



# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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## Labor Relations Prose: Victim of Imperatives

ROBERT E. DOHERTY  
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

THOSE who have studied the literary outpourings of industrial and labor relations specialists have probably come away with the notion that our “field” is in a bad way. There are reasons why this should be so, and they cannot all be attributed to the low quality of the people who publish in this subdiscipline, although that is no doubt a contributing factor. In many instances the reason for our bad reputation can be found in the requirements laid down by our chief gurus.

The first of these is that the methodology used and the accompanying data-gathering<sup>\*</sup> procedure are deemed to be vastly more important than the subject under discussion. Now designing methodologies is an enervating activity. It taxes the creative urge and dulls our aesthetic sensibilities, causing us to approach the actual writing of our manuscript in a state of exhaustion.

Second, all articles and books must begin with the author pointing out the errors of commission and omission made by those who have gone before. There has, in fact, been an uninterrupted sequence of putdowns on studies dealing with the impact of technology on job satisfaction dating from Professor Joel Rugmante’s recent article in *Industrial Relations Quarterly* all the way back to an obscure piece by Erasmus. It is understandable, then, that we find in journal articles opening sentences such as: ‘The literature on labor turnover abounds with faulty regression analysis,’ or ‘Many researchers on strike propensities have tended to neglect...’ This, too, is a taxing business. There are not many good ways remaining to ridicule the competition. We come to the second

\* Nobody has talked about “facts” or “information” for at least fifty years.

paragraph, our creativity spent, just too tired to be concerned about the niceties of grammar, style, syntax, even spelling.

A third reason for a general slovenliness of style can be found in the requirement that our work be highly quantitative. The longer and more complex the mathematical equations and the fewer words a manuscript contains, the better its chance of publication. Professor Philander Cadwallader’s recent article in *Labor and Personnel Relations*, for example, had only 11 words in its 26 pages. We prize such scholarship, but this format does not, one must admit, give authors much opportunity to sharpen their literary skills.

Finally, no editor would accept an article that did not contain certain key phrases. All arguments must have a “central thrust,” if they are intended to be taken seriously, and it is required that an alternative be preceded by “viable,” lest the reader think we did not really have an alternative in mind after all. Since 1975 editors have demanded a liberal sprinkling of “interface” (used both as noun and verb), and rejection is assured should an author write “at this point” or “at this time” rather than the required “at this point in time.” It is good to have these words and phrases at the ready; it is easier to use them than it is to think up expressions all by ourselves. Their frequent use does produce a certain sameness in our prose, however, and I can understand why some should object.

It is for these reasons that I urge readers outside the fraternity to exercise patience and, if the spirit moves them, a modicum of charity.

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*Robert Doherty is Associate Dean of the New York State School of Industrial & Labor Relations at Cornell University, and what we want to know is how come other schools have literate, widely published scholars as administrators?*

## Chewing Blubber

DARK SUSPICIONS arise as we read more and more of the writing that comes<sup>†</sup> from the teacher-training specialists. And why not? Who is

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<sup>†</sup> A real professional would say “emanates.” Since “emanation” can correctly mean “the flowing forth of effluvia,” this may well be a case in which jargon beats judgment.

teaching teaching to those teachers who can't seem to teach much reading or writing? All those jargon-besotted administrators—where did they learn how to write that stuff? Someday we'll explore such questions, but for now let's warm up on this excerpt from the works of Jan Weaver, the Dean of Professional Studies:

One of the problems in official matriculation occurs because after the Advisors and Dean have recommended admission and a letter offering the candidate admission to the program has been sent by the Office of Admissions, the candidate must pay appropriate fees and have a paid receipt before they are completely admitted. In assisting Graduate Program Advisors recently, I have discovered that the Advisors are not aware that the individual student has not, for some reason, paid the appropriate admission fee and that is the reason why the student's name is not on the list. Therefore, if you have contact with the student, you might wish to ask whether or not they have paid all fees and returned their letter of admission to the Office of Admissions.

Let's start with elementary things—stuff we used to teach in the lower grades before we learned all about life-adjustment and that we had to chew blubber in order to interrelate with the Eskimo experience. In the first sentence we find a missing comma, one failure of pronoun agreement, and one mildly amusing redundancy in “paid receipt.” In the second sentence we see a curious malfunction of the perfect tense, the absurdity of “the individual student,” as though to distinguish him from some collective student, and another redundancy familiar to all teachers of freshman composition, “the reason why.” In the third sentence there is *another* failure of pronoun agreement, doubled this time in “they” and “their,” and the nasty indelicacy of having “contact” with the student.

That's the easy part. Next we wonder how that “official” matriculation is different from mere matriculation and the “officially admitted” student from the student who is merely admitted. What about those “appropriate” fees? Have some rascally students taken to paying *inappropriate* fees just to trouble their hapless Advisors?

From the garbled syntax of sentence two—this is the hard part, so pay attention—it would seem that names are missing from the list *because* the advisors don't know that the students haven't paid. The writer must mean that the failure to pay, of which advisors may be unaware, has kept some names off the list; but to say it clearly and smoothly in English requires a writer who can manage pronouns and conjunctions.

We can do that. First we delete the opening phrase; it's just padding, and it's because of that “recently” that the following perfect verb sounds so weird. Then we write:

I have discovered that Advisors [Why A?] don't know that some students haven't paid and that *that* is why their names aren't on the list.\*

Next we consider the most grievous faults—the failures of agreement in which a candidate becomes *they* and a student becomes *they* and returns *their* letter. How could such terrible things happen in an *official* document from a high-ranking *professional*? Ignorance? Impossible! Ignorance of simple grammar in a Dean of *Professional* Studies would trouble past bearing our habitual assumption that teacher-training is related to education. So forget ignorance—it must be something else.

Aha! How about this? What would be the correct form after a singular antecedent? *He*, of course. Everybody knows that. But wait! That's a rank sexist slur. How about *he or she* or *he/she*? Still sexist—*he* comes first. Maybe *she or he* or *she/he*? Sexist again, but the other way around. What to do? The hell with it! Stick in *they*. After all, who's going to read the thing? Just a bunch of graduate advisors (Advisors?), and what do *they* know?

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\* Back in those dank dark ages of dismal drill and monotonous rote learning, a sixth-grader could have told you that that “that that” that that sentence contains is needed. (A new record. The previous record was held for centuries by: He said that that “that” that that dean had written was wrong.) Now that most of our mouths are gummed up with blubber, even *professional* deans find two thats in row just too much to manage.

### Ask a Stupid Question...

GLASSBORO has so many low-ranking, junior administrators that it's hard to find them useful work. We don't even try, in fact; we just find them things to play with.

George Wildman and Robert Harris are co-chairmen of the Task Force on Recruitment, Retention, and Image. We don't know how they produce their prose—whether by one as told to the other or by taking turns word by word—but here's how it comes out:

In the first two sessions of the Task Force, the group explored the task facing them. Discussion ensued during these sessions concerning the goals and objectives to be accomplished. The Committee began the task of gathering supporting data by virtue of reports supplied by the offices of Admissions, Counseling, and the Registrar. Considerable time was spent attempting to define terminology as a basis for functioning, and much thought was given in an attempt to identify some of the major concerns which the Task Force would be facing in its work.

The first, second, and fourth sentences of that paragraph say the same thing, although the fourth *does* add that bit about defining “terminology [terms?] as a basis for functioning.” The third sentence actually has its own thing to say, but only that they “began the task of gathering.” Does that mean that they began gathering or that they began getting ready to gather? This sentence also uses “by virtue of” as though it meant “from.” Never ask a junior administrator to say something straight out. He'd rather be knocked flat in an airport by O. J. Simpson. (Good idea.)

Since the combined salaries of the twenty members of the Task Force must be more than half a million dollars a year we're glad to report that their labor has had some results. As early as their second meeting, they divided themselves into three “interest-area subcommittees” (shouldn't that be sub-Task Forces or Task Forcelets?), one each for Recruitment, Retention, and Image.

They did more. Each interest-area subcommittee undertook to “define its term.”

Now you would think that any fool could define *recruitment*, *retention*, and even *image*, although why that should be necessary is not clear. We have to guess that many members of the Task Force were unacquainted with those words and needed remedial work.

Discussion ensued by virtue of input, and tasks were explored. Thought was given in an attempt, and time was spent attempting.

By the next meeting, each “interest-area” subcommittee had defined “its term.” Here's what they found—as a basis for functioning:

**recruitment:** the institution's philosophy and procedures by which we attempt to attract students to continue their education . . .

**retention:** the ability of the college to hold students who are pursuing a degree program (B.A., M.A., including certification).

**image:** the reflection of reality and substance.

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R. Mitchell, Assistant Circulation Manager

and a cheery grammatical

**MERRY  
CHRISTMAS**

to just about Everybody!



# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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A recently published HEW survey, *Social Indicators*, 1976, tells us, to no one's surprise, that one out of five American adults is what they call a functional illiterate. It also finds that about a half of all American adults might as well be called functional literates: They *can* fill out simple forms, and they can read the instructions on child-proof bottle caps.

Right now America is probably less literate than ever before in its history but *more* literate than it will ever be again. We can quite reasonably expect the day when few of us can read and write at all and when only a few of those few can read and write skillfully. When that day comes the literate minority will be able to control the thoughts and lives of vast herds of the illiterate. Now *that* is elitism.

We have convinced ourselves that our malignant illiteracy is caused by television, by divorce, by parental neglect, by poverty, by malnutrition, by over-crowding, by drugs or electrical guitars, by the war in Vietnam, or even by Dr. Spock. All these horrendous hypothecations and others even gloomier are now comforting articles of belief in schools of teacher-training, since none of them suggests that the teaching is bad. But it is, and bad teaching is probably the *one* cause of mass illiteracy about which we can do something.

With one breath, our teachers boast that they are highly trained *professionals* worthy of profound respect and large salaries. With the next, they whimper that they can hardly be expected to compete with *Mod Squad* or teach large classes. Our teacher-training departments presume to teach how to teach, but not, apparently, how to teach in the face of great but clearly expectable obstacles. It's as though physicians should ask to be spared the trouble of treating the sick. If our teachers aren't deeply enough educated and well enough trained to win, as good teachers have always won, battles against stupidity and ignorance, then what *can* they do? Babysit?

A teacher who doesn't know how to have more influence than *Charlie's Angels* is just no damn good. A teacher who cannot compel more attention and credence than the sellers of hemorrhoid ointment is just no damn good. An educational system which harbors such teachers is just no damn good, and a school of teacher-training which turns them loose is just no damn good.

Don't despair. We are going to do something. Glassboro has been chosen\* to be the Flagship of

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\* When *we* use the passive, we mean the passive. Nobody here did the choosing. As Mark Chamberlain says: "He [Hollander the Chancellor] has made us an offer we can't refuse."

Teacher-Training in New Jersey, an unhappy title surely, but a happy chance. There is nothing more important for us to do than to design and construct a program for the making of excellent teachers.

First we must put away the presumption that we have such a program. We don't, and boastful claims will invite public displays of our inadequacies. But we must equally put away the suspicion that we can't make such a program. We can, and *The Underground Grammarian*, naturally, will keep reporting on what we do and what it means.

A F-----† program will make us scrutinize *everything* we do, since putting teacher-training into the hands of teacher-trainers alone is like leaving war to the generals. It may be our lofty neglect of this principle that has brought us legions of teachers less interesting and less influential than *Gilligan's Island*.

And for now, let's wait for others outside of the teacher-training apparatus to praise us before we praise ourselves. "Excellent" does not permit certain modifiers: "somewhat excellent" just won't do. Careless talk about our "demonstrated excellence" will bring embarrassment. Try it and see. Loose lips have been known to sink even F-----s.

### Sea Isle City 3, Glassboro 0

ONE year ago, we pointed to the need for a grammatical competence test for all teachers and administrators at Glassboro. It would be, we thought, one small way of showing the taxpayers how much we care. Strange to say, nothing has been done.

Our President says that grammatical skill is now considered in candidates for retention, tenure, and promotion, and our *Academic* VP says the same about incipient members of his staff, but we still have no competence test. Well, never mind. Until such a test comes to be, we'll just have to carry on with our case by case examinations. Such examinations are all the more important now that we are taking up our new station as Teacher-Training Flagship. We *do* want to be excellent.

The passage chosen for this month's competence examination is the work of a Robert Loughran, a junior but especially significant

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† We just can't print it again. It's sappy.

member of our administration. We'll take up his significance later; for now consider this memo to resident students, 12/14/77:

As you are probably aware, a horrible fire occurred in a woman's dormitory at Providence College. An early determination of the cause has been attributed to the igniting of Christmas decorations. We through a directive from Mr. Tumminia, Vice President of Campus Planning, have consequently advised the Resident Director of each dormitory to remove all decorations from their resident hall that would be considered a fire hazard.

It is your responsibility as a resident to insure that your individual room is also clear of any potential hazard. If needed, extra trash bags will be made available via your student advisor for the removal of any necessary materials.

We are not attempting to damper your holiday spirit. We are, however, endeavoring to insure that you are living in a safe environment.

This passage is less than excellent. It has some flaws. Some of them, had they appeared in more respectable company, might well have been dismissed as mere typing mistakes, but this writer sounds as though he may indeed be quite unaware of the difference between a woman's dormitory and a women's dormitory. Considering the occasion, that "damper" might have been a failing try at a macabre and tasteless pun, but it's probably nothing more than a mistake.\*

It's fun to see a novel silly mistake in that startling "via," but most of the mistakes are common and dull. We see the nonsense often caused by a needless passive in the assertion that a determination has been attributed to igniting, and the usual misplaced modifier in that "resident [?] hall" that might be considered a fire hazard. It is

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\* Sometimes mistakes like this are made by secretaries, but we hold that he who signs the document takes the rap. That's why we wish that someone had signed a memo from the Interim Advisory Committee to the President for Career Development Assistance which offered to "disperse" \$10,750.

The secretaries here are generally more competent in English than their bosses. The College certainly wouldn't lose anything by having all secretaries and bosses swap desks, tasks, and salaries. The typing, of course, would be rotten, but just imagine what we would gain in grammar and policy-making.

momentarily fun to notice that "possible" becomes redundant in the company of "might," but the similar fault in "individual room" isn't any fun at all. And what can it be that makes pronoun agreement so hard for those people?

But enough of that. Further analysis can benefit only the writer, and we'd rather not do him any more favors. It's time to reveal what was earlier promised—the Significance of Robert Loughran.

Robert Loughran isn't just some chap who wandered into the street and fell into some not-too-burdensome duties in the Wildman apparatus. He is one of our own graduates, a graduate of a teacher-training program in social studies. Had he not come to rest with our Dean of Students, he might easily have been nurturing the youth of Sea Isle City.

This troubles the mind. We are reminded of something else we said a year ago:

We see why so few students can write English; few teachers can write English. The ability to write and speak clear, correct, conventional English is not an antiquated social grace; it is an indispensable skill of our profession and the medium in which teaching and learning happen.

We still mean it. Until some unimaginable new mode evolves in us, language will be to learning what water is to swimming. We can hope for very little effectiveness in a teacher who is less than skillful in language, our best medium not only for the expression but even for the very creation of intelligence.

But let's be fair. It would hardly be logical to draw conclusions about teacher-training at Glassboro from a single example. One fly does *not* a summer make, nor yet one ant a picnic. Let's assume the best—that Loughran's competence in language is not typical, because if it is, the jig is up. Who would ever trust us to train any more teachers? So, if he isn't typical, his grammatical skills must be greater or less than those of the typical graduate. If greater, the jig is even upper, so let's just not think about that. And there you have it. We can save our self-respect simply by asserting that Loughran's grammar is his own problem and has nothing to do with his training as a teacher of social studies. Whew.

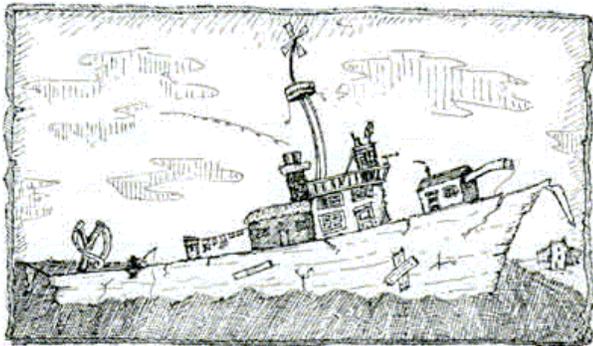
But wait. How can that be? Aren't we devoted to excellence? Hasn't Robert Loughran been chosen, out of all his classmates, to stay on and

serve his alma mater for \$16,682 per year? Don't all these things mean that he is one of our *best*? Well of course they do. And doesn't *that* mean that the writing sample we have printed is the work of one of the best of our graduates? Hmm.

Something must be wrong with our logic. Listen—we're all in this together, and this is just the kind of stuff, especially if there's a lot of it around, that might dent our Flagship. For our part, we'll keep looking at the writing of the Glassboro graduates who are still around—there must be some who write well, and you can all help by seeing to it that no word of this gets to our Chancellor at 225 W. State St. in Trenton 08625.

**“An offer we can't refuse!”**

## OUR FLAGSHIP



An exclusive and hitherto unsuspected depiction of the auxiliary trawler *Gschmrub*, late of the Bulgarian Navy. Reprinted here by special permission from *Jan's Fighting Ships*.

### DHE Unanimous: Glassboro gets it!

Overheard in Trenton: “Well, we're at this neat surplus place, you know, and we see this thing and naturally we think right away about Glassboro. I mean, after all, it's over ten years Chamberlain has been bringing those people on board—right? The Chancellor was a little worried, but I told him—listen—no problem. I know those people. If they'll buy the Triad they'll buy the *Gschmrub*.”

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# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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## A Light Shines in the Parking Lot!

We have met the enemy, and they is us. *Pogo*

IT is a trait of the genius that he tells us what any fool can see for himself—much later. Adam Smith told us long ago that when members of a profession consort together, the result is a conspiracy against the public. Many of us have by now come to see that he was right.

When Chief Justice Burger said that half of America's trial lawyers were incompetent, were you dumbfounded? It may astonish us that he *said* it, but isn't it just about what you would have guessed?

And why not? It grows clearer day by day that we are in the hands of people who say that they know what they're doing, but they don't. Our governors can't govern, our regulators can't make things work, automobiles are built with the wrong engine, sometimes you can't even get a dial tone, and we can't teach children to read and write. Everywhere we see self-styled experts failing in the work they said they could do and excusing themselves because the work is difficult.

In the last month or so we have had more than a thousand letters from citizens out in the world who have come to hear about *The Underground Grammarian*. Many themes found voices in those letters, and of them one of the more portentous was also one of the more frequent: At last someone is putting the blame where it belongs—on the schools and on the teachers. Many writers sent evidence in the form of documents brought home by their children. Some of the English is as bad as anything here.

We teachers like to think that we fight a desperate battle, holding the last pass against a barbarian horde. Many educated, literate, successful citizens see barbarians in teacher suits. Those citizens are not cranks; they are publishers, bankers, writers, lawyers, stockbrokers,

executives, even teachers, and many just plain people who write better English than our vice-presidents. All those people are beginning to suspect us of conspiracy against the public. If we are to prove them wrong, if they *are* wrong, we'll need something better than pious protestations about how devoted we are and self-serving lamentations about the insuperable difficulties of the work that we *said* we knew how to do.

*Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings*, we are told, strength may be ordained. It's true. In the latest *Faculty Senate Highlights* there is mention of "plans to ensure adequate parking space for faculty and staff which will be effective in the near future." Let's just hope that we can find enough of them to cause a parking problem that might even *justify* the existence of a college vice-president paid to fuss around with parking problems.

**NCATE Evaluation Newly Disclosed:  
GSC Teacher-Training  
Found Adequate!  
Trustees Weigh Gschmrubs:  
Heads to be Examined**



The Academic Affairs Committee of the Board in conclave, undertakes to discover, by the purest introspection, whether or not the water in the basement of the Triad will always be deep enough to float the *Gschmrub*.

**P**RESIDENT Mark Chamberlain has revealed to our assistant cub reporter that Glassboro's trustees are rummaging about in their own heads in order to reach some decision on the F-----. This procedure, hardly *de rigueur*, is in this case *faute de mieux*.

At the January board meeting, members expressed the hope that faculty would wish to offer their F----- opinions, but the obstinate profs have thus far eschewed the output of input. "Not a single member of the faculty showed up," our

reporter was told when he asked about the faculty meeting Chamberlain said he would call in the first week of the new semester. "Now they'll probably claim that they didn't come," our informant went on, "just because the meeting wasn't in fact called. You can't satisfy those people."

So it is that our trustees have been driven to such remote extremities. Furthermore, the recent NCATE evaluation report seems to be missing from their individualized learning resource centers, although their heads are well stocked with comfortable articles of belief on that score.

Fortunately for everybody, our research department has found a copy of the NCATE report, and our fast-breaking news department will bring you every month useful and appropriate citations from the text, and the trustees won't have to trouble to read it.

Maybe they *have* read it. Perhaps that explains their serene confidence. Chapter Five, which serves as a summary evaluation of the entire undergraduate teacher-training program, does conclude with these cheery words: "The team evaluates the basic program as *adequate*" (p. 77, italics original).

If we have achieved *adequacy* in less than sixty years, how far can we be from *excellence*? Let the scoffers pump that out of the bilge, and as for the rest of us—

**Batten the Mizzen  
and run up the poop!**

### Feats of Clay, Continued

**Y**OU would think that a prudent dean, having once seen his prose derided in public, would mend his ways. You'd think, too, that some president might say to such a dean, "Uh, say listen, how about we implement some image-enhancement upgrading procedures?" Well, bless your hearts, you just don't understand administrators. When the blizzard blows they hunker down, hindquarters to the wind, and wait out the storm.

The prose of Kenneth R. Clay, one of our many deans, was pretty bad when we looked at it about a year ago, but it has slipped a bit since then. Here's a part of his memo to the Support Services Task Force, 1/30/78:

Issues were defined as those kinds of common concerns that in some cases affect all support services or groups of three or more offices, rather than those issues only identified by a single office. The following common issues were identified at this meeting and are presented below in draft form for your information:

1. How are individual office responsibilities and functions determined and who determines these functions and responsibilities?
2. The administrative organizational structure in some cases does not seem adequately to reflect functional relationships that are required and exist between various support offices.
3. Lines of communication and flow of information between offices is often considered insufficient or inadequate.
4. Physical space allocated to various offices often is inadequate for the services provided or location of space does not reflect important functional relationships that exist between various offices.

The first sentence defines *issues* as *concerns* that in *some* cases affect *all* services or groups of *three or more* offices, leaving it to others to think up a name for those concerns that in *all* cases affect *some* services or groups of offices of *any* number. The latter require definition as much as the former, that is, not at all, but recognition of that truth would have shortened not only the memo but the task of the Task Force, and there'd be no getting to the water-cooler through *that* crowd. And so, having devised a definition neither useful nor needed, Clay blithely ignores it later in the same sentence and ends up saying that some concerns *are* issues but that some issues are *not* issues.

The second sentence, thick with passives, makes us wonder just what form draft form *is* and ends with the bureaucratic “for your information.” Some people have to be told why they are reading a memo.

This college has been here for more than half a century. The taxpayers might notice *issue* number one above, which reveals that our administration

has not yet discovered who should tell whom to do what. That's an issue that can be settled in thirty seconds unless you have a Task Force.

But let's not blame Clay for the last fifty years; let's blame him for the *next* fifty years, which Task Forces yet unborn may have to spend looking for the meaning of items two and four. We can hear them now, contending like demented Talmudic scholars: Supposing that an administrative organizational structure, supposing also that we know what that *is*, does *in fact*, at least in some *other* cases, adequately reflect functional relationships, whatever *they* are, but nevertheless *seems* not to: Is that an issue or merely a concern? Are we excused from concern (issue?) with location of space (*physical* space, at least) that does not reflect important (not the trivial) functional relationships that do *not* exist between various offices?

One of our favorite Glassboro writers was quoted in the public press as defending his prose thus: “It communicated, it was understood.” That much, of course, can be said of a thumb firmly pressed to the nose, and we hope that those who teach his children have standards less self-serving.\* Even that feeble excuse, however, cannot be made for items two and four. A detailed analysis might well cause irreversible brain-damage, but, while the meaning is clouded, the message is clear: Our administration is a mess.

When we read item three something else becomes clear: The man charged with cleaning up that mess has a little trouble making his subjects and verbs agree.

We'd like to quote the next paragraph, but it's much too long.<sup>†</sup> That paragraph suggests that hundreds of expensive hours have been poured into a task which would be unneeded in a well-organized administration, and many more are scheduled. And then, after all that time and labor, we can expect an *interim* report. And don't bother standing around on one foot waiting for the *final* report. Bureaucrats don't butter any bread by

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\* At GSC we have what we call academic freedom, which means that high-ranking administrators may announce to the world that correct English doesn't matter and raise neither a storm of protest nor even so much as a trustee's eyebrow.

<sup>†</sup> Call 445-5337 and ask for a copy. Our off-campus readers should note that the area code is 609.

finishing the job at hand. Their profit lies in pointing to *all that work* they have to do and that *long, long time* that it must take. In this case there may indeed be some justification for delay, since that final report depends, as Clay puts it, on “responses to our questionnaires which we do not have at present.”

Now *that* we understand: Questionnaires that are required and *don't* exist.

### Brief Notes

□ Please note that nothing that appears in THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN is protected by copyright or anything else. Not only are you free to quote or reprint or circulate anything we say—we hope you will.

□ A former naval person has told us that the Gschmrub, as any fool can see from the size of her forward cork and the rakish cant of her stern launcher, is not an auxiliary trawler. She is a heavy cruiser. How stupid of us.

□ Readers often send us examples of dismal English written in the outside world, but we can't use them because we have troubles of our own. We're glad to report that there is a publication which prints dismal English and names perpetrators. Here are the rules:

For every item of Gobbledygook published . . . we will pay \$10 and keep the name[s] of contributors strictly confidential. Whenever you can—Please!—authenticate the entry by sending the original or a copy . . . Address: Gobbledygook '78, Metro Desk, The Washington Star, 225 Virginia Avenue SE, Washington D. C. 20061

### The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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**Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune,  
whose words do jarre, nor his reason In frame,  
whose sentence is preposterous.**

*Ben Jonson*



# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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## A Leaf in the Wind and a Straw

CONSIDER Enid Blaylock. Enid Blaylock is professor of something called educational psychology at the Long Beach campus of the University of California. In a guest editorial in *The Star-Ledger*, Enid Blaylock chides the public for its obstinate refusal to understand “the new goals of education.” She’s plucky, because if the public *did* understand those goals and what she has to do with them an irate citizenry might just snatch her bald and drive her with whips and nettles into the Pacific Ocean.

Enid Blaylock wants us all to know that falling SAT scores are *not* due to any failures in the schools or the teachers. They must be blamed on the silly makers of the tests, who persist in testing “only reading and writing” and thus “fail to measure or predict much of real importance.” Here’s *real* importance:

. . . students are taught to appreciate . . . cultures other than their own and to perceive themselves in a positive light. In addition, they are encouraged to express their feelings openly and honestly, to develop and maintain good interpersonal relationships and to question basic ideas.

Squinting through the jargon (they do like *inters* and perceiving in kinds of light, don't they?), we can see how blubber-chewing got started. To do this stuff a teacher announces that the class will now rap in small groups while she wanders down to the lounge to leaf through a hair-do magazine and spend time perceiving *herself* in a positive light just as Professor Blaylock taught her to do.

Enid Blaylock, having let slip those “new goals,” can now tell us that the tests

do not attempt to quantify such crucial concerns as students’ self-perception; their attitude



toward, and relationship with, people whose culture and social class differ from their own; their ethical behavior, values, personal philosophy and moral commitments; their creativity, emotional health and sense of ethnic identity—precisely the areas\* that schools have been emphasizing . . .

That disorderly parade of clumsy jargon suggests that Enid Blaylock has good reason to denigrate tests of writing skills. We must put aside grammar, however, to advise Enid Blaylock that she and her pitiable students are practicing family counseling, social engineering, psychotherapy, and mystagogy—all without so much as a mail-order license from a motel in Sarasota. Socrates thought himself not wise enough to instruct mankind; Enid Blaylock blithely proclaims that those meager intellects and indifferent talents who pass so easily through our notoriously undemanding teacher-training schools, that those placid girls who “just love children” and those inarticulate boys who finally *do* ask a question in class—“How long does this paper have to be?”—that those children, tutored in their trade by people to whom reading and writing and ciphering are not of “real importance,” will soon be making our children into “better human beings and not simply ‘achievers’.”

*Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*, no? Where are all those “better human beings”? How is it that America is not wondrously transformed? The students who are regularly vandalizing the schools—do they merely “express themselves openly and honestly”? The schoolchildren who beat up teachers—is that how they “question basic values”? Or might it be that those students, however mutely, muted into savagery by schools that will not lead them into the way of words, sense that they are being cheated and despoiled?

**The uneducated man is like a leaf blown from here to there, believing whatever he is told.**

Enid Blaylock may have more brass than Muhammad Ali, but she stings like a butterfly and

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\* People who are in the education business but who are not prepared to teach a subject prefer to say that they teach “in areas” or even “in spheres.” EB uses both terms but never mentions any subjects.

floats like a bee. “Just consider,” she crows, “that today’s students have mastered the use of a wide range of communications media—television, computers, tape recorders.” Mastered. After only twelve years those cunning little blighters can press Rewind and tune in *Hawaii Five-0* all by themselves. By “computers” she must mean calculators, but accuracy is for mere achievers and “does not necessarily mean that a person is well-rounded.” So much for Enid Blaylock.

Consider now Marva Collins, one of those few teachers who *can* be called professional. She has hung out her shingle, and people pay her to teach their children. Furthermore, she makes no self-serving protestations about all that lofty—and untestable—“better human being” stuff. She seems to think that children who learn to read and write might be on the way to becoming better persons. Enid Blaylock might think that a quaint notion.

Marva Collins does not whine that society is to blame that we cannot teach poor, black children to read and write. She just does it. She makes her students memorize things and write and speak in sentences. They learn.

Her pupils, many of whom do not know the alphabet when they arrive, take standardized tests at the beginning and end of each year to measure their ability. Their progress has been phenomenal. Many jump from well below to well above their actual grade level. [*Time*, 12/26/77]

While Marva Collins measures what her students have learned, Enid Blaylock tells us that the SAT is “a sorting instrument [that] requires revision if it is to properly gauge<sup>†</sup> present student performance in academic areas.” Academic. Yeah.

The younger children at Westside, Marva Collins’ answer to Enid Blaylock’s “new, expanded role of the schools,” have been known to hide their shoes as 3:00 o’clock approaches so that they may stay a little longer. All the students know by heart the words of Socrates: The uneducated man is like a leaf blown from here to

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<sup>†</sup> The splitting of the infinitive, like the celibacy of the clergy, is a matter not of doctrine but of discipline. Why do you suppose she chose to split? Does it prove that she’s no mere achiever either?

there, believing whatever he is told. He might even believe Enid Blaylock. While Enid coos about mastering media, reading and writing excluded, of course, Marva Collins says that if some one were to give her \$20,000 worth of audio-visual equipment she'd leave it on the sidewalk. Therefore, we hope that none of you will donate film-strips to Westside Preparatory School, 3819 West Adams, Chicago, IL 60624. Try to think up something more useful.

Readers in California might also write to their governor, a well-known mere achiever.

### Gschmrub Ahoy!

THE F----- MEMORANDUM contrived by the Dean and the Chairmen of the *Professional* Division wasn't meant to entertain. The covering letter reminds us that 13 people—golly, they're dedicated folk—met for 80 hours to do the deed. We can't give them all they deserve (who could?) but we can get a good start.

Their screed (no author named, of course) bristles with bizarre slashed compounds like “task/managerial” and even slashed, hyphenated (would that be “slashed/hyphenated?”) forms like “judgment/decision-making.” On page 17 we find an unintended admission of the motives of the mad slashers:

The competent teacher will be knowledgeable about environmental / cultural / physical influences upon the mental, social, emotional, & physical development of children and youth.

We can note briefly how verbosity undoes the brain and causes the inane “development of youth” where the writer was unable to let stand the lonely noun, “children,” but the lesson is in the slashes. If he (she?) can write “mental, social, emotional, & physical development,” why not “environmental, cultural, and physical influences”? Do the slashes add some meaning lacking in the conventionally punctuated series, or does the author fancy that they make his stuff look *professional*? In that ghastly *he/she*, frequent of course in this piece, the slash must mean *either, but not both*, and ditto in *and/or*. Try that in the passage above or in “judgment/decision-making.”

Educationists like to claim—and need to believe—that their language must be complicated

because their ideas are complicated. In his ignorance, of course, the layman may erroneously conclude that they are gibbering. Baloney. There are no complicated ideas in this memorandum; those that aren't simply simple are simply too elementary to require saying at all. That's why these people, like frantic freshmen filling a page, pad out their compositions by festooning their statements of the obvious with garlands of superfluous modifiers. It is as though we said not that circumstances alter cases, in itself not worth the saying, but that physical, emotional, social/historical, psychological, cross-cultural/interpersonal mitigating factors can be perceived to frequently eventuate in disparate results/outcomes dependent upon and varying in accordance with inputs. Anyone who finds that complicated is stupid.

The cited passage is different only in that the writer didn't know what he was doing. It says, with a firm grasp on the obvious, that a good teacher knows a lot about students. They call that a “finding” and teach required courses “centered around” it.

Into the hands of these *professionals* have we delivered the future. We'll tell you more about the F----- Memo next month.

Many new readers have written to ask the meaning of F-----, but this is a family journal. We neither print that word nor use it in letters. We advise the curious to address Jan Weaver, Dean of *Professional* Studies, at Glassboro State College, Glassboro, New Jersey 08028. She uses that word. You might ask for a copy of the memo too, so that you can read about the subsiding panacea and study Hypothesis 4.

### Scientia coronat

#### More or Less

☞ The prose of Lizziel Sullivan, Tutorial Specialist, was examined at length in Volume One, Number Seven. Those very few readers who were disquieted by that article may now take comfort in the knowledge that Lizziel Sullivan, having been “thoroughly evaluated,” has been, upon recommendation by our President and by the unanimous vote of our Board of Trustees, reappointed.

### Brief Notes

□ A faithful reader and an active free-lance Grammarian, *Perplexed in Pittsburgh*, writes to question some tangled obscurities in the final paragraph of last month's front page. He asks what the babes and sucklings have to do with the Faculty Senate and points out that the last sentence would make sense only if there actually *were* a vice-president "paid to futs around with parking problems."

He deserves a reply:

*Dear Perplexed,*

*Heh, heh.*

*Yours in English,  
The Underground Grammarian*

□ A reader in Florida has informed us that the nine teacher-training schools in his state offer 3,079 courses in education, an average of 342 each. He calls that deplorable.

At Glassboro we have 464 such courses. We call it protecting the troops.

### The Annals of Grammar In Memoriam

First Dean of Women's Studies

All too Untimely, Alas

She met her End

Through an Open

Personholecover

The Underground  
GRAMMARIAN

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# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

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EVERYONE KNOWS that the reading and writing skills of high school graduates have declined regularly for about the last fifteen years. Few know, however, what we can now reveal: As the median verbal scores of students fell only 10.25% in the last decade, barely more than one measly per cent a year, the median IQ of professional educationists fell more than twice as fast, from 114 (an all-time high) to about 92. Take comfort from this news, for it does at least provide a rational explanation for a perplexing fact of life.

For at least ten years, every American who is not a professional educationist has understood why students read and write worse every year: The schools teach less every year—that's all. The very wind-up toy salesmen in the streets could have told you that silly electives and gimmicky mini-courses had driven out the teaching of reading and writing—and ciphering, as well—and that school had simply become too easy. They could have told you, too, that while such stuff made life easier for teachers and brought in barrels of federal money for nonsense like role-playing and consciousness-raising,\* it assured that each graduating class would be more ignorant than the last. The wind-up toy salesmen knew that. Jockeys and Roto-rooter operators knew that. Parents, of course, knew that; all educated people knew that. So who *didn't* know that? Who kept telling us that television was to blame, or maybe integration, or maybe Society, or even the Zeitgeist? Who was sure that schools and teachers, at least, were blameless? Who? You know who—Educationists. That's who.

\* There's no end in sight. In the public schools of Pitman, New Jersey, where SAT scores are even worse than you might expect, they are spending tax money for an enterprise in which "breakfasts will be prepared for [the students] to show man's interrelationship with all men." Antipasto? Kielbasa? Blubber?

Well, it's a long worm that has no turning, and now even some professional educationists may know. You must understand that those folk are snappy indeed at what they call noncognitive learning, but when rational thought is needed they have to be told what "studies have shown." Now, at last, they have their own "findings." The National Association of Secondary School Principals now releases a startling report that concludes, from a study of some high schools where scores have *not* fallen, that all we need is a strict, demanding academic regimen. Gosh! What'll they think of next? What will they do, now that they've had to learn what everyone else has known for years? Something? Nothing?

We can make a good guess by looking at our own experience. Like the educationists at Glassboro, they will launch into the future those leaky tubs that foundered in the past—here a patch, there a patch . . . They will, à la Westmoreland, call for more money, more troops, more required courses in education.<sup>†</sup> They will, at the expense of the taxpayers, hire other educationists as consultants and announce themselves "perfectly satisfied" by their credentials, as the cuckoo was satisfied to have the jackass for a judge.

There is no reason to expect that those secondary school principals will prove any more enlightened than our own *professionals*, who emit, in their putative search for "excellence" as teacher-trainers, long pages of hypotheses and abstract speculations and socio-cultural/ethnic/economic generalizations decked out in pseudo-psychological jargon. (It must be said, in fairness, that there isn't any more of that "demonstrated excellence" talk around here nowadays: all they claim now is that if excellence is what we want, why, of course, they can provide that. This makes us wonder what that other stuff was, the stuff they *used* to call excellence, and further to wonder why we should now trust those who were, by implicit admission, unable to provide excellence in the past and, by simple logic, either ignorant or

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<sup>†</sup> You think this is a joke? We don't make jokes. At a meeting of the F----- Steering Committee of The Division of *Professional Studies*, Marion Hodes moved that the education requirement be increased to 60 credits, one half of an incipient teacher's training. The motion was passed unanimously.

mendacious about what they couldn't do. But enough—their new stance, however reluctantly taken, may be only a small step for a man, but it's a great leap forward for a Division of *Professional Studies*.)

Ten years from now we'll remind you that we gave a problem that almost any one can solve into the hands of the only people who can't solve it. It won't matter, though; few will be able to read what we say, and even fewer will care. The rest is non-cognition.

### Good English . . .

. . . needs more than elementary correctness. Even more reprehensible than the danglers of participles are those writers who darken counsel by words without knowledge and pervert our language in an attempt to deceive.

We expect perversion of the language from those whose advantage lies not in a precise expression of their thoughts—politicians, hucksters, criminals. Scoundrels they may be, but the thoughtful know that and are not duped.

We expect perversion of the language from those whose minds are out of tune—fools. The thoughtful are not duped.

Even the thoughtful may be duped, however, when those we suppose honorable or wise prove scoundrels or fools. When a professor perverts our language, he does so either as a scoundrel or a fool and outrages the truth and his calling.

We remind our readers that it is not for their delectation but rather for the discomfiture of the perpetrators that perversions of our language are made to seem laughable in these pages. There is nothing funny about vice and folly.

Laugh, but laugh little, remembering that the perpetrators smart, but smart little. If we are ever to do some good and useful work, it will be out of not the mirth of our readers, but their wrath.

### By Fons, as Told to Origo

WE'RE TIRED, too, of playing with the educationists. We'd rather idle away an hour with some of our highly paid and unusually educated administrators. For instance, there's Leo Beebe, Dean of the Division of Administrative Studies.<sup>‡</sup>

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<sup>‡</sup> We have divisions and task forces and deans who spearhead our thrusts and classes at 0800 hours. This

(In other schools it's a Business Department, but we have so many serious scholars around here that the refugees from the marts would feel a bit déclassé without a *Studies* title.) Beebe writes in public about being “obsoleted,” but that's natural—he was, after all, involved in the production of the Edsel. We'd also like to discuss his “twin thrusts,” but this is a high-class sheet. We must forgo Leo Beebe.

How charming it would be to dally with Marguerite Stubbs and Betsey Wriggins and explore their darling little proposal to offer a kollege kredit course titled “Who am I?” Enid would be so proud. We'd better not mess with them, however; nobody on our staff can handle that existentialism stuff.

Leo and the ladies are probably just trying to sound academic. We're not after the little guys who push gobbledygook in the schoolyard; we want the big shots, the syndicate, the founts and origins of jargon and inanity. We know where to find them, too, although they're doing everything they can to cover their tracks. Their latest big shipment isn't even signed, but that's all right—that means we can collar them *all* for peddling junk.

The F----- Memorandum was composed with great care on the mistaken assumption that all it takes to make good English is the absence of things like failures of agreement and comma faults. That our English must be conventionally correct is obvious; making it so, however difficult they must have found that, earns no merit. It is also necessary to say something and make sense.

“Teaching,” says some one or other of our *professionals*, “is the application of a *systematic series of actions directed toward specific ends.*” (Original italics.) That's a very useful description, just as illuminating about fraudulent conversion and vacuum-cleaner repair as it is about teaching. The subject and verb do, however, agree, and the diction is surely *professional*, so the writer must have decided that the inanity didn't matter.

Perhaps, however, it was just one of those stupid generalizations that we all need from time to time to start a line of reasoning; but in the next sentence we read that “Within the general system of teaching acts are many subsets of actions and

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helps our administrators by preparing them for what they want to be when they grow up.

processes.” If you have the knack of writing like that—it isn't hard—you can fool some of the people some of the time into thinking you are an expert. Try it yourself in those two sentences, replacing “teaching” with “hydraulic engineering” or “open-heart surgery.” Sounds neat, doesn't it?

It gets worse. In the next sentence, we are meant to see that the author is as *learned* as he is *professional*:

For example, based upon developments in philosophy, psychology, and communications theory, teaching and learning are now seen as reciprocal relations within a special system of information processing.

Wouldn't you like to take hold of this chap and require him to describe precisely those “new developments” that have brought him and the other slow learners to the knowledge that teaching and learning affect each other? Wouldn't you like to know what he means when he says that teaching and learning are “relations,” and how a “special system” differs from a mere system? “For example,” he says, as though about to provide the names of some “subsets of actions and processes.” So where are they? And that “based upon” phrase, what exactly does it modify? Does he mean to be cagey in saying that teaching and learning “are seen” as “relations”? Does he see them as relations? Do his pals? What do we pay him for this kind of work?

This is the document of which Jan Weaver boasted, tartly reminding us that 13 people met for more than 80 hours to concoct it. It would have served her better to say that her Bulgarian graduate assistant had scribbled it out between classes. There isn't a page that doesn't show either inanity or duplicity. You can open it at random and put your finger on bunk. Not only the teachers of our children but also the teacher-trainers of the future will be trained by these teacher-trainers.

We turn now to Hypothesis Four on page 10, but first a little comic relief in the form of a silly misplaced modifier:

*Hypothesis 2:* That students who complete the fifth year residency of the experimental program will differ significantly [how else?] in ability to make and implement appropriate educational decisions from a control group of teachers who have completed one year of employment.

This hypothesis not only entertains us with its funny dangler, but it refreshes as well with its naive distinction between a “year of employment” and the equally possible but less credible “year of teaching.” Perhaps, merely perhaps, deep, deep in their hearts, in the still watches of the night, perhaps they do suspect that there is a difference. That possibility we gladly grant, but we cannot grant the utility of Hypothesis 2. To test it would need some one who is able to recognize an “appropriate educational decision” when he sees one.

With our customary restraint, we will now refrain from expressing an appropriate educational decision about Hypothesis 4:

All participants in the experimental program, preservice [*sic*] or experienced teachers, will show similar shifts in responses on the Concerns Inventory from undifferentiated unrelated, through personal concerns, to logistical/collaborative concerns, and to impact and effectiveness concerns as each change is introduced and developed.

Imagine, if you can, that somebody was not ashamed to have written that. Twelve others read it and found it good.

If the author of the F----- Memorandum knew what he was doing, his intent was to darken counsel, and he is bad. If his intent was good, then he just didn’t realize that his prose was deceptive and insulting, and he is foolish. It is good that his name is not given, for that demonstrates that his colleagues assented that he might speak for them all, and thus what we can find in the writer we can find in those who empowered him.

We cannot wish that the traits to which the F----- Memorandum bears witness will be passed on to future teachers; at the least, we require in a teacher clarity of mind and goodness of heart, so that whatever evil the former might work the latter would forbid, and whatever beloved folly the latter might embrace the former would unmask. The one alone, knaves have; the other, fools.

*But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement. For by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.*

We now say Goodbye for the Summer. To our non-Glassborovian readers we here repeat the instructions in the enclosed supplement, although in brief: Do those things. You can reach us all summer at the usual address: Post Office Box 203, Glassboro, New Jersey 05028.

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# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Volume Two, Number Six . . . . September 1978

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THE entire editorial staff of *The Underground Grammarian* was shaken to read, in the *Philadelphia Bulletin* for July 3, 1978, portentous words from Representative Aspin of Wisconsin: “It’s popular to say the volunteer military is a failure because it’s taking too many dummies. [But,] in fact, it looks like the services are taking too few of these men.”

Sure enough, there were the statistics. The republic stands in peril because its guardians just can’t seem to attract enough volunteers stupid enough to find happiness in the dull and interminable routines of military life. A hell of a note—and on the eve of Independence Day, no less.

The military services sort recruits into five categories, the first containing those whose intelligence puts them in the smartest 7% of the population. Category Five is made up of people too stupid to do anything. The shortage is in Category Four, those stupid enough not to mind doing the few things they’re not too stupid to do.

We have been saying that clear language is not only the expression but the very origin of clear thought, and that clear statements in ordered sequence are the substance of all knowledge. We still say that. We have said further that training in the skills of correct language is therefore training in the ability to think. That, too, we still say. We also said that to give as many people as possible the ability to think would be a good thing. Now there, we may have been wrong.

Things are suddenly clearer. There is only one chairman of the board at General Motors; let him be literate. There are thousands and thousands of nut-turners; so what if their participles dangle a little? You let one of those guys start worrying about where to put his participles, the next thing you know he'll be picking up on non-sequiturs. From that it's a small step to sniffing out unstated premises, and our Chevette hatch-backs will crumble into junk because all those ex-nut-turners will be busy with proxy fights, and that will be the end of civilization as we know it.

How blind we've been, castigating patriotic educators who are simply doing their duty in providing recruits for the fourth category. They have known all along that if everyone were taught clear writing and clear thought there would soon be no more sweepers and wipers, no more hewers and drawers, no more vice-presidents, no more deans. That's some category, that Category Four.

As Thomas Jefferson lay dying—it was Independence Day of 1826—he asked with his last breath, “This is the Fourth?” Naturally enough, everyone has presumed that he was referring to the anniversary. Not so. The spirit of prophecy was come upon him, and he saw the future of the Republic. Columbia had opened to him a vision—a tawdry horde of the dulled, drab peasantry of the America to come, the Fourth Category.

“This,” he asked her—a thin whisper, his last, “*this* is the Fourth?”

“That's nothing, Tom,” she replied. “Just wait till you see the Fifth.”

He wanted to warn us, but his chance was past. We have to remember his words for ourselves: “If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.”

### **The Works of Scriblerus X. Machina**

WHEN the Communications Department blasted off into the unknown regions of interdivisional space, its chairman left us to mull over his now famous Farewell (*sans* Hail):

But in the sober light of day after the intoxicating elixirs of self-delusion have begun to fade, after the sonorous tones of your voices have begun to sound hollow, after the

technicolor hues of your dreams have begun to mute into the blacks and whites of reality—then you may perhaps face these details of reality.

He was reminding us that we had not yet entered the twentieth century, so he must have chosen that quaint and antiquated tone of purple fustian for ironic emphasis—don't you think? How subtly he reminds us of our enslavement to outworn tradition by his innovative use of *mute* as an intransitive verb and that multimedia metaphor in which our elixirs *fade* before our very eyes!

Now the Communications Department re-enters our atmosphere, blazing like another Kohoutek, and bringing no faded elixirs but a heady draft proposal for a F----- of its very own. We looked at the part where they tell all about the teaching of writing, twentieth-century style. Here's the plan:

The communications Department proposes to establish an ideal classroom for the teaching of the basic writing course. . . . While there is no single classroom prototype that could be considered ideal for all circumstances, there is a concern that different approaches be taken. One of the keys in suggesting an ideal classroom is that traditional classrooms have a way of perpetuating traditional approaches . . . . By bringing together in one room a large variety of audiovisual implements, creating a relaxed atmosphere by having the room carpeted with pictures on the walls and easy chairs and tables and by having duplicating equipment and a variety of newspapers and magazines readily available, we can encourage attempts to change both students' perceptions and teachers' approaches to the task of learning how to write.

Now why couldn't we have thought of all that neat stuff? Because we've been hung up perpetuating traditional approaches—things like drill and practice, writing and rewriting—that's why. Even desks! Now we see. What we need is a dentist's waiting room redone by Radio Shack, magazines and Muzak, comfy chairs, and a shiny new Xerox so the scholars won't have to fight over the latest number of *Popular Mechanics*.

Notice a refreshing absence of flat, empty surfaces where a thoughtless student might accidentally write words on a piece of paper and set the whole class back a century. That's the hard

part, all right, putting the words on the paper. That's why hardly anyone was able to write before the advent of that large variety of audiovisual implements. (*Implements?*)

The proposal itself seems to have been put together in just such an innovative, relaxing setting. Notice, for instance, the creative (or easy chair) treatment of punctuation in that bit about the pictures. The room is carpeted with pictures on the walls. The pictures are on the walls and easy chairs and tables. It's a split-screen effect. *Electronic!*

Elsewhere we find:

A second prong in the outreach of the department would come from a Communication Consultancy Center. This would be created as an umbrella from which many different kinds of services could be offered to the community.

Stunning. No fuddy-duddy of the age of paper and pencil could ever have accomplished prose like that. The secret is *vision*. Only a writer who has learned his craft from long hours of assiduous (but relaxed) scrutiny of a twenty-inch color implement could hope to develop a vision modern enough to see that outreaches have prongs, prongs coming from their Centers, and that a prong, or maybe a Center, can be created as an umbrella, an umbrella from which services can be dispensed, services that can help us all to learn how to communicate in just this fashion.

Well, you can just bet your Bearcat scanner against a busted quill pen that all our staff writers will be standing at the door the day they open that Communications Consultancy Center. We're mired in traditions. We could never, for instance, have come up with these spiffy structures that go the tired old passive at least one better—maybe two:

. . . [the] Department can provide leadership that will cause it to be viewed as a resource.

. . . few of the courses . . . have been able to be offered on a regular basis.

. . . needs should be able to be filled . . .

You just can't hope to master that smooth modern style without spending hours, whole *seasons* probably, in the old easy chair, beer and pretzels at hand, studying the styles of the greatest

play-by-play and color men to be found on the audiovisual implement.

And just look at these daring departures from stodgy tradition. We're so old-fashioned that we almost thought they were mistakes:

. . . the advantages the computer offers . . . lies in continuous availability.

. . . the equipment needs . . . is appended.

. . . there needs to be provisions made . . .

All of this is encouraging for anybody who worries about the teaching of writing here at Glassboro. It shows that the Communications Department is perfectly willing to put some of the taxpayers' money where somebody's mouth is—in a collection of machines. Time was when your basic model communications teacher would rather watch reruns of *Washington Week in Review* than teach a writing course. Now they'll be clamoring to twiddle the dials and leaf through *Cosmopolitan* and rap about nontraditional approaches to interpersonal communication in the easy chair.

Well, it's obvious that a F----- program in communications is just what we need to solve the writing problem at Glassboro . . . and yet . . . and yet . . . something is wrong. What can it be?

Hmm. There *is* something unsettling in the bit about the speech courses. There's a sentence that says: "The needs in the latter area can be best described as a lack of attention." Good heavens. Do you suppose that that was meant to mean what it means? Can it be a subtle clue, an unconscious admission, an inadvertent invitation to sniff about and find some other things that need exactly that—a lack of attention?

Hmm.

Pshaw. We're just getting too suspicious, reading meanings into every little thing. Why that sentence is probably nothing more than a simple *mistake!* Any writer is entitled to one tiny little mistake.

So not to worry. We can all go down to the launching in good conscience, sing in our hollow tones one chorus of "Anchors Aweigh," smash a fifth of faded elixir on the prow of the refitted Starship Triad, newly home from one uncharted deep, sallying forth into yet another, carrying our hopes and dreams, ere they mute, our tuners and

amplifiers and, of course, the prongs of our outreach.

### **The Sallying Forth**

*It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;  
it may be we shall touch the Happy Isles.*

### **Teratology**

SOME of the stuff we have to read causes cramps and vertigo and defies rational commentary. Here's an example from a booklet describing courses in Industrial Relations at St. Joseph's College, City Avenue & 54th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19131. It was written by two persons—one to aid, the other to abet—Edward J. Mullaly and Dennis J. Comey. We suspect that they broke off their incisors while kissing the Blarney Stone.

Count a probe into the why and wherefore of organized labor as evidence that the St. Joseph's College program is unique and distinctive, daringly innovative. A scholar may lament the handicap that authors and publishers have not enclosed a philosophy of unionism within the covers of a tightly chaptered textbook. That gap, however, will be closed by a resourceful teacher, equipped to offer a broad brush survey of labor history, thus to uncover patterns woven by tradition, to evaluate tried and tested practices, to capsule ongoing guidelines melding into an unformulated but operative philosophy, needed and wanted.

If you send for your own copy, you'll see a scholar niche a factor as foibles shamble an ultra-logical approach.

This next chap works alone. He's Herbert H. Wong, Assoc. Professor of Environmental Education at Western Washington University, Bellingham, WA 98225. He writes:

The general "classroom culture" and "school system culture" are in the majority programmed with prescribed perceptions, attitudes and values which characterize a quasi-stationary culture or at best, a metaphorical industrial model. A toplan educational system of values and its existing isomorphic, formulated goals and

means can be traumatically challenged by EE and its evolving, diverse-goal system as EE functions as a catalytical non-discipline to prepare and facilitate people to move through a meta-transition into the phase of non-stationary culture . . .

We can't account for that, but, we can help with "topian." It means: having something to do with wall decorations. There.

Maybe our schools are just facilitating too many people to move into these catalytical non-disciplines.

### **Good News from Texas...**

Dave Allred and Ron Coleman are members of the Texas House of Representatives and subscribers not only to *The Underground Grammarian* but to good English and good education. Let all Texan readers know that these gentlemen intend to pay attention to your concerns and suggestions. Please write them—if only, for now, to greet them—at the Texas House of Representatives, Box 2910, Capitol Station, Austin, Texas 78769. If you live in Dallas, you can depend on Representatives Allred and Coleman for a vigorous response when you tell them how you feel about the story that comes next.

### **...and Bad**

For any of our readers who may have been away on vacation, we reprint these excerpts from *The New York Times* for July 23, 1978:

. . . the Dallas Independent School District was forced to disclose that half its new teachers had failed a competency test ...that is used to test the intelligence of persons 13 years old and older.

. . . Administrators... did even worse than the teachers and . . . both groups did worse than a sample of high school students at a private school in affluent North Dallas

Of the 535 teachers tested, 11 correctly answered 10 or fewer of the 60 questions. Of the 77 administrators who took the test, 16 scored 10 or below.

Our office calculator (from Texas Instruments) says that 2 percent of those teachers and almost 21 percent of those administrators are too stupid to make it into Category Four and contribute to the preservation of the American way of life, so they may as well stay right where they are where no one will get hurt except some kids who don't pay taxes or vote. Of course, if the standards at Texas Instruments are similar to the standards for teachers in Dallas, then our figures may be a bit off.

It must be said, however, that somebody down in Dallas had both the sense and the audacity to have such a test given. We send congratulations and this bit of advice: You take care—you hear?

For an evening of adventure and excitement, why not go to the next meeting and urge such a test in your town. Stay close to the door.

*The Underground  
GRAMMARIAN*

Post Office Box 203 Glassboro, NJ 08028

R. Mitchell

Assistant Circulation Manager



# The Underground GRAMMARIAN

Volume Two, Number Seven . . . . October 1978



## **Pluralites ponenda est!**

**I**F you take hold of Occam's Razor by the blade and try to shave with the handle, you'll end up with a face full of hair and some short, stumpy fingers. It'll serve you bloody right. Some folk, however, don't care what's on their faces, as long as it isn't egg, and they worry about diminishing digits only when they have dollar signs out in front of them.

More and more states are looking for ways to find out how much the students learn in those expensive schools. The results are not encouraging. The National Education Association

itself is dismayed, but not, as you'd think, because the schools don't seem to do a good job. They are dismayed with the tests being used to measure what the students have learned. They reason thus; If students can't do well on those standardized tests, we'll just have to come up some better tests, tests that will show us exactly what's wrong with these obstinate rascals who refuse to learn to read and write.

"What we need," says Dave Darland, the director of instruction at NEA, "is a new set of procedures to get at the learning problem." There. That's for all you saps who have been thinking that there might just be a teaching problem. It's a *learning* problem!

The NEA is now urging so-called "criterion referenced" tests that don't measure anyone against anyone else or against any presumed standard. Expensive as such tests might be to devise, they would show that all those kids have really been taught a hell of a lot, considering their learning problems, that is.

One of our colleagues, a David Weischadle, who is an associate professor of education at Montclair, was whining the same tune in an editorial last July in the *Times*. Well, yes, he conceded, there *are* some high school graduates who can't read or write. Why there may even be many more such "problem youngsters than we know." Problem youngsters.

The youngsters' problems, Weischadle discloses, are compounded by heedless parents who fail to help the schools in the "early identification of learning problems." "The parent should have," he proclaims, "complete confidence in the school." Sure.

So what's to be done? Naturally, Weischadle calls for "the acquisition of local, state or Federal monies to enact better programs." What did you expect?

What we can all expect, of course, is more of this line. Educationists don't like simple explanations except for the one that says that the schools could do the job if we gave them more monies for better programs, programs even better than the last better programs for which we gave them monies and which have brought us to the point where 17% of high school graduates are illiterate.

*Pluralites non ponenda est*, wrote William of Occam, *sine necessitate*, but these folk need

pluralities lest they have to face the thought that students learn less when they are taught less. They'd rather find a way to conclude that the fault must be shared, by everyone *else*, but that they're still willing and able to save us if we'll just have complete confidence and fork over the monies. It's always plural.

### **Nobody here but us Professionals**

THAT Weischadle, who is mentioned above, can be studied at length in the New Jersey section of *The New York Times* for July 16, 1978. His piece is called, naturally, "Educating the Parents." Mass illiteracy he easily dismisses as a matter of "problem youngsters," but those uppity parents who are beginning to complain about illiteracy—they need to be taught a lesson. They can vote! If we don't straighten those malcontents out right away, they might end up listening to demagogues and voting against some of our favorite monies.\* Worse yet, and it's with this fear that Weischadle begins his finger-wagging, some of them might *win* those malpractice suits that they're discussing with their lawyers.†

Weischadle protests that even if illiteracy *were* the fault of the schools, that wouldn't mean that the schools were to blame. Here's the delicate way he puts it:

Have the critics been fair to the schools? To the extent that schools are responsible for a youngster's educational growth, the critics have dealt with the right party. However, it does not necessarily mean that professionals in the schools are inept. It does mean that educational leadership has failed to articulate the problem effectively and carry out the necessary programs.

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\* Teachers' organizations are as happy about tax revolts as Macbeth was about walking trees. They're behaving, however, more like Chicken Little, which means they'll end up like Lemming-wemming.

† Speaking of lawyers, we are reminded that salaries of public servants in New Jersey are supposed to be matters of public record. We often print them so the taxpayers can meditate. Weischadle's salary seems to be unavailable. A chap in the business office, one Kervik by name, (201) 893-4363 by phone, said he'd provide it, but he didn't. You think he forgot?

It's hard to know exactly what Weischadle means by that "articulate." First we thought that the "professionals" had been unable to utter intelligible sounds, for that reading does reflect experience. However, in this kind of writing, no "professional" would ever waste a nifty word like "articulate" on such a simple thought. Next we guessed that the man might be saying that the "professionals" had been unable to define the problem thoroughly and accurately. That, too, we had to reject. Such inability would be remarkably similar to ineptitude in "professionals," surely, but Weischadle says they're *not* inept. Only one possibility remains: "To articulate the problem effectively" must mean to find some description that will keep irate parents from thinking that the "professionals" are inept. Of course! That's just what Weischadle's is up to in this piece—*educating* the parents.

He does some pretty fancy articulating as well. Where do they learn that language? In the ordinary graduate school, candidates are expected to be competent in a couple of foreign languages, but in those education places they know that skill in language will cripple the budding "professional" by enabling him to say things plainly. You get no monies that way. Straight talk would mean the end of effective articulation as we know it.

Here are some examples of bent talk from Weischadle's little piece. He won't say that people are talking about something; he says that "much recent discussion has focused on" it. He can't say, "Hurry"; he says that "delay should not be allowed to take place." He can't say that people should use wisely what they have; he says that "an enlightened utilization . . . must be present." He can't say that the people who deal out discipline should be consistent; he says that "the haphazard application of disciplinary action . . . must be eliminated." He can't say, "Don't worry." He says that "uneasiness should be settled."

Still, we worry. For one thing, there is no clear meaning in the settling of uneasiness. In fact, it sounds ominous. If the settling of uneasiness has the same effect as the settling of terms or plans, we don't want any part of it. For another, how can we take any comfort from a teacher of teachers who condescends, in broken English, to explain why we should have "complete confidence" in

him and other “professionals,” so that they may get on, unhampered by our ill-informed and amateurish complaints, with the “acquisition . . . of monies to enact better programs” that will, *this* time around, solve the illiteracy problem?

In these examples of Weischadle’s tortured English, the grammatical subjects are things, not persons, and abstract things at that. All things that must be done by people, but we see no people. This language suggests a world where responsible agents, the doers of deeds, have been magically occulted by the deeds themselves. A weird structure of that sort, *utilization must be present*, for example, has the merit (?) of excusing somebody from an obligation to use something. If things go wrong, therefore, it’s not any *person’s* fault; it’s just that utilization wasn’t present.

Such structures, furthermore, often generate certain morally flavored auxiliary verbs: “delay should not”—“application must,” etc. This is another grammatically symbolized cop-out which implies that moral obligation falls upon deeds rather than doers. It is up to those negligent deeds to get themselves done. This is convenient for those “professionals” who won’t be able to do them.

Normal English, in its typical structure, a simple sentence in the active voice, implies a world where agents perform acts. There are times when we would wish it otherwise, and in our minds we can devise subterfuges that will make it seem otherwise. We do the business of the mind in language, and we make our subterfuges of the same stuff. Weischadle, in his grammatical gyrations, is not just writing bad English; he is positing a certain kind of world. In that world, one can *parler sans parler* like Castorp and reject in advance all responsibility for what one says. Here’s how Weischadle does it—indeed, how almost anyone of those “professionals” would do it: “The pre-school years have been recognized as being important formulative years.”

He probably means “formative,” although he may be thinking that the pre-school years are the years spent sucking a formula from bottles—but no matter. The important thing is the grotesque contortion by which he escapes having to say that the pre-school years *are* formative, or, if you like, formulative. It matters not at all to the “professional” that what he has to say is obvious and banal and widely enough known that it needs

no saying; he still finds a way to evade responsibility for having said it. In this timid language of misdirection and abdication, no one would dare stand forth and proclaim that a turkey is a turkey. He might mutter, tentatively, that a turkey has been recognized as being a turkey—although not necessarily by *him*.

Into such prose, human beings vanish. No wonder we couldn’t discover Weischadle’s salary. He has withdrawn into the precincts of the passive voice. He has given over all doing of deeds and drawn up about him the mists of circumlocution. Far from our ken, he has sojourned in the land of the self-eliminating application and followed the spoor of the place-taking delay. He is, by now, by gloomy night and periphrastics compassed round. He is, in short, or sort of short, no longer recognized as being Weischadle. Now we see the truth. There is no Weischadle.

## Teratology

[This is the complete text of a notice sent out by the people at Personnel Services at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, IL 62901.]

### NOTICE

This is a clarification of the Learner Program on page five, in the section entitled, “University Civil Service Learner/Trainee Program.” The first sentence reads:

The learner program is designed to employ persons who are not qualified for beginning level civil service classification.

We feel it should be clarified to read:

The Learner Program is designed to allow access to entry level employment persons who have been pre-screened for job readiness in the absence of qualified candidates on the re-employment register.

If you have any further questions, please contact Training and Development.

[These are quotations from a document sent to parents and students by someone at the Southeast Junior High School in Guilford County, Virginia.]

Should violations occur by students which are in opposition to the health, safety, and welfare of themselves or other students, the privilege of riding a school bus by a student is subject to be withdrawn.

Any extreme clothing which directs unusual attention toward your child, or vice-versa, should not be worn to school.

Students should plan with their parents for all eventualities so that if the student misses the bus, provision by the parent to bring the student to school during inclement weather will seldom, if ever, use this excuse.

[“Vice-versa” is what it says. Some folk here will decide that that must be what’s wrong in the sentence.]

**Make It  
BIG!  
Be a Scribe!**

IT won’t be long before most Americans will need scribes to write their letters for them. Glassboro students with talent in writing—there have to be two or three—should give up whatever nonsense they’re now studying and prepare themselves for lucrative careers as professional scribes.

The ability to write clear, correct English is now so uncommon that there are numerous commercial enterprises that will pay for it. One such is Grammarians, Inc. in Washington, DC. They write or rewrite all sorts of stuff from leaflets to whole books. Their clients are often large corporations in which not one literate person can be found. Grammarians, Inc. has more work than workers, and it needs help. If you can write and would like a good job, come around to talk about it. Remember, though, the work involves the reading of some horrible rubbish. If you don’t think you can take that, you can always go to work for one of the clients.

To non-Glassborovians: If you want to know anything more about Grammarians, Inc., the address is 1430 K Street NW, Washington, DC 20005.

**accidentally**

THIS horrible barbarism appeared in last month’s issue. We expected a bit more comment than we actually got, but then our readers are mostly partisans. What comment we did get started at “Tsk tsk” and went on from there. And on.

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**The Underground  
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**Professional primates  
Project proposed!**

Chimps outshine chumps,  
TUG study reveals!



On the left: The annual cost of the average HEW evaluator, not including travel. On the right: The cost of 25 chimpanzees doing the same work, bananas and diapers included, as well as travel expenses based on prevailing United Parcel Service rates.

## Yes, Virginia, there is a Free Lunch

THANKS to U.S. Representative Robert W. Daniel, of Virginia, we now have the complete text of an infamous document that newspapers around the country treated briefly and facetiously last summer. It is an evaluation of a remedial math and writing program in the public schools of Hopewell, Virginia. The author, whose name appears nowhere on the document, is a functionary—how right that ugly word seems just now—of HEW. The function of this tax-supported functionary was to judge whether or not the remedial program merited continued tax support of its own. Here are some of his (her?) comments. In each case, what you see is the functionary's complete response to a question on the evaluation form:

The objectives were not to specified are the measurable participants that involves to the fullest extent practicable to the total educational resources

evidence demonstrated by the standardized achievement test data was surfaced to the desegregation elimination, reduction, and prevention of minority group isolation.

there is no realistically promises that addresses the needs identified in the proposes program.

sufficient magnitude in relation to the number of participants cost of project components, contains evidence of the proposes project & a very measurable amount of funds are very specified in the project program.

Let's take what comfort we can from this gibberish. We have learned that there is, in fact, a tax-supported program in which the amount of funds actually *are* very specified and even "measurable." It had always seemed otherwise. Nevertheless, in spite of that cheery news, there's still one little cloud, no larger than a consultant's outstretched paw, on the educational horizon. Even as we sit here, innocently enjoying the thought that there is, just as we had suspected all along, no realistically promises, some people are at work planning to hire more such evaluators in a cabinet-level Department of Education. If those

education people can achieve stuff like that as a mere satrapy\* of HEW, imagine what they'll be able to do when the training wheels come off.

It was not out of wisdom, but weariness, that our Congress failed in its latest session to visit upon us a Department of Education. After all, bureaucrats and educationists† deserve a full-employment act too, and a DOE will provide featherbeds for whole new bands of them. They will, in turn, hire herds of the linguistically handicapped to evaluate all the remedial programs for the linguistically handicapped in places like Hopewell, Virginia. So there is, indeed, no realistically promises, but there sure as hell is a free lunch.

Well, we don't begrudge them comfortable berths in Washington. At least they're not on welfare, and most of them are securely institutionalized out of the sight of impressionable children. All we ask of them, when they come into their kingdom, is that they toss us one tiny crumb, advancing thereby the cause of pedagogical theory and even saving us all a few bucks.

Our studies have shown that chimpanzees can actually grasp Bic Bananas and brandish them about, both to and fro. Whenever their Bananas happen to touch flat surfaces, they produce very interesting marks. Chimps, as you surely know, have already mastered sign language and abstract impressionism, both of which would seem beyond

---

\* The satrap in charge of the evaluator is Thomas K. Minter, Deputy Commissioner for Elementary and Secondary Education, HEW Office of Education, Washington, D. C. 20202. If you happen to be a functional illiterate looking for work, don't despair. Try Minter. It's not his money.

† For "professional" educationists, teachers are the grunts, administrators, the officers. Any variety of "doctorate" in education, therefore, is a way to get out of the trenches and become a vice-principal or a counsellor, an assistant director or a coordinator, a supervisor or an advisor, anything, anything but a teacher. More than 60 percent of those who manage to eke out doctorates in education, typically through tabulating the answers to an inane questionnaire, do in fact escape the classroom. [*Digest of Education Statistics: 1977-78, p. 121.*] Once bedded down, these folk cheerfully provide each other with meetings to attend, reports to generate, guidelines to follow, goals to implement, instruments to devise, and findings to seek. A Department of Education makes a splendid trough for their trotters.

the capacities of a typical HEW evaluator. With a little training, chimpanzees could surely be taught to keep their Banana marks on the page, thus producing documents every bit as useful as the one quoted above.

The current evaluators wouldn't have to be displaced. We could save money simply by not hiring any new ones and training those we now have to such a level of competence that they will actually be able to clean more than just one cage each.

### The Steaming Bird

IN this festive season, we like to give whatever thanks we can find to give and award the Order of the Steaming Bird to those who have made us grateful. This year's award must be shared by several worthy recipients. Here a slice and there a slice, accordingly, we pass to Martin P. Cohen, our Collection Manager (did you know we had such a thing?), and to a certain Harriet Diamond (provenance unknown), and all those jolly, carefree folk in our Adult Continuing Education Office.

In this fall's program of courses offered by that outfit, we find this description on page 17:

*Grammar in Plain English*—One and a Half Hours

A presentation on Ms. Diamond's frustration with the traditional approach to teaching grammar that resulted in her development and publishing of a very usable text for GED grammar with her recommendation on teaching grammar [*sic!*].

We can easily imagine Ms. Diamond's frustration, but it's hard to imagine why anyone would want to suffer a presentation *on* it. In any case, she's not frustrated by restrictive clauses, and her text, unlike the frustrating, traditional text, is *very* usable, not merely usable. As for that "grammar"—the last word—let's overlook it. It's probably just a typo.

We rejoice and give thanks that this booklet was mailed out to a mere five thousand homes.

Martin P. Cohen wants to "eliviate" the problem caused when visitors are given parking tickets and dunned to "Pay for" the fine. In one little letter, he achieves 7 comma faults, 3 failures of agreement, 1 run-on sentence, 1 apostropheless possessive, and some word-by-word translations from Bulgarian.

We are thankful that our visitors are given tickets rather than copies of Cohen's letter.

### Feeeelings . . . wahwahwah

THE AT&T people put out a monthly thing (they probably call it an organ) named *Marketing Focus*. It's about as interesting as the Dubuque white pages, and we'd neglect it utterly if it weren't for the caveat on the cover: "Not for use or disclosure outside the Bell System except under written agreement." Accordingly, we quote from the works of Claud Beckham, acting director of something or other:

"The classic example in the telecommunications business is dealing with a customer's telecommunications order-processor, whose progress depends on minimizing telecommunications expense, when the customer's corporate strategy obviously requires a substantial increase in information movement."

Well for heaven's sakes, we all knew *that!* So what's all this secrecy business?

### More on Dallas

We have had many queries and comments about the goings-on in Dallas. We can now report that what they're doing in Dallas is good, not bad. You can find an exploration of the matter, along with diverting examples of English as written by graduates of teacher-training schools, in the December issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*.

### Opacity in Iowa

Here's a memo from a certain Marge Helsell, a "curriculum developer" in the Cedar Rapids Community Schools:

"If you know the whereabouts of the Opaque Projector that was stored in the Board Room call 2105. If this item is not located its disappearance will have to be reported as missing."

### Important Notice To Glassborovians

The January issue of THE UNDERGROUND GRAMMARIAN, Volume III, Number 1, will appear during the last week of December, 1978. Since the college will be on vacation then, the January issue will not be distributed on the campus.

## Lagado Lives!

FROM Task Forces and Task Groups all over the campus, we now have summaries of reports to the Middle States people. Let's hope they're all educationists who won't notice our firm grasp on the obvious and some prose foolish and boring enough to constitute a felony in any well-ordered state. In the summaries we find: a) things that everybody knows, b) things that anyone could have guessed, c) things that nobody needs to know, and d) mysteries.

In one summary, the task forcers promise that they will "identify and evaluate the physical base [?] of the college." Whatever that *base* might be, they never do *identify* it, and when they evaluate they assert an important but unelucidated distinction between "satisfactory" and "adequate." They end up discovering that it will cost money to fix things, or, as they put it, to pursue amelioration.

Another bunch—task *groupers*, these—thrashes its way into "distinguishing" and "operationalizing" such "key concepts as 'goals' and 'objectives.'" Whether or not they ever do operationalize the key concepts, we can't figure out. They do, however, distinguish them, and in such a manner that everything they want to talk about becomes a goal. They have, presumably sent the objectives to some other task group.

Stupid, pretentious jargon is everywhere in these summaries. Countless processes are to be enhanced. Some units lack sufficient viability to balance certain structures. Impacts abound. Furthermore, those who use "quality" as an adjective would surely be happier in another line of work. Cosmetics, maybe.

Now can you understand, you whining taxpayers, why we can't be bothered with teaching your feeble-minded offspring? We're busy, dammit! We have to identify some physical bases and distinguish between the adequate and the satisfactory! We have to pursue amelioration! You expect us to worry about the sorry scribblings of *students* when you know damn well that we're busy formulating goals in a concurrence process? And speaking of goals, don't you people realize that the goals of education have been lying around here for *twenty-five hundred years*? Now just who the hell do you think is going to get them all

operationalized and distinguished? So just stop your yapping and leave all this hard stuff to us professionals, OK?

## "Reading Problems"

THE public schools often teach reading in such a way as to insure continued employment for the swarms of reading specialists, diagnosticians, and therapists who conned them into teaching it that way. If it weren't for the "professionals" of reading, most children would learn how to read almost as easily as they learn how to talk. If your child has been in school for years but still can't read worth a damn, be skeptical when the school people start talking about a "reading problem." Remember Weischadle and the NEA, and all the folk who would breathe easier if they could only persuade us that the failures of the schools were due to all those "problem youngsters" and their "learning disabilities." Remember also Marva Collins. Many of her students had "reading problems" that mysteriously disappeared after less than a year of traditional teaching at Westside.

If you have disquieting suspicions about the way your child is being taught to read, or if you'd rather teach him yourself, you should write for counsel and comfort to the Reading Reform Foundation, 7054 E. Indian School Road, Scottsdale, Arizona 85251. At the RRF, you will find concerned and informed people who do not make livings by convincing you that they are experts.

## *The Underground Grammarian*

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**Neither can his mind be thought to be in tune,  
whose words do jarre,  
nor his reason In frame,  
whose sentence is preposterous.**

\*\*\*\*\*  
**The Underground  
 GRAMMARIAN**

Volume Two, Number Nine . . . December 1978  
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**The Annual Report**

'TIS THE SEASON to be jolly, and this month's issue is about as jolly as we get around here. Admittedly, we are taking a dim view of the minimum competence testing hoax, indicting the New Jersey Commissioner of Education for some tricky diction, and firing off the first little squib of our new campaign of public ridicule designed to expel all the "professionals" of education from the public schools, but that is about as jolly as we get.

There are some tidings of good cheer. This issue of *The Underground Grammarian* marks the end of two years of struggle against ignorance and inanity at Glassboro. Say not it naught availeth. Our prose has improved. It is getting harder to find examples of barbarous English except in special contexts—in the accreditation business, for instance. To be sure, more and more "drifts" appear, but it is also true that Mark Chamberlain has been writing in the active voice and that our numerous deans and vice-presidents have either given up writing entirely or taken to circulating their works only among close friends.

This is gratifying. It is true, of course, that these bloodthirsty Glassborovians complain when their colleagues go unlacerated, but, like Willie Sutton, we go where the money is. We read examples from all over the USA and Canada. They make GSC look good.

We suspect that we may have rediscovered a lost principle of pedagogy, or, as "professionals" would put it, a mode of behavior modification recognized as being outcome-enhancing. Its name is Fear, strongest of instructors and teacher of tricks to dogs of any age.

Of old, while captains and burghers concocted programs and devised strategies, the barbarians waited patiently beside their shaggy ponies. In our time, it is the smug and complacent barbarians who devise and concoct. We don't need the ponies, just the patience.

WE like to give discredit only where discredit is due. In the October issue, we printed some examples of school administrator gibberish written and circulated by person or persons unknown at the Southeast Junior High School in Guilford County, Virginia. In fact, those unnatural acts were committed not in Virginia but in North Carolina.

WE like also to refrain from giving discredit where only little, if any, seems due. Some writing is bad because it flows from ignorance or inanity or the intent to deceive. Those things cannot be excused, especially in people who take the taxpayers' money for the work of their minds. Some mistakes in writing, however, come from haste or carelessness. They are bad, but we cannot conclude from them alone that the writer is either an ignoramus, a fool, or a scoundrel.

Several Glassborovians sent us marked-up copies of a recent AFT bulletin marred by numerous typographical errors. That's bad, but they clearly are typographical errors rather than ignorance. When in one paragraph we find "grammer" three times, we assume ignorance. When "u" appears where "n" should be, we assume haste.

Maybe next time.

MAKE not the lesser grebe more less, dear friends, by laughing him to scorn; nor yet contempt of sloth express; nor rue the day the gnu was born. No less than you the aardvark needs his innocence presumed, unproved; like you the vile hyena pleads that all his sins may be removed. Like you, the nasty roach may need some day a friend to help him out. Upon the loathsome centipede, bestow the benefit of doubt. Lest when such creatures have their say, on Christmas Eve as midnight tolls, they speak the truth, & Christmas Day we find our stockings full of coals.

**A Minimum Competence to all,  
 and to all a Good Night!**

WE are now ready to explain the minimum competence testing mania that stalks the land and that our educationists have embraced as a

reasonable academic facsimile of disco dancing. In this life, the frivolous nitwits seem to have all the fun. Educationists are not frivolous, but they are entitled to their fun, too.

Here's how they get it: First, you have to imagine a herd of people. Let's call them Herd A. They are different from each other in many ways, but, in at least one way, they're much alike. They are about equally literate. Here's how most of them write English:

Our school's cross-graded multi-ethnic, individualized learning program is designed to enhance the concept of an open-ended learning program with emphasis on a continuum of multi-ethnic, academically enriched learning using the identified intellectually gifted child as the agent or director of his own learning. Major emphasis is on cross-graded, multi-ethnic learning with the main objective being to learn respect for the uniqueness of a person.

A pitiful case, to be sure, and an urgent argument for a minimum competence test for *someone*, but it's not that simple. You must also imagine another herd of people, Herd B, equally diverse but also more or less alike in literacy. Here's how *they* write English:

The time capsule of the 20th century floating threw space finely reaches it's goal one hundred years later. As it is open up information of the past one hundred years is released.

The automobile one of man's greatest achievements for transportation. Now it can not be used because man has wasted all of the nature oil of the earth. It is studied and the result is that man could have developpe a less wasteful type of transportation. But the need for power and speed overwhelmed there thoughts.

That does have a poignant quality. Finely, indeed, is just how we might have reached our goals, if only our thoughts hadn't been overwhelmed. Nevertheless, the passage has some faults. The writers of Herd B also seem less than minimally competent.

Little by little it became obvious even to the dimmest of curriculum coordinators and program supervisors that the public's alarm about minimum competence could be turned into more

jobs for their ilk and bigger staffs for just about every department in the educationist bureaucracy. It is an axiom of those jaunty functionaries that there are no problems, only challenges and opportunities, and this was one of the richest opportunities since the invention of guidance counsellors.

So the thing was done. Because members of Herd A are often bigger, it seemed only right that they should test the members of Herd B, rather than *vice versa*. (The testing of Herd A will probably have to wait until the Day of Judgment.) The testing goes like this: That apparatchik who wrote the first passage will eventually assure us that the schools are doing a great job. He'll point to the scores. The scores will prove that many members of Herd B now *do* understand the colon and can often make decisions about *lay* and *lie*.

So there. Let nothing you dismay.

**S**PEAKING of *lay* and *lie*, here's a strange item you might have missed, buried, as it was, in the letters column of the *Star-Herald* of Trenton. That paper had printed a guest column by one "Publius," said to be a member of the educational apparatus. Publius commented on the quality of the written English in a summary report cranked out by the people who cooked up the minimum competency testing program for New Jersey. He did not provide quotations, but he did describe some sad mistakes of just the kind we have learned to expect in such documents.

Thereafter, the New Jersey Commissioner of Education, one Burke, set forth his understanding of the matter in a letter to the editor. Like any standard educationist, he suggested that a concern for stuff like punctuation and the agreement of subjects and verbs was "pedantic" and "picayune." So much for education in New Jersey.

Having thus implied that there is nothing much wrong with the summary, Burke, like any standard bureaucrat, hastens to put as much distance as he can between himself and the perpetrators of the almost flawless document. Nobody in *his* department, he says, had anything to do with it. That seems true.

He goes further, however, saying that the summary was done by "laymen" and that the deliberating committees were made up of the same. That is false.

When that crew was first collected, there were complaints that ordinary citizens were but poorly represented. The imbalance was duly corrected, bringing the membership to 108, of which only 83 were “professionals” of education. That still failed to satisfy someone, apparently, for 13 more “professionals” were added a bit later. The final score was: “Professionals,” 96; Laymen, 25 (including 5 members of school boards).

At Burke’s office, they say that well, maybe “laymen” *wasn’t* the best word. What he *meant* was that no one in *his* outfit had done the deed. (*That*, of course, Burke had already said.) In Trenton, “professionals” of education who belong to *other* gangs can be called “laymen.” It may be a kind of “cover.” Our concern about such misrepresentation will be thought, of course, picayune and pedantic.

Is the commissioner capable of saying what he means? If so, why does he choose to mislead us? If not, shouldn’t we be considering a minimum competence test for commissioners? We can clear him of the suspicion of duplicity only through granting his ignorance, and *vice versa*, but it must be the one or the other. Take your choice.

It is interesting that the “mistaken” use of “laymen” causes a misunderstanding so convenient for educationists. As they’ve tried to blame falling scores on test-makers and rising illiteracy on “problem youngsters,” so they would dearly love to conclude that failures of agreement are caused by those laymen.

We have noted before that public dismay about education has been converted into job security for the very people whose failures caused that dismay. Well, that’s progress. In ancient times, we used to pay the barbarians to stay *away*.

### ***Lay or Lie?***

Go to School and find out  
which is which!

**Join the Minimally Competent!**

### **Impaction**

IN February of 1977 (1:2), we suggested the institution of a reading and writing competence test for faculty and administrators at Glassboro. Although our various factions are contending among themselves as to which is the most devoted to excellence, none showed any interest in that

suggestion. That was a mistake, for it is written that those who refuse to strain out a gnat will someday have a camel shoved down their throats. Amen. Such testing will surely come, and, however little we may care to do it ourselves, we will care much less for those who will do it for us.

Consider the plight of public school teachers in Montgomery County, Maryland. The taxpayers there aren’t yet angry enough to insist that the teachers be tested, but all applicants *are* tested for minimum competence in their subjects. *Minimum*, that is. English teachers, for instance, are expected to score 80%. That’s four out of five. If the tire manufacturers were that good, all we’d have to do is pray for the spare to blow up.

There’s worse. The man in charge of the testing is a certain Steven Mosier, “personnel chief.” *His* competence percentage nobody knows, but you can make your own estimate by attending to what he says: “We saw the tests as one way of improving and impacting grammatics and word usage.” Yeah.

Mosier is quoted by Edward B. Fiske in a piece on teacher-testing in *The New York Times*, where we also find the querulous plaint of the NEA in the words of one Margaret Knispel: “Instead of going to teachers and asking them as professionals to address the issue of standards, they [?] are jumping in with tests by outsiders [again?].” Uh-huh.

We asked them; we asked them and asked them. They answered not, proclaiming that they were “professionals” committed to excellence and perfectly able to mind their shops every bit as well as the House Ethics Committee or the aluminum siding industry.

If these people were in fact being tested by “outsiders,” we could applaud, but the only outsiders in the public schools are children. We are watching ill-educated administrators testing ill-educated teacher-trainees.

It seems that education can be saved only by driving out all the educators. We’ll do it.

*and a very Merry Christmas  
to one and all  
from  
The Underground Grammarian*

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