The Cooperation Movement: Writing and Mass Education, 1890-1930

David R. Russell

Iowa State University, drrussel@iastate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/engl_pubs

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Curriculum and Social Inquiry Commons

The complete bibliographic information for this item can be found at http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/engl_pubs/194. For information on how to cite this item, please visit http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/howtocite.html.
The Cooperation Movement: Writing and Mass Education, 1890-1930

Abstract
The cooperation movement (c. 1900-1930) was the first in a series of twentieth century attempts to broaden responsibility for language instruction by involving faculty across the curriculum, the most recent of which is the current writing-across-the-curriculum movement. Cooperation in language instruction was another of the widespread urban educational reforms of the Progressive Era (c. 1900-1920). Cooperation was fundamentally a response to the new structural and curricular differentiation of modern secondary and higher education, which in turn reflected the specialization of knowledge and work in urban industrial society. Its theory shaped by organicist social thought, its practice by scientific management, the movement influenced writing instruction not only in comprehensive secondary schools and universities, but also in vocational, technical, and professional schools, in settlement houses, and in adult extension classes (particularly those for immigrants). Though the cooperation movement finally had little effect on writing instruction in the 1930s and beyond, it raised central issues of curricular organization and language pedagogy to which later reformers returned.

Disciplines
Curriculum and Instruction | Curriculum and Social Inquiry

Comments
The Cooperation Movement: Language Across the Curriculum and Mass Education, 1900–1930

David R. Russell, Iowa State University

Abstract. The cooperation movement (c. 1900–1930) was the first in a series of twentieth century attempts to broaden responsibility for language instruction by involving faculty across the curriculum, the most recent of which is the current writing-across-the-curriculum movement. Cooperation in language instruction was another of the widespread urban educational reforms of the Progressive Era (c. 1900–1920). Cooperation was fundamentally a response to the new structural and curricular differentiation of modern secondary and higher education, which in turn reflected the specialization of knowledge and work in urban industrial society. Its theory shaped by organicist social thought, its practice by scientific management, the movement influenced writing instruction not only in comprehensive secondary schools and universities, but also in vocational, technical, and professional schools, in settlement houses, and in adult extension classes (particularly those for immigrants). Though the cooperation movement finally had little effect on writing instruction in the 1930s and beyond, it raised central issues of curricular organization and language pedagogy to which later reformers returned.

In recent years, much research into cross-curricular writing instruction has used ethnographic or case study methods (Applebee, 1981, 1984; Gere, 1985; Heath, 1983; Langer & Applebee, 1987; Swanson-Owens, 1986). Clearly these methods lend themselves to the study of language acquisition in its myriad social and cultural contexts. And because they are richly descriptive of local practice and assume that writing is highly context-dependent, they resist hasty generalizations.

But ethnographic methods may themselves encourage hasty generalizations of another sort—what Heath (1983) has called “the fallacy of the ethnographic present.” Never can “the description of the current times fully capture the influences and forces of history on the present” (p. 9). To trace those influences and forces, she points out, the ethnographer must turn to social history.

This is particularly true of those who study writing across the curricu-
lum, which by its very nature is shaped by many discourse communities, each with its own history, since the curriculum became differentiated in the late nineteenth century. Historians of rhetoric and education have just begun to study the effects of curricular differentiation on writing and its teaching by tracing the ways specific disciplines developed their unique rhetorical conventions (Connors, 1982; Gambrell, 1987; Graff, 1987). But cross-curricular writing instruction in America poses a particularly complex set of historical problems not only because of curricular differentiation by content areas or disciplines, but also because of institutional differentiation. American mass education, like the industrial organization it is largely modeled on, is specialized by its function. Individual schools and specific programs within schools have different clienteles, organization, curricula, and—most importantly—purposes. These social and institutional factors may influence the kind of language instruction they offer, both consciously, as a matter of policy, and less consciously, in their expectations of students, their methods, and their attitudes toward writing and learning. One cannot adequately understand the synchronic dimension of educational practice without probing the diachronic dimension: the traditions which shape current methods—and purposes—of instruction.

For example, current research shows that most content-area teachers require little extended writing but instead rely on form responses and short answers where material is already structured by teacher or text; that extended student writing is generally informative (summary and analysis) rather than personal or imaginative; that the audience is overwhelmingly the teacher-as-examiner. But with one notable exception, researchers have ignored the development of these practices; thus their function within the curriculum may seem obscure or irrational. Applebee (1987) suggests that the version of curriculum that give rise to these practices is based on an industrial metaphor (Callahan, 1962) and is often accompanied by a fairly complex management plan that controls the sequence of diagnostic testing and provides appropriate instruction, evaluation and reteaching. . . . With some shifts in emphasis across the years, this version of curriculum dominated instruction throughout the first half of the twentieth century, was at the base of the curriculum reform movement of the 1960s, and, despite the process- and context-oriented research of the past two decades, continues to undergird contemporary approaches to schooling. . . .

To summarize bluntly, given traditional notions of instruction, it may be impossible to implement successfully the approaches we have championed. (pp. 138–139).

In this essay I want to develop and expand this suggestion by arguing that resistance to cross-curricular writing instruction has its origins in the mass education system which grew up at the turn of the century, when
The Cooperation Movement

401

America consciously adapted the methods of industrial organization to the demands of preparing a host of varied students for life in a complex, highly-differentiated society. Cross-curricular writing instruction was, almost from the beginning, an option—but an option which went against the grain of the differentiated bureaucratic structure of education and its compartmentalization of knowledge by disciplines.

I will first explain the earliest attempts at cooperative language instruction in terms of the social context of American mass education during these formative years, and then suggest some of the reasons why that interest faded, or rather, was redirected during the following decades toward other efforts—the latest of which is the current writing-across-the-curriculum movement. Finally, I draw out some implications for current research by noting how traditional notions of disciplinarity and writing (shaped at the turn of the century) may affect curricular reform.

Origins of the Cooperation Movement

In 1901 the New England Association of Teachers of English published a pamphlet entitled "Successful Combination Against the Inert" (Browne, 1901). It outlined a program of cooperation which would enlist secondary and college faculty from all disciplines to improve students' language, both spoken and written. During the next thirty-odd years, dozens of articles appeared on the subject, both in the professional journals and in the national press. Hundreds of programs began at the school, district, and state levels. And the newly-formed NCTE made cooperation part of its national reorganization plan for the secondary schools (Hosie, 1917, chap. 14). In 1924 teachers at the NCTE convention ranked cooperation as the highest priority for improving instruction (Searson, 1924), and a survey of Freshman Composition listed it as one of five significant trends in instruction (Taylor, 1929).

The cooperation movement can best be seen as another manifestation of the complex and often contradictory enthusiasm for reform during the Progressive Era (roughly 1900–1920), though it is important to remember that the movement was well launched before "progressive education" congealed into an organized movement after World War I. As with so many other educational—and political—movements born in the nineties and nourished in the climate of prewar optimism, reformers of every stripe, from socialists to genteel reactionaries, embraced cooperation—often unaware of the contradictions which lay under the surface.

The impetus toward cooperation in writing instruction came from many directions—educational theorists, crusading journalists, reform-minded teachers and administrators. And the cooperation programs or "schemes," as they were called, showed similar variety, so much so that a
single definition of “cooperation” is impossible. For some, cooperation meant instructors from outside the English department taught writing within their courses. For others, it meant the whole faculty set and enforced standards for writing while the English department taught all writing in the curriculum (or corrected student writing from all classes). For still others, cooperation meant administrative controls on writing assignments in the whole curriculum, or community involvement in language instruction. Everyone agreed that each teacher should in some sense be an English teacher, but which English should be taught to which students, by what methods and for what ends?

As America’s schools and colleges entered the twentieth century, they faced a central dilemma. On one hand, urbanization and industrialization had specialized knowledge and work to an unprecedented extent. In myriad ways, society demanded that educational institutions create new specialized knowledge and train workers—both professional experts and flexible laborers—on whom urban-industrial America depended for its growth. On the other hand, the nation also demanded that educational institutions promote the social cohesiveness on which urban-industrial American depended for its survival. As cities grew, the old rural and small town social structures became inadequate to meet the complex demands of urban life, and Americans increasingly looked to education to bring about community, democracy, Americanization, equality of opportunity in society.

The use—and teaching—of language lay at the center of this dilemma. And in many ways, the political struggles which characterized education in the Progressive Era are reflected in the debate over responsibility for language instruction. On one hand, language instruction was a means of differentiation. Language served as a tool for sorting students, and writing instruction (or lack of it) was often a vital part of preparing them for specialized social and economic roles. On the other hand, language instruction was a powerful unifying force, at least potentially—though there were many competing versions of a unified society and of a “common” language. From the Americanization movement in the teeming urban ghettos to the General Education movement in pastoral liberal arts colleges, language instruction became a rallying point for reformers searching for a common denominator to weave together the disparate threads of an increasingly complex polity. Before looking at specific ways educational reformers addressed language instruction in a society where knowledge and work were becoming increasingly specialized, we must briefly consider the broad intellectual environment which shaped the cooperation movement.

Educational reformers pushing for various cooperation schemes did little theorizing, busy as they were with day-to-day problems of administration and teaching. But the shifting intellectual currents affecting Ameri-
can schools also influenced cooperation efforts. In the deepest sense, these reformers shared the widespread progressive faith in the power of scientific organization to redeem social ills. However, they also reflected the—often conflicting—theories of language and education available in the Progressive Era.

The most influential new theory among advocates of cooperation in secondary schools and colleges, particularly the Midwestern reformers of the NCTE, was the organic or functionalist approach of Dewey (with whom several reformers had worked closely). Clearly, cooperation fit with Dewey's emphasis on teaching the older three R's as part of the newer subjects introduced into the differentiated curriculum, uniting cultural studies with vocational studies in the experience of the child. And behind some rationales for cooperation lay Dewey's views on the central role of communication in bringing about democratic cooperation among the disparate elements of industrial society—and the schools' responsibility for teaching that communication. Deweyan reformers in English education, such as Fred N. Scott, Gertrude Buck, and Sterling Leonard, saw composition in social terms, as a response to a particular exigency and audience, and in organic terms, as a "vital process, like a plant or animal" (Buck, 1899, p. 35). In a widely-circulated article on cooperation (1913, p. 485), NCTE founder James Fleming Hosie argued that writing in all areas of the curriculum would counteract the "overspecialization" of modern schools "which can only result in mutual lack of sympathy, and which tends to disintegrate the life of the student instead of unifying and harmonizing it." Cooperation would encourage a "consistent unifying of his life" and help schools see "boys and girls as developing beings with whole, undivided lives."

However, in the nation's classrooms, the most common approach to writing instruction was the aggregate of received ideas about writing which James A. Berlin and others have dubbed "current-traditional rhetoric." In this view (based largely upon eighteenth-century faculty psychology and, in education, the theory of mental discipline), writing is a discrete mental faculty or set of skills, independent of social or disciplinary factors, which is learned once and for all by mastering specific information, often through mechanical drill (Berlin, 1984, ch 6). As composition became a separate part of the new differentiated curriculum in the 1870s, current-traditional notions spread through influential textbooks by Sherman Adams Hill, Barrett Wendell, both of Harvard, and John Franklin Genung of Amherst.

A less useful theory in promoting shared responsibility for language instruction would be hard to imagine. Current-traditional rhetoric discouraged the study of language in its various disciplinary and social contexts—the very areas where cooperation would have to take root in the differentiated curriculum. Instead it encouraged classifying and counting
errors, atomistic measures of linguistic performance favored by school efficiency experts, and remedial correctives. Ultimately, it helped further rationalization and specialization of curriculum and instruction by viewing language as a transparent, objective system which need not be examined in social terms, instead of as a complex, intersubjective medium which underlay the specialization of urban industrial life. Though the organic or functionalist approach dominated educational and social theory, it had comparatively little effect on classroom practice, and the Deweyan reformers of the NCTE never successfully challenged the dominant current-traditional approach (Berlin, 1984, ch 7).

Cooperation and Curricular Specialization

The most obvious fact of educational life in the Progressive Era was sheer growth in numbers. High school enrollments jumped from half a million in 1900 to almost three million in 1928 (Applebee, 1974, p. 280), and college enrollments almost tripled (as a percentage of the population) during the same period (Census, 1975). But numbers alone did not create the need for cooperation. There would have been no calls for cooperative schemes if America had simply built more one-room school houses on the rural model, or more of the sectarian academies and colleges of the nineteenth century, with their required liberal curriculum, their homogeneous student body and faculty which generally shared a single body of knowledge and set of values. Instead, as Lawrence Cremin (1988) has forcefully argued, the metropolitan experience overwhelmed earlier models. The new schools reflected urban industrial life in its structural differentiation. New disciplines (or subject areas) were formed and old ones transformed. The curriculum became differentiated—elective—both within single comprehensive schools and universities and through the creation of new specialized institutions: vocational, technical, professional schools, the settlement house, the reform school, the extension class, and so on.

This differentiation was in a profound sense linguistic—through the specialized discourse of each discipline of profession (with which each formed and asserted its identity), or through the linguistic forms of social class or ethnic groups, whose use of language became a means of community-forming and, in other contexts, a means of sorting and discrimination (on Ellis Island the inability to speak or write English constituted evidence of a mental defect). Against this background, the need for cooperation stood out to reformers in many camps. Shared responsibility for language instruction would, variously interpreted, help to overcome the structural divisions in academia or to heal the divisions in society. Like so many other educational reforms of the era, cooperation was considered a redemptive force in a system gone wrong, and its advocates pursued it
with missionary zeal. But the increasing specialization of knowledge made theirs a formidable task. Critics like Charles Woodbridge (1923, p. 8) could lament, "Our modern schools, like our modern battleships, are made up of watertight compartments." But the power and efficiency of the new structure ensured its success, as we shall see.

Cooperation and the Efficiency Movement

The national school reform movement of the 1890s and beyond, like the broader Progressive movement in American social and political spheres, attempted to build on a sound scientific foundation. It sought to rationalize the organization of instruction in order to solve the many problems which the reform press was calling to the nation's attention. Nation, Harper's and New Republic pointed to poor student writing as one such problem (albeit a minor one). As a Nation editor wrote (1908, p. 258), it is a "crying scandal .... Merely from the point of view of waste of money it cries for a remedy . . . . What the student gains in one hour he throws out in the next. [With cooperation] the expense of training him in English will be greatly lessened." Educators responded with corrective organizational schemes. Efficiency was the watchword, in the expanding educational system as in the burgeoning industrial sector.

In the eyes of the new scientific administrator, differentiation was not a hindrance but a boon to cooperation in language instruction, if only a rational means could be invented to efficiently organize cooperative efforts across disciplines. Experiments abounded. One fairly common practice was to have English teachers correct papers written in content-area courses, on the theory that non-English teachers were not qualified to evaluate writing. In a few schools the papers for content-area courses were both written and graded in English classes, and students even used content-area texts in English class—practices which caused some friction, as we shall see (Congdon, 1915; Fore, 1915; Lyman, 1929; Vose, 1925, pp. 14-22).

Reformers often praised the cooperation scheme at a Cicero, Illinois, high school with a high immigrant population. The principal convinced the school board to limit English enrollments to 60 students per teacher. English teachers' released time was spent working with social studies classes to improve students' speaking and writing. English teachers graded every paper according to a formula, and both history and English teachers were required to devote a specific amount of time in each class period to recitation of various types and instruction on specific errors, all closely monitored by the principal, with red pen and stopwatch (Vose, 1925, pp. 44 & 77).

As the systematization of American education marched steadily on, the new bureaucratic apparatus pursued reform measures to address prob-
lems of language instruction on a wider scale. School districts and state education departments made cooperation schemes part of their master plans, prescribing specific kinds and amounts of oral and written work in various components of the curriculum. The new centers of educational research studied cooperation and published their findings. National commissions charged with formulating educational policy addressed the issue. The NCTE in particular devoted a chapter of its landmark Reorganization Report (1917) to describing and recommending cooperation—in the section of the report devoted to “administrative problems.” At bottom, lack of cooperation was merely a symptom of a deeper problem—the conflict between a curricular structure which tended toward differentiation and an educational ideal which sought unity. Administrative schemes launched with great optimism quickly ran aground.

Faculty Resistance to Cooperation Schemes

Despite the energy reform administrators devoted to constructing efficient schemes—and despite the universally-acknowledged need to broaden responsibility for language instruction—cooperation did not go unchallenged. The very differentiation which administrators had hoped to harness in pursuit of rational language instruction became the chief obstacle. Disciplines fighting for recognition and curricular turf were threatened by many of the reforms imposed from above. English teachers resented having to correct other teachers’ papers. The lament of one high school English chair echoed in many quarters: “Cooperation begins and ends in the English department” (quoted in Vose, 1925, p. 56). In an angry English Journal article, C. S. Duncan, an Ohio State professor, laid the blame at the door of the educational bureaucracy. Most cooperation programs, he complained, are yet another “new device . . . bequeathed to the teaching of English composition by business”—a means of increasing cost efficiency by relieving other teachers of their responsibility (p. 155). A few English faculty welcomed such cooperation programs as a way to increase their prestige as specialists and expand the position of English in the curriculum (Fore, 1915). But as a whole, the new discipline asserted that its primary role was in teaching literature, not serving other departments, who could “clean their own doorsteps,” as a Harvard English professor put it (J.M.H., 1915).

While some English teachers resisted cooperation programs, content-area teachers often simply rebelled against programs which made demands on their time and threatened their turf, prompting one principal to remark, “Artificial means of cooperation, especially in large high schools, are hopeless” (quoted in Vose 1925, p. 19). At the model cooperation program in Cicero, Illinois, for example, the head of the history department resented the administrative requirements for speaking and writ-
ing in cooperative classes—"checking-up classes," as he called them (Vose, 1925, p. 64). Under the pressures of burgeoning enrollment and curricular ferment, disciplines which had only recently achieved autonomy and professional identity—English, social studies, the laboratory sciences—were loath to give up time and turf to address what was after all a very old and thorny problem. The cooperation movement was barely a decade old when NCTE founder James Fleming Hosie lamented, "Cooperation is very generally regarded as one-sided. It is supposed [by content-area teachers] to be a device for giving English a larger place in the curriculum or, on the other hand, a means by which teachers of other subjects may unload their manuscripts and escape the grind of correcting them" (p. 480).

Ultimately, administrative schemes designed to increase cooperation often simply hardened disciplinary divisions and roles, presenting new problems for solutions. Cooperation worked against the system’s tendency toward specialization and centralized control, forcing programs to fight continual turf battles. Cooperative schemes which encouraged extended writing and interdisciplinary efforts were all-too-easily reduced to schemes which fit the organizational and managerial structure—form responses and short answers structured by teacher or text, content coverage emphasizing discrete information, and mechanical correctness as the focus of writing instruction. Moreover, the powerful testing and efficiency movement, valued by administrators for the curricular control it afforded them, tended to measure outcomes in discrete, concrete terms—test score increases per dollar invested, errors reduced per teacher hired—which made the subtle, less concrete outcomes of language instruction appear irrelevant. With cooperation, as with so many other progressive reform efforts in and outside of education, the promise of scientific management went unfulfilled, and the challenge of creating unity in an increasingly differentiated social and intellectual environment remained. The specialization of knowledge, which undergirded the structure of the new society and the schools which served it, could not be transcended by any organizational scheme without shaking the foundations of the system.

Cooperation and Institutional Specialization

Of course structural differentiation segregated people as well as knowledge, and in ways designed to serve urban-industrial society. Many new kinds of schools—or new tracks within traditional schools—prepared students to play a variety of new social and economic roles in modern America. Language was a key factor in the specialization of work, as it was in disciplinary specialization. The new roles in the work force demanded varying linguistic attainments, as did the new branches of knowledge.
And not surprisingly, then, the cooperation movement affected schools serving almost every social and occupational level. But before examining cooperation in schools at four of those levels (social settlement, vocational, professional, and liberal arts), I will describe a form of cooperation which existed primarily in the new comprehensive secondary schools and universities, a form by which Progressive Era educators adapted language instruction to a variety of occupational and social needs within one school: remediation.

Cooperation and Remediation

In comprehensive schools and universities, the most common form of cooperation in language instruction was a system of referrals by teachers in all areas to a remedial English course or courses. The faculty thus did not all teach language, but merely cooperated in finding and isolating those who needed the "hospital squad," a remedial class (which in secondary schools usually met after hours) for students deemed deficient in English by their content-area teachers (Charters, 1910). The concept of remediation was itself an invention of the Progressive Era, an adaptation of the medical—hence scientific—model to education. The inability to use language in some way was traced to mental—or even physiological or racial—defects, which could be remedied in some cases by separating the student (the patient) in a "lab" or "hospital" and applying correctives measures. Agnes Perkins (1907), who helped found the first remedial college course at Wellesley, voiced a common argument for cooperation. "Our school-boys and schoolgirls . . . come from homes wherein is no instinct for culture, no instinct that leads to comeliness of speech or manner." Unlike teachers in the elite English and French schools, she says, we "in this money-getting land . . . deal with another race—a motley, composite, untrained race—and there is vital need that concerted training in our schools act as a substitute for that inheritance and breeding which best of all beget spontaneous and instinctive purity of speech" (p. 373; see also Gardiner, 1908).

The new comprehensive universities, which were admitting an increasingly diverse student population, often had cooperative remedial programs (Vose, 1925, pp. 4–8). Harvard's committee on English was typical ("Harvard," 1915). It began in 1914 when yet another in a long succession of faculty committees was formed to look into the problem of student writing. It found that writing skills declined after English A. As a result of the study, a standing faculty committee was appointed to improve student writing. The standing committee became in effect the writing police, requiring instructors in all courses "to send to the committee any examination book, thesis, or other piece of work which has demonstrated a writer's inability to express his thought." "Delinquent students"
were handed over to the English department for "correction." That meant a remedial course (called, significantly, English F) which two to three hundred students were required to take out of a total of four to six hundred reported to the committee each year (Vose, 1925, pp. 5-6).

Both in secondary schools and colleges, cooperation became an instrument of the growing bureaucratic system of tracking students—often on the basis of national origin, race, or class—rather than a means of sharing responsibility for language instruction across the curriculum. At Harvard there was "a foreign squad, an awkward squad, and sections for the rest who showed no great infirmities" (Nation, 1910, p. 333). For the remedial model, language instruction was not so much a question of developing social or intellectual skills, but of treating a social or mental illness, as the medical terminology suggests (Rose, 1985). In this regard, language instruction borrowed its rationale from other urban reform efforts in the Progressive Era, particularly the public health movement. But remediation had its most visible uses within the new comprehensive schools and colleges because it reinforced the institutional structure. Teachers gained a means of sharing responsibility for language standards without sharing responsibility for language instruction, which remained with specialists and preserved the differentiated curriculum. The schools gained a means of sorting students into groups that could be taught (or not taught) a certain set of linguistic conventions tied to future occupation and life style. Ultimately, the remedial model encouraged teachers to focus on discrete content—declarative rather than procedural knowledge—and on discrete, surface-level skills—product rather than process. Thus, it discouraged interdisciplinary discussion of the deeper relations between writing and learning in the content areas.

Cooperation and Social Settlement

Cooperative language instruction was part of the ongoing progressive attack on urban slums through the Americanization and settlement movements. Following exposés of slum conditions by investigative journalists, reformers established private, voluntary institutions to give advice, education and care to the masses of immigrant and Southern poor streaming into industrial cities. Drawing on the ideas of Dewey and his friend Jane Addams (founder of the first social settlement, Chicago's Hull House), urban reform groups attempted to transform slum schools into social centers which would serve the whole community. A major part of that service was basic English instruction for immigrants and the illiterate poor. Language instruction, and the cooperation schemes which supported it, had two goals: to prepare students, both juvenile and adult, to enter the blue collar jobs available to them, and to encourage social stability by instilling the values of the dominant culture. Reformers harnessed a variety of cur-
ricular and community resources to achieve these goals. In *Schools of To­
morrow* (1915, ch. 8), John and Evelyn Dewey praise a black ghetto school in a high crime area of Indianapolis. Lacking an academic curriculum, the school instead trained students to be cooks, cobblers, tailors, carpenters—occupations which required little writing or academic language training. The school provided little. Instead the English work focused on surface features—spelling, usage, letter format, etc. Cooperation meant the English classes wrote notes to the adult night school students encouraging them to attend regularly, or invitations to the community to participate in school functions, the cooking class tea, for example. Such activities helped accomplish the “social settlement” function of such schools, and were thought to contribute to a lowered crime rate by increasing civic pride and stability. Thus, cooperation satisfied the urban reformers without challenging the differentiation of schools or society, and furthered social melioration among urban blacks without raising social aspirations.

Among many European immigrants, however, cooperative schemes sparked political conflict. Urban reformers often used English instruction as a vehicle for a broad program of socialization—American history and civics, to be sure, but increasingly such values as personal cleanliness, factory-like discipline, and sometimes even disdain for ethnic customs and beliefs. In some areas, immigrants resented attempts to use language instruction to expand the role of the schools in ethnic neighborhoods. For example, when school authorities made vocational and social settlement efforts the emphasis of public schools in some ethnic neighborhoods of New York City, residents attacked what they believed to be a cheapened education for their children. Riots broke out in 1917, forcing local politicians to abandon the proposed “reforms” (Cremin, 1988, pp. 236–37).

On the national level, the wave of immigration (some fifteen million between 1900 and 1915 alone) and the growing racial and labor unrest associated with it, sparked a wave of anti-immigration nativist sentiment. In the wake of the 1911 Dillingham commission, which documented the “inferiority” of immigrants largely on linguistic grounds, wealthy social reformers and business associations redoubled Americanization efforts. They employed a coercive, “melting pot” approach in order to quell nativist fears and at the same time preserve high immigration levels (and thus cheap labor). Some reformers—including Dewey—argued for a pluralist or “orchestra of mankind” approach to Americanization, one which would preserve cultural differences, but the forces seeking to create a “melting pot” won the day. The issue, once again, was not the existence of language instruction. Almost all parties agreed that immigrants should learn English and that the schools must play a central role. The issue was differentiation, this time racial and ethnic as well as economic. What goals would language instruction promote? Ethnic community or national unity? Vocational training or academic education? When parents and ad-
ministrators had low expectations and very limited purposes for language instruction, declarative knowledge and product-centered pedagogy were adequate—and indeed quite useful to immigrants and newly-urbanized students who otherwise might not have gained the skills necessary to survive in the new urban-industrial society. But when parents and school administrators differed in their expectations of students and the purposes of language instruction, cooperation was difficult at best. Long term, effective cooperation in language instruction, as in anything else, required agreement about goals. And in an increasingly differentiated society and economy, such agreement was difficult to achieve (Cremin, 1988, pp. 237-239).

Cooperation and Vocational Schools

Vocational or “manual training” schools were the most visible Progressive Era educational reform, a clear manifestation of urban-industrial society's power to transform institutions. Though manual training originated in a desire to broaden the education of all children by introducing them to technology, it quickly became a means of sorting and training students for the new (primarily blue-collar) jobs industrial expansion created. Around the turn of the century, most American cities founded secondary schools of commerce, technology, or “industrial arts,” directly or indirectly supported by business interests.

Perhaps because these schools had clear goals and relatively homogeneous student bodies, cooperation in language instruction often made more headway than in comprehensive schools. At Boston High School of Commerce, for example, English and social studies teachers shared texts, planned and graded assignments together, and even team-taught courses. These courses (economics, history of business, civics) were closely tied to the commercial courses, and teachers in all areas used common criteria for marking papers (Gallagher, 1909). Such vocational schools justified language instruction on frankly utilitarian grounds, as a “matter of success in business,” in the words of one principal (Newlon, 1917, p. 698). Margaret Vose, author of a 1925 study of cooperation, called school-wide standards of correctness “an excellent investment,” since “in our better stores clerks who desecrate the English language no longer hold their positions” (p. 3).

Cooperation also promised savings to the vocational schools, through more efficient instruction, and gave English classes a practical connection to the curriculum, which some believed more appropriate than literary study to students preparing for manual or commercial trades. In the Gary schools, considered by Dewey and others as the model for vocational instruction, the state curricular requirements were met in part through one hour per day of “English taught by shop and laboratory instructors”
(Bourne, 1916, p. 74). Before taking apart a motorcycle in the machine shop, for instance, the students learned to spell the names of the parts, wrote sentences describing its operation, copied and filled in a study outline from the blackboard (p. 126). Students in many classes wrote up the results of class projects and community service activities, which were then printed in a student-run shop and distributed, usually as part of school-sponsored public health or civic improvement campaigns (Dewey, 1915, pp. 327). Because students shared career expectations and teachers had relatively clear goals in language instruction, they could more easily visualize audiences besides teacher-as-examiner and focus in their class projects on the communicative aspects of language in organic relation to content. Yet the very nature of those expectations and goals limited language instruction and tended to discourage, for example, the kinds of extended writing assignments which might prepare students for college or other professional training.

And even these vocational-school experiments in cooperation, though widespread, were still the exception. Differentiation was much easier to create than integration, even in schools with a single goal. During the teens and twenties, Business English courses began as a separate component of the curriculum, tied to other courses more or less closely, depending on the individual school and teacher. And English, first divided from other fields of knowledge, itself divided into subfields to serve the specialization of work in modern America.

Cooperation and Professional Schools

Urban-industrial society needed a host of managers, engineers, and technicians as well as blue-collar and clerical workers. The burgeoning mass education system quickly evolved differentiated structures for training these new middle-class professionals, the intellectual elites of business and industry. In the private institutes of technology (MIT, Sheffield, Rensselaer), then in the public land grant colleges, faculty recognized the need for training in speaking and writing beyond the standard belletristic composition courses, and cooperative schemes sprang up to meet the need. Not surprisingly, cooperation flourished in the applied fields, those most closely linked to industry and the new professions. In the complex, highly rationalized industrial world, written communication played an increasingly important role, from time-motion studies on the shop floor to national statistical surveys, and the new professionals spent much of their time writing.

At MIT, where the educational philosophy emphasized the links between practical and theoretical knowledge, writing was an important part of the “laboratory” work. As early as 1879, Sidney Webb, the British reformer and Fabian socialist, remarked on the extensive use of writing in
The everyday work of economics students. By 1907, MIT had one of the country's best-known cooperation schemes. Students received organized writing instruction for all four years in a variety of departments. During the first two years they took composition and foreign language courses which included conferences, peer criticism, journals, and materials from technical courses for writing and translation assignments. During the second two years, the science and technology classes incorporated writing. English faculty helped other instructors design assignments, met with students in conference to guide revision, and regularly lectured on writing in the technical courses (Russell, 1989).

Cooperation schemes flourished in some land grant schools as well, where a heterogeneous student body trained for a plethora of careers. At Ohio State, Joseph Denney (1897), English department chair and later dean of Arts and Sciences, developed discipline-specific writing courses for agriculture, pre-law, pre-medicine, journalism and engineering students. These were taught in the English department, with advice from other departments. At other universities, however, individual departments developed their own writing courses, even "inhouse" English departments, with or without the help of the English department proper. Professional associations became interested in writing instruction, particularly the Society of Professional Engineers, and they encouraged departments in land grant universities to devote more resources to it (Connors, 1982, pp. 335–338).

During the teens and twenties, traditions of business and technical writing instruction began to evolve. Specialized textbooks appeared to meet the needs of teachers in these courses, and debates sprang up about the proper methods of teaching specialized kinds of writing. Some influential English teachers, trained in literary analysis, favored a belles-lettristic approach: the study of imaginative literature would improve writing of all kinds, including technical writing, and, more importantly, would "humanize the engineering student's character and his aims in life" (Aydellotte 1915, quoted in Connors, p. 334). A more specialized approach, favored by vocationally-oriented public institutions of the Midwest and West, emphasized writing skill in a specific discipline or professional area. Though the debate was couched in philosophical terms—integration versus differentiation—it was fundamentally a battle for curricular turf, about how differentiation would be achieved (Connors, 1982). Curricular fragmentation and rivalry discouraged disciplines from examining their rhetorical and pedagogical paradigms in light of others' paradigms; consequently, the relations between writing and knowledge remained obscure—or simply transparent—to scholars and teachers. Discussions of student writing rarely moved past surface features to consider discipline-specific assumptions and conventions. Thus, the sciences and technologies never developed lasting cooperative structures for integrating writing instruction into
their courses, but instead developed separate writing courses and in-house English departments, which preserved differentiated roles. On the other side, humanists showed little interest in integrating science and technology into their zeitgeist. In the developing professional schools, differentiation was the pervasive background against which cooperative schemes stood out in contrast.

Cooperation and the Liberal Arts: General Education

The Progressive Era also witnessed the birth of the most widespread and long-lived reform effort in colleges and universities, General Education. And although General Education was little concerned with teaching language across the curriculum, as we shall see, it was nevertheless an important response to differentiation in mass education, and one which in the succeeding decades profoundly influenced cooperative efforts in higher education.

The General Education movement began in 1909 at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, a small, selective-admission liberal arts college of the kind that succeeded the nineteenth-century sectarian college in educating the nation's social elite. Its founders were reactionary reformers from the humanities who wished to preserve the genteel tradition against what they saw as an onslaught of philistine scientific specialization. They hoped to unify the newly-fragmented American university curriculum by defining what "generally educated" persons are and turning them out. But with no single community of educated persons in America's pluralist society, the movement chose one community—the liberal humanist culture of the genteel tradition—into which all students would be initiated. They rejected not only the fragmented communities of the new sciences, but also the Christian sectarian community of the old American college, with its classical Latin and Greek curriculum. Instead, they tried to preserve the elitist character of higher education by substituting a modernized, secularized Anglo- and Francophile version of high culture, with its own canon of great books—this time in the vernacular—and its own value structure, a conservative, even brahminic romanticism (Rudolph, 1978, ch. 3; Berlin, 1987, pp. 43-46; Graff, 1987, ch. 2).

At colleges like Reed, which served an essentially homogeneous, upper-class clientele, this version of General Education endured. Writing instruction followed what became known as the Princeton model: faculty in the humanities taught small freshman seminars in various aspects of western culture, and in the process tutored students in writing. But in larger comprehensive universities, with heterogeneous students and curricula, General Education actually increased differentiation through complex systems of electives. Instead of uniting a fragmented academia under the banner of genteel humanism, General Education became yet another
The Cooperation Movement

415

compartment of component or the curriculum, often a concession to the
humanities, which were struggling for enrollments. This component itself
was rarely unified. It typically consisted (and still largely consists) of a
smorgasbord of electives which did not present a coherent picture of
knowledge or teach a single set of linguistic conventions. Where it was
unified into core courses, as at Columbia (1919), those courses quickly
evolved into a “Cook’s tour of Western civilization,” as one early critic
described them, with no unifying intellectual principle, only a general desire
to improve the cultural level of the rural, middle-class, and ethnic minority
students flocking to the new university (Bell, 1966, pp. 18–21).

In keeping with these aims, General Education courses typically
“stressed enjoyment, understanding, appreciation, and taste at the ex-
 pense of intellectual rigor,” as Frederick Rudolph puts it in his history of
college curriculum in America (1978, p. 240). Rigor would come in the
specialty. It was therefore difficult to stress writing in General Education
courses (except in composition courses per se). The typical method was
lecture, sometimes supplemented with discussions led by graduate stu-
dents. And objective tests were common, since the faculty member’s pri-
mary commitment of time (and her loyalty and reward structure) lay in
the specialty. More importantly, even if the faculty had sufficient interest
in and rewards for teaching General Education, the very nature of the
courses militated against extensive writing in them. There was no single
community, no body of shared knowledge and values, no clearly defined
audience to write for. It was difficult to ask students to use the
conventions of the academic specialty (or specialties) which the courses treated,
since most students were not majors and did not have the time in one or
two courses to acquire the linguistic forms of the discipline(s), even if they
had the interest (Bell, 1966, p. 32). Nor was it academically respectable to
have students write for “general” (and therefore nonacademic) audiences
or in “popular” genres. Faced with these obstacles to writing in General
Education courses—obstacles compounded by the lack of time and re-
wards for assigning writing in any class—faculty tended to use writing lit-
tle. Ultimately, no tradition of writing instruction developed within Gen-
eral Education—no set of techniques, assignments, expectations—because
the motive remained obscure and the genre, the audience, the purpose,
and thus the responsibility for writing remained ambiguous.

In an increasingly complex, pluralist society, attempts to find or create
a cultural and linguistic common ground went directly against the grain.
The new professional elites had little need to learn the language and
culture of the old social elite. Indeed, during the decades to come, stu-
dents in the burgeoning public universities for the most part saw no need
to be initiated into that elite, and had to be required to take General Edu-
cation courses. Similarly, their professors in professional disciplines often
pushed for reductions in General Education requirements to allow more
time for specific education. In the resulting ebb and flow of General Education reforms over the next half century, the crucial links between language and culture, between writing and social or professional role, were often submerged—but still powerful. General Education could not erode that basic differentiated structure of mass education (and society), or the linguistic differentiation which supported it.

The Decline of the Cooperation Movement

In the years following World War I, the heady optimism of the Progressive Era began to fade among cooperation's advocates, as among reformers in many areas of national life. In a revealing 1925 study, Vose surveyed administrators who had reported having successful cooperation programs during the period 1908 to 1915. She reported "the general failure of the practice" and concluded: "Many of the plans are merely nominal or have been frankly abandoned," due to increased enrollments, teacher turnover, or what one principal called "the complex organization of the school" (p. 55).

That "complex organization" was the central problem. Had the system been willing to restructure the schools to make cross-curricular language instruction a priority, as many Deweyan progressives wished, shortages of time and resources might have been surmountable. But ultimately, schools and colleges resisted cooperation because it challenged the stability of the mass education system. A thoroughgoing commitment to cooperation would have made more difficult the already formidable task of integrating masses of students into the burgeoning industrial economy. To effect cooperation throughout the educational system would have required consensus about the goals of language instruction—and of education itself. Such consensus was not possible within the system (if that vast aggregate of American educational institutions could be called such), nor within the society which supported it. Thus, the fledgling mass education system avoided the deeper issues of language instruction, concentrating instead on moral training through literary study and an almost obsessive focus on grammatical correctness (Piché, 1967, 1977). In one way or another, in school or out, Americans gained sufficient communicative competence to perform their roles in the new society. And the unprecedented growth and prosperity during the twenties reassured the nation that its schools were sound. Talk of cooperation withered.

The reformers' disillusionment was perhaps inevitable given their assumptions, social, educational, and linguistic. Organicist social theory trusted that social integration always accompanied differentiation, that advances in communication would usher in a new age of community. Theorists did not appreciate the ways communication could be used to so-
lidify intellectual and social distinctions in mass society. Educators charged with the task of running differentiated schools in the most cost-efficient manner could not be expected to build a single intellectual or linguistic community in those schools, especially since none existed in the society at large. Moreover, Americans labored under commonsense assumptions about language—and particularly about writing—which were inadequate for the new complexities of discourse in modern print culture. At a time when genres were proliferating in mass media and audiences fragmenting in a deluge of publications, teachers could only fall back on current-traditional notions of writing as mere recorded thought, or of audience as “the general reader,” or of correctness as an objective quality independent of social context. As Dewey had concluded by 1927, when he wrote *The Public and Its Problems* (pp. 125–126), changes in communication all too often outran the ability to understand them. Efforts to broaden responsibility for language instruction floundered in the same theoretical constraints. In succeeding decades, the cooperation movement was largely forgotten, but the struggle for cooperation in language instruction would be renewed by later generations, for they faced those fundamental dilemmas of education in mass society with which Progressive Era reformers first wrestled.

**Teaching Traditions and the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Movement**

The latest manifestation of the desire for cooperation in language instruction—the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum movement—exists within the mass education system created in the Progressive Era. Indeed, American education today is even more highly differentiated—both in its curricula and its wider institutional structures—than the system which gave birth to the cooperation movement. Teachers, administrators, and students have inherited a set of traditions and attitudes toward writing and its teaching which shape their responses to current reforms—and often help explain their resistance. To reformers, these old attitudes and traditions may seem irrational or self-defeating. But in historical perspective, resistance to reforms often seems a logical response given a school’s (or a content area’s) social and institutional position. Let me close by discussing two of the ways social history can illuminate responses to Writing-Across-the-Curriculum reforms—one based on curricular differentiation, the other on institutional differentiation.

Current research has often noted the reluctance of content-area teachers to employ significant extended writing as a component of instruction, to employ personal or imaginative functions as well as the usual informational functions (summary and analysis), or to adopt a role other than teacher-as-examiner (Applebee, 1981). This reluctance is logical given the
curricular structure teachers work within (and were themselves educated in). Disciplines are discrete; much of the teacher's training, mission, and professional identity lies within her discipline. Since the Progressive Era, each teacher's role and responsibility was largely defined and circumscribed by that differentiated organization of curriculum and, indeed, of knowledge. And since the beginning of the mass education system in America, composition instruction has been the responsibility of the English department—not a shared responsibility. Given the burgeoning enrollments and poorly-prepared teachers of turn-of-the-century America, this division of roles (and thus of labor) was a logical response. Today, the same time pressures militate against assigning extended writing. Content area teachers argue (with reason) that they do not have time to assign extended writing.

But perhaps even more importantly, traditional attitudes toward writing—which the division of curricular roles fostered—make it difficult for teachers to experiment with alternatives, even when teaching loads might permit significant extended writing. Current-traditional notions of "correctness" inherited from the Progressive Era may make some content area teachers reluctant to accept writing (even in drafts) which is not edited by the teacher. The teacher's role as examiner is difficult to step out of since it is assigned to her by the institutional hierarchy. Assumptions about the nature of writing in her discipline may make a content area teacher reluctant to assign personal or imaginative writing (again, even in drafts). At the deepest level, a teacher may consider it a violation of her curricular role to cover less material in the field in order to make room for extended writing (particularly since the standardized tests primarily measure such coverage) (see Applebee and Langer 1987, p. 146ff). Her role has been traditionally (and logically) defined in terms of "discipline"—showing students the "right" way within the constraints of that content area. She may find her identity as a teacher of a discipline challenged by student responses which propose answers or use evidence or methods of inquiry not sanctioned by the discipline.

Moreover, discipline-specific writing instruction may force a teacher to explain (and to some extent conceptualize) the conventions of her discipline and—more difficult still—to occasionally describe how the conventions she requires on, say, a history paper, are different from the conventions a student is wrestling with on a chemistry or literature paper in another class. But few teachers are trained to articulate those assumptions and notions, which are so deeply imbedded in the culture of the discipline that they attain the status of common knowledge, determining, as Applebee puts it, "what will be seen as interesting, what as obvious, and what as needing elaboration" (1981, p. 4). Thus, asking a teacher to assign and respond to writing outside these disciplinary constraints is in effect asking
her to reexamine her professional identity and redefine her century-old role within the institution—a threatening prospect indeed for many, particularly since the role of writing teacher is already (and traditionally) assigned by the institution to the English faculty.

In the broadest sense, then, the pedagogical tradition reflects the curricular structure. Learning is viewed as additive rather than synthetic—discrete information to be learned and relearned instead of a disciplinary paradigm to be progressively elaborated into a unified field of knowledge. Curriculum in the mass education system is also additive rather than synthetic—an aggregate of discrete courses and disciplines which need not form a coherent structure of knowledge, either in the mind of the student or in the society at large.

The social history of institutional—as well as curricular—differentiation may also help explain resistance to reforms in writing instruction. Applebee and others have noted that the process approach to writing instruction has all too often failed because “the processes are trivialized when then they are divorced from the purposes they serve” (1984, p. 188). For certain purposes—either instructional or job-related—writing tasks may require no prewriting. Indeed, short answers, fill-in-the-blank or verbatim copying may be most appropriate and effective, as Applebee points out. Thus, in a school which primarily prepares students to enter certain industrial or service jobs where the writing requirements—if any—are highly structured and routinized (as they are in many, perhaps most, jobs), these “product-oriented” activities may be viewed as the most appropriate and effective. Many Progressive Era schools were justly proud of their success in teaching what are often thought of today as “low-level” literacy skills to students from discourse communities who lacked them, students who otherwise might have failed to enter the regulative, bureaucratic industrial society which demanded those skills—and still does demand them, in everything from applying for a job to taking the GRE examination. Asking the administration and faculty in an institution with such a history and such goals to adopt extended writing assignments, personal and imaginative, along with a process model of writing and pedagogy, would be, in effect, asking it to change its past identity and its future mission. Similarly, curricular planners and researchers working within comprehensive schools or colleges might benefit from studying the institution’s history to discover the ways its language instruction is differentiated—the history of its testing programs, its development of mechanisms for tracking and remediation, changes in students’ career expectations and in the attitudes of parents, teachers and administrators toward the role writing will play in the various educational and vocational paths students will pursue. Is the institution’s current writing instruction accomplishing its purposes? How efficiently (and by whose definition)? For
which kinds of students? Without a sense of an institution's history and mission, the purposes of writing instruction—and responsibility for accomplishing them—must remain ambiguous.

Social history may also inform research at another level in the institutional hierarchy—specialized professional training—by tracing the relationship between formal language instruction and professional writing practice. The professions which developed in the Progressive Era (including teaching) defined themselves by the "knowledge paradigms"—to borrow the Kuhnian term—embodied in their characteristic ways of writing and passed these paradigms and written conventions on to each succeeding generation. Yet they did so largely without formally studying those conventions or teaching them in a formal way within educational institutions. Formal writing instruction remained largely the province of one branch of the humanities, English. How were those conventions passed on? And how did students' formal writing training affect their apprenticeships in the writing of specific disciplines? My reading of the cooperation movement suggests that cooperation was most successful in institutions with a single identity and mission, such as specialized professional or vocational schools. Perhaps in these institutional settings teachers and students perceived writing activities as directly relevant to the aims of their education and thus valued them more highly. But clearly there is much to be learned about the ways discourse communities in our highly differentiated society developed and transmitted conventions of written knowledge.

If social history does nothing else, it must at least militate against hasty generalizations about writing in "typical" schools or classrooms. Today as in the past, differentiation in written language—and in its instruction—reflects the differentiation of knowledge and work in a complex, century-old network of social interactions, which cannot be captured in a single process or pedagogy.

But social history has more than admonitory uses. It can complement empirical studies of writing by illuminating the social contexts and purposes of instruction, the traditions and notions which shape current practice. And it can guide curricular planners in crucial ways. If administrators, teachers and researchers understand the history and traditions of an educational institution, its place in the social and educational environment, they will be much better equipped to structure writing assignments and pedagogies which serve its purposes (or redefine its purposes if they are in a position to do so).

In a nation which cherishes ideals of unity and equal opportunity, it is easy to forget that specialization is not a temporary aberration, to be corrected with some new program or pedagogy that will remove or negate differences; it is the fundamental organizing principle of modern education and, behind that, of modern knowledge and life. Every curricular reform of writing instruction in secondary or higher education must sooner
or later come to terms with differentiation and the attitudes it fosters. And in that effort, our profession must resist the fallacy of the ethnographic present.

References


New International Journal of Research in Language Education

The trilingual (German, French, and English) Mother Tongue Education Bulletin will become a semi-annual 20-page newsletter beginning in January 1990. The international team of editors is also planning to publish An International Yearbook of Research in Mother Tongue Education, containing 15 research articles of 18 pages each. The Bulletin will be sent only to members of the International Mother Tongue Education Network (IMEN) or to members of the Association Internationale de Linguistique Appliquee (AILA) Scientific Commission of Mother Tongue Education. These members will also receive the Yearbook at a special discount price, included in their membership fee.

If you are interested in becoming a member of IMEN or AILA (dues: $25.00 U.S. per year for individuals; $50.00 U.S. for institutions), in purchasing the yearbook separately, or in submitting an article for publication, please contact Gilles Gagne, PPMF primaire, Faculte des sciences de l’education, Universite de Montreal, C.P. 6128, Succ A, Montreal, Qc H3C 3J7, Canada.