Establishing The Bases Of Critical Literacy

in the Ivy Tech Classroom

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Introduction

This paper describes the need for a critical writing course at Ivy Tech State College. The course will address needs that are not being met by the current writing curriculum. The writing curriculum, as it exists, helps students develop a greater proficiency in the functional, rule driven areas of writing. The current General Education and basic skills writing classes also help the students to develop expressive fluency, as I will demonstrate. The classes do not, however, prepare students adequately for the kind of dialogic, academic writing that other classes, especially General Education classes, have come to require in light of recent articulation agreements.

I will argue that a critical approach in the required General Education writing class can better help students develop greater facility in academic writing by requiring more dialogic writing, in which students are required to incorporate the views of others and to cite sources appropriately. This kind of class represents a needed advance on the monologic, expressive writing that currently predominates in the required writing class, English 111.

In describing the need for such a course, I will examine the predominating views of literacy at Ivy Tech. Much of my discussion will be based on the four representations of literacy that are described in C. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon’s Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy: functionalism, cultural literacy, expressivism, and critical literacy. The authors consider these views to be separate and competing views of literacy, but I see them as representing different points in a person’s acquisition of literacy, which develops over the course of a lifetime. In Orality and Literacy, Walter Ong described some of the
social, historical, and psychological consequences of the West's shift from a state of primary orality to its current state of literacy. I will argue that the shift to literacy can also be applied to individuals, who go from the "natural" state of orality to the acquired state of literacy. The individual's shift to literacy involves several stages, which correspond to the views of literacy that Knoblauch and Brannon establish. These stages are developmental, and a critical dialogic understanding of literacy encompasses and supersedes other understandings of literacy.

I will first examine the various approaches that have been used in the required writing class at Ivy Tech. I will argue that while the two basic skills writing classes currently offered help to prepare students to develop a critical awareness, such an awareness is not developed in the General Education writing class with its current-traditional text and pedagogy.

I will argue that in an individual's shift to literacy, a functional understanding of literacy is usually the first to develop. Individuals generally develop proficiency in the functional, rule driven areas of writing in early school years. Individuals who fail to acquire an understanding of these functional areas during these early years often come to view writing with dread, something to be avoided if possible or done quickly if unavoidable. This characterizes the views of many of Ivy Tech's nontraditional students, especially among those in my basic skills writing classes. In the section "Establishing an Expressive Base," I intend to argue that such students are best helped, not by greater focus on the rules, but by helping the students to understand that writing goes beyond a matter of rules. In a basic skills writing class, a strong expressive component can facilitate
the development of a monologic voice, a necessary development before a student can
develop dialogic proficiency.

David Bartholomae argues that "Unless we [teachers] produce this effect in our
classroom, students will not be authors" (Writing, 69). Development of such a voice is the
object of expressive writing assignments, which help the writer to focus on the
development of meaning rather than on concerns about what is correct. Perl and Egendorf
described writing in terms of retrospective structuring (which focuses on meaning) and
projective structuring (which is concerned with form). According to Perl, students have
difficulty writing when they focus on projective structuring rather than retrospective
structuring (324). I have included student writings which demonstrate how an emerging
monologic voice can help students to concentrate on the production of meaning. The
development of such a voice often helps to allay the strongly negative feelings that
students often associate with writing. I will argue that helping students to develop such a
voice in the basic skills class often involves recognizing patterns of orality that impede the
student's literary development, and I will describe some of these patterns.

An expressive pedagogy can be used to ameliorate the students' negative feelings
about writing, and I contend that this affective change is an important step in the student's
shift to literacy, but a strong expressive component does not address all the student's
needs. The student's difficulties with the functional demands of the language still exist.
Also, the development of a monologic voice does not prepare the student for the kind of
dialogic writing required in other program and General Education classes.
The functional areas of correctness cannot be ignored at Ivy Tech. Not only does Ivy Tech "guarantee" such skills among its graduates, but portfolio requirements for each writing class necessitate some attention to the elements of standard usage. I intend to show in the next section, "Establishing a Functional Base," how a program of multiple revisions of selected works can not only help students to pass portfolio review, but can also help students to develop writing which goes beyond expressivism, with its emphasis on an external audience. Portfolio changes the politics of the classroom considerably. I intend to demonstrate, through the examination of a student piece that went through seven drafts as it developed from a journal piece to a portfolio piece, how a student can acquire greater proficiency in the functional areas of writing. This is done not by a rigid adherence to the rules of standard usage, but by emphasizing the reinterperative possibilities that revision allows. I will show how focusing on revisions increases the student's understandings of the elements and combinations that are unique in each piece of writing.

The functional requirements of portfolio might seem at odds with the egalitarian ideals of a critical view, but I contend that the multiple revisions that portfolio requires facilitates an understanding of the "representational" nature of writing, an important critical concept. Critical theorists emphasize the "representational" nature of all writing. Every representation that is constructed can be deconstructed to expose the author's underlying biases and assumptions, especially in the areas of class, gender, and ethnicity. A program of multiple revisions can help facilitate the students' understanding of the representational nature of their own writing, whether the writing is monological or dialogical. This critical understanding advances the individual's shift to literacy. Students'
increasing proficiency with monologic prose helps to demystify writing as they struggle to create and revise their own representations. Their skills critiquing their own work, however, still do not altogether prepare them for the dialogic critique of other views, as a critical view fundamentally requires. These revisions in the functional areas of writing could be, and in fact now are, effected in a traditional rhetorical writing class whose goals differ dramatically from those of a critical class.

Ivy Tech's long history with a functional, vocational approach to writing changed to a more traditional approach in 1988, and that traditional approach still predominates in the writing classes at Ivy Tech. The text that is presently used is a current traditional rhetoric. It describes writing by genre, which the author, Stephen Reid, bases on the purposes of writing. These purposes range from observation to argumentation. Many of the assignments, especially in the earlier chapters, encourage monologic, expressive writing, and often these are the pieces that the student elects to revise. Even the required research paper is largely a matter of "getting it in proper form." True dialogic writing often does not develop because of the rhetorical emphasis on form.

I contend that the matter of text is very important. In a critical class, students are encouraged to question all authority. No position is above question as students and teachers develop their understandings in a radically democratic environment. At this stage in an individual's shift to literacy, students need to become agents of their own learning. They must begin to develop their own research plans and to establish their positions in complex areas. I argue that such autonomy is not likely to develop in a class with a rhetorical text or pedagogy.
The next section, "Developing a Social Base" will examine the question of authority in a required General Education class that would be reorganized along critical pedagogical lines. I will first examine textbooks. I will argue that a reader, such as Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Ways of Reading*, with its assignments arranged in thematic sequences will facilitate the development of dialogic proficiency, as students address the points made by the authors they read and by each other. I will also discuss the issue of the teacher's authority in the critical classroom. I will demonstrate how portfolio can serve to empower teachers in such an environment by establishing an external requirement that must be met. This requirement necessitates that the student and the teacher work cooperatively to develop material that will meet the standards of portfolio. I contend that the requirements of portfolio may help to avert the spectacular crashes that critical classes are sometimes prone to.

I believe that Ivy Tech's nontraditional population would be well served by a writing curriculum that facilitates the development of a critical awareness and dialogic proficiency. There are several benefits of such a curriculum. First, the dialogic emphasis of the course will more adequately prepare students for the academic writing required in program and other general education classes at Ivy Tech or elsewhere, as these credits are transferable. Secondly, such a class will develop an appropriate degree of rigor in the required college writing class. It will avoid the "softness" associated with expressive writing as well as the triteness of current traditional rhetorical models. This will not be an easy class.
Finally, there is the matter of power. Ultimately, a critical approach is an empowering approach, as Donna Dunbar-Odom described in a seminar:

To become empowered is to become able and willing to question authority—all authority—in order to see what subtexts may lie under the surfaces of declarations, explanations, and exposition. This means [students] will know what kind of power language has...If my students are on the margin, I want them through the power of their reading and writing and thinking to find ways inside; if they are already on the inside, I want them to understand that those on the margins are coming in. If no one questions authority—on the written page, in the classroom, wherever—and if the students do not recognize the power within them to ask questions, the status quo, which has excluded too many for too long, will remain. (1/25/88, cited in Berlin, *Cultural Studies*, 62)

The course that is described here does not yet exist at Ivy Tech. Ivy Tech has a large proportion of nontraditional students—students on the margin. However, the institution is often perceived as an alternative to a traditional college. We are a nontraditional institution—surely, a nontraditional curriculum is in order. Critical literacy is just that. I believe that the writing program at Ivy Tech works well at the basic skills level to help students develop expressive fluency and greater functional proficiency. At the General Education level, however, we could be doing more to help students develop a greater understanding of dialogic writing as well as of the empowerment that can come with a critical understanding.
Literacy has become a contested term in the college writing classroom. Broadly, literacy refers to an individual’s ability to use verbal symbols to create meaning, both in reading and in writing. Beyond that lies the debate. C. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon describe four views of literacy in *Critical Thinking and the Idea of Literacy*, including a functional view, a cultural view, an expressive view, and a critical view. I base much of my discussion on these views, but it is my contention that these views refer to developmental stages that an individual undergoes in his or her shift to literacy. This section briefly describes Knoblauch and Brannon’s understanding of each view and how I feel each view fits within a more encompassing critical view.

The Functional View

The functional view of literacy is illustrated in such popular works as the Bell Commission’s report *A Nation at Risk*. The functionalist view explains writing in terms of sending and receiving and literacy as a tool. Writing and reading in this view enable workers to perform more effectively, which benefits the employer, the worker, and society as a whole. Students are supposed to acquire a functional proficiency in the language during their secondary and pre-secondary school years. It is during these years that students are trained in the many rule driven areas of the language. Of course Jonathan Kozol and others have demonstrated that such proficiency is often not acquired, but competency based instruction and standardized testing programs are designed to develop proficiency in these functional areas of writing.
The functional view of literacy is a very conservative and is strongly criticized by critical theorists for its blind acceptance to the conventions of standard usage. Workers are trained enough to build a missile, but not so much that they would question whether or not it should be built (Knoblauch, “Literacy and Politics, 76”). The problem with the functional view of literacy is, according to Knoblauch and Brannon,

...its persistent tendency to 'forget' the human origins of knowledge by enfolding science within a mythology that celebrates the discourse of empiricism while concealing the identities of its storytellers and the tactics of its storytelling. Objectivism lacks consciousness of its own rhetoric. (89)

I contend that functional competency is a stage one goes through during the acquisition of literacy. By the time students graduate from high school they should be reasonably proficient in the conventions of the written language, though many are not. Many of Ivy Tech’s incoming students are not. Obviously, to focus on the "rules" is not a worthwhile objective for a college level class, but equally obviously, the functional elements cannot be ignored in an entry-level writing class. Proficiency in these functional areas gives writing the power needed to succeed in the classroom and in some parts of the real world. In a critical classroom, functional needs can be met not by blind acceptance of convention, but through multiple revisions in which students develop a deeper understanding of the conventions in relation to their own work.

The Expressive View

Expressivism is a liberal movement in writing pedagogy that emerged in the sixties with the work of Goodman, Emig, and Elbow. According to Knoblauch and Brannon,
expressivist models have several common elements including an active, unified mind, which is the source of expression; a recognition of the power of human consciousness to constitute and order experience through symbols; a belief in the creative potential of all forms of discourse and of all individuals; and emphasis on the distinctive quality of personal "voice" in writing (125). Expressivism is criticized by conservative schools for its "softness" or for failing to maintain proper standards of correctness and by forces to the left for its romantic, solipsistic quality and for being politically disengaged.

As students acquire greater proficiency in these functional areas, they can begin to use these language tools on projects requiring the development of other understandings of writing. Students who would move beyond the functional areas of writing must develop a voice in their writing. Unless required to, many people do not take the time to work out the kind of monologic representations that push back the frontiers of their individual understandings. Students in an expressive environment begin to see that writing goes beyond a matter of rules, and they begin to understand the power of words. Even Bartholomae, whose differences with expressivism are very evident in his debates with Peter Elbow, concedes:

I think it is possible that many students will not feel the pleasure or power of authorship unless we make that role available. Without our classes, students will probably not have the pleasure or power of believing they are the figure that they have seen in the pieces they have read: the figure who is seeing the world for the first time, naming it making their thoughts the center of the world, feeling the power of their own sensibilities. This has been true for teachers in writing projects, it will be true in our classes. Unless we produce this effect in our classroom, students will not be authors. (Writing, 69)
Critics of an expressive view (like Bartholomae) criticize it for its softness, but I feel that in order to go beyond an expressive voice, a student must first acquire one. A monologic voice enables the student to develop increasing proficiency in what Knoblauch and Brannon describe as the "undefinable" qualities of writing like unity and coherence. Such a voice is a necessary prior development to a critical view. An expressive environment can help students develop a stronger unselfconscious voice. This is the voice the student will share with others in dialogic writing, which is an essential part of a critical class.

The Cultural View

The cultural representation, according to Knoblauch and Brannon, views literacy as the means by which the cultural heritage is maintained. Cultural literacy is acquired through the study of "great books." These works preserve the traditions of the culture against the ever-encroaching forces of chaos. This view of literacy, exemplified by Hirsch's Cultural Literacy is at the base of most traditional and current traditional post secondary writing texts, as is described in Knoblauch and Brannon's Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing. This view emphasizes proper form as well as understandings based on works that date from classical and post-Renaissance times. This static view tends to ignore the evolutionary nature of social change. Most of Hirsch's great works were written by white males. This view does not place much value on perspective beyond this narrow range. This limited perspective makes it an inviting target for proponents of a more critical view. A critical view of literacy also has a cultural
base of sorts. A critical view, however, looks more at the representations of the present than those of the past. Examining works from the past is often for the purpose of deconstructing, not for locating an authoritative answer. A critical view transforms a cultural view, with its passive emphasis on the past, into an active social view that is more concerned with the conditions of the present.

The Critical View

The most recent development among the representations of literacy is critical literacy. This radical view was popularized by Aronowitz and Giroux's *Education Under Siege* and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Critical literacy seeks to empower students, not as a functionalist would by emphasizing literacy as a tool which would help them to advance, but rather by helping students, especially disadvantaged students, to develop the ability to construct literary representations that will allow them to challenge the power structures that are designed to keep them disadvantaged. Critical literacy draws heavily on the liberatory views of feminists, Marxists, and post modernists. A critical view of literacy recognizes the political nature of all knowledge and expression as well as the ever evolving dialectics of various conflict perspectives. According to Knoblauch and Brannon,

Critical Literacy doesn't aim at politicizing education; it recognizes the political nature of education and ... works to make students aware of that recognition. Critical teaching doesn't aim at polarizing people by its emphasis on multiculturalism and human diversity; it aims to repudiate the harmful myths of the melting pot. ... it aims to establish difference as a legitimate feature of community ... It intends to provoke disciplined thinking in all students, from whatever background, in the interest of political awareness, civic duty, and a tolerance of cultural pluralism. (49)
At the college level, critical literacy develops beyond the view of a monologic voice trying to capture the truth. Critical literacy is fundamentally dialogic and representational. Students look not only to their natural voice, but also to other voices in the creation of critical representations, which are also subject to critique. A dialogic view of writing makes the writer part of an unending dialectic in which the writer seeks to advance his or her thoughts in the light of ever changing circumstances.
Literacy in the Curriculum

Ivy Tech State College is a small vocational technical college which offers Technical Certificates and Associates of Applied Science Degrees in programs in Business, Health, Trades, and Arts. Ivy Tech's strong functional emphasis was originally conceived as an alternative to the traditional community college. How is literacy perceived in such an institution? The content, emphasis, and pedagogy in the required writing classes have changed dramatically in the past twenty years and can be described in several distinct stages including the Related Education stage, the First General Education stage, and the Second General Education stage, each of which is described below.

Related Education

Writing instruction prior to 1988 might be called the Related Education stage. In this stage the objectives of the course were very functional. Students in business programs studied Business Communication, and students in trades programs were required to take Technical Communication. English Grammar I and II were offered to secretarial students in hopes of imparting an understanding of the conventions of standard written English. Many of our nontraditional students did not demonstrate great proficiency in such conventions.

The objective in most of these classes was to prepare students for the writing requirements of the world of work. Writing was perceived as a series of skills that could be learned and applied in situations constructed to resemble the "real" world. A few examples will demonstrate. A much used text in Business Communication was Norman
Sigband's *Communication for Management and Business*. The text is a highly prescriptive rhetoric which included numerous examples of good news letters, bad news letters, and reports on which students could model their own letters and reports.

*Technically Write*, by Ron Blicq was used in the Technical Communications class. The text was organized around the fictional company, H. L. Winman and Associates, a group of consulting engineers, who faced various kinds of technical writing requirements. These situations were the bases of examples and assignments. Michael Butler's *Correct Writing* was used in English Grammar I and II. It contained over one hundred twenty exercises in traditional areas like sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and usage. As the title would suggest, the text emphasized strongly the conventions of standard American English. These rigid models are distinctly uncritical. Instead of questioning authority, students are urged to follow it blindly. Knoblauch and Brannon, in an earlier book *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* describe what is produced in such classes:

Numerous contemporary rhetorical texts naively accept classical assumptions about discourse even in the absence of ontological certainties that had once supported them. These texts often reduce writing to static, ceremonial exercises in which students set out to validate the commonplace rather than to discover new meanings. They also assume that "truth" is what the writer begins with, that conclusions are evident before the lines of reasoning that yield them have even been developed, indeed the writer's only concern is a fitting shape or dress for thought. (31)

Pedagogically, the classes were organized around what Freire called the "Banking" concept of education:

Banking education (for obvious reasons) attempts, by mythicizing reality, to conceal certain facts which explain the way men exist in the world; problem-posing education makes them critical thinkers. Banking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy)
the intentionality of consciousness. . . In sum: banking theory and practice as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men as historical beings; problem-posing theory and practice take man's historicity as their starting point. (248)

This characterizes the pedagogy of the Related Education classes that were offered at Ivy Tech. Material was covered in a traditional fashion. The instructor dispensed the required information in lecture and reading assignments. Information was absorbed in varying degrees by students who returned the information to the teacher in various forms including tests and assignments. Students who were the most adept at the kinds of language manipulation required in such circumstances succeeded the best. The information may not have been useful in any way to the student except as a commodity for tests, and I suspect that it was often left in the classroom when the student left the class.

**General Education I**

In 1990, the Related Education division was restructured into General Education. This change necessitated major changes in the writing curriculum. Gone were Business Communication, Technical Communication, and English Grammar, and in their place rose two basic skills writing classes and English 101, English Composition, the last of which was a required class in most programs. The required text for all English Composition classes was John Langan's *College Writing Skills with Readings*, a rhetoric which strongly emphasized the five paragraph essays, formal thesis statements and topic sentences and absolute correctness in traditional areas of grammar, punctuation, and spelling. The text emphasized various rhetorical modes of exposition, like comparison/contrast, division
and classification, and narration. Once again the emphasis was in putting thought into its proper form while disregarding the circumstances that make each situation unique.

This text was a current traditional text downplayed the intricate subtleties of form that characterize even the simplest writings between real people involved in real situations. Langan's text had all the excitement of Sigband's book, which it replaced, but it lacked any such claims of usefulness.

Another change, however, greatly accelerated the pace of change in the writing classroom, and that change was the portfolio review system, which is now a requirement of all basic skills and General Education writing classes. Students in both basic skills classes and in General Education writing classes must submit a portfolio consisting of three pieces to a committee composed of writing instructors. The committee reads and evaluates each portfolio on a pass/fail/discuss basis. Students who fail portfolio fail the class in which they are enrolled.

Getting ready for portfolio is a major objective in each class, especially in the weeks that precede the portfolio due date. About ninety percent of the students who submit work to portfolio pass. The review requires that at least some of some of the student's work undergo revision, often multiple revisions. The committee consists of three or four permanent members and several adjunct faculty. The committee members teach most of the writing classes, and often "talk shop" during the portfolio review. This communication has accelerated the growth of change in the writing classes, as each committee member gets to see what everyone else is doing. The committee's standards evolve, and as a committee we communicate frequently with adjunct faculty and with
students about what is expected in portfolio. The committee accepts traditional five paragraph essays, although it does not encourage such a format. Portfolio pieces are generally between one and five pages long. Basic skills portfolios are generally shorter than those from English 111. The committee has established evaluation criteria for each class (see Appendix A).

Portfolio has had a strong influence on the pedagogy in writing classes at Ivy Tech. It has necessitated a change from the "banking" style of education to a class in which teachers and students work together to prepare for portfolio. I will discuss this change in greater detail in later sections.

The two basic skills writing classes that were established have also had a strong impact on the content of the required English class. Now incoming students who lack proficiency in the functional areas of writing or who lack expressive proficiency can attend to the development of those qualities before entering the General Education class. Ivy Tech's population includes a sizable portion of "at-risk" students. In fact, according to the basic skills coordinator more than 80% of the incoming students in 1994 were recommended to take at least one basic skills writing class. In later sections I will demonstrate how these basic skills writing classes can facilitate the development of functional and expressive writing skills.

**General Education II**

In 1993 state mandated articulation agreements between Ivy Tech and other state colleges made necessary another significant change in the required writing class as well as
the rest of a core of ten General Education courses, including Sociology and Psychology. Among the requirements for this core of classes is that each class must be taught by an instructor who is at least masters certified in the area. This has resulted in a significant increase in the rigor within these classes. These General Education classes now require papers and essays whose requirements often exceed what students must face in other program classes, and English 111 is not adequately preparing students for the academic writing requirements they will face in these other General Education classes.

One of the chief impediments is the new text. Stephen Reid's *Prentice Hall Guide for College Writers* has replaced Langan's text. This text might seem dramatically to the left of Langan's text. The text contains numerous samples of short writing by prominent authors as well as some student writings (which are often shown in neat cursive script). The traditional five paragraph essay is nowhere to be found. Each chapter contains a page or two of warm up exercises for journal writing. The topics are often quite open-ended and lend themselves nicely to expressive writing assignments. Each chapter also features two longer pieces written by professional writers. These pieces are usually about interesting and sometimes controversial subjects. The readings for chapter six, a chapter that is organized around writing that "explains," are David Quammen's "Is Sex necessary? Virgin Birth and Opportunism in the Garden," a fascinating piece about parthenogenic reproduction and Jennifer Mitford's "To Dispel Fears of a Live Burial," a graphic critique of the standard practices of the funeral industry in America.

The text's traditional roots are still present, however; and these roots impede the development of proficiency in academic writing. Let us look at the text more closely. The first two chapters are introductory. The first chapter is about the myths and rituals of
writing. The first "myth" demonstrates the kind of conservative rhetorical approach used throughout the book:

"Myth: 'Good writers are born, not made. A writing class really won't help my writing.'

Fact: Writers acquire their skills the same way athletes do--through practice and hard work." (4)

The use of the word "fact" to describe the author's perception of how writers acquire their status demonstrates the prescriptive tone that is deeply imbedded in the text.

Each of the myths about writing is countered by the author's "fact." The second chapter is another obligatory inclusion. Chapter two introduces the writer to the process of writing, which Reid describes in four stages, collecting, shaping, drafting and, revising. I will return to his description of the writing process after a brief outline of the remainder of the text.

The next three chapters ("Observing," "Remembering," and "Investigating") describe what Reid calls the "invention strategies" of writing. (xvii) Chapters six through nine ("Explaining," "Evaluating," "Problem Solving," and "Arguing") are designed to "move the student smoothly from exposition to argumentation." (xvii) Chapter ten deals with research papers and eleven on responding to literature.

The emphasis throughout the text is on the kinds of writing and how to structure each kind. In another representative example from chapter six ("Explaining") Reid recommends in the section on shaping an explanatory essay the use of definition and classification (in addition to spatial order and comparison/contrast, which were described in a previous chapter). The section on classification is revealing:
Classification, on the other hand, is a single strategy that can organize a paragraph or a whole essay quickly. Observers of human behavior love to use classification. Grocery shoppers might be classified by types: racers (the ones who seem to have just won forty-five seconds of free shopping and run down the aisles, filling their carts as fast as possible), talkers (the ones whose phones must be out of order because they stand in the aisles gossiping forever), penny pinchers (who always have their calculators and read the unit price labels for everything), party shoppers (who camp out in the junk food aisles, filling their carts with potato chips, dip, candy, peanuts, and drink mixes), and dawdlers who leave their carts crosswise in the aisles while they read twenty-nine different soup-can labels). You can write a sentence or two about each type, or devote a whole paragraph to explaining a single type. (204)

This seems to differ from Langan's unabashedly current traditional text only in the number of supporting paragraphs that are allowed. This is the kind of skill-centered approach that Aronowitz and Giroux refer to as the "technicization" of the humanities in *Education Under Siege*. (52) Such writing ignores the social context of writing or reduces it to merely a "consideration," as opposed to the driving force that it is in real writing situations. A pedagogy that disregards the unique contextual complexity of each audience-writer relationship in sterilized exercises like this ultimately rehashes the arguments of cognitivists and functionalists who would understand writing by understanding "the" process, as though there exists only one process.

The text is a rhetoric, a sort of how-to manual. It treats writing as a skill that is acquired through practices and the shaping of experience around certain existing models. Chapter ten on research papers also contains some interesting "facts." In a recent article, "Using Cultural Theory to Critique and Reconceptualize the Research Paper," Kathleen McCormick critiques the concept of traditional research papers, especially as they are
described in writing rhetorics. Reid's approach is clearly not very critical. For example, among the criteria he uses on which sources can be evaluated is the following:

Sources should be reliable. Check for possible bias in an article or book. Don't expect the National Rifle Association to give an unbiased report on gun control legislation. . . . (401)

Although he later concedes that all sources are biased, he recommends using a "a variety of sources representing several different points of view," (401) as though a consideration of a variety of different sources could enable greater objectivity. What Reid ignores is the ramifications of those biases and the politics that underlie them. Of course, each situation is unique, and the underlying political reality varies in every circumstance, but in reality these politics powerfully influence the composing of the piece. "If you are in doubt about an author's point of view or credibility, consult experts in the field or check book reviews. Book Review Digest, for example. . . ." (401). This advice will produce results that are only as good as the experts or the book reviews that one consults. Are these any less biased than the source in question? The student is not advised to try to understand the competing ideologies as representational, but rather is advised to follow the advice of "experts." Knoblauch and Brannon's critique seems particularly apt here. Students are encouraged to "forget" the human origins of all knowledge. They should put their faith in experts. This is a distinctly uncritical idea.

Reid's text is ultimately just another current traditional rhetoric. This is not meant to be a comprehensive critique of the text. There are many other examples that demonstrate his rather fixed view of writing. To be fair, his examples tend to be more thoughtful than Langan's mindless procession of five paragraph essays, but Reid's
rhetorical approach removes writing from the real world and makes students look to the text to find out the "right" way to write, as if there existed only a single right way.

As long as rhetorics are used in the writing classroom, a critical understanding of literacy is not very likely to develop. Students reading such texts do not learn to write by reading a text any more than swimmers first learn to swim by reading a text. The matter of text in a critical classroom warrants careful consideration, a point to which I shall later return.

Overall, the writing curriculum at Ivy Tech has some notable strengths. Within the basic skills writing classes, students increase their expressive abilities through the development of a monologic voice, as I will demonstrate. I will also show how students also acquire greater proficiency in the functional, rule driven areas of writing through a program of multiple revisions. However, English 111, as it is now organized, does not adequately prepare students for the kind of dialogic writing that is required by other courses in the General Education division. We could be doing more to help students develop the kind of critical dialogic understanding of writing that ultimately represents an advance in the student's shift to literacy.

How can critical literacy fit into a vocational technical institution? Is there room within an environment whose educational objectives are so unreservedly functional for the kind of fundamental questions that a critical view necessitates? Is it practical to require or even expect a critical awareness among a nontraditional post-secondary population whose average age is thirty two and whose educational objective is an Associates Degree in Applied Science? I contend that the working class roots of the institution make Ivy Tech
an ideal place to introduce the concept of critical literacy. Many students who come to
Ivy Tech have not enjoyed great success in traditional academic programs, especially those
students in basic skills classes. These are precisely the students that a critical view could
empower. There currently seems to be very little in program, General Education, or basic
skills classes that requires a truly critical response. I believe that there could be, especially
in the one required writing class in General Education, English 111.

Before examining how a critical approach might be effected, let us first examine
the bases of a critical dialogic view. Such a view is more advanced than a strictly
functional or a monologic expressive view. Development in these areas is appropriately
emphasized in basic skills classes. The next sections will describe how basic skills classes
can facilitate the development of an expressive voice and a greater awareness of the
functional, rule driven areas of writing. Proficiency in these “bases” of critical literacy is
necessary for the development of a mature critical view.
Establishing an Expressive Base

In this section I will describe the first base of a critical view. An important first step in the students' shift to literacy is the development of greater expressive fluency. The students must develop a monologic voice which will eventually be augmented in a critical class by the voices of others as they develop greater dialogic proficiency. This section will examine the student's shift to literacy in its earlier stages. I will describe how students who have been "ruined" as writers can be helped in an expressive environment. I will also describe certain patterns of orality that are often observable in the basic skills class. These oral patterns are replaced by equivalent patterns of writing as the student advances in his or her understanding of literacy.

The Individual Shift to Literacy

In his seminal work *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong discussed many of the historic, cultural and social developments of Western civilization in terms of the shift from a state of primary orality to a state of literacy. This shift to literacy has established forms of communication that oral cultures cannot conceive of. Information is now processed in corporate, national, and global networks, most often in writing. Students who do not move beyond the conventions of orality will not be likely to engage in this dialectic. A college writing class should prepare students to make such contributions. A student should be expressively fluent in writing. The student's writing should also demonstrate some functional competency. A college writing class should do more, however. College writing classes should prepare students to think critically about issues...
that they are concerned with. Developing this critical awareness is a worthwhile goal for such a class. When students begin to deconstruct arguments and examine them critically, they can become part of these discourse communities. This seems like a more useful understanding of literacy than whatever understanding that learning writing by genre will facilitate.

Individuals likewise go through such a shift from the "natural" state of orality to the acquired state of literacy. An individual's understanding of literacy develops unevenly, as circumstances require, over the course of a lifetime. Thomas Farrell describes how observations about the sociological shift that Ong describes can also be applied to individuals:

"... individuals recapitulate the history of the race with respect to the development of communication skills particularly with reference to the skills of literacy." (30)

Louisa Phelps expresses a similar view as she describes how a critical view of literacy can be described in a developmental way which,

... rejects ideas of literacy as a set of limited skills that children learn in competent steps and learn once and for all. Instead we see language as profoundly implicated in the intellectual and social development; writing and reading abilities grow and adapt to new contexts and needs over the life span (37).

The acquisition of literacy generally begins around the first grade when an individual first begins to read and write. Writing instruction through primary, middle, and secondary schooling is designed to help individuals acquire greater facility in the conventional rule driven areas of writing. The emphasis on competency based instruction and standardized testing programs tends to produce an understanding of the functional skills of writing.
Of course, not everyone acquires such understandings. The student's shift to literacy can be impeded at any point in the process. Sometimes students like Brian, a student in Developmental Writing I (the first of two basic skills writing classes), can be "ruined" as writers.

One experience I had writing was with a teacher who wouldn't understand that I just couldn't write on command. The assignments were specific topics that were of no interest to me whatsoever. I used to get very frustrated about writing anything. It takes me awhile to compose my thoughts to write. Usually by the end of the hour, I had very little on paper. The teacher always wanted the assignment by the end of class. She also always wanted proper grammar and punctuation. It seemed unreasonable to want the assignment just so within an hour. This is the reason I started to actively hate writing anything at all. The class got so bad that I dreaded going to it. I lost all interest and didn't even care if I passed the class. I failed the grammar and writing semester miserably.

These feelings are common in my writing classes, and as long as they hold sway, they interfere with the student's expressive abilities. Before describing how an expressive component can address some of these deep seated fears, let us examine the contours of this feeling more theoretically. Vygotsky described the relationship between thought and words in *Thought and Language*. He saw words as the end product of thought which has flowed across the interconnected semantic and phonetic planes. Thought flows across these planes and is eventually embodied into words. He considered the relationship of thought and words to be a process that was characterized by, "a continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought. . . . Thought is not merely expressed in words: it comes into existence through them "(218). Later he says, Thought and word are not cut from the same pattern. . . . The structure of speech does not simply mirror the structure of thought, that is why words cannot be put on by thoughts like a ready made garment. Thought undergoes many changes as it turns into speech. [How many more changes
in writing? It does not merely find expression in speech; it finds reality and form. (219)

Words do not capture meaning; they create meaning. Focusing on the phonetic plane detracts from the semantic unity. Writers, more than speakers, must also attend to the syntactic plane. Students like Brian need fewer rules, not more. Perl and Egendorf describe the retrospective structuring of writing, "when closely observed, students appear to write by shuttling back and forth from their sense of what they wanted to say, to the words on the page, and back to address whatever is available to them inwardly" (Britton, 142). In any form of discourse this retrospective structuring must be accompanied by "projective structuring" which is chiefly concerned with the structure of the discourse. At a certain level, writers need to focus on retrospective structuring, which enables the writer to focus on the creation of meaning. Students in the basic skills classroom often focus on projective structuring. This emphasis on projective structuring creates problems in student writing. It may be caused by the student's previous lack of success in the functional areas of correctness. It may also be the result of current-traditional instruction which often emphasizes rigorous adherence to "correct" form, such as the five paragraph essay.

Perl and Egendorf noted that "what seems particularly unskilled about the way these students write is that they apply prematurely a set of rigid critical rules for editing to their written products" (123). In an earlier article Perl observed such tendencies in a student named Tony, of whom she said, "From the moment Tony began writing, he indicated a concern for correct form that actually inhibited the development of ideas" (324). Later she says, "Indeed, their lack of proficiency may be attributable to the way in which premature and rigid attempts to correct and edit their work truncate the flow of
composing without substantially improving the form of what they have written” (329).

Many of my students compose like Tony. Their focus on projective structuring, combined with their problems with the prescriptive rules of standard English, results in writing that is neither meaningful or correct. Students in basic skills writing classes seem almost paralyzed by their anxiety over the correctness of their writing. More emphasis on projective structuring can only exacerbate this feeling.

Writing, any kind of writing, to students like my Brian or Perl's Tony seems to become a matter of dread, a matter to dispose of as quickly as possible. The affective roots of this condition effects the student's development in literacy. The shift to literacy is impeded, and the student often loses the patience to engage in literary activities.

Students like Brian whose shift to literacy is interrupted often fail to acquire much proficiency in the conventions of literacy that he or she is exposed to after turning away. In expressive writing assignments, it can be seen that students who are unfamiliar with the conventions of literacy often resort to oral conventions which are often quite different from their written equivalents. The next section describes how some patterns observed in student writing can be attributed to the student's use of oral patterns of discourse.

**Orality and Literacy in the Basic Skills Classroom**

The student's previous lack of success in writing may make writing, especially to teachers, a source of some discomfort. This anxiety may be heightened by the way words come to writers. In speaking words are chosen much faster and more spontaneously than in writing, where words must carry the entire meaning. Writing is a much slower process
than speaking, and the kind of reflective thinking necessary in writing is very difficult in a state of self-conscious anxiety. Writers must shift from the oral state, the immediate state of noisy perception, to the literate state which requires much greater focus on retrospective structuring and quiet, reflective abstraction.

Virtually all students are able to use spoken language unselfconsciously. Why do they have such difficulty attaining such fluency in writing? Are the two forms of discourse really so different from each other? I believe that the answer is yes. Writing is not just speaking that has been written down. Any view of literacy must recognize the magnitude of those differences. Some of these differences are apparent in the writing of students in my basic skills writing classes. Understanding the underlying patterns of orality can be useful to help the student to better understand the conventions of literacy, conventions in which they failed to acquire proficiency before their shift to literacy was interrupted.

Students entering my composition classes often demonstrate proficient oral use of the language. Ong used the term "residual orality" to describe the pockets in a literate society in which oral patterns of expression predominate (43). Shirley Brice Heath's ethnographies of the literate and oral traditions of Roadville and Trackton reveal the depths of some of these differences. She mentions, for example, how books are never given as gifts in Trackton and how children who go off by themselves to read are considered peculiar (191). In Trackton, oral patterns of expression predominate. These patterns determine, to a large extent, the patterns of literacy that develop also.

Children who come up under such circumstances often operate under several disadvantages as they acquire literacy. First they tend to have fewer resources available to assist them in the development of literacy. Schools are less well funded, and fewer people
are available to help them in the myriad problems that every student has in school. A deeper problem, however, is the weight of the oppression by the dominant culture, which is designed to perpetuate the system that produced such inequities in the first place.

Students, for example, are taught the importance of Standard American English in writing, and variations in their own patterns of expression are discouraged and deemed "incorrect" and inappropriate. Instead of helping to unify their world, education divides the world for these students. Is it any wonder that they sometimes do not develop the kind of literate patterns that we view as "essential"? Before examining some of the benefits of expressive writing techniques, let us consider more fully the differences between orality and literacy.

Amy, a basic skills writing student, wrote the following piece in response to an assignment which asked her to describe a writing experience:

I write what I think, because I rarely say what I think. When I speak I'm constantly aware of what could be considered inappropriate, yet when I write the rules of etiquette seem to change dramatically. Not to say I'm no longer responsible for their interpretation. This is what makes writing so interesting, how can I make the reader understand and/or relate to what I'm trying to say? I mean they can't feel the tension in my wrist, they don't know when I've paused in the middle of a sentence. There's no body language in writing, only words to describe what I think or feel. If the words flow, you may think I have grace. If the words make you ponder, you may assume i'm [sic] "deep". If the words keep you in suspense you may think I'm clever. The possibilities are exhausting. The challenges to become a good writer, I suspect, will require a great deal of commitment, but so far I enjoy it.

To this sheet she attached a handwritten note that said, "I'm trying to convey the difference between writing and speaking but I feel that I've left something out. I find that alot in my writing. What should I do?"

Amy's words demonstrate a moment in her shift to literacy. She has expressed her thought with a grace and poignancy that is not altogether characteristic of what I usually
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see in my basic skills composition class. The student quotes I have included are from unrevised journal pieces as well as from pieces that have been polished and revised. Some of the selections (though not all) demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the conventions of literacy on a personal basis. Students like Amy struggle to create meaningful prose. Students' work reveals much about the complex interactions between thought and expression, both oral and written.

This section is designed to explore some of the oral patterns of expression that are frequently found in the work of students in the basic skills writing classes, from which all the examples were taken. Understanding the patterns of orality that underlie some of the students' expressive difficulties enables the student to provide more meaningful criticism of the work. Some of these difficulties include a linear view of writing that moves unrecursively ever forward, difficulties in maintaining a clear and consistent use of first and third person, a tendency toward situational monologic writing over more abstract and reflective work, and a use of language that is more intuitive than analytical. As students develop in their shift to literacy, they will acquire greater proficiency in the conventions of writing. Before looking at how an expressive pedagogy can help in such areas, let us look at each area more closely.
Linear vs. Recursive

Oral use of the language always moves forward in a linear fashion due to the evanescent quality of speech. Because, as Ong noticed, speech passes out of existence as it is uttered, there is no opportunity to revise speaking (32). We can restate, but we cannot erase or change anything that has been said. This is not a limitation of speech; it is just part of the phenomenon. Dialogue moves forward in such a way as to make revision unnecessary. Meaning is created and maintained in a dynamic, continuous manner.

Nonverbal accompaniments are continually processed and incorporated in addition to the words and their meaning. Speaking has a theatrical quality that is lacking in most types of writing, which must rely much more on word meaning to create sense. Writing often requires an attention at the word level that is simply not a part of most oral situations, where the rules of expression are often different.

In the composition classroom, this particular oral pattern has several consequences. First the writing often appears hurried. Abbreviations and what Vygotsky calls "predicated" sentences--sentences lacking a subject, which exist as an unstated image in the mind (236)--are common, as are long sentences like the following Lanyea wrote:

But I decide to wait until we made it home, when we made it I ask him what he was going to do he said nothing then he notice a friend of mine number on the caller ID he was like what Cassandra calling for so that was my time to say that I was going out you can tell that he wasn't all that happy.

The thought moves relentlessly on in a manner that seems very conversational and not very attentive to the conventions of standard written English. Ong claims that oral language is additive rather than subordinate (37). Lanyea's sentence clearly demonstrates
there are six independent clauses and six dependent clauses. Almost every clause advances the action.

Another characteristic of spoken language also present in Lanyea's work is the lack of revision. Many highly oral students, because of the linear form of their sentences, have a difficult time revising. These difficulties may be due in part to the difficulty in revising such long, complicated thoughts into discrete sentences. The lack of revision may also arise from a simple lack of understanding of the idea of revision. First of all, revision as a concept is not very meaningful in oral cultures. Revision of spoken words is not possible, and revision of written work is often regarded as simply a matter of editing which, to a person unfamiliar with the conventions of standard written English, is a frustrating experience.

Although she did not choose to revise this piece, Lanyea's words express her thoughts, and writing sentences like this are often the beginning of an unselfconscious "voice" in writing. If she continues to write, she will develop increasing facility with the conventions of writing. It should also be noted that this sentence appeared in a journal piece that she wrote to me about a situation that occurred in a relationship. She understood the point of the story she told, and she told the story with authority. Lanyea was not worried about my critical responses, and the writing reflects a linear structuring that seems relaxed and free from the stress that teacher assigned topics sometimes generates.

The retrospective structuring characteristic of writing is not very evident here. Lanyea's sentence moves relentlessly on, never seeming to look back. Retrospective
structuring allows the writer to develop thoughts into sentences in a way that is not possible or even desirable in oral expression. Writing looks back more frequently because the structure has permanence and because the writer is influenced by his or her perception about how the reader will respond to the work. Writing affords much greater reflection than oral expression. Students who would improve the state of their writing must develop the patience for the kind of reflective struggles that writing inevitably produces as the writer develops thought.

An important part of a basic skills writing program must be to help make students feel more comfortable in their natural voices. A student who is not comfortable in his or her own voice is generally not very adept in creating the subtler kinds of representations that underlie critical literacy. It is not enough merely to tell the student to think more in writing. The student must gain enough successful reflective experiences to fuel some deep affective changes about writing.

Person

Another area in which oral and written differences impact on the composition classroom is reflected in the student's treatment of person in writing. A student named Anthony writes,

What I got out of that experience is that when you write down your thoughts, ideas and feelings on paper, you can store them, If you forget what you wrote down, you can just go back and read your papers.

The thought itself is interesting. Anthony has expressed a value of writing here. Another interesting aspect of his writing (as well as Amy's) is the natural use of the second
In strongly oral cultures, most communication is, obviously, oral. The construction of dialogue always requires at least two people. Meaning is synthesized and negotiated between individuals who continually address each other directly. Meaning is shared between individuals in a way that writing seldom is. The synthesis that is achieved in speaking exists as a point of tangency between two separate individuals. It is meaningful to both parties because both parties were instrumental in the thought’s creation and expression.

Writing is also shared meaning, but it is shared differently. Writing is generally not co-created in the same way speech is. In fact, writing is most often done in the reader’s absence. Lacking the ever-present reader/contributor, writing becomes a solitary act. The writer constructs a monologue, and while the structure may appear seamless, the writing reflects a synthesis of meaning between the writer and the different critical "voices" he or she invokes during the process of composing. The written product may be shared with others, but it is often not as meaningful to the reader as it was to the writer, whose struggles gave form to the thought. Speaking is, for the most part, created in the second person. Writing, on the other hand, is generally created in the first or third person.

Anthony’s sentence at the beginning of the section shows him using a natural oral pattern in his writing. It also represents one area in which the accepted patterns for writing differ with the patterns of spoken language. The degree to which Anthony is able to incorporate the shift to first and third person depends on his need to do so. The conventions of writing, once learned, will be retained as they are useful. He will go
beyond the conventions of person in writing if he continues to develop in his personal shift to literacy.

**Situational vs. Abstract**

One of Ong's psychodynamics of orality describes how oral patterns are based on situations with other people (49). These situations exist close to the human lifeworld he also states (42). Oral discourse is always a "situation," a social event. Each person in the dialogue contributes to the creation of a shared meaning. Meanings that emerge within the structure of the oral discourse are based on needs of both parties.

Writing, on the other hand, is nearly the opposite. The writer is often alone, and the writing that accumulates is the product of the author's solitary reflection. Writing is done after the event, often long enough after to develop a coherent and articulable point of view. The time for reflection that is characteristic of writing facilitates the development of thought that is increasingly abstract and analytic. The writer chooses words much more carefully to convey an inner meaning, Vygotsky's "inner speech" (32). Oral situations develop to fill an event; writing operates in a more vertical direction, toward greater abstractness, as we reflect.

Students in my basic skills composition class often look to situations from their lives to write about. These stories are not just narratives, or remembering stories, as a colleague suggested. These stories of people and events are chosen precisely because they do have meaning to the student. The meanings and the stories evolve as these student-
writers tentatively begin to revise, attending more to what Vygotsky understood as the interreacting semantic and phonetic planes.

Students often focus on major moments, but sometimes they are more subtle. In the following piece, April observes the crowd outside:

The crowd outside are in (5) fives. They are all leaning against a Geo Tracker. They are all men. I hope you don't mind me talkin about this sort of subject. They are listening to music. Up to date music. They are all about 6" feet and over. They are all fine. I sat pondering watching the moves they make. Wondering what they are talking about. The crowd outside, they are drinking beer. It's cold outside. They're having fun. Drinking beer is immature. especially when driving. But they was not driving at this time so what can I say. I don't know them. But they do know my friend Shaun. They come around regularly. I guess doing the same thing day after day. That is really boring. I don't know if they work, I don't even know if they sleep, But I know for certain that they do be out there every day.

April's writing is a strongly visual piece. Rather frankly, she appraises the crowd outside. Many of the supporting details are based on her perceptions. She sees the Geo Tracker, the men, and the beer. She also makes reference to the sound of the music and the feel of the cold outside. Her writing conveys her sense of the event that she describes. She also selectively reveals some things about herself. As April shifts to a literate representation of the moment she retains certain oral qualities. The last sentence, for example, has a rhythm and structure that are strongly oral. Likewise, her sentences are not quite defined yet. However, the rhythm of the last sentence and the ambivalence in her judgments indicate that she has a strong feel for the sound of her words.

Students must move beyond such expressive writing as they advance academically and professionally, but encouraging students at this level to write about situations and people around them often provides a structure that students want to develop, and often as
they move deeper into the subject, they develop the insights and vertical understandings that are characteristic in the development of literacy.

**Intuitive vs. Analytical**

Another oral pattern that is evident in the composition classroom has to do with

Vygotsky's understanding of the sense of words.

The sense of a word... is the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word. It is a dynamic, fluid, complex whole, which has several zones of unequal stability. Meaning is only one of the zones of sense, the most stable and precise zone. A word acquires its sense from the context in which it appears; in different contexts it changes its sense. The dictionary meaning of a word is no more than a stone in the edifice of sense, no more than a potentiality that finds diversified realization in speech. (244)

In oral use meaning is less an indicator of the sense of a word because it competes with intonation, gestures, expression, and other nonverbal elements. In addition, speaking requires much less lead time. Speaking is done almost on the edge of thought, and individual words are used loosely and intuitively, or seemingly so. Misused words are absorbed into the same vacuum as the well used words.

Writing, on the other hand, lacks nonverbal accompaniment and relies almost entirely on the meaning of words to create sense. In addition, it preserves the bad with the good. Students with highly oral backgrounds must get used to using words with a precision that lags beyond the moment. Students like Lanyea (page 22) have to slow down to the slower rate that writing requires.
An Expressive Pedagogy and Beyond

Eventually a student should move beyond the kind of monologic proficiency that an expressive environment can provide, but the development of an unselfconscious voice in writing is a necessary development in an individual's shift to literacy. Peter Elbow describes the kind of awareness that students can develop in an expressive environment,

But I insist that it's a reasonable goal for my students to end up saying, 'I feel like I am a writer: I get deep satisfaction from discovering meaning by writing—figuring out what I think and feel through putting down words; I naturally turn to writing when I am perplexed—even when I am just sad or happy; writing is an important part of my life. (Being a Writer, 72)

There is quite a difference between Elbow's attitude and that of Brian cited earlier in this section. I have found, however, that an expressive emphasis in a basic skills writing class can help students develop a much more positive attitude about writing.

In order to help incoming writing students to make these changes, I establish an expressive component in my basic skills writing classes. I require my students to write 75 journal entries over the course of a semester. I ask for at least one side of handwritten prose on standard sized paper although I give credit for anything longer than one half a page. I also give credit at a rate of one credit per page for anything that goes over a page in length, as many do. I collect the journal on a biweekly basis. I read and respond briefly to each piece often with suggestions about how a piece could be developed further.

Journal writing opens an avenue of communication with the student, that many, especially those on the margin, need in order to sustain the kinds of developmental changes that Louisa Phelps referred to in the quote I included on page 16.
An expressive base forces students to reflect. As they struggle to fill the biweekly "hole" of ten pages, they often search through their individual pasts and presents for subjects about which they can develop a point. Often what is actually written is not as significant as what Elbow refers to as the "cooking." (Embracing Contraries, 52).

Students are forced to commit themselves in writing, and for many it seems to be a new experience. Louann wrote the following in a journal entry,

When I first started writing class, I had no idea what I was doing. Didn't know what to expect when I walked into the class room. Had no idea what was expected of me and what we would be writing. I was very nervous and was afraid that I wouldn't be able to do the work... I've learned a lot from this class. I feel much better and more relaxed about my writing. After about a month and a half in writing class, I felt more at ease and more comfortable with my work... Never knew that I had so much to write about. Always thought that I had a very boring life. Well come to find out, I've had a full life and a lot happening in it. Once I started writing it all down, I found out a lot has happened. You just have to stop and think about it all.

I believe that in "thinking about it all," she is developing in the "shift to literacy" in a manner that is very meaningful to her. Danita, in one of her last journal entries for my class, describes a similar feeling of discovery:

In this writing class, I opened up a whole new world. I let go of a lot of anger in my words. I entered this class very upset. I didn't want this class and I felt that I didn't need it. I thought this class would be horrible, boring and hard. Boy was I wrong. I really enjoyed this class... In this class I felt like I was in charge of my work. If I didn't understand, I had a chance to get it completed on my own. Not just turned in and have a remark on it like good or bad...

Eventually, a critical understanding will encompass an expressive understanding of writing. A key tenet of critical literacy is the representational nature of all writing, and every representation that is created is subject to a critical analysis. Students who enter my
class are often very used to critical analysis, by instructors whose concern for the functional qualities of standard English have led students to despair when they are unable to meet these standards. Such students need to have writing demystified. They need to come to the realization that writing is, in the words of one student, "just a thing."

Expressive writing assignments do that. The following sentences come from two journal entries written by a student named Stuart,

Writing can be a struggle, but the more I do it, the better I get at it...I was able to work through some of my writing anxieties by doing my journal entries. My journal was a way for me to experiment with my writing. I could see a noticeable difference in my writing. It has improved since I started this class. The students who did not have their journal writing seemed to struggle more with their writing. The journals can help a student gain confidence in their writing ability... At first, I thought that I wasn't learning anything in this class... I felt that I couldn't write worth a darn... I wasn't giving myself a chance to really develop some of my writing.

Students like those mentioned in this section can develop a monologic voice through expressive writing assignments like the journal. Developing such a voice helps a student to untangle his or her own writing and helps to instill a growing sense of confidence in the ability to express thought in writing. It does this by focusing on the development of retrospective structuring, which emphasizes meaning rather than projective structuring which emphasizes form. Expressive assignments allow the reader to take charge of the work with growing confidence and authority.

Peter Elbow says,

If my goal is to make students feel like writers, my highest priority is to show them that I've understood what they're saying. It's only my second goal to show them where I had to struggle. (Being a Writer, 77)
In the basic skills class, my goal as a teacher is to make my students feel like writers. Helping them to develop a monologic voice can do so. Eventually a critical understanding will modify this expressive understanding. In her opposition to Brodkey's much publicized English 306 "Writing about Difference," at the university of Texas, Maxine Hairston took the very uncritical position that students should avoid "hot" or controversial topics (such as difference). She noted in the January 23, 1991, *Chronicle of Higher Education* that, "students develop best as writers when they are allowed to write about something they care about" (A15).

Hairston's reluctance to encourage hot topics indicates an important difference between an expressive environment and a critical one. Expressive writing looks inwardly. Through expressive writing assignments, students construct new meanings through which they seek to understand themselves more fully. James Moffet, quoted in Faigley's article, "Competing Theories of Process," describes what he sees as the self actualizing potential of writing when he says, "good therapy and composition aim at clear thinking, effective reading, and satisfying self-expression" (235). Expressive writing helps students to find a center. Critical literacy, on the other hand, decenters the student. Instead of directing the students gaze inward, critical literacy redirects it outwards to environments, especially local environments, in order to transform situations equitably.

Still a student must first experience the feeling of being at the center of his or her own world before being able to move beyond that. Students must first struggle with their own representations before they can understand the key tenet of critical literacy that all writing is representational. Finally, a student who has not constructed his or her own
presence is not likely to experience much success in deconstruction, another important idea in critical literacy. However, the development of a strong monologic voice should not be the goal of a college writing program; rather it is only a necessary first step. A curriculum that does not go beyond expressivism does a disservice to its students.

In a critical class, an expressive component should not receive primary emphasis for reasons that David Bartholomae describes in one of his discussions with Peter Elbow,

I don't think I need to teach students to be controlled by the controlling idea, even though I know my students could write more organized texts. I don't think I need to teach sentimental realism, even though I know my students could be better at it than they are. I don't think I need to because I don't think I should. I find it a corrupt, if extraordinarily tempting genre. I don't want my students to celebrate what would then become the natural and inevitable details of their lives. I think the composition class should be part of a general critique of traditional humanism. For all the talk of paradigm shifting, the composition course, as a cultural force, remains fundamentally unchanged from the 19th century. I would rather teach or preside over a critical writing, one that is worked out in practice for lack of better terms, I would call "academic" writing. (Writing, 71)

These are strong words, but I believe that "sentimental realism" has a useful place in basic skills writing curriculum, but the focus should shift in the required General Education course. A journal could still be required, but its purpose would not be as developmental as I have described here. In a critical, dialogic class, the purpose of the journal would be to communicate with the instructor about readings and understandings. It would be a useful though somewhat less important part of a critical class.
Developing a Functional Base

Of course, a pedagogy in writing must include more than expressivism. Incoming students frequently do not demonstrate proficiency in the functional areas of writing. According to 1994 ASSET scores, 83% of all incoming students were recommended to take at least one semester of basic skills writing, and 18% were recommended to take both basic skills writing classes. Indeed, many students come to Ivy Tech do so because it is not perceived as a traditional academic school. Many of our students have not enjoyed great success in academics.

This section will establish the second base of critical literacy: functionalism. I will show how the Ivy Tech writing curriculum, particularly at the basic skills level, helps to develop greater functional proficiency in writing. In this section I will describe the functional requirements of the Ivy Tech portfolio system. I will also demonstrate how a program of multiple revisions can help a student to meet those requirements.

The Functional Environment

Writing classes at Ivy Tech have long been very functionally based, as I have described in the section "Literacy in the Curriculum," and recent developments have necessitated an even greater emphasis on the functional areas of writing. These areas include the rule driven areas of the language in which secondary and pre-secondary students are trained. These include areas like spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and mechanics. Certainly the emphasis in a college writing class should go
Beyond such matters, but at Ivy Tech writing teachers cannot ignore such elements for several reasons.

First, Ivy Tech's "guaranteed skills" policy guarantees that graduating students will demonstrate proficiency in such areas. Of much greater immediate importance, however, are the portfolio requirements that each class faces. Students who fail portfolio fail the class. Students are expected to demonstrate functional competency in their work, and although few of those who submit portfolios fail, those that do fail do so because of extreme difficulties in the functional areas of writing. Some degree of functional proficiency is required among students in writing classes at Ivy Tech.

Many of the students in my basic skills classes are on the margins. I feel that the development of greater proficiency in the functional demands of the language can empower students. This is not done through worksheets or by emphasis on "proper form." Rather, it is accomplished through a process of multiple revisions which helps the students to acquire the kinds of representational skills that a critical view requires. Carr and Salvatori describe how revisions can help students acquire proficiency in the kind of scrutiny that is necessary in a deconstructive pedagogy.

The content and pedagogy of the course are based on two related premises: we assume that reading and writing are reciprocally interactive interpretive processes, and we emphasize the power of language to transform even as it represents. The difficulties of reading and writing, of marrying text and idea, are treated not simply as problems of disruption or of imperfect communication but as ways of opening up interpretive possibilities, as enabling opportunities to revise, extend, and/or renew previous forms of understanding. Students learn to read their own writing with the same intense scrutiny that they devote to literary texts, to question the fundamental assumptions of an essay, to play off its various underlying metaphors, to explore and revise its acts of closure and disclosure. (Carr, Steve and Mariolina Salvatori. "English 37, Literature and Ideas, Course Description." Unpublished document. Department of English, University of Pittsburgh, 1983).
The blind acceptance of authority that is characteristic of functionalism is replaced in a critical classroom as the student revises and refocuses with an ever increasing clarity. Students are expected to submit polished work to portfolio. It is expected that each piece will have undergone at least several revisions. All writing classes must submit portfolios. Of course, different teachers value different elements in writing, and portfolio also gives the committee other views about how each instructor sees literacy. Comments also focus on negative criticisms, frequently in the areas of correctness and proofreading, although errors are generally not enough to fail a person. The committee discusses many portfolios, but it fails fewer than ten percent of those who submit work (although the number of students who fail for not submitting a portfolio is often greater).

Portfolio does not, of course, guarantee that students will maintain high standards in all future work, but it does guarantee that students will have some experience shaping several pieces of writing beyond their initial form. Through revisions students become more adept in the conventions of literacy. Revisions force students to examine their written work more critically in the sense that they must begin to find the kinks and work with them. This kind of critical reflection results in work that is more focused and developed, as the accompanying analysis will demonstrate.

Portfolio necessitates changes in the classroom. I am the portfolio committee representative in the classroom and the classroom representative in portfolio. I do not vote on my students' work or on the work of anyone I have worked with on portfolio pieces. I require that students develop a total of six pieces beyond the initial draft stage,
and my policy is not to grade a piece until I feel it would pass a review by the portfolio committee. It almost invariably requires several revisions to reach this stage.

One of the requirements of portfolio is that all submitted work be word processed or at least typed. All students spend at least half their classroom time in the writing lab on the computer. They revise on the computer, and even students who entered knowing nothing about word processing are soon able to find their way around. Norton Text Editor is the program used in the writing lab. It is a simple, menu-driven word processing program, and students are introduced to the package in a class-long presentation at the beginning of the semester. Students become familiar with editing functions quickly, and their keyboarding speed tends to increase throughout the semester. Students are able to learn quite a bit about word processing during the course of a semester, and by the end of their third writing class, their knowledge about word processing is often considerably greater than it was when they entered their first writing class.

A subtler advantage of word processing has to do with ownership. As students key in changes, the original disappears. As each draft replaces its predecessor, they are left with only the changes, which are generally more focused, developed, and correct. As the writing improves, the student generally becomes more willing to make changes, as they are easy to incorporate. Once a change is made, it leaves no trace of its former self, and even what inspired the change is forgotten. A new text appears almost effortlessly. Because the revisions often involve refocusing, the resultant prose is often more carefully worded, and it is often more correct. Students are often most inclined to take ownership of their work. The successes they acquire with words and machines often change their
views about their writing ability, and while often their functional writing skills do not show an immediate corresponding increase, I feel successful as a basic skills writing teacher if students leave my class thinking that writing is important and that they can write.

Randy, in a recent essay described a serious motorcycle accident which destroyed his first Harley and nearly killed him. He has put the story on disk and revised it for a grade. As we were discussing his three-page piece, he indicated that he felt that this was the best piece that he had ever written. I was surprised that he put so much value on his work. Randy chose to describe an event in the real world. It was a highly significant event in his life and one that he has thought much about since. As he works in his revisions of the piece, he sharpens the focus to match his evolving understanding. Each draft generates new understandings as he struggles to articulate the major areas of the piece including the pride he felt acquiring his new bike, the memories leading up to the accident, and the pain of his recovery. The deep personal stake that Randy has in his subject gives him motivation that goes beyond a grade. He is telling a story from his life with a growing sense of authority and confidence in his ability to fashion a literary representation of an event.

Danita, in a recent journal piece, tells about how her feelings about writing have changed,

In this class I felt like I was in charge of my work. If I didn't understand it, I had a chance to get it completed on my own. Not just turned in and have a remark on it like good or bad. This class explained what I was doing wrong and how it could be corrected.

From a purely functional viewpoint, her work is still rough (although this is from a journal). She is, however at a point where she is beginning to understand the need to
revise and the need to learn about the functional rules that make editing easier. I have no
doubt that Danita could develop her literate expression. She appreciates a good story, and
she likes to write, and she is developing the patience that writers need in their revisions.
Let us next examine how multiple revisions can help a piece to develop.

A critical theorist might well shudder at the emphasis on the functional elements of
correctness necessitated by the portfolio system. To what degree can such a requirement
permit a truly critical environment? Does not the emphasis on correctness that portfolio
necessitates run contrary to the egalitarian spirit of a critical classroom? Does not the
process teacher's concern for revision imply an inexorable progress toward a final product
(a distinctly uncritical idea)? Finally, what about grades? These functional matters
require attention, again because of portfolio, which students must pass in order to pass the
class.

Functionalism in the Basic Skills Classroom

This section will trace the development of a piece from a journal entry to a
portfolio piece. Beverly is a thirty-five year old African-American woman in
Developmental Writing I, the first of two basic skills writing classes. She is large and
imposing. Her journal entries indicate a strong belief in a righteous God. She seems a
serious, hard-working student. Her initial drafts generally demonstrate strong oral
tendencies, which she shapes into expression that evidences careful choices and increasing
attention to the conventions of written expressions. I will show how a process of multiple
revisions can help students to focus on the functional elements of writing that traditional
grading of first (or even second) drafts does not facilitate. Copies of the actual drafts are contained in Appendix B. Through revisions, Beverly develops greater proficiency in the kinds of reflective decisions that writing requires. Dialogic and critical writing requires this kind of functional proficiency, and if no attempt is made to help students to develop such skills, they will experience difficulty in the kind of critical version of English 111 that I propose. Students acquire greater proficiency in these functional areas by encountering them in their writing. They learn about sentences by writing sentences, and they learn about good sentences through revisions.

Beverly's piece is strongly expressive. She invents a story in which she trades her friendship for a golden Bible. It is a simple story but moving in its simplicity. Expressive writing is appropriate, I believe, in basic skills classes. Through such writing, students can develop these basic skills. The student's degree of deficiency in these basic skills is proportional to the degree that he or she has avoided writing in life. Beverly entered this class not liking to write, but she likes this piece. This kind of success will help to change her negative feelings. I do not feel that such expressive writing assignments are appropriate in General Education writing classes, but students must develop a monologic voice before developing dialogic proficiency. She must find her voice before she can share it.

Draft 1

The first draft was written in her journal. The title "Writing Experience" indicates her intention to discuss an experience she had with writing, which she does. Her entry consists of eight sentences. In half her sentences she describes, analyzes, and evaluates a writing experience that she had in class. In the remaining sentences she begins her story.
In the exercise she imagined herself looking into a store window and seeing a heavy golden Bible.

After her description of the Bible she articulates an emerging understanding about the expressive value of writing, "... I realized that when you let your mind wander [sic], you can come up with all kinds of experience." She seems surprised by her own creative capacity, and in the last sentence she describes this as a good experience. She is beginning to realize the abstract possibilities of writing. To more accomplished writers, this is axiomatic, but to a person whose primary means of expression are oral, this is an important understanding.

In these sentences she also demonstrates another form of oral expression that often crops up in writing. In sentence six she switches to the second person, which is often used orally to convey general truths to the listener. She struggles with person in the seventh sentence. She starts off in first person but than shifts into the second person in keeping with the general tone she established in the previous sentence. She apparently realized, upon rereading the sentence, that she was talking about herself and changed "yourself" to "myself" although she ends up back in the second person by the end of the sentence.

My comments are pretty general at this point. I suggest that she develop the piece, and she does.
Beverly elected to begin her second draft in her journal also. She was in the process of working on this draft when she decided to enter it on the computer. The differences between this draft and the next start off minimally, but she is still working with it. In addition to several minor changes, she works out an ending in the word processed version. In this draft she begins where the first entry ends. She drops her description of the assignment, though she retains her analysis. She seems compelled to explain the value of what follows. In the previous draft, four of the original seven sentences were contextual descriptions or analysis of the writing experience. The other three sentences were the beginning of her story. In this draft there were only two analytical or contextual descriptions. The rest is story.

In this draft, she develops a beginning for the story, "I was bored, so I decide to take a walk." It is a compound sentence that has a strong oral feel to it. The next sentence consists of a string of independent clauses separated by commas. Beverly is working on creating meaning here, and the structure of the piece is not yet her focus. "...the next street light was giving off a gleam [sic] of light in one of the merchant showcase window." is a rough expression of thought, but it gets her quickly to the shop.

In her description of the Bible, she seems to slow down. Her next six sentences seem more carefully crafted. Her descriptions carry strong sensory images. She describes a gold book, gold and red letters, as well as less successful images like the texture of stucco (which she eventually abandons) and the thin gold weaving (which she retains and develops). The last three sentences begin the dialogue with the owner of the shop, but she
stops here when she decides to enter the piece on the computer. I did not comment on her journal entry because I commented on the typed version, which came in at the same time. almost never critical of the structure of journal assignments. In the next draft, her first on the computer, I begin to work with her on the more functional areas.

**Draft 3**

By this draft she has established the main elements of her story. Once a student puts a piece on disk, I begin in my capacity as a helper. My objective in this role is to help students to develop a piece which will meet the functional requirements of portfolio, while maintaining as much as I can the students freedom of expression. I also try to confine myself to making remarks, like my observation about gold's not having the structure of stucco. She changes that reference in the next draft.

I also mark within the text although I try not to write over student work. I underline wordy elements and suggest corrections in the functional areas of correctness. I prefer to do these evaluations with the student present, which permits greater discussion. I try not to interfere with idiomatic expressions that reflect current, subcultural, often oral use. If such pieces wind up going to portfolio, I advise the student to address the nonstandard usage in the memo which introduces the rest of the portfolio. Allowing such idiomatic use of the language gives the students greater control over their own work.

In this draft Beverly is still in the rough stage. That it is all one paragraph indicates that she is still working out the scenes. She attempts to convey the mysterious wonder of the Bible, she describes the transaction, and she establishes the friendship that developed
between her and Mr. Redding. This is a complicated vision. She develops a tale in which she exchanges the internal virtues of friendship and Christian love for the beautiful external treasure of the Bible. In this draft she is settling the overall structure. The individual scenes can be worked out in later drafts. I realize that my paragraphing symbol was premature. Before she can develop the individual scenes, she must develop a coherent vision of the whole.

**Draft 4**

Beverly took my advice in the previous draft, and she dropped the first two sentences. There is nothing left to connect this story with the real world except the title. She is now entirely within her story, and she continues to develop the scenes and details creatively. The "gear" of light in the seventh line of the previous draft becomes a "shiny" light. In my comment I offer a suggestion like the director of a motion picture. The comment is not meant to be prescriptive, but she changes the lighting in the next draft. She apparently decided to drop the stucco image, and decides on a smooth and soft texture to describe the golden Bible. We discussed my suggestion about reversing the colors of the letters, and again she decided to incorporate my suggestion, a minor change. I notice that near the suggestion about reversing the colors, I also advise her to change "where" to "were." The sentence, however, called for the singular verb "was." She makes the change to "were" in the next draft, and I change that to "was."

I am becoming more insistent about paragraphing in this draft. I not only give her directions to paragraph it, I also indicate with paragraphing symbols where to do so. She
has reached the point where the content is established firmly enough to find the turning points.

Draft 5

This draft could have been Beverly's final draft although she elected to continue editing. In this draft she has made a few adjustments to the content. She has worked out how the light drew her to the window, and she has established what she feels is an appropriate texture for the treasured Bible. She has also worked the piece into individual sentences that flow smoothly and demonstrate high functional standards. She has worked the piece into a story that contains some well developed images, a coherent storyline, and some thoughtful, revised sentences.

As she rereads the piece, she will begin to develop a conception of literacy which goes beyond her initial reflections about an interesting class experience. She has developed a piece of writing to the point that it meets the functional requirements of the portfolio committee. She has experienced a more complex understanding of literacy as she worked and reworked sections in her drafts, and she values the results.

My last comments reflect my grading policies. When a piece reaches this level of functional proficiency, I indicate a willingness to give it a grade. Grading a piece like this is always tricky, as any writing teacher will attest. I've read many pieces by students who describe writing experiences in which they decided, for whatever reason, to put in a heroic effort on a piece (as Beverly seems to have done here) only to have their work dismissed lightly by the teacher. Such students are rarely inclined to make another effort. It seems
obvious that teachers in a basic skills environment should make every effort to maintain a
student's enthusiasm for the kind of reflective struggles that characterize writing as a
method of verbal expression. Beverly told me that she felt that this was among the best
writing that she has ever produced, and I believe that to be true. She wanted an "A" on
the piece.

I tend to agree. Beverly began with a journal piece in which she described an
experience she had in class. She has, in successive drafts, converted it into a literary piece.
She has developed images, and she has worked (and will continue to work through two
more drafts) her thoughts into sentences that meet the functional requirements of
portfolio. In addition, her understanding of the expressive quality of writing is augmented,
as each draft require refocusing. Beverly has advanced in her individual shift to literacy,
and she has experienced some success with writing. A basic skills class that does not
require success often does not impact on the affective roots that hamper the student's
understanding of literacy. I allow students to grade their own work with the provision
that I determine when the work is gradable. Students must also justify whatever grade
they ask for, and an "A" requires more justification than a "C".

Allowing students in a basic skills class to grade their own work has several
advantages:

1) It eliminates the possibility of undervaluing a significant effort made by a student,
2) Allowing students to grade their own work necessitates doing the kinds of
revisions that will make the work gradable. This insures that the students'
 writings develop to meet the standards of portfolio,
3) Having to justify their choice of grade helps students to develop a more critical awareness of their writing, which they will need in order to write the memo to the portfolio committee, and

4) It establishes a baseline to be used in the evaluation of future works. This becomes her standard for an "A".

I feel that such a grading policy would be practical in a critical class also. Grades can be a problem in a critical classroom, but as I will discuss in the next section, portfolio establishes an important audience outside the class, one which I will help them get ready for. This external audience will help to provide the basis for the teachers authority in a way that pits both teacher and student against the dreaded portfolio committee.

**Drafts 6 & 7**

These last two drafts were not just a matter of who got the last word. Beverly stopped working on the piece after she got a grade. When she resurrected the piece for portfolio at the end of the semester, I did a quick review and made only one suggestion, which she routinely incorporated into her seventh and final draft. She submitted the piece to portfolio and passed. Does this guarantee that now Beverly will be able to produce a comparable piece on the first draft next time? Of course not, but her individual concept of literacy has been expanded in a situation she views as successful. Often a student's increasing literary proficiency results in fewer drafts needed to produce a comparable piece, and she is beginning to acquire confidence in her ability to render a literary
representation. Students like Beverly need this success to counteract the image of themselves as "ruined" writers.

Danita describes a similar past and also demonstrates how a student can be motivated by success.

...When I entered this class, I felt sort of bad. I felt that way because I hated my writing and I didn't want anyone else to see it. I felt that they weren't good enough. That's because I had a high school teacher who always criticized my writing. "Oh you didn't indent, it's not punctuated right, your commas aren't in the right place," just constant criticism without showing me what was wrong or how to correct it. But now the semester is over, I just want to say that I love my writing now, even if no one else does.

Literacy entails the incorporation of literate activities into one's lifestyle. Many students enter my basic skills class with little success in literate activities. A pedagogy which includes multiple revisions of selected works helps to create a better understanding in the student about the functional requirements of writing in a way that the traditional grading of first drafts does not facilitate.

Functionalism in General Education

In a critical classroom, portfolio requirements would still necessitate attention to the functional elements of writing, and revisions would still occupy an important part of the class. The emphasis, however, would not be so much "getting it right" as it would be "making it better," better in the sense that it is more specific, better supported, an more attentive to the elements in which writing can be oppressive. These become the bases of bases of functionalism in a critical class which, as I maintain, is a more encompassing view of literacy, a view that is a reasonable objective in a General Education class in writing.
Portfolio will also require that revision occupy an important part of a critical version of English 111. A critical view of literacy recognizes the dialectical nature of writing. Students will begin to see that their writing as well as all other writing is subject to critique and that new understandings must often be woven into the texts of their writing, and that often large patches need to be rewritten. Portfolio, with its functional requirements, helps students to develop the kind of patience that a critical view requires.

In a critical dialogic class, the functional elements should go beyond considerations of correctness. In such a class greater emphasis will be on critical tasks like deconstruction and developing dialogic writing, in which the student incorporates the writing of others and cites sources accordingly. The students will read other authors and respond to them critically. It would be reasonable to establish portfolio guidelines which would insure that at least one piece from an English 111 student be dialogical, or perhaps both. In order to pass portfolio, students would need to develop skill in dialogic writing. This knowledge would serve them in other General Education classes.

Realistically, I realize that even in English 111, students will face some of the functional difficulties that Beverly faced in her revisions. Students at all levels have difficulties in some areas. However, in her revisions Beverly has focused her efforts in many areas, and she has learned by doing so. This active, ongoing process is fundamental in a critical pedagogy. At any level writing must meet certain functional requirements. In basic skills classes, the functional elements include the conventional rule driven areas, but in English 111, the functional areas should refer primarily to the conventions of academic writing.
Creating a Social Base: Toward a Critical View

The third base that must be established in a writing curriculum, especially one which emphasizes a critical view, concerns the cultural or social dimension of writing. Writing in the real world seldom allows the kind of freedom established in expressive assignments like the journal. As students acquire greater proficiency in the functional and creative aspects of writing, they need to develop a facility with the language that should go beyond mere functionalism. Zavarzadeh and Morton claim that the traditional liberal humanistic education that may have been sufficient for the "low-tech" society of the early twentieth century is no longer sufficient for the needs of today's high-tech multinational capitalism (69).

Let us now consider an alternative to the current traditional composition course. In this section I will examine some of the changes that will be necessary in order to develop a more encompassing critical view. I see two essential areas of change that must be considered. In the first section I will return to the matter of text, and in the second I will show how a critical course might be organized pedagogically to facilitate the development of a critical dialogic awareness and at the same time fit within the portfolio system with its strongly functional requirements.

Text

A curriculum that would be critical is strongly hampered by a traditional text like Reid's. Certainly the texts studied in the class will influence a student's understanding of literacy. Rhetorical texts such as Langan's and Reid's treat writing as a matter of
correctness and "proper" form. These texts do provide many models and extensive general advice on how to write, but do such texts help to sharpen a student's critical awareness? It seems to me quite the opposite. Langan's text, far from encouraging a critical response, urges mindless recourse to the traditional five paragraph essay. Reid's text seems to endorse the same methods in a somewhat lower keyed approach. His sample essays are better, but the methods he espouses seem to be mere variations of Langan's.

It seems that as long as a rhetorical text is the student's major connection with the world of writing outside the classroom, the use of any such text tends to produce writing that emulates some form. What is needed in a critical environment is not so much a text that purports to explain how writing is created as a text that spurs students into a critical examination of their own understandings. E. D. Hirsch demonstrates the need for a cultural base in Cultural Literacy. He identifies over 3500 references drawn from his canon of great literature that literate people should know. Such knowledge, according to Hirsch, is the ticket to society. These schema are the repository of the culture, and Hirsch proposes a curriculum structured around the coverage of these "necessary" texts. How well would such a traditional program serve our population? Not very well I think. It is certainly not a very practical consideration within the limited general education curriculum required of students. Most programs require only one English course, and the kind of cultural literacy that Hirsch describes does not seem very realizable within the course of a semester.
Nor is it necessarily desirable. The great works to which Hirsch alludes reflect the values of a group that was largely comprised of privileged white males. The dominant position this perspective once held (and still holds) has been assailed from many corners, and one of the compelling awarenesses of the late twentieth century is that the rugged individualism that is at the core of the western myth cannot maintained at a global level. Proponents of a critical view feel no compunction to cover the dogma of a worldview that is morally bankrupt and in desperate need of transformation, not mere reformation. In a critical environment the cultural base is transformed from a backward looking historical view like Hirsch's to a social view that is centered primarily in the conditions and representations of the present. The emphasis is no longer on the work of an elite few. A critical pedagogy begins with the acceptance of diversity and multiculturalism. It accepts differences and explores them. Coming to a better understanding of the dynamics of diversity becomes a goal in the critical classroom.

A more useful text in such a course would be a reader, like Bartholomae and Petrosky's *Ways of Reading: An Anthology for Writers*. The text contains twenty five reading selections which are, according to the author "readable texts that offer powerful rereadings of ordinary experience, pieces worth extended work."(vi.) They are, in fact, extended readings, averaging about thirty pages. Such a text would contain far more than could be profitably read during a semester, and selections would need be made. The authors have assembled a series of sequences and mini sequences that could be developed by groups within the class. Students could choose, to some extent at least, from among various areas like education (in which Freire's work is prominently featured), history and
ethnography, gendered writing, and many more. Within each sequence various authors are read. The representations are often at odds within a sequence, and within each sequence the student can read at some length and develop a critical voice. The finding of one's voice within a topic or sequence will be the objective of the sequence. Finding this voice will be the objective of journal assignments as well as revised pieces, which will be developed as usual for portfolio. Instead of a source of rhetoric, the text will serve as a source of rich and varied readings, which will help the student develop a more critical awareness within an area.

A critical awareness will develop when a student realizes that in virtually all important areas, truth is not the subject of the search, but rather an understanding of the various competing representations that are present. A critical dialogic awareness requires that the student understand the different, often competing, sides of an issue and to develop a reasonable position within that issue. This understanding of writing is best developed not by telling students how to, but by requiring that students do so. They learn about this kind of writing by doing, not by reading about it.

**Pedagogy**

The changes in a critical classroom go well beyond the text, however. The issue of authority in the classroom necessitates other dramatic changes. In a traditional writing class, such as the current English 111, teachers acquire authority by developing proficiency in literary parlor tricks like the comparison/contrast essay and by rigid
attention to what is "correct." The teacher, who has that knowledge, is guaranteed an advantage, which is the basis of the teacher's authority.

Teachers have long been able to pronounce truth and enforce it through grades and evaluations. Teachers acquire authority in a subject as they teach it. Countless hours of preparation and reading allows them ever greater knowledge of the lore of their subject which enables them to move confidently through the subject during the course of a semester. Giving up that authority can be tricky business, as Lil Brannon described in *Critical Teaching*. (66) Students expect that authority in teachers, especially "good" students, those comfortable with traditional didactic classroom methods. If a teacher does not move with surety, he or she may be seen as ineffective or even incapable.

The issue of authority in a critical classroom makes many traditional instructors nervous. If no positions are beyond scrutiny, including those of the teachers, their classes must find a new center, one that requires a greater responsibility on the parts of the students to examine critically what they are studying. Nor is this decentering process merely an optional feature in a critical environment. It is essential, and the implications of this shift are far reaching as Mariolina Salvatori describes:

Because I would like to reclaim pedagogy as a philosophical science, as the theory and practice that 'makes manifest' its own theory and practice by continually reflecting upon and deconstructing it, I will call *didactics* any approach to teaching that shuns the teacher's and the student's critical reflexivity on the act of knowing and promotes the reduction of somebody else's way of knowing into a schematization of that method. Whereas *didactics* sets up "models" and dictates procedures that will make the approximation of that model possible, pedagogy inquires into the prehistory of those models, and analyzes and assesses their formation. The radically different epistemological assumptions at the basis of didactics and pedagogy determine radically different teacher/learner relationships, classroom activities, projects, and curricula. (93)
James Berlin articulates a critical understanding of the teaching of writing, "In teaching writing, we are tacitly teaching a version of reality and the students' mode of operation in it (766). A meaningful curriculum in a writing class should go beyond providing a bigger set of tools or a greater understanding of composing styles. Berlin's "new rhetoric" sees the students as "a creator of meaning, a shaper of reality, rather than a passive receptor of the immutable given" (776).

In a critical class, the teacher enjoys no special privilege, and the teacher's lack of authority has sometimes resulted in classes that crash rather spectacularly. Lil Brannon in Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy describes how students were reluctant to assume the authority that she gave them. C. Knoblauch in the same book describes a less spectacular failure in which students just missed the point in Tony Cade Bambara's "The Lesson." To be successful, it seems that a critical class requires a commitment to principles of radical democracy and to rigorous study. Neither commitment can be forced, and if students do not cooperate, there exists the distinct possibility of collapse. I believe that the portfolio system can help avert such collapses.

The portfolio system, as it exists at Ivy Tech, has a dramatic impact on the matter of teacher authority in the classroom. In a classroom, according to Patricia Bizzell, there are three kinds of authority. The first is the kind of coercive authority that is found in traditional courses. This is the kind of authority a teacher uses over a student irrespective of the student's wishes or even best interests. This kind of authority is common in traditional and current traditional writing courses. It also underlies traditional pedagogy in other subjects. It is the kind of authority that critical pedagogies reject.
The second type of power that Bizzell describes is persuasion. The power that is exercised by the teacher is done with the student's consent. This consent is given because the student believes that the teacher has his or her best interests in mind. This position is more in keeping with the pedagogy of a critical classroom. The teacher is no longer the source of information but more of a facilitator, one who, in the words of Bizzell, tries "to create a classroom climate in which students can generate their own standards of good writing. We may have a say in what standards they generate...But our guidance can only be offered in the form of advice" (56).

A pedagogy based on persuasion is in danger of collapse if students insist on "unreasonable" positions. What about students who argue against diversity and a radical democratic view? Bizzell cites the example of a student who rejects feminism on the grounds that women are biologically fit to be only a wife and a mother (57). Can an open classroom accommodate such reactionary points of view? Such a position argues against the liberatory foundations of the critical classroom. What happens when persuasion is insufficient? If the teacher penalizes a student for such an opinion with a lower grade, is that teacher not engaging in precisely the kind of oppression that the critical teacher tries to avoid?

Bizzell describes a third kind of power which she describes as "authority," which she describes as a two step process.

Authority is exercised by A over B instrumentally in the sense that sometimes B must do what A requires without seeing how B's best interests will be served thereby, but A can exercise such authority over B only if B initially grants it to A. This means I am imagining authority as being exercised through a two step process. The beginning of the exercise of authority lies in persuasion: A must persuade B that if B grants A
authority over B, B's best interests ultimately will be served. This stage of persuasion would be subject to all the conditions of collaboration described earlier in my discussion of persuasion. But once B has been persuaded to grant authority to A, their relationship changes to a less dialogic one. B empowers A to direct their course of action without A's having to exercise persuasion at every step taken. (57)

Once the student has agreed to such authority, the teacher can compel changes even if they seem distasteful at the time. I think that such authority is a smoke screen of sorts, and the student who is compelled to make such changes may well resist what he or she considers to be oppression by the left. It is still a matter of teacher vs. student with the teacher guaranteed an advantage.

Portfolio changes things subtly. Once a student asked me to proofread a paper he was considering to submit to portfolio. The student was a young man whose wife had recently filed for divorce. He was deeply unsettled by the prospect of divorce and developed an angry paper in which he extolled traditional family values. In one section of the paper, he denounced divorced people as "losers and quitters." Overall, the paper's pious pronouncements demonstrated an underlying view of women and marriage that Bizzell might consider oppressively conservative. Bizzell's position might be to compel changes to a more liberal view on the basis of her authority. I contend that such an approach is likely to make such a student even more entrenched in his position. As a portfolio committee member, I was able to point out that half the committee had been divorced and that they might react adversely to the "losers and quitters" remark. The student made changes that incorporated a more liberal understanding.

Portfolio changes the politics of the classroom. It is no longer a matter of teacher vs. student. Now the teacher and the student are on the same side and together are pitted
against the portfolio committee. The student knows that failing portfolio means failing the class, and their apprehension about portfolio makes them more receptive to the teacher's suggestions about revisions. Is this just another smoke screen? Perhaps so, but the above student did gain an understanding of how audience effects the production of a piece. It did necessitate an understanding of writing that went beyond expressivism. As a teacher I can use portfolio as a leverage against positions that run against the grain of the liberatory politics that underlie my evolving critical awareness, and students generally view my presence as that of an "insider," one who will help them to develop work that will pass portfolio.

I take that role seriously. It is part of my pact with the students. I will help them pass portfolio if they will give me the authority to do so. I also try to avoid statements that would suggest that the portfolio committee is a monolithic group whose requirements are precisely describable and which must be met. I also try to avoid invoking the name of portfolio over matters that can be handled by other forms of persuasion. Far from being an impediment to a critical environment, I think portfolio gives the teacher an authority in the classroom while it seemingly avoids the coercive techniques that a critical pedagogy would eschew. The critical class that I would establish could accommodate the portfolio requirements of Ivy Tech writing classes.

In fact, portfolio would be an empowering device for the teacher, who must struggle against the tendency of a critical classroom to "crash and burn" or collapse spectacularly. Teachers who would renounce the authority of the traditional classroom run the very real risk of diminishing their ability to require serious work in the class.
Bizzell's first step in the process of gaining authority involves the student's granting authority voluntarily. The portfolio committee encourages that decision on the part of the student. The student enters the class and learns quickly about the very real requirements of portfolio. They soon realize that a panel of English teachers (some undoubtedly harder than their own) will be reviewing their work, and they must pass that review. In such circumstances the teacher becomes the key to portfolio, and the agreement to grant authority to the teacher is often made at that point.

Furthermore, portfolio encourages the students to maintain a commitment to the class that goes beyond the moment. Such is the power portfolio gives teachers. Teachers use that authority to justify their representation of literacy. I once overheard a teacher tell her class that if they were writing a story about an accident they were involved in, than the portfolio committee would expect every sentence to be about the accident. I suspect that many odd statements are made about what the committee wants. These statements, I'm sure, contribute to the air of mystery and menace that students associate with portfolio.

The need in a critical classroom will be to develop curricula that will facilitate the development of writing projects that would be submitted to portfolio. Within these projects individuals could work to tie their individual pieces to part of a larger theme or set of themes that the class could develop. Students and instructors would work to develop these projects, and portfolio would give meaning to their projects beyond what is typically generated by individual students for individual teachers.

The creative possibilities that such a class would allow are exciting. These possibilities could improve English 111 in several ways. For one, it would give stronger
meaning to the cover memo, which must accompany each portfolio. In such memos students could address the issue of their place within the project. Their efforts to tie their work with the larger work of the class would also demonstrate a form of dialogic writing.

The portfolio committee could establish that at least one, possibly both pieces be dialogic as well. This could be a way to increase the requirements of English 111 beyond expressivism. Such dialogic requirements would insure that in any section of the class, regardless of how critical the pedagogy, students could develop some proficiency in the kind of dialogic writing that will be required at least in other General Education classes.

Another exciting possibility that such a "project-based" critical approach would allow is the development of projects that could be developed and distributed within the classes or even beyond. Each sequence that is developed could require the production of a class anthology or project that could be created and distributed, at least on disk, for free.

In such circumstances, a critical class becomes an exciting place. Students work not on learning the rhetorical rules of writing, but rather on developing writing projects both individually and collectively in which the student will work to develop a place. This is a broad view of literacy, but one which I think can be incorporated successfully at Ivy Tech.
Conclusions

A student named Tammy, who had been absent for a couple of classes returned to class, and I "welcomed" her back. I do not remember exactly what I said, but it was probably a joke about her attendance. I do that sometimes. I want to let students know that I do keep track of attendance, not because I have to, but because I really do care about their presence in my class. Little jokes (generally at the expense of the student) generally keep things light. Tammy said, "Don't give me a hard time" in just such a tone that subtly but forcefully made me sense that it would not be wise to give her a hard time. So I apologized instead, and that seemed to diffuse the situation.

I didn't think any more about the incident until she mentioned it in a journal entry. In the entry she told me that she almost walked out of the class that day. She perceived that I had been picking on her regularly. She did not know why I disliked her so much. She wanted to stay in the class, but would not if I kept giving her a hard time. I was surprised at how she read the situation. First of all, I did not dislike her at all. She had always impressed me as a friendly person, a person with a sense of humor. I sometimes use banter to stimulate engagement. I always try to keep things light in class, but I apparently misread either the thinness of her shell or the weight of my remarks.

I have taught for twenty years, and in that time I have seen people, paradigms, and pedagogies; and all have left their marks. I appreciate the performance elements of teaching and generally have no difficulty maintaining control in the classroom, though I never have to be very authoritative. I look with grim fascination at the stories of critical classrooms that have gone down in flames, like Lil Brannon's (Critical Teaching, 63) or Ellsworth's experience in Bizzell's article. In other cases, like Knoblauch's experience with
Bambara's story, the class merely misses the critical point. These collapses were not the result of mistakes. They are perhaps inevitable in a critical environment, where the teacher enjoys no special privilege. Nor does the teacher have the kind of safety net that a rhetorical text provides. I have accumulated my authority over two decades of teaching, and now I am serious about incorporating a pedagogy that is predicated on my divesting myself of that authority. I am very apprehensive about this matter of authority. I suppose this is the traditionalist, the same part of me that still thinks that "teacher" is still the best name for what I do or am.

But I have come to realize how much uncertainty underlies my "knowledge." Postmodernism has had a humbling effect. One of the most humbling realizations that comes from a project like this is the sense of how parochial my understandings were prior to its undertaking. In moving away functional "business communication" approach to a traditional or current-traditional approach, I felt myself moving to the left. When I began utilizing expressive writing assignments in my basic skills writing classes, I felt like I crossed a line into a more radically equitable view of writing. Now, as I move toward a critical pedagogy, I realize that diversity is a growing force, and a major objective of a college level writing class should be the recognition of the legitimacy of difference.

This is an especially pointed understanding for me. I have a long history with standard English, and expressive writing assignments have yielded so many rich experiences, experiences transformed into new understandings that emerge as students/writers create their verbal representations. Students have described stories that
have made me aware of the incredible diversity that exists just below the surface of classroom life. A writing class should give students the opportunity to become writers in charge of meaningful writing projects; for, to paraphrase Bartholomae, if we don't provide that opportunity, no one else will.

Yet a college writing class that does not address the dialogic writing does not serve its students' needs in further program or general education classes. Academic writing which proceeds from a critical viewpoint based on radical democratic principles is a realistic goal within a required writing class. It is more realistic than a traditional writing class using a rhetorical text and certainly more useful than a vocational writing class.

Students who have not developed expressive fluency or who do not understand the functional qualities of writing are well served in the basic skills class. Prolific journal writing can facilitate the development of an expressive monologic voice, and a program of multiple revisions of selected works can help students acquire greater understanding of the rhetorical and functional areas of writing.

However, a college level writing class should begin beyond an expressive literary understanding. At this level students need to go beyond the acquisition of an expressive voice. They need to acquire dialogic proficiency. They should be able to locate themselves in discussions and react to competing positions. Traditional writing classes use cultural references and models that are based on the great works of the past. A critical class is more concerned with the present and the representations that currently reflect and comprise the inequities that keep so many of our students on the margin. A traditional "great works" curriculum is neither practical nor desirable. Our students at Ivy Tech
would be much better served by a course in which the student develops a critical awareness in the issues of our times—issues based on gender, class, and ethnicity.

I hope that as my understanding of writing and critical literacy develops, students like Tammy will feel less like educational objects and more like agents of their own learning. I want them to understand that some parts of writing are rule driven, but the writing is much more than a matter of rules. I want them to experience the expressive power of writing, the kind of reflective development that literacy enables, and I want them to see that writing can develop beyond expressivism. I want them to understand the political nature of all writing and how every literary representation is subject to critique in an ongoing dialectic through which humanity unfolds. I want them to understand that writing encompasses far more than I can ever tell them, and I want them to know that it belongs to them.
Selected Bibliography


Farrell, Thomas J. "Developing Literacy: Walter J. Ong and Basic Writing."***


Appendix A - Portfolio Requirements

The following are the competencies that student portfolios should demonstrate at the conclusion of the various classes. Failure to demonstrate these competencies will result in the student’s failing the portfolio review and subsequently failing the class.

Exit Competencies for BSA 024

By the end of 024, student writing should have:
- have a clear purpose
- contain developed paragraphs and support
- be free of major or repeated problems in sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and usage which interfere with the writer’s meaning
- demonstrate an awareness of audience

Writings submitted should:
- consist of multi-paragraph compositions
- be typed or word processed
- demonstrate that final drafts have been proofread

Exit Competencies for BSA 025

By the end of 025, student writing should have:
- all BSA 024 competencies
- a clear focus
- sufficient specific and illustrative support
- demonstrated ability to thoughtfully explore chosen topic
- clear, logical and appropriate organization
- only some minor convention errors which do not interfere with the writer’s purpose
- some sentence variety and some precise, effective word choice

Writings submitted should:
- be at least short essays; a page and half to three pages is most appropriate
- be typed or word processed
- demonstrate that final drafts have been proofread

Exit Competencies for ENG 111

By the end of 111, student writing should have:
- all BSA 025 competencies
- a sharp, distinct focus
- substantial, specific and/or illustrative support and have no significant support error (no irrelevant information that distracts from the topic)
- a well thought-out and connected organization and should be coherent, without obvious gaps between thoughts
- very few convention errors
- a variety of sentence structures and effective word choice
- a writer’s voice which is appropriate to the chosen audience
- appropriate parallel construction at the sentence, paragraph, and essay levels

Writings submitted should:
- be at least two to three typed double-spaced pages
- be typed or word processed
- demonstrate that final drafts have been proofread
Appendix B- Drafts of "Writing Experience"

The following are six drafts of an assignment which Beverly submitted. These drafts are discussed individually in the section "Developing a Functional Base."

Draft 1.

This was a good writing experience for me to be able to imagine yourself somewhere in time and come up with details of thoughts of being in a certain place and what you can come up with while you write. Isn't it amazing what you can come up with? You could make this into a story.
A Writing Experience

This was a good writing experience for me to be able to imagine myself somewhere in time and come up with details and thoughts and this is what I came up with. It was past 8:00 PM, and I decided to take a walk.

The sun had gone down, and I walked down a narrow street named Park Ave. I didn't realize that the street was so dark only a few streetlights illuminated it. Still walking, I noticed that the next street light was giving off a glow of light. In one of the windows, I saw a gold book.

I looked closer, and it was a Bible uplighted in gold. The door was still open, so I walked in, I rubbed my hands down the surface of the book. Side by side, as the same as if a wall that had been stucked the same feature. Undertaken on the front cover was Holy Bible. I opened the book. The words of Christ were printed in red ink, and the other words were printed in a gold into the outline of the pages. Were made of a very gold covering. The merchant said, "I help you." He asked, "How much is this one of a kind Bible." He saw it's not as well and felt it was discontinued.
Draft 3.

Writing Experience

This was a good writing experience for me. To be able to image myself somewhere in time and come up with details and thoughts, and this is what I came up with. I was bored, so I decided to take a walk. The sun had gone down, I walked down a narrow street, the Park Ave. I didn’t realize that the street was so dark, only a few streetlights were present. I’m still walking and I noticed that the next streetlight was giving off a gear, in one of the merchant’s showcase window. I walked up to the window, I saw a gold book. I looked closer, and it was a Bible plated in gold. The door was still open, so I walked in, I rubbed my hands down the surface of the book. It felt the same as if a wall had been stuccoed, the same texture. Indented on the front cover was HOLY BIBLE, I opened the book the words of Christ were printed in a red letters, and the others were in a gold letters. The outline of the pages were made of a thin gold weaving. The merchant said, "my I help you, I asked how much for this one of a kind Bible. He said it was not for sell, I felt very disappointed, he could see the hurt express on my face. He applied, you can exchange this Bible for something of value that you owned. I thought about it, I had nothing that could even come close to the value of this book. I offered the merchant by friendship. He said, "I’ll take that. He said, that’s one thing I don’t have is a lot of friends. I would come and visit with Mr Redding, I would bring him a plate of dinner that I cooked, He really enjoyed my cooking, He would talk and I listen, I really learned a lot from him. We became friends until he died. There wasn’t many people
at his funeral, but I was there. Even though he is gone now, every time I look at my Bible made of gold, I can see his warm smile, and I'll smile too, and a good feeling will go through my body. I feel that his presence is still here, with me.

Beverly: This is getting good! Another draft?
I was bored, so I decided to take a walk. The sun had gone down. I walked down a narrow street named Park Ave. I didn’t realize that the street was so dark. Only a few street lights were on. I was still walking when I noticed that the next street light was giving off a shiny light in one of the merchant's showcase window/s. I walked up to the window, I saw a gold book. I looked closer, and it was a Bible plated in gold. The door was still open, so I walked in, up to the window were the book of gold was shiny. I reached over and pick up the book, It felt so light in weight and heavy of information. I rubbed my hands down the surface of the book. It felt the same as smooth silk, smooth, soft, and so gentle to touch-the same texture. Indented on the front cover was HOLY BIBLE, I opened the book, The words of Christ were printed in red letters and the others were in a gold letters. The edge of every page in the book, where made of weaving. When the book is closed and every page is closed together, the book looked like a gold light, that reflects a twinkle of a star. The merchant said, "May I help you?" I asked him how much he wanted for this one-of-a-kind Bible. He said that it was not for sale. I felt very disappointed, he could see the hurt expressed on my face. He continued, "you can exchange this Bible for something of value that you own". I thought about
it. I had nothing that could even come close to the value of this book. So instead I offered the merchant my friendship. He said, "I'll take that." He asked, "one thing I don't have is a lot of friends." From there on I would come often and visit with Mr. Redding. I would bring him a plate of dinner that I cooked. He really enjoyed my cooking. He would talk and I listen, I really learned a lot from him. We became friends until he died. There weren't many people at his funeral, but I was there. Even though he is gone now, every time I look at my Bible made of gold, I can see his warm smile, and I will smile too, and a good feeling will go through me. I feel that his presence is still here with me.

This is nice Beverly. One more draft. Use paragraphs. Clear this up a little more. This could be a portfolio piece.
Writing Experience

I was bored, so I decided to take a walk. The sun had gone down. I walked down a narrow street named Park Ave. I didn’t realize that the street was so dark. Only a few street lights were on. I was still walking when I noticed that under the next street light that a light was shining from one of the merchant’s showcase windows. I walked up to the window, and I saw a gold book. I looked closer and saw it was a Bible plated in gold. The door was still open, so I walked in and up to the window where the book of gold was shining.

I reached over and picked up the book. It felt so light in weight. I rubbed the surface of the book. It felt the same as silk-smooth, soft, and so gentle to touch—same texture. Indented on the front cover was HOLY BIBLE, I opened the book. The words of Christ were printed in gold letters, while the other words were printed in red letters. The edge of every page in the book were made of a gold weaving. When the book is closed and every page is closed together, the book looked like a gold light, that reflects a twinkle of a star.

The merchant said, "May I help you?" I asked him how much he wanted for this one-of-a-kind Bible. He said that it was not for sale. I felt very disappointed. He could see the hurt expressed on my face. He continued, "you can exchange this Bible for something of value that you own". I thought about it. I had nothing that could even come close to the value of this book. So instead I offered the merchant my friendship. He said, "I’ll take that." He said, "one thing I don’t have is a lot of
friends.

From there on I would come often and visit with Mr Redding. I would bring him a plate of dinner that I cooked. He really enjoyed my cooking. He would talk and I would listen. I really learned a lot from him. We became friends until he died. There weren’t many people at his funeral, but I was there. Even though he is gone now, everytime I look at my Bible made of gold, I can see his warm smile, and I will smile too. A good feeling will go through me. I feel that his presence is still here with me.

Let's joke this. What do you want in it?

The merchant said, "May I help you?" I asked him how much he wanted for this one-of-a-kind Bible. He said that it was not for sale. I felt very disappointed. He could see the hurt on my face. He continued, "you can exchange this Bible for something of value that you own," I thought about it. I had nothing that could even come close to the value of this book. So instead I offered the merchant my friendship. He said, "I'll take that."

We said, "one thing I don't have is a lot of friends."
Writing Experience

I was bored, so I decided to take a walk. The sun had gone down. I walked down a narrow street named Park Ave. I didn't realize that the street was so dark. Only a few street lights were on. I was still walking when I noticed that under the next street light that a light was shining from one of the merchants showcase windows. I walked up to the window, and I saw a gold book. I looked closer and saw it was a Bible plated in gold. The door was open, so I walked in and up to the window where the book of gold was shining.

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