need to realize that writing is hard work." She picked up another paper and stared at it. "If
Dr. Knowles can help me teach the paragraph, that's all I can ask." We talked for a few minutes about paragraph patterns. Then, I asked her if she saw any value at all in working with Knowles' writing process. "For younger kids, yes," she said, "but I don't have time to deal with that sort of thing."

Evidently, Mary Kay meant what she said. For after attending just two of the in-service sessions, she simply stopped going.

Janet White, whose room was down the hall from Mary Kay's, had stopped attending the Knowles' presentations after the first session. Several days after my discussion with Mary Kay, I telephoned Janet again to see how she was coping with her students and to ask her if she would consider coming back to the Blue Moon for the November meeting.

"I don't think so, John," she told me. "My hands are full right now." Prodding a bit, I asked if what she had written in her September note had held true. "Well, yes, I suppose so," she said. "With my kids I don't have the time I need to devote to writing." As our conversation drew to a close, I wondered aloud if there was anything Knowles could do to attract high school teachers to his meetings. "As far as I'm concerned, Dr. Knowles is fine for the elementary folks," Janet said, "but if he's going to help us he should discuss how to deal with kids who do drugs and talk nasty and rip up their papers as soon as they're handed back." Janet
laughed after she made this little speech, but she had sounded deadly serious.

The concerns of Mary Kay were voiced in terms of paragraph structure, whereas Janet's problems may have been rooted in the socio-cultural problems of Vicksburg's neighborhoods. But despite the differences in their specific classroom difficulties, these women obviously shared one trait: Neither of them felt she could turn to Alfred Knowles for help in dealing with her students. To be fair to Knowles, I should stress that he never was given the opportunity to visit either woman's classroom. There were, though, dozens of classrooms that Knowles did visit, and many of the teachers in those rooms seemed to feel similar to the way that Janet and Mary Kay did.

One morning in November, Knowles and I drove to the southeastern corner of the county to visit the classroom of Tom Shoemaker, a high school teacher who taught in the Wayne Trace district. Tom, a burly man with a reddish-blond beard, had originally been registered for the in-service sessions. But in October he had called me to say he would not be able to attend the first meeting; in November, after being visited by Knowles, he did not call--he simply did not show up.

Arriving at Wayne Trace at 7:50 in the morning, Knowles and I were greeted by the assistant principal and led down a poorly lit hallway to Tom's classroom. The door was partially hidden by a large free-standing trophy case stuffed
with rows of paperback books. I thought it odd that books of this sort would be kept in the hallway. But after entering Tom's room, I began to see why storage space might be scarce. In a way, it resembled a junk shop more than a classroom. Endless stacks of magazines lined an entire wall--there were old copies of Look as well as fairly current issues of Seventeen, Hot Rod, and Sport. To the left of the magazines, along the wall farthest from the door, was a raised platform, which obviously served as a stage. Strewn across it were hats, coats, shoes, and several plywood boxes painted yellow and orange. Toy gun belts and a pink ballerina's costume hung from the hooks of a hall tree upstage center. The dominant object in the room, however, was a miniature skull that was perched on the corner of Tom's desk. It looked fairly menacing even though a corn-cob pipe protruded from its mouth.

Tom greeted us with a big smile and motioned toward the odd assortment of objects that cluttered his room. "I'm the drama coach, too," he said as if trying to explain the controlled chaos that surrounded him. Soon, the assistant principal left us, and Tom's first period English class poured into the room.

Knowles' presentation that day was geared toward eliciting a character sketch from the students. There was, however, a major problem with this idea: None of the students could think of a character to write about. After
coaxing the students for several minutes, Knowles finally began suggesting ideas. Tom, who seemed somewhat embarrassed, walked around the room suggesting ideas, too. Finally, everyone settled on a character and began to write. The students were on their best behavior and worked diligently at their desks for more than ten minutes. Knowles, who had been writing too, then asked the group to pair up and read their work aloud to each other. Dutifully, each student soon found a partner. But for some reason, they seemed hesitant to read. Noticing this hesitancy, Knowles grabbed a student seated near him and began demonstrating the work the pairs were to do. The student stood next to Knowles and listened as he was read to. "Is there anything else I should've added to my writing?" Knowles asked. "I like it a lot," the student replied. A bit exasperated, Knowles re-explained the concept of adding more information in order to make character sketches as interesting as possible. "You'll do all right, but sometimes it is hard to think of things," Knowles conceded. After class, the two of us drove toward another school in the Wayne Trace district. "That was a strange class," Knowles said after a long silence. I nodded my head in agreement.

Weeks later, I returned to Wayne Trace to discuss curriculum with Dave Burns, the assistant principal at the high school. After we had discussed textbook selections and the new county course of study, I inquired about Tom
Shoemaker and his morning class. "Tom's a bit of an eccentric," Dave said, "but we tolerate him—he's good for the kids." We both chuckled about Tom's crowded classroom for a minute. Then, Dave grew serious. "Tom's probably not ready for Dr. Knowles," he explained. "He likes the kids to hear outside speakers, but he has trouble with that group—most of them can barely read."

Tom Shoemaker never did directly tell me that Knowles' approach did not address the needs of his students. He was not nearly as outspoken as Mary Kay Smith had been. And perhaps his class was a special case. After all, the majority of Tappan County high school students were probably not too similar to the poor readers that Tom contended with every day. But his lack of attendance at the in-service sessions coupled with his assistant principal's comments made it clear that Tom had classroom difficulties that were, to him, unconnected to whatever Knowles had to offer. It could be argued, of course, that Knowles should not have been invited to Tom's class in the first place. And at the very least, Knowles probably should have been forewarned about the students' lack of reading skill. But as Dave Burns told me, Wayne Trace administrators had tried to schedule Knowles in another class. There had been, though, no other teacher in the high school who had wanted him.

I talked with Knowles about Tom, Janet and Mary Kay—among others—shortly before the in-service sessions were to
resume in early January. We both knew by that time that most high school teachers were simply not enthusiastic about the writing project. But try as we might, neither of us could determine what to do about the problem. "Let's just keep going, John," Knowles finally said. "We won't reach everybody, but we knew that."

One of those that was never reached was Kathy Lott, a short, plump woman from Greene Township who taught in the same building with Edith Snouffer. Like Tom Shoemaker, Kathy seemed to feel that Knowles had little to offer her students. But unlike Tom, she proved to be quite outspoken about her convictions.

After Knowles had visited Kathy's classroom in February, I received a telephone call from her principal. As we talked, he explained that she had placed a note in his mailbox which read, "Please, no more Dr. Knowles!" Since I was the county office consultant working on the writing project, he felt it was appropriate for me to call Kathy to discover what was bothering her. "I wouldn't normally ask this, John," he added, "but she's upset and maybe you can calm her down." Needless to say, I was curious about the import of Kathy's note, so I telephoned her at school during her conference period.

"Maybe I shouldn't have said that," Kathy began, referring to the cryptic line she wrote to her principal, "but he's been overloading us all year--it's got to stop."
She then enumerated all of her many responsibilities and concluded by saying that her classes were now in the process of writing a research paper. "It's not Dr. Knowles fault," Kathy added, "I told the principal not to send him to my room."

I was curious. Why would Kathy be averse to having Alfred Knowles work with her students? Soon, the answer was clear. "I've been telling the kids about proper form for weeks," Kathy said, "and Dr. Knowles tells them not to worry about punctuation." It was evident that she was having trouble with the way her students were compiling bibliographies. Admitting that proper bibliographic form and generating ideas for papers were two different aspects of writing, Kathy did mention that Knowles would have been good for her students if they were ready to be creative. "But right now I can't even motivate them to do the work, let alone be creative about it," Kathy added.

Before the conversation ended, I asked Kathy if she would consider returning to the Blue Moon for the remaining in-service sessions (Kathy, like many others, had attended just once). "I'd like to--he does do a good job--he tries," she said, "but I'll have to see how my time is this spring."

When I conducted my interview with Edith Snouffer in early June, I discussed with her what Kathy Lott had told me. To what extent, I wondered, was Kathy's attitude representative of other teachers' views? "Kathy can be a bit
high strung at times," Edith said. "But I know many of us share the concerns she expressed." Edith's point was a simple one: Since high school teachers feel they have just one last chance to reach students before they graduate, many of them focus on inculcating content knowledge into their students rather than concerning themselves with a student's potential to be creative. "By the time we get these kids, they are so jaded, so grade conscious that we have difficulty believing Dr. Knowles' ideas will work." Edith uttered this observation with conviction but quickly added that she would feel differently if she were in Alfred Knowles' position.

What would Edith have done differently if she had been thrust into Knowles' position? I asked her this question point-blank. At first, Edith claimed that she did not know what she would have done. But after thinking for a moment, she began to conjecture. "I'd probably try to find out more about what particular classes are doing," she said, "but that would be difficult—you'd have to have more than one person working on it." Edith then became expansive. "Even some of the activities the teachers like, such as combining the sentences from Lolita, they could've been done in a different way," she said. My curiosity aroused, I asked her what she meant. "Well, Dr. Knowles might make sure that when he works with sentence-combining that we want our kids to work with it too," Edith said. How would that be possible, I asked, considering that Knowles had to deal with so many teachers
and students. "I don't know," she said, "but you don't want to combine sentences when you're trying to teach A Tale of Two Cities."

As Edith spoke, I recalled the conversation I had had with Karen Graham in March. Her particular problems had centered on finding ways of motivating students to want to revise their work. Knowles had ignored that problem, she had maintained, and assumed that developing student's fluency with pen and paper was enough. I also recalled Tom Shoemaker's class, the group with the reading problems, and wondered what might have been done to convince Tom that writing with his students could have helped meet their needs as struggling readers. Others, too, entered my mind: Janet White and her discipline problems, and the teacher at the Blue Moon who could not connect with "grade school stuff." I asked Edith about the situations these teachers were in. Could Knowles have found a way to relate to them? Edith just sipped her iced-tea and reiterated what she had already said.

Near the end of June, when I was trying to make sense out of all that I had heard and seen that school year, I interviewed Nancy Small, a colleague of mine from the county office. She was an accomplished consultant, a twenty-year veteran, a wiry, quick-witted survivor in a county system that saw curriculum specialists usually stay fewer than three years. She was also familiar with Alfred Knowles and his project. In fact, Nancy had often driven Alfred to his
school assignments when I had been unable to do so. At one point during our interview, I posed to her the same questions I had asked Edith. Did Knowles meet the needs of the high school teachers he worked with? And if not, what might he have done differently? If anyone could shed light on what had happened that year, I thought, Nancy could. "I've seen it again and again," Nancy said, referring to the inadequacy of many in-service programs. "Whenever you push for broad, sweeping changes, teachers feel alienated and fall through the cracks." What she said was interesting, but I pointed out to her that my original question remained unanswered. "What would I do differently?" she rephrased the question, then paused for several seconds. "First I'd make sure I had the support of the teachers," she finally said, "and then start over from scratch."
CHAPTER VII
TOWARD RECONCEPTUALIZING TEACHER
IN-SERVICE PROGRAMS IN COMPOSITION

Introduction

Now that we have had a close look at the four major patterns of meaning that emerged from the composition in-service sessions, it is time to return to a goal of this study that was mentioned in the opening chapter. This goal, it will be recalled, involves using certain theoretical perspectives to reflect on the implications of what happened during this massive teacher training effort. As I have already stressed, these perspectives not only gave shape to this study while it was still in embryonic form, but they also informed my thinking throughout the 1984-85 school year. One perspective is rooted in the dynamic view of language-learning that has been developed by the Vygotskian school of Soviet psychology. The pedagogical strategies of third-world educator Paulo Freire and their theoretical underpinnings have given me another perspective. And the critical approach to the study of schools as propounded by scholars such as Michael Apple and Henry Giroux gives form to the third part of this triad.
These three views are, of course, interrelated. Even though Freire focuses his efforts on teaching literacy to third-world peasants, Apple and Giroux on the power relations that can make schools oppressive institutions, and Vygotsky on the material socio-cultural conditions that lead to the development of language, all of these theorists share what can be termed a dialectical view of human processes and institutions (cf. Mack 1-66). Unwilling to analyze the world as if it were comprised of discrete bits of data, they instead view all phenomena in terms of relations. Thus Vygotsky sees language development as a continuously unfolding socio-cultural process, related to the webs of meaning that stem from, among other things, a particular person's cultural heritage and current socio-economic conditions. As Vera John-Steiner and Ellen Souberman have pointed out, this perspective insists that the relationship between a language-learner and society is a "dialectical process which, like a river and its tributaries, combines and separates the different elements of human life" (in Vygotsky, Mind and Society 126). Freire's approach to pedagogy displays a remarkable similarity to Vygotsky's view of language learning. In fact, he asserts that teaching and learning cannot truly exist unless the teacher and learner together "seek the dialectical connections that explain the form of reality" (Politics of Ed. 55). Giroux, too, vigorously emphasizes the need for dialectical analysis.
Speaking from his vantage point as a *Administrators and Knowles needed to think in terms of broad* critic of current school practice, he urges all who would study schools to "develop a dialectical conceptual framework for grasping education as a societal process" (*Ideology and Culture* 61).

It is beyond the scope of this study to fully explore the complex theoretical implications embedded in the writing of Vygotsky, Freire, and Giroux. (Nancy Mack's recent dissertation "False Consciousness and the Composing Process" provides a thorough treatment of Giroux and Freire; and for a theoretical analysis of Vygotsky, James Zebroski's work is an excellent source.) Instead, my aim is to simply draw upon the world view embodied in the work of these theorists in the attempt to shed light on how the Alfred Knowles' composition in-services might have begun to reach more Tappan County high school English teachers. A. R. Luria, Vygotsky's student and colleague, states that authentic study and reflection does not involve looking at "things in and of themselves," but rather at "the interrelationship among them" (*Lang. and Cognition* 17). In and of themselves, a series of in-service sessions might simply be viewed as a well-intentioned attempt to educate teachers. As we have seen, however, interrelationships between, say, teachers and their students can have a profound influence on the results of an in-service session, perhaps just as much influence as an expert's effort to educate a teacher-audience. Therefore, it behooves us to
attend to the dialectical interrelationships that Luria mentions if we are to learn anything from what happened in Tappan County. And certainly, such an approach may also be important for people like Nancy Small--people who may want to "start from scratch" as they plan for future teacher in-service programs in composition.

The First Pattern: Simplicity vs. Complexity

As this chapter attempted to show, many Tappan County high school teachers seemed disappointed with Knowles because of his apparent need to discuss composing processes in rather simple terms. The teachers expressed this disappointment in various ways throughout the school year. Some wrote letters that stressed how unsophisticated Knowles was. Others complained that he was simply superficial. And still others maintained that a step-by-step approach to the teaching of composition could not provide students with any real reason to write. The teacher concerns lead me to think that the entire writing project may have held more appeal if the complex nature of composing had been addressed.

The teaching of writing, as explained by Knowles, simply involved leading students through a planned sequence of activities that stressed pre-writing, writing, and revising. But as Sondra Perl has pointed out, many scholars have abandoned "the traditional notion that writing is a linear process with a strict plan-write-revise sequence" (364). Asserting that writing is recursive in nature, Perl, who
often cites Vygotsky in her work, implores teachers to warn their students about the complex, idiosyncratic, tentative process that composing actually is. Otherwise, she implies, students may give up too easily on a piece of writing that does not automatically fall into place in recipe-like fashion. Writers do not, Perl maintains, simply prepare some ideas, mix them thoroughly, and add a dash of commas before serving their prose. Instead, writers continuously write and rewrite, read and reread, start and stop in the agonizing effort to grasp and exploit tiny strands and sub-strands of meaning that are striving to emerge. Concomitant with this process is a continual struggle with a myriad of interrelationships. How does a writer's inner sense of a word's meaning relate to how a reader might interpret it? How is what was written ten minutes ago going to influence what is being written now? Such questions merely begin to suggest the complexity that Perl attempts to depict as she describes the relationships all writers must grapple with (368-369).

When Tappan County teachers spoke of needing more complexity, they seemed to be endorsing the ideas Perl espouses. Certainly, they saw that simply asking students to write quickly could not guarantee that any worthwhile ideas would be generated. By the same token, they knew that asking students to circle passages in their papers could not ensure that a passage worth revising would be identified.
Furthermore, they became convinced that asking students to find mechanical errors in their writing at a specified time could not provide their students with the desire to correct those errors. And perhaps most importantly, they quickly discovered that a linear sequence of activities could do little toward helping students find something interesting and significant to say. If the teachers at the in-service sessions had been told of Perl's ideas, perhaps they could have begun to discuss openly what they already seemed to know privately: Following a set of pre-ordained procedures is not going to make anyone a better writer or teacher. And discussing such realities might have gone a long way toward helping the teachers cope with the many confused, tentative students that filled their classrooms.

Unfortunately, however, many teachers gave up on a writing process approach that could not deal with complexity. In this regard, they were much like the students Perl warns about, who give up on their writing because it does not come easily.

But even though they are complex, Perl's ideas alone may not be able to provide teachers with all of the explanatory power they seek. It is one thing to know just how difficult and complex writing is, but it is quite another to understand how students might be motivated to attempt such difficult work. And obviously, such knowledge was sought by the Tappan County teachers who continually complained that their
students simply saw no reason to write. L. S. Vygotsky has much to say about this common student attitude. And for high school English teachers who have become accustomed to facing rows of unmotivated student writers, Vygotsky’s ideas may provide some much needed help.

In *Thought and Language*, Vygotsky stresses that behind every communication lies a motive, a reason for the communication (150). In other words, students do not talk or write, or even verbally think, without a need they hope will be satisfied. And Vygotsky’s studies suggest that one reason students have so much difficulty composing is that they have "little motivation to learn writing when we begin to teach it" (*Thought and Language* 99).

Many teachers falsely assume that a student’s need to pass a course provides him with enough motivation. But as many teachers in Tappan County realized, many students have trouble writing, even when threatened with the prospect of receiving an F. Written language, as Perl and others have pointed out, is much too complicated to be easily produced on demand. In fact, there appears to be a complex dialectical relationship between a student’s historical-social development and the intellectual development that is a prerequisite of learning how to write.

Two Vygotskian scholars, Nan Elsasser and Vera John-Steiner, discuss this relationship in a paper published in the *Harvard Educational Review*. They report that people who
have begun collective action to change their lives by overthrowing repressive governments seem to develop analytical and synthetical skills lacking in other oppressed people. To support this contention, Elsasser and John-Steiner cite a study done by A. R. Luria, Vygotsky's colleague. Shortly after the Russian Revolution, Luria talked with hundreds of peasants from rural areas of the U.S.S.R. During these talks, he found that those peasants who had been active participants in the revolution were thinking critically about themselves and their relationship to Moscow, Europe, and the world. Convinced they could better their economic position, they began to analyze why those in power had oppressed them for so long. But those peasants who had been uninvolved in the social transformation of the revolution professed ignorance of all matters unrelated to their immediate experience (see Luria's *Cognitive Development* 141-142). After citing Luria's study, Elsasser and John-Steiner conclude that people's ability to think critically and thereby become motivated to learn written language might be dependent on whether they view themselves as capable of socially transforming the world:

> When people are convinced that they can shape their social reality and that they are no longer isolated and powerless, they begin to participate in dialogue with a larger word, first orally and then through writing. (361)

Certainly the middle-class students of Tappan County cannot be equated with Russian peasants. However, many of
the students I observed during my year with Alfred Knowles felt powerless and oppressed as they sat rigid in their seats, struggling to write down their ideas. Perhaps if Tappan County teachers had been encouraged to work cooperatively with their students to help them produce writing that met real needs, the complexity these teachers sought could have been developed. Certainly, the dialectical relationship that exists between student, teacher, and for instance, neighborhood problems is worth exploring if those in schools are to find reasons to write. Unfortunately, however, during Knowles' in-service sessions, teachers were taught that what a student writes about does not matter. A character sketch one day, perhaps a comparison-contrast paragraph the next--anything was permissible as long as students worked through a linear sequence of activities to compose their work. But what if teachers had been shown ways of helping students write in order to deal with real concerns--perhaps school policy or male-female relationships or neighborhood recreational facilities? Such writing could not only have helped provide students with reasons to write, but it also could have helped give teachers the most complex theory of composing possible--one as fascinating and challenging as every day life itself.

"Knowing your students and what they need--that's what's important in teaching writing." Comments like this one from Francine Bennet made me believe that she, and other Tappan
County teachers like her, would have welcomed the challenge of dealing with such complexity.

The Second Pattern: Freedom vs. Control

Even though it simmered quietly throughout the 1984-85 school year and did not result in any angry confrontations between teachers and administrators, the tension caused by the struggle over who would actually control the composition curriculum in Tappan County was apparent. Many curriculum directors, trying to ensure that all students learned the same skills, continually asserted their authority by insisting that their teachers use Knowles' teaching techniques. Underlying this insistence was the belief that students would score well on competency tests and master course of study objectives if exposed to a five-step writing process procedure. On the other hand, many high school teachers, convinced that they alone knew what was best for their students, sought independence by virtually ignoring the existence of the composition in-service sessions. Underlying this assertion of independence was the belief that teaching to pre-specified objectives would not ensure student competency in composition. In fact, many teachers suggested just the opposite, saying over and over that teaching writing required a flexible, creative approach. To a large extent, this conflict between the teachers' need for autonomy and the administrators' need for control resulted in a disquieting impasse that pleased almost no one.
The crux of this conflict, I believe, was rooted in the teachers' refusal to accept as valid the administrators' view of what curriculum is and should be. This view, as Henry Giroux has pointed out, is traditional in outlook and emphasizes tidy step-by-step guidelines for finding learning objectives, organizing teaching strategies around these objectives, and evaluating the results ("Sociology of Curriculum" 249). William Pinar, another educational theorist, claims that this model of curriculum design may be a tidy one, but it lacks one important element: a well-articulated philosophical view about what learning and knowledge are. The truth of Pinar's assertion can be easily seen, for almost any group—conservative businessmen, socialist reformers, liberal desegregationists, or fundamentalist Christians—could feel equally comfortable plugging their particular objectives into this curricular schema.

Giroux is even more harsh than Pinar in his evaluation of traditional curriculum models. Those who adhere to these models, Giroux states, are "moribund" "technocratic" practitioners, following a "school-as-factory" policy toward education ("Sociology of Curriculum" 249). Giroux's harsh criticisms stem from his contention that the assumptions underlying the traditional approach "ignore fundamental questions concerning the larger relationships between ideology and school knowledge as well as meaning and social
control" ("Sociology of Curriculum" 249). The dialectical relationships Giroux refers to are interwoven in a myriad of complex ways. But basically, he is referring to the idea that school knowledge does not exist as so many objective facts. Instead, it springs from value-laden socio-cultural patterns that view certain ideas as appropriate for certain students and teachers and others as off limits because they might threaten the status quo. "Control, not learning, appears to have a high priority in the traditional curriculum model" ("Sociology of Curriculum" 249). With this assertion, Giroux speaks directly to the concerns of many Tappan County teachers who balked at implementing teaching techniques and curricular plans foisted upon them by administrative fiat. Some, such as Edith Snouffer, shut their doors and pretended to follow the directions they were given. Others, such as Susan Hughes, struggled to meet school district requirements and still retain autonomy. But whatever a teacher's response might have been, almost all felt the pressure to conform to the new curricular requirements.

Needless to say, few teachers openly questioned the traditional curricular models used by their principals and curriculum directors. Tacit resistance was the method employed when teachers refused to attend the Knowles composition in-services. And tacit resistance prevailed when bogus lesson plans were written after a particular class had
been taught (several teachers used this technique in case their principals decided to check their plans for the proper objectives). Nonetheless, the resistance was real and seemed to stem not only from resentment at being controlled, but also from the belief that important relationships were being denied in the push for a uniform, teacher-proof way of teaching writing.

The relationships deemed important by Tappan County high school teachers seemed quite similar to those Giroux emphasizes. For instance, many teachers implied—and sometimes explicitly stated—that they knew their students' idiosyncrasies, the social patterns of their neighborhoods and communities, and the particular cultural meanings attached to writing in their schools. We should be the ones exploiting this knowledge to teach our students, they seemed to say. In this regard, the teachers were attending to the same connections Giroux writes about when he states that curriculum must "address itself to the concrete personal experiences of specific cultural groups and populations" ("Sociology of Curriculum" 249). On another level, the teachers were also questioning the relationship between so-called objective knowledge about writing and the values of those who expound that knowledge. And when they examined that relationship, they often concluded that knowledge simply cannot be separated from the interests of people who might benefit from it. Otherwise, all Tappan County teachers might
have heartily endorsed Knowles' writing process as the final word on teaching composition.

It cannot be argued, of course, that Alfred Knowles and the curriculum directors simply fabricated knowledge out of thin air to benefit themselves. Certainly, they were well intentioned and truly wanted Tappan County students to practice techniques that would help improve their writing. But by presenting the writing process approach as if it were something that could—and should—immediately be implemented by all teachers, Knowles and the curriculum directors were, in effect, denying the historical, cultural, and social influences that powerfully charged every teacher's view of how writing should be taught. Needless to say, the teachers themselves did not ignore the relationships these influences represented.

By the same token, many teachers could not ignore how they had been suddenly forced to switch roles by this teacher-training effort. Instead of being teacher-experts in their field, they had become neophyte-learners at the feet of an outside expert. Such a role reversal can be a humbling experience indeed, especially for those who have spent time reading and teaching Shakespeare, Twain, and Faulkner. Stripped of their status as experts, the teachers were in danger of losing an image of themselves that, in many cases, had taken years to create. It should come as no surprise that many teachers resisted a writing project that, in
essence, was telling them what to teach and when to teach it. After all, a prescriptive approach of this sort denied the most important relationship a teacher has—her relationship with herself. That, and nothing less, is what can be lost when a teacher no longer views herself as a competent person, capable of making her own instructional decisions.

It is deeply ironic, of course, that teachers should resist a training effort that employs the same methods they often use in their own classrooms. But perhaps they sensed that they were threatened with a loss of social status as well as a loss of control over curricular decisions. Obviously, no principal or curriculum director attempted to enter a teacher’s classroom and dictate to her on a continual basis. The teachers in Tappan County did retain some responsible autonomy and were not treated like unskilled laborers at a fast-food franchise. But even though what Madan Sarup and Harry Braverman have termed "direct control" was not implemented by the county administrators, the teachers' status as middle-class professionals was being threatened in some measure (Educ. State and Crisis 32). It does, after all, take much less skill to follow someone else's curriculum and teaching techniques that it does to create one's own. Such deskilling is part of a process that Michael Apple and Kevin Harris call proletarianization—a process that begins to occur whenever skilled work is devalued by those practicing a scientific management approach
toward employees (see Harris 134). People will fight when their economic status is threatened. Vietnamese immigrants in the United States learned that lesson when their fishing boats were destroyed by white American fishermen who feared competition. And although teachers like Kathryn Scott did not become violent in their resistance to Knowles' inservices, they certainly became angry at being treated like the "low-class help" Kathryn felt she had become.

Erich Fromm, echoing the ideas of Marx, emphasizes that people need to feel productive, to feel as if they have active control over the work they do. If this is not the case, Fromm writes, workers can become passive to the point that they are spiritually and mentally dead (Marx's Concept of Man 30). The anger and resistance displayed by the teachers of Tappan County indicate that they had not yet reached this death-like state. They were still fighting to keep the status they have, and they were still clinging to as much autonomy as possible. But if those who seek to work with teachers do not begin to address the dynamic relationships that create the experience that is education, their chances of success will be few. It is difficult to educate an angry teacher and impossible to revive a dead one.

The Third Pattern: Change vs. Stagnation

The expectations of Tappan County administrators were high as the 1984-85 school year began. Thousands of dollars would be invested and hundreds of work hours allocated to
change the way writing was taught in the Tappan County Schools. Such a broad, sweeping effort, it was felt, would ensure success. But as the school year progressed, it became evident that the changes that had been expected were not forthcoming. Few high school teachers bothered to attend the composition in-services. And even those who did were not trying to alter their teaching styles. Told to let their students write freely, most teachers continued to give their students structured rhetorical patterns to follow. Told to down play the importance of punctuation, most teachers continued to lecture their students on correct comma usage. Some teachers did incorporate Knowles' terminology into their vocabularies. But besides this change, it was almost as if Knowles' effort had had no impact at all. Undoubtedly, there are many complex reasons for this lack of success, and many of them will never be uncovered. But by using a dialectical approach to aid us, we may begin to gain an understanding of what went awry.

A first step in this direction might involve a brief examination of the relationships that existed between the initiators of the in-service plan and those it was meant to serve. In viewing these relationships, one pattern strikes me immediately: To a large extent, they were antagonistic. In other words, a cooperative spirit of equality did not prevail between administrators and teachers as the in-service sessions were planned and held. Open hostility, of course,
was never actually displayed. But such blatant displays of emotion are not necessary for an antagonistic relationship to exist. As G. Carchedi, a dialectical theorist from the University of Amsterdam, points out, relationships are inherently antagonistic whenever two groups of unequal power and status are united in a mutually dependent effort to produce something (348). Obviously, both teachers and administrators had to unite in the effort to produce a different approach to the teaching of composition. But the roles each group was forced to play continually militated against collaborative effort.

To use Marxian terminology, the administrators were the owners of the in-service sessions, and the teachers the non-owners. After all, curriculum directors and county office personnel had planned the sessions and possessed control over how they would be run. By the same token, the administrators were the non-laborers, and the teachers the laborers. Obviously, the teachers alone had the responsibility of working with students and of planning the lessons that would teach the writing process.

This schism between owner and non-owner, laborer and non-laborer, is quite common in our culture--so common, in fact, that it is usually taken for granted. It is, though, worth some scrutiny. As Gordon Lawrence has shown, the effectiveness of in-service seems to be directly related to the amount of active involvement teachers feel they have in
planning and directing particular programs. In other words, if teachers do not have at least some control over the in-service, it will probably fail. A recent study of female high school English teachers conducted by Michaeline Chance-Reay echoes Lawrence's findings. She found that when teachers are "presented with procedures to follow" they consider the in-service an "insulting" imposition (157). Clearly, if teachers feel a sense of ownership over the in-service program—and if they are more than mere laborers carrying out orders—the chances of actually changing classroom practice may greatly increase.

The idea that it is important for people to have active control over their work is, of course, nothing new. In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts, written in 1844, Marx emphasizes the same point. Work imposed on a person is work external to that person, Marx maintains. And the result of this external imposition is an estrangement from the work itself and from those who ultimately control it (70-81). Marx's thought cannot be transplanted from the context in which it first appeared and used as a blueprint to guide teacher in-service efforts. But it can help shed light on why many teachers appeared estranged from Knowles' efforts to teach them his writing process. To a large extent, most teachers clung to ideas and techniques that they had developed themselves while working with their own students. For instance, the outlining techniques used by Jenny Bonham
were not external to her; they were not something imposed from outside her classroom. They were developed by her as a response to particular instructional situations, and as such, they were under her control. Just the opposite was true of Alfred Knowles' quick-drafting techniques. Developed by other teachers immersed in other classroom situations, these techniques struck Jenny as foreign. Using them would have forced her to change her approach to her students and to change her idea of what composition is. It is not surprising that she refused to be controlled by ideas that had not sprung from her own experience as a veteran classroom teacher.

Jenny is, of course, just one example. Other teachers, too, felt estranged from the in-service effort. Most displayed their estrangement by simply refusing to participate. Others, like Joe Kraft, attended some of the in-services, but still used their grammar texts to teach composition.

What might have worked with these teachers? What might have been done to effect the change that Tappan County administrators wanted? Needless to say, no ultimate answers to these questions exist. But our analysis suggests several ideas that might be worth exploring. First, it appears that some way needed to be found to heal the split between the producers and owners of the in-service knowledge and those who were to learn it and use it. In other words, the
teachers should have perhaps become co-owners of the in-service project, assuming equal responsibility for actively producing knowledge they could use. Furthermore, the knowledge generated by the in-services may have needed to spring from concrete classroom problems that teachers were confronted with. As Marx reminds us, the means to satisfy people's needs must be found in "material life itself" (The German Ideology 48).

Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator known for his work with third-world literacy programs, has developed some pedagogical strategies and concepts that could prove useful in exploring in-service possibilities geared toward accomplishing the goals we have just outlined. Asserting that true learning can occur only when teacher and student work with each other as equals, Freire posits that authentic dialogue needs to occur before any educational project is attempted. Such dialogue involves abandoning teaching methods that force the teacher and student to play distinctly different roles (The Politics of Education 49). The producer-consumer dichotomy is thus broken as all of those involved in the work of a given group discuss issues that need to be dealt with. Freire also contends that a dialogical approach makes it possible for student and teacher alike to become active subjects, capable of producing their own knowledge and using it to help solve the problems they
may have. There is no room for passive object-receivers of information in Freire's pedagogy:

It is only as subject, and only as such that a man or woman can really know. In the learning process the only person who really learns is s/he who appropriates what is learned, who apprehends and thereby re-invents that learning. (*Ed. for Critical Consciousness* 101).

It must be stressed here that the learning Freire writes about does not involve theorizing about ideas that are divorced from the everyday concrete experiences of the learner. Embedded in Freire's concept of dialogue is the notion that reality must be continually confronted if students are to act on their world and transform it to meet their needs. In fact, Freire sees validity in educational programs only when people understand that learning is "a force to transform the world" (*Ed. for Critical Consciousness* 81). To help accomplish this goal, the everyday reality learners are asked to confront is contextualized as a problem to be solved. Such problem posing can enable students to go beyond simply identifying parts of their world and attaching names to them. It can, as Freire writes, engage students in a "dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action" (*Cultural Action for Freedom* 13).

This very brief summary of Freire's pedagogy does not begin to delve into the richness and complexity of his thought. However, it does provide us with a general model that suggests some basic strategies for dealing with the
problems that beset the Tappan County in-service effort. Perhaps that is all we can hope for. After all, Freire's explicit strategies cannot be ripped from the lived situation in which they were created. First, Freire's notion of dialogue might have helped curriculum directors a great deal as they began to think about educating their teachers. Perhaps if they had begun the search for new ways to teach writing as co-learners (instead of as the owners of knowledge), their teachers may not have been alienated from the outset by what was perceived as another demand from the central district office. By the same token, engaging the teachers in dialogue about their English classroom situation might have given all involved the chance to develop a sense of active involvement. As passive receivers of information, the teachers had little reason to assert themselves and self-confidently create new teaching methods. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, helping teachers problematize their experience with teaching writing might have given them the heuristic tool they needed to actually question—and perhaps change—taken-for-granted beliefs about their current practice.

As Henry Giroux points out, making current practice problematic involves exposing the contradictions it contains *(Theory and Resistance in Ed.* 199-201). What if it had been discovered that a particular teacher told her students one thing ("Don't worry about spelling."), yet did another ("I'm
sorry, but on your final copy I'll have to take off points for each misspelled word."? And going a step further, what if it were discovered that certain students always wrote superficial essays for the teacher, yet wrote powerfully persuasive pieces to their boyfriends and girlfriends? Certainly, questioning the reasons for such contradictions could lead to some deep reflection about current classroom strategy, perhaps culminating in the kind of material action Freire writes about. For instance, it would be relatively easy for a teacher to alter the kind of writing she assigns her students once she uncovered what they actually cared about.

The implications here are evident; a composition in-service may need to make its subject matter the teachers and students themselves. That may be the only way to bridge the false dichotomies created by the academic colonialism of traditional teacher training approaches. There can be, of course, no guidebooks to follow in creating such programs. The uniqueness of each class, school, and teacher makes step-by-step pre-ordained plans impossible. But it is probably safe to say that such programs will not be developed by several curriculum directors sitting along in a room at the Tappan County District Office.

The Fourth Pattern: Broad Impact vs. Specific Concerns

As Chance-Reay points out in her study of female high school English teachers, in-service, because it is almost
always geared toward large groups, "cannot possibly meet individual needs" (156). The fourth pattern that emerged from our look at Tappan County seems to support this contention. Teachers concerned with teaching bibliographic form did not have time to try Knowles' drafting techniques. Teachers who were guiding students toward an understanding of literature could not be bothered with sentence-combining activities. And those who had discipline problems were merely trying to survive. Broad efforts developed to reach large numbers of teachers may be well-intentioned, but they do not appear to have much chance of success as long as individual concerns are not addressed. Alfred Knowles' effort made more of an attempt than most in-services to reach individual teachers. After all, Knowles actually worked with many teachers in their classrooms. But despite this attempt to meet individual needs, the Tappan County composition in-services appeared to have had little impact on classroom practice.

Again, as a way of analyzing what went awry, it might be beneficial to briefly examine the contradictory relationships that were embedded in this in-service project. One way of accomplishing this goal is to think in terms of opposing pairs of needs that were brought into sharp relief as the school year progressed. Perhaps we could simply term these conflicting interests. There is not enough space here to make a specific, exhaustive list. However, just looking at
some general patterns should give us a solid perspective.

At a fairly broad level, the conflicting interests centered around the goals that Knowles had for Tappan County students as opposed to the goals of the teachers themselves. Here are just several ways these goals collided: Many teachers wanted their students to focus on reading, whereas Knowles focus was on writing. Many teachers stressed content knowledge in their classes, whereas Knowles stressed creative expression. Many teachers felt the need to teach classic literature, whereas Knowles emphasized rudimentary composition. And many teachers taught advanced skills to prospective college students, whereas Knowles emphasized techniques he used with primary school children.

None of these conflicting pairs is very surprising, especially when we consider that Knowles possessed very little experience as a classroom teacher. The surprising fact is that little was done during the in-service effort to resolve these conflicts and heal the splits that made authentic communication between teacher and expert virtually impossible.

There are, of course, many reasons why these conflicting interests were not reconciled. And some of them are quite understandable. For instance, the cellular structure of schools themselves, as Dan Lortie points out, militates against cooperation and communication (14). It is, after all, difficult for teachers to speak frequently with anyone
except their students when they are confined to their individual classrooms for six periods a day. But despite such restrictions on a teacher's ability to freely communicate with her peers, certain dialogical patterns of communication could have perhaps been explored in the effort to counteract the contradictions that were present in Tappan County.

In their article "Doing Dialogical Research," Rosemary Randall and John Southgate draw upon the work of Paulo Freire to explore how the conflicting interests found in all institutional settings might be cooperatively dealt with. What they have to say may be germane to what happened in Tappan County. First of all, they emphasize that those who desire to change behavior in any setting must first renounce their role as expert and attempt to initiate a cooperative, critical search for the threads of meaning that exist among those who live and work in that setting. This point is important. It implies that perhaps Knowles and others in control of the in-service effort may have needed to reorient themselves. In fact, their initial goal of wanting to change teacher behavior in specific ways may have been misguided. If they had instead concentrated on genuinely knowing about the lives of the teachers, perhaps a shared understanding could have developed, thus preventing some conflicting interests from surfacing in the first place. A crucial concept is involved in such an approach--the concept that any
effort to preimpose expert ideas when working with people amounts to cultural invasion. Freire uses this concept to explain why liberal, well-intentioned social workers and agriculturists are often met with indifference when they try to teach undernourished peasants modern methods of farming. As we have seen, however, the indifference and resistance encountered by Knowles in Tappan County was just as real as that of Freire's peasants.

Avoiding cultural invasion leads to another method emphasized by Freire. In other words, it is not enough to simply conduct a dialogue in a non-threatening way. For instance, once the meaning people bring to a particular setting is uncovered, it must be organized in some fashion. Freire calls this coding (Practice of Freedom). Randall and Southwick emphasize that coding is important for one major reason: it enables groups to identify and critically examine the "essential elements" of the cultural meanings brought to a given situation (351). For a group of English teachers, this process might involve looking at what they are actually saying when they use terms such as grammar, creativity, research paper, or grading. Certainly such terms comprise some essential elements in many English teachers' meaning systems. By examining such critical terms, it is then perhaps possible for people to begin decoding their meaning by "questioning the underlying relationships" that make up a given experience (Luria, Cognitive Development 164).
To once again relate these ideas to Tappan County, let us imagine that Knowles and the curriculum directors had begun Randall and Southgate's process as a way of uncovering the meanings the teachers and everyone for that matter had about several meetings, it might have been discovered that what Knowles meant by creative expression did not preclude the use of content knowledge by the teachers. Perhaps, too, decoding a word like reading would have exposed the fact that writing and reading are not mutually exclusive and need not be taught in isolation from each other. Finally, a critical exploration of the term research paper might have shown that there are many methods of research, and compiling a bibliography is just one small part of one limited kind of research paper.

Needless to say, no one can predict what the teachers of Tappan County would have discovered had they been given the chance to dialogically explore their situation. However, it is clear that, at the very least, such a process could have begun to break up basic misunderstandings and distrust that commonly pervade teacher in-service. Something else is clear, too, I believe. Non-threatening, dialogical discussions about the meanings English teachers bring to class with them might go a long way toward making teachers feel as if their particular concerns are being met. How could it be otherwise when it is their classroom and their problems that are generating the ideas that will be explored?
A Conclusion

In his landmark study Cognitive Development A. R. Luria states that "the basic categories of human mental life can be understood as products of social history--they are subject to change when the basic forms of social practice are altered" (164). If anything can be gleaned from what happened in Tappan County, it is reflected in Luria's words. People in general--and teachers in particular--do not alter their thinking about writing (or anything else) in isolation from other concerns. For instance, how a teacher approaches composition is largely determined by her use of it and the motives that give purpose to that use. The point here is simple: If the teaching of writing is to change, then the larger relationships that socially determine how writing will be used in a classroom must change also.

I can offer no blueprints for action. To do so would be to practice the same brand of academic colonialism I have already denounced. But I will offer this idea: Until writing is viewed by school practitioners as a complex social process that can be used by people to meet real needs, no amount of teacher in-service will substantially influence how composition is taught in our schools. In other words, teaching writing as an academic exercise--as a way of proving competency or as a way of earning grades that can be bartered for admission to college--must no longer be our approach. Ira Shor, successfully using Freirian pedagogy here in the
United States, linked his students' writing to their experience with fast-food hamburgers and teen-age marriage in order to free them from the false notion that writing is merely a subject to be coped with in school (162-163, 234-240). Nancy Mack, too, has attempted to root student writing in the world of students themselves by showing her classes that academe often perpetuates insidious (and insipid) misconceptions about what may be safely written about in classrooms (Mack Chapter 3). But teachers such as Shor and Mack are not the only ones who know that writing must be genuinely connected to the lives of students. Ninth graders can be aware of this necessity, too.

Several years ago when I was teaching in a small rural high school, I was disturbed by what I saw as my students' inability to write well. I had deposited into their heads all of the usual information, force-feeding them rules of standard usage and dittoing off organizational patterns for them to imitate. I even tried tutoring them individually in an effort to help them brainstorm for creative ideas. But nothing worked. My students continued to hand in garbled, incoherent papers which had been dashed off quickly and carelessly. One day in desperation, I began questioning my colleagues about the luck they had been having with my students. One teacher, a local farmer who taught vocational agriculture, expressed surprise when I told him of my students' poor efforts. Then, he pulled from a stack of
papers on his desk a report written by Alex, one of my worst writers. I was amazed by what I saw. Alex (my "worst" student) had written a complex analysis detailing what could be done to improve crop yields on his father's farm. Not only was the analysis detailed and interesting, the writing itself was practically flawless, quite free of the usage problems and punctuation errors that had plagued Alex's writing in English class. Later that day, I asked Alex what he had been working on in Vo-Ag class. "Just been figurin' out what to do. We wanna grow more soy beans next year," he replied.

When I left school that day, I did not know what it meant to root the teaching of writing in the social practice of students and teachers. But I know now that Alex did. And learning what Alex already knew is the task that faces those who would reconceptualize teacher training in composition.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


---. Telephone Interview. 3 June 1985.


Zebroski, James. "Writing as Activity: Composition Development from the Perspective of the Vygotskian School." Diss. The Ohio State University 1983.
APPENDIX

Data Collection Techniques

Three basic strategies were used to record information as this study was conducted:

1) The use of note taking during a particular meeting, conversation, interview, or event.

2) The use of note taking from memory after a particular meeting, conversation, interview, or event had occurred.

3) The use of audio tape to record meetings and interviews as they occurred.

The following list refers to the text of this study and delineates when a certain data collection technique was used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
<th>Collection Technique</th>
<th>Page Numbers</th>
<th>Collection Technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-4</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
<td>100-103</td>
<td>tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>104-106</td>
<td>tape and notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>106-107</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28-29</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>109-112</td>
<td>notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-31</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>112-114</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>tape</td>
<td>116-117</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>tape</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63-66</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>118-120</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>67-68</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69-73</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>121-122</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73-75</td>
<td>tape</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-82</td>
<td>tape</td>
<td>125-128</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>129-131</td>
<td>notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-87</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-92</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>133-134</td>
<td>notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95-96</td>
<td>notes</td>
<td>135-136</td>
<td>tape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97-100</td>
<td>notes from memory</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>