Chapter 11: Reading and Writing and Piaget

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

Reading and Writing and Piaget

by R.D. Narveson

Like most English teachers I have been skeptical of schemes to reform the teaching of literature and composition. Our experience suggests that for the most part our successes are likely to result from the intangibles of personal styles, developed empirically through classroom practice. As Ross Winterowd has written, "One can only conclude that writing is far too difficult a skill to be taught--and yet we do teach it." (1975, p. 2) Nevertheless, I seized the opportunity to join the ADAPT program because it seemed to offer a more thoroughly articulated theoretical basis for teaching and learning than I had previously experienced. The program was particularly attractive because it provided a context within which one could proceed intelligently from the insight that what we do is not so much to teach writing or critical reading as to stimulate students to develop their capacities to write effectively and read critically. In the crucial matter of providing an environment favorable for learning, the ADAPT staff would be guided by Jean Piaget's theories of human intellectual development. Within the diversity of courses we would offer, we would try to provide a more coherent structure of experiences than students usually encounter at a large public university. I expected no miracles. I foresaw, nevertheless, a promising setting in which the general intellectual maturity of students might be enhanced, and thus their particular capacities as readers and writers as well.

There was truth in the hard response of one colleague of mine when an earnest student asked what would improve his English skills. "Sunshine and vitamins," was what he said; "sunshine and vitamins." For it seems that maturation of language skills is intricately bound up with a person's whole intellectual development and "cannot be hastened apart from that development" (Kitzhaber 1963, p. 26). But when we speak of "intellectual development" most of us have in mind something rather global and undefined. Lacking agreement on what specific skills, processes, or perceptions might mark a mature mind, we as educators have found ourselves encouraging disparate aims without much sense of

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their priorities or relationships. It is refreshing to find in Piaget an unusually specific and precise description of some of the mental operations that typify human behavior at different stages of life. These operations, he has shown, always develop in the same sequence. The mental processes characteristic of maturity he calls formal operations. He does not suggest that our intervention alone can speed minds to maturity. But his work does help us to plan a variety of stimulations to nudge our students in the direction of mature thinking.

Piaget's descriptions of human intellectual development are derived from observing how children use logical processes to make sense of their physical experiences. He has had comparatively little to say about the emotional or imaginative life. It was therefore clear that however much the work of Piaget and his interpreters could aid in the task of teaching reading and writing to college students, I should not expect the same degree of guidance as might my colleagues in the physical sciences or even the social sciences. The ADAPT program did nevertheless allow me to share with them at least the following four objectives:

1) To replace, wherever possible, patterns of passive receptivity with patterns of physical and social as well as intellectual activity.

2) To exploit peer-stimuli to learning available when students work together for several hours each day.

3) To foster student initiative in problem-stating and -solving by the use of "learning cycles."

4) To adjust student tasks to their present levels of intellectual development while offering appropriate challenges to grow to higher levels.

Each of these objectives is a large subject in itself. My comments on the first three will be brief.

Our first objective, to make learning physically and socially--as well as intellectually--active, accords with the Piagetian theory that all intellectual activity, even the most sophisticated, has its roots in sensory-motor experience. It is far easier for an English teacher to neglect this radical connection than to exploit it. I looked with envy at the apparatus available to the physics teacher and the simulation games inventively employed in ADAPT economics and history. How could one introduce comparably concrete activities into the composition and literature classroom? And even if one could, would it be worth the time and effort? I soon learned,
delightedly, that there are some simple activities that are a
great boon to learning at least some things about literature. I
learned, for example, that after students had sprawled on the
floor in groups, arranging a bunch of cards with words on them
into the form of a limerick, they had internalized far more about
meter, rhyme, stanza, and grammatical nuance than twice the time
spent in purely verbal exercise would have taught them.
Attaching muscular movements and physical arrangements to these
mental concepts caused the concepts to stick better in their
minds. Furthermore, they developed a better sense of the
variables a poet must manipulate, and so respected poetry more
and found it more challenging.

True, any psychologist could have predicted these results,
but I had not learned the lesson so graphically in twenty
previous years of teaching. Why had I never learned before that
students respond more powerfully to Mark Twain or Jane Austen if
they simply spend part of their class time seated in a circle
taking turns reading aloud to each other? So help me, this was
college, not grade school, yet it was so.

I must acknowledge that it was not an easy task for me to
device suitable physical and social activities to accompany the
conceptual learning that was the primary objective, but I was
encouraged by such successes as these to keep looking for more.

In pursing our second objective, it was to my advantage
that various methods of encouraging peer-group activity are now
staples of English classroom practice. As it turned out, the
sort of small-group investigations of literary works and of
student papers that I have used for a number of years proved even
more effective in the ADAPT classes. The reason is plain.
Students, like people in general, hesitate to reveal to strangers
the intimate feelings that are a central part of genuine literary
experiences. But as they come to know their fellow students,
they become more relaxed in their company. They become willing
to speak and to listen. Most literature and writing courses,
though small enough to encourage intimacy, meet for only three
hours each week of the semester. By contrast, ADAPT students
were together in small classes for about twenty hours each week.

As for our third objective, I saw many advantages to
teaching writing and critical reading as essentially
problem-solving activities. Viewing writing from such a
perspective encourages students to use the writing process to
discover and order their thoughts about matters of concern to
them. It helps them to fit the activities of the English
classroom, such as their explorations of their responses to
literature, into the patterns of their other classes, where they
are working to explore and order other aspects of experience. It
makes them address an audience (i.e., their peers and their professor) whom they know to share their interest in mastering their experiences. Addressing such an audience, they are discouraged from pontificating and dogmatizing and encouraged instead to frame and test tentative hypotheses. The sense of sharing an investigation with others likewise engaged encourages them to find value in their own observations and opinions and to lessen their passive reliance on authority. Their desire to share leads to the search for and discovery of rhetorical solutions to problems of selection and ordering, and their solutions to these problems are more meaningful because arising from their felt needs rather than, as frequently, from the instructor's lesson plans. One final and significant advantage: the problem-solving approach is, as Lee Odell (1973) argues, a fairly direct application of Piaget's notions of how people learn.

If one expects students to employ a problem-solving approach to their writing, one should familiarize them with such an approach in their classroom activities. Each of us attempted to do so in his own discipline. Our formal device was the "learning cycle," described in "The Teacher's Guide to the Learning Cycle" found elsewhere in this volume. One of the most difficult challenges of our program, never completely met, was to arrange planned activities in learning cycles that began where I wanted them to and ended where I wanted them to. But if the teacher can be flexible and adaptable enough to pick up student cues, the learning cycle of exploration, invention and application can frequently be improvised on the spot. Such learning experiences, as everyone knows, are frequently more significant than those planned ahead of time.

The fourth objective, to adjust tasks to current levels of development while appropriately challenging students to grow, is perhaps a crucial one to the ADAPT program. Are the stages of intellectual development, as Piaget has defined them, real or even approximately real? If they are, can we describe specific tasks that demand specific stages of development for their successful completion as Piaget does in his writings? Unfortunately, to quote Winterowd again, "the 'factors' involved in writing are overwhelmingly numerous and largely unknown" (p. 20). Piaget has concluded that there is a final stage of intellectual development, the stage of formal operations, marked by the ability to perform certain clearly definable operations. Yet some students who can perform physics and chemistry tasks requiring such ability are not good writers; nor do all good writers perform well at those tasks. We can, to be sure, define sorts of writing behavior that are accepted as marks of maturity. We have always done so. But we have done so without Piaget, and so far at least, it is not demonstrated that he can help us to do
so any better. Yet, the idea of clearly demarcated stages in human intellectual development is an attractive one, and makes worthwhile the attempt to define, within the lesser degree of precision allowed by the subject matter, some specific tasks required in essay writing that may relate to Piagetian levels of development. The pages that follow describe one groping effort to do that.

For three weeks in November the students in the ADAPT program worked with Mark Twain's novel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In addition to discussing the novel in class, they wrote about it in their journals and wrote short (two- or three-page) papers, which in most cases they rewrote after submission for criticism both by their peers and by their teacher. On November 24, to conclude their work with the novel, they wrote essays in class discussing questions chosen by class vote from their own suggestions. The essays that resulted differ widely in quality, as might be expected; and the differences in quality may reflect any of the usual differences in preparation, previous training in writing, or natural talent that distinguish one person from others in a group. Because of the considerable time and class attention given to this novel, I assume that level of preparation is not highly important in accounting for the differences in the essays. If the essays reflect with some accuracy the competence of the students to explore systematically a question about material that is familiar to them, it should be interesting to see how they go about the task, and to ask whether their ability to perform the task relates to the stages they have attained in Piaget's developmental scheme.

The symbolic code that we call language is marvelously complex. It is complex in its spoken form, it is complex in its written form. The two forms are closely related but significantly different. Human beings produce the spoken language spontaneously; for most, this is not the case with the written form. The gestures, expressions, and variations of pitch and stress that aid spoken communication are mastered by most people through constant spontaneous practice with instant corrective feedback from other people. Writing is a solitary act, for the most part; the writer must imagine the response he will get from an audience that for the most part he will not see responding. Used to producing without conscious thought the countless little signals that give nuance to his words, he finds it hard to adapt to the very different signals that his written message conveys through vocabulary choice, syntax, and on down through spelling, punctuation, and mechanics. And as if all this were not troubling enough, the student at the college level is asked to produce not only discourse that is communicative and expressive but also ordered to represent the efficient carrying out of intellectual tasks.
In the preceding paragraph I have described the task of representing an ordered working out of an intellectual problem as if it were imposed on top of the other tasks of writing, such as producing individual utterances that are both communicative and expressive. We are encouraged to think this way because people can and do produce writing that is beautifully communicative and expressive and yet is not orderly or coherent on a large scale. Who does not appreciate a good wise crack, or a joke, or a vigorous expression of pleasure or antipathy? But it may be equally, or more, accurate to think that the situation is just the other way around: the mental grasp of order and system that gives us control over our experience may be present even though we cannot, or have not, produced the writing that communicates our understanding to others. In fact, how will we know what sort of sentences and paragraphs to produce unless we have some notion of the order and coherence we aim to communicate? Or, what seems even more likely, the processes of understanding what we want to say and the processes of producing the writing that says it may be intertwined; they may go on together. It may make sense to say of someone who does not know what to write that he does not know how to act. An ambitious attempt to attack the teaching of writing using this assumption is described by Zoellner (1969). But Zoellner is handicapped by his behavioristic assumptions. He has no theory of what goes on in the mind. For such a theory, the ADAPT staff has chosen to turn to the work of Piaget and his followers.

Through many years of painstaking observation and questioning of children, Piaget has worked out a schema for describing how human intelligence functions. Observing that intelligence functions differently at different ages of the same individual, he has proposed that each person passes through a number of distinct stages, which he has described. But he has done more. He has described how people learn, grow intellectually, and pass from one stage to another. His is a developmental theory. The ADAPT staff finds Piaget's theory attractive because it suggests that we can relate student performance to student intellectual development rather than to student intelligence as measured by IQ tests. It suggests, in other words, that our freshmen are still learning through a process of maturation as well as through concentrated efforts to master particular subject matters or skills. If this is true, what can be taught will depend to some extent on the stage of development a person has reached. It will be fruitless to try to teach a person skills and intellectual constructs that are still beyond his grasp. In general, intelligence is too little understood for anyone to define any person as being at a given stage in all respects. Particularly after adolescence, a person may be at one stage in dealing with one sort of experience, and at another in respect to others. Nevertheless, if the theory is
to be useful, we must identify at least some characteristics of mental operations at each stage. It is with this imperative in mind that I have looked at five of my students' essays, to see whether they reflect certain modes of operation that I can associate with Piagetian stages of development.

Piaget described the last two stages of intellectual development as the concrete operational stage and the formal operational stage. He defined the concrete operational stage with reference to tasks that children could carry out successfully after reaching a certain age, but not before. At the concrete stage the child performs mental operations involving objects. Piaget summarizes these operations as those of classes, relations, and numbers (Piaget, 1964). The age at which concrete operations develop may vary; in this country it is usually somewhere between six and eight years. The formal operational stage is defined with reference to tasks that a person in the concrete operational stage does not perform successfully. A person at the formal operational stage, Piaget says, can "reason on hypotheses, and not only on objects." I interpret this to mean that he can reason with concepts that cannot be referred in an immediate or simple way to physical reality. For example, in looking at a swinging pendulum, you cannot "see" that it is the length of string, and not the weight, the arc of swing, or the vigor of the push, that controls the period; you have to reason out the possibilities and test them against experience. The ability to perform formal operations supposedly develops somewhere between the ages of twelve and sixteen, in most people.

According to some studies as many as fifty percent of college freshmen who are asked to perform Piaget's tasks that show formal operations are unable to do so. He has speculated that young adults may be formal operational in areas that interest them while remaining on the concrete operational levels in other areas (Piaget 1972). If this is so, we need different tasks to identify the levels of thought in each discipline. The problem for the English teacher is that all of Piaget's tasks are physics or chemistry based. Success in them is immediately and clearly confirmed by reality. By contrast the tasks in English classes require operations with language, and success is confirmed or denied by reference to other language. There may be operations with language that cannot be performed by those whom the Piagetian tasks identify as formal operational. That would be convenient indeed. But I do not know with any certainty what they are. In examining my students' essays about Huck Finn, the best I can do is to specify and describe some of the tasks involved in writing them, show that the tasks are performed more successfully in some of the essays than in others, and suggest, very tentatively, a possible correlation with the Piagetian stages attained by the writers.
The rhetoric text used in ADAPT English supplies me with a guide in selecting the operations to focus upon. In keeping with a current trend, this text, Rhetoric: Discovery and Change, by Young, Becker, and Pike (1970), spends much time on what is sometimes called "pre-writing" activity: finding a subject, defining an audience, determining the stance of the writer, and deciding how to handle the subject. It stresses the importance of understanding one's subject as thoroughly as possible by exploring it thoroughly and systematically, and it tells how to look and what to look for. This organized way of exploring is a "heuristic," a method of finding things to say about any subject that one has information on. As any heuristic must, this one has many parts to it. The one on which we have spent the most time is the maxim that an experience can be understood only if three aspects of the experience are known: 1) its contrastive features, 2) its range of variation, and 3) its distribution in larger contexts. "Contrastive features" are the features, and combination of features, by which we recognize the experience and tell it apart from other things. The "range of variation" describes how widely some of the features can vary and still be part of the experience. "Distribution" refers to how often and where individual features occur as well as how often and in what contexts the whole experience occurs. Even apart from the rest of the system, a careful attention to these three aspects of an experience will produce a great deal for the would-be writer to operate with. Thus the first thing that I will look for in the essays is the evidence that the writer has attempted to understand his subject by examining it from these three aspects.

Such an exploration of a subject produces a mass of observations which are difficult to operate with because of their number and diversity. The data must be organized before they are useful. Probably the commonest device for organizing material is the "hierarchy," which consists of classes, subclasses, and superclasses,—as many levels of generality as desired. All college students classify, but students vary widely in their ability to choose productive systems of classification, to make clear distinctions between classes and levels of classes, and to keep classes and class membership constant. How the students work with classes is the second thing that I will look for in the essays.

The five essays are reproduced, warts and all, just as they were written. Any departures from the conventions of written English are the students' own. Each essay is numbered for easy reference. Rather than interrupt the text of my discussion, I have grouped them separately; the reader is encouraged to set the essay and my discussion of it side-by-side while he reads. (The reader is warned that the sex of the students may not be inferred from the pronouns.)
Each student chose his question from among three that were selected by class vote after each student suggested a question, but no student was allowed to write on his own question. The wording of the questions varies because the students copied them differently from the blackboard.

**Essay 1.** This student mentions a great many "contrastive features," particularly of Huck's life with the Widow, and in thinking about their "range of variation," decides on a high level class-division into the categories of "restraint" and "freedom." He finds examples of both of these in Huck's life with the Widow, and also in his life with Pap. In the third context specified in the question he wants to find the same categories illustrated, and here he runs into trouble. To show that "restraint" is present in Huck's life with Jim he discusses the Grangerford incident, overlooking the objection that Jim is not with Huck at that time.

In his third paragraph the student very commendably decides to widen the range of considerations by introducing "civilization" and its opposite, for which he lacks a name. He calls the life Huck leads with the Widow and with Pap civilized, the life with Jim the opposite, but makes no distinctions between the very different life at the Widow's and at Pap's. In his conclusion he notes Huck's distaste for civilized life, but misses the chance to relate civilization to "restraint" and life on the river to "freedom."

I conclude that the writer of Essay 1 has made an effort to understand the three aspects of his subject. He has not seen a way to expand his range of contrastive features so as to describe more of the book, as he could easily do by finding traits of civilization in other episodes besides those involving the Widow. He has attempted an expansion under the headings of "freedom" and "restraint" only to run into distortions of the facts. A number of the most frequently occurring features of the book escape his notice, such as the religious elements, the superstitions, the confidence games, and the story-telling. As for his use of classes, the ones he sets up offer him plenty of scope. Further definition of each class, and the use of more and clearer examples, especially in the case of life with Jim, would be helpful to him, and might particularly have led to a better relating of "civilization" to the other two classes.

Judged simply for its grasp of aspects that a reader of the novel may justly admire, the essay is only adequate. Too much is left out, and too much is left confused. On the other hand, its demonstration of some of the variety and particularity of the book is quite good.
Essay 2. In some ways, the question chosen by this student offers him fewer suggestions about how to proceed than did the question discussed in Essay 1. If student 2 is going to make comparisons and contrasts, he must think up his own classes of things to work with, whereas student 1 was given both the strategy and the classes.

The student begins by asking for contrastive features of "civilized" life that bothered Huck, and immediately finds large classes that fairly well exclude each other and that include a wide range of variations both among and within the classes. He is also aware of the importance of distribution in contexts, though neither very conscious nor thorough about it. His answer covers more limited features of the novel than it could have, because he does not go beyond the narrow range that the question suggests to him, except for some brief mention of the freedom and beauty Huck finds in nature but not in civilization. To be consistent and thorough in talking about Huck's likes and dislikes, the student might also have mentioned the things that Huck finds in civilization that are good, such as the "style" displayed by Tom and the Grangerfords, the affection shown him by the Widow, the Grangerfords, the Wilks girls, and the Phelpses, and also the abundant and mouthwatering meals he describes so lovingly. On the whole, despite some limitations, this essay succeeds in operating with clearer and larger generalizations without sacrificing the solid specificity of the first essay.

Essay 3. This student begins her essay, which deals with the same question as Essay 1, in a way that permits her to explore widely. She sets up the broad concept "life styles," explores some of the possible subclasses of features under that concept, and then identifies different "life styles" with each of the three characters her question specifies. The two broad sub-classes, "personality" and "social status" are further sub-divided, the latter to include "wealth, occupation, religion, and manners." The wide range of variation and the number of contrastive features that this hierarchical system encourages is very large.

In a paragraph devoted to each character, the student attends to each item under "social status" but does less than justice to "personality," though fortunately some personality traits do get mentioned as she is describing social traits.

Turning next to Huck's life with each character, the student asks how Huck must adapt in each case. Included is both outward treatment--beatings, neglect, care, instruction--and inner feelings--Pap's callousness versus the Widow's motherly affection. Life with Jim is described as combining the best of each of the other two situations.
In a final section the student extends the range of variation by looking at the constants of Huck's personality that persist throughout the variety of contexts described—Huck's "love of adventure" and "bright imagination." In summing up, the three concepts discussed are brought into clear and orderly relationship: social status, "treatment received from each person" (unfortunately almost too different from the earlier term "personality" for the reader to make easy connection), and Huck's personal traits.

This essay shows the student in firm control of a wide range of variables. The classifications are complex and clear. So much of interest is found in the episodes discussed that one does not desire reference to more of the episodes. In the case of both students 2 and 3, I feel confident that just a little encouragement along with a little more experience will lead them to extend their answers to encompass more fully the material they are discussing. They show that they are in command of the mental operations that would enable them to do so.

Essay 4. This student chooses the same question as students 1 and 3, but reformulates it in a way that reduces its range by omitting Pap from consideration and eliminating the request for contrasts as well as comparisons. He begins his answer by setting up two opposing classes, "romantic" and "realistic." I note that having framed the question to ask for comparisons, the student sets up an answer that calls for contrasts. Of course, asking for both would encourage a wider range of exploration. The classes set up are on an extremely high level of abstraction. Sub-classes are then given for "romanticism": "freedom, self-reliance, independence, and heroism," along with being "individualistic" and going "back to nature." All of these terms have been used by literary critics in discussing the novel Huck Finn, and I hazard a guess that this student has either read some criticism, or heard a teacher use the terms, or both. Each can be used to shed light on the novel; this student assumes, however, that merely mentioning them does the job, as if the terms themselves served as keys to unlock meanings. The terms are not defined by reference to features of the novel, as was done in the preceding essay. In fact, in an attempt to develop the concept "romantic" the student turns away from the novel to the example of Rousseau's ideas about Indians. Jim is said to "represent" freedom, though how Jim does so more than Huck is not explained. Huck is said to achieve a feeling of power, but the example, attending his own funeral, is from Tom Sawyer.

Sub-classes under "realistic" include: Huck's having to "do what he was told," Jim's enslavement, racism, ignorance, and superstition. The list is miscellaneous; how each item is a feature of "realistic" life is not explained and would be hard to
explain. For example, Huck and Jim are just as superstitious on
the river as they are at the Widow's.

In the conclusion of the essay the subject is changed from
the sort of life Huck lived to the personal qualities Huck
acquired while living on the river. We are told that Huck was
different at Aunt Sally's and at Widow Douglas's; but no
instances are given of how he acts differently, and in fact his
response to both situations is the same in the end: he can't
stand being "civilized."

Essay 4 thus seems to me to illustrate what is produced when
a student attempts to solve a problem by employing concepts that
he has not internalized and made his own. The concepts are used
because their use by authority figures recommends them, in the
same way that a child understands that knots are used to tie shoe
laces. In both cases a jumble is the result. Neither the child
nor the student should be condemned for his efforts; on the
contrary, both should be commended, and then their attention
should be directed to activities better suited to them. If
allowed to continue operating with high-level abstractions
inadequately related to the student's own reading experience, the
student will be denied the experience of having made his own
sense out of his reading; he will confirm his belief that he
cannot by his own mental efforts formulate valuable and true
concepts about literary texts but must depend on those who
preside over the mysteries to reveal the truth to him.

Essay 5. This student is also in difficulty. The case is
more extreme than the preceding one. The shortness of his essay
suggests that he literally did not know how to act. He sets down
a number of contrastive features but, failing to attend to range
of variation and distribution in contexts, he gets bogged down in
the particulars of one episode. Finally escaping that trap, he
goes to the opposite extreme of generalizing without supporting
examples. The two categories employed, chronological age and
level of maturity, are not explored in enough variety to offer
much help in deciding what incidents to discuss. Instead of
beginning his discussion by leaving the question open to various
possibilities, he commits himself to a very limited position:
Huck has changed, and in exactly two ways. He also quickly
involves himself in a contradiction but apparently does not know
it. He asserts that Huck is seven or eight years old at the
start of the story and about fourteen or fifteen at the end; yet
the story covers only a year. Possibly he has not read the story
carefully and is not aware of the time scheme, but it is more
likely that he has misunderstood what was said in class about how
young Huck acts in the opening chapters and how much older he
acts later on.
Like students 1 and 4, student 5 mishandles his classifications. In his choice of concepts for his higher level classes he is closer to student 1 than to student 4; both he and student 1 choose concepts that should be within their range of personal experience so that they can relate easily to them. Given encouragement, they should be able to select a broad range of features from the novel that fit their categories.

Can we draw any conclusions about stages of intellectual development from this analysis of five essays? It would seem that students 2 and 3 are operating at a level distinctly different from that of the other three students. I want to call it a more mature level. I feel safe in calling those essays productions of formal operational thinking. But what of the other students? Do their essays manifest concrete operational thinking? Their difficulties in realizing the full possibilities of the heuristic concepts of contrastive features, range of variations, and distribution in contexts, and their even greater difficulties in conceiving and controlling a hierarchy of classes, may so indicate. If these writers are in fact operating concretely, the first essay, particularly, suggests that they can learn to produce acceptable discussions of literature if they are encouraged to respect what they know about human life from their own personal experience and to relate features of their experience to features of the texts they read. Of one thing I am fairly certain. The essay of student 4 confirms my belief that conventional literary criticism is not an appropriate model for all students.

No one doubts that students vary widely in ability. Not everyone agrees that some of the difference is due to level of mental development rather than "intelligence." That the differences of the kinds found in these essays are related to Piagetian stages of development is neither proved nor disproved. Lacking any clear knowledge of what accounts for the differences, we may assume what we please; but whatever we assume will affect our teaching practices.

Karplus (1974) has pointed out the implications of a developmental model for physics teaching: 1) a teaching program must offer prospects of success to students at different stages; 2) new topics should be introduced on a level at which students at lower stages can gain at least partial understanding of them; and 3) students at lower stages must be given encouragement so that they will gradually raise their level of operation. These operating principles seem equally applicable to the teaching of composition—and equally challenging to the teacher.
Essay 1

How is Huck's life with the Widow Douglas and Pap compared and contrasted to the life with Jim.

Huck's life with the Widow Douglas and Pap can be compared to the degree that he was restrained by both. While at Widow's Huck had to be all dressed up and be at his best manners all the time plus had to go to school and take lessons from Miss Watson. While with Pap he had to stay in the cabin most of the time because Pap was afraid of Huck running away. In both though, Huck had alot of freedom also. With Pap Huck alway went out to collect wood and bring in the fish and set lines and be out into nature which was his love. With the Widow Huck always got to sneak out at night and make fun of Jim and be with Tom, so really the restraint and freedom kind of 'equalled out.

That was the same way with Huck's life out on the river with Jim. Several times throughout the book he could have been considered in restraint, for example when he was living with the Grangerfords he had to wear dressy clothing again and had to go to church on Sunday, and again with the King and the Duke where he had to go along with them because he knew he couldn't convince Jim that they were phoney. Then there is the good side where while at the Grangerfords Huck could play with Buck and just have plain old fun, and with the King and the Duke Huck found them fun at first to be with but then it just got carried away and Huck knew he had to escape those two.

As you can see Huck's life with the Widow Douglas and Pap were quite similor to his life on the river with Jim but in different contexts. The biggest contrast between his life with the Widow and Pap and with Jim is that civilization plays the biggest part in it. While on the river with Jim they could just travel by themselves with the only contact with civilization coming when they needed food or when they had to in the cases of the ferry boat captain, the Grangerfords, the King and Duke, and Uncle Silas and Aunt Sally. While with the Widow and Pap, Huck was in contact with civilization all the time except when he wanted to get out of the Widow's house to think or when Pap locked him up for a couple of days in the cabin while he went to town.

What it boils down to is that in comparing them they equalled in restraint and freedom pretty much but when contrasting them according to contact with civilization, they were almost exact opposites. Huck didn't care for civilization so he took off and tried for the next best thing, floating down the Mississippi River with Jim as compared to complete isolation. Huck loved the river and loved adventure, he got both on the river where he wouldn't have gotten it living with the widow. I
believe Huck made a wise choice when he decided to go his own way down the river.

Essay 2

Discuss and give examples of things in civilization that bothered Huck.

"I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can't stand it. I been there before."

This is what Huck has to say at the very end of the book. It certainly is clear by this statement that the idea of being "sivilized" bothered Huck. He's tried it but he didn't like it. What was it about being "sivilized" that bothered Huck?

It seems that a lot of the "sivilized" people that Huck has a close relationship with try to push their ideas and values onto Huck without giving him an explanation that is satisfactory to him. The Widow Douglas for example tries to get Huck interested in praying. Her explanation of prayer to Huck is that it's something that would get him whatever he asked for. Well, Huck tried it by praying for fish hooks and he didn't get anywhere. He told the Widow about his failure and she told him that he was a fool and left it at that. Religion is a part of civilization and Huck certainly couldn't see any sense in it after his experiences with prayer and his experience with the Grangerfords. He sat in church with the Grangerfords and listened to them praying and singing about brotherly love, while they were holding their guns between their knees.

Huck through his travels is able to see many faults in the way people are interacting with one another.

When Colonel Sherburn kills Boggs and is obviously in the wrong, Huck sees the whole town back down as Sherburn calls them a bunch of cowards.

When Huck sees the king and duck tarred and feathered he says "Human beings can be awful cruel to one another."

Huck has been out on the river and has lived also in the civilized world. On the river he has a sense of freedom which he can't experience while living in a "sivilized" manner. When he's out in the woods he often describes the beauty surrounding him. In towns he describes the cruelty and foolishness of the people that he sees.
It's no wonder that Huck wants to "light out for the Territory," after all of the things that he has seen during his travels. He has been able to compare civilization and nature and to him nature's good points outweigh those of civilization.

Essay 3

Compare and contrast Huck's life with the Widow Douglas and Pap with his life with Jim.

Living with the Widow, Pap, and Jim, Huck had three different life styles. This is mainly because these three people were completely different personalities and were of different social status.

Social status is a rather broad heading which is made up of smaller facets. Social status is decided by one's wealth, occupation, and to a certain extent, religion and manners. These facets can be identified in each of the characters Pap, Widow Douglas, and Jim. Once identified, it becomes possible to see why each lived as he did and how this then affected the way Huck lived.

The Widow Douglas lived in town and apparently was of a "respectable" class of society. Huck says that the Widow tried to "civilize" him. This included dressing him nicely, teaching him the Bible and religion, and teaching him etiquette such as grace before meals. Huck says that the Widow was "...regular and decent in all her ways..." (3) According to these ideas, Huck's opinion of the Widow is of a middle to upper social class.

Pap is something else. While the Widow urged neatness in dress, Pap was just the opposite. "His hair was long & tangled & greasy..." (17) "As for his clothes--just rags..." (18) Where the widow believed in education, Pap called it "foolishness." (18) He never had money and when he did he drank it away. Thus he was drunk a lot of the time. He really wasn't much of a father because all he did for Huck was beat him. He was far from a religious type. He could never hold a job, so he really amounted to little more than a bum. It can be seen then that Pap belonged to a lower class.

Jim is something else now. He has very little money, education, etc. In fact being a slave, he really has nothing whatsoever which might up him in a class of society. He was a slave and therefore even lower than the lowest social class of the white man's society. Being uneducated, his religion resulted in little more than a strong belief in superstition.
Living with these different people caused Huck to have to adapt to each. Living with Pap, Huck suffered the brutal life of frequent beatings, no care or attention, and no feeling between each other as human beings let alone father and son. Living with the Widow, Huck came a little closer to an emotional tie within a family type unit. The Widow tried to treat Huck good, and show him good. Even in the religion she taught. (11) Huck came to like the Widow even though "he couldn't stand" being "sivilized" or living her way of life.

To Huck the median of these two life styles was life on the river with Jim. Here he was on his own as he had been with Pap, but he still had the human companionship and friendship he found at the Widows in Jim. Jim got along well with Huck because they could both live in an unsivilized manner. Huck was comfortable on the raft. He and Jim learned how to help each other and thus it was a give and receive type situation. Jim didn't dominate Huck's actions as the Widow might have nor did he treat Huck in the unfair way of Pap.

No matter what situation Huck lived in, he never lost his love for adventure or his bright imagination. At the Widow's, he still would sneak off with Tom to scheme and make adventures. Even with Pap, Huck kept his imagination going. This came in handy in helping him escape so successfully. And of course in going down the river with Jim, Huck used his imagination a lot not only to get them out of scrapes but into new adventures.

Huck's life styles differed in the way he dressed and lived. This decided by the social status of those he lived with. But his life style also was affected by the treatment he received from each person. However no matter the change, Huck always kept his imagination and love for adventure.

**Essay 4**

Compare Huck's life with Widow Douglas compared with his life with Jim.

Huck's life with Widow Douglas was much different than his life on the Mississippi with Jim. The river life was very romantic, while his life with the Widow was much more realistic.

While Huck lived on the river he had the romantic idealistic type life. How much more freedom could you have than traveling down the Mississippi on a raft? He had all of the elements of an ideal life: freedom, self-reliance, independence, and heroism. On the river Huck could live how he pleased and be individualistic. He could go back to nature and have an
un-restrained life. This type of life is often romanticized and idolized. For example, Rousseau, whom we discussed in class looked upon the American Indians as noblemen living in a state of nature. Many novelists have glorified life on the frontier wilderness.

Jim represented freedom. Huck helped him achieve his independence and while he was helping Jim, he was also gaining his own independence. This freedom was a very important element, frequently mentioned about Huck's river life.

Besides having freedom on the river, Huckleberry Finn achieved a feeling of power. By doing things his way, he could influence what other people believed about him. The biggest example of this was when he fooled the entire town into believing he was dead, and then could attend his own funeral. I would be willing to bet a lot of people would want to watch their own funeral if they could! Life on the Mississippi was definitely a life Huck enjoyed, as he saw no sense in becoming "sivilized."

Huckleberry Finn's life with the Widow Douglas was much more realistic. Huck had to do what he was told, such as being well-mannered, and learning his lessons well. (He had to learn the multiplication table all the way up to $6 \times 7 = 35$) During this time many realistic elements were present. Jim was their "nigger" slave and racism was evident. There was much ignorance in people in town. An example would be the many characters who were very superstitious. These were typically the uneducated people. Another example of realism was that Huck was not free to do everything he wanted when he lived with the Widow Douglas. Huck was different at the end living with Aunt Sally. He had changed much during his life of freedom on the Mississippi. He gained independence and individualism, characteristics frequently considered ideal.

Essay 5

Was Huck a changed person in the end? Explain.

By the end of the story I see that Huck has changed at least in two ways.

The first way I see is by age. In the beginning of the story Huck is about seven or eight. He has no mother, his father is off somewhere in the country drinking and gambling on what money he obtains. Huck is an orphan in this sense he lives in an empty hogshead or barrel. Huck doesn't go to school, he has not been civilized yet. After Tom and Huck found the money the Widow Douglas wants to "tame" Huck. He only agrees when Tom forms a
band of robbers and will let Huck join if he stays with the Widow.

Next, I see Huck as a young boy, who has not matured. By the end of the story Huck is a young man. He still has an adventurous spirit. When Huck was young he was unruly and uneducated. By the end of the story Huck has settled down sum he has been to school so he is educated a little.

Yes, Huck has changed. By the end of the story Huck is at least 14-15 years old. He has met people from all stages of life during his travels down the river. He has grown up both age and maturity. He is still a orphan but he has gained an insight into different stages of life and has learned by using his common sense.
REFERENCES


