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Process, Literature, and Academic Realities: The Contribution of Daniel Horowitz

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This issue of the *JALT Journal* honors Dan Horowitz, and rightfully so. He accomplished a great deal while in Japan, and was already making his mark with this journal when he died.

However, since I do not live in Japan, I knew Dan in a broader context: in the world of academic writing and reading, in the world of tasks and professors' demands. In that international world he was also known and respected. And it is his contributions to the international academic community, and his influence on my own work, which are central to the discussion that follows.

I first met Dan at a publisher's dinner at the 1984 TESOL Conference. I can't remember the publisher's name, but I vividly recall sitting across from Dan, discussing with some pride the paper I planned to present the following morning, in which I was to deal with issues of teaching coherence and intertextuality in writing classes. Dan listened with genuine interest, then spoke of his own curricular innovations. As he spoke, it soon became clear to me that it was Dan, not I, who should be discussing coherence and the teaching of writing the next day; and, much to his surprise, I asked him to stand up during my talk and to present his approach, which, incidentally, is part of his book that was in preparation last year.

Since that time, I have always looked to Dan for research ideas and teaching approaches which I couldn't find elsewhere. Peter McCagg has spoken of him as "a brilliant person—the most clear-headed thinker I have ever had the honor to be associated with" (McCagg, 1989). I would like to add that he was also one of the most creative; he saw a real classroom need and concentrated on it until he came up with ideas which were both ingenious and workable. I never spoke with Dan about teaching without taking notes; I never heard him present formally without saying to myself, "Those are wonderful ideas!"

The greater academic ESL/EFL community first became aware of Dan in March, 1986, when he published a classic, often-quoted "Forum" piece in the *TESOL Quarterly*, where he took on the Writing Process Establishment, with humor, insight, and common sense (1986b). He later commented, "I wrote...this article out of anger at the arrogance I had encountered among the process advocates at TESOL '85 and at the blind 'bandwagon' mentality that periodically warps the critical judgment of so many members of our profession" (1986e, p. 796). In this "Forum" article, Dan argued that the writing process advocates had become as short-sighted and territorial as the Current-Traditionalists whom they replaced. If they were more clearheaded, he argued, they would recognize that the process approach is inadequate for students of academic writing since:

1. It fails to prepare students for at least one essential type of academic writing: the essay examination;
2. It fails for some types of writers, for example, those who always work from outlines;
3. It fails students who do not have certain types of writing strategies;
4. It fails to give students an accurate picture of university writing. (1986b, 141-144)

Dan concluded by warning that "teachers should be extremely cautious about embracing an overall approach which, in its attempt to develop their students' writing skills, creates a classroom situation that bears little resemblance to the situations in which those skills will eventually be exercised" (1986b, p. 144).

Responses to Dan's "Forum" article were immediate: two, by JoAnne Liebman-Kleine and Liz Hamp-Lyons, appeared in the December, 1986, *TESOL Quarterly*. Dan answered these responses with comments which expanded upon his original argument, maintaining that the process advocates are obsessed with the cognitive relationship between the writer and his or her internal world; therefore they provide no clear perspective on the "social nature of writing" (1986d, p. 788) so important to university success. His conclusion was one in which he urged open-mindedness, insisting that neither the academic view nor the process view of writing "subsumes the other or can stand alone" (1986e, p. 797).

These exchanges in *TESOL Quarterly* about composition theory and teaching set the stage for two of Dan's articles on topics central to our understanding of authentic academic writing: one, on genuine academic tasks in university classrooms (1986c), and another, dealing with the demands of the most common task for undergraduates, the essay examination (Horowitz, 1986a; also see Keller-Cohen & Wolfe, 1987). In his article on academic tasks, which appeared in *TESOL Quarterly 20* (3), 1986, Dan noted the limitations of previous questionnaire-based needs assessment, and advocated a more qualitative, in depth approach to determining academic tasks. He suggested that by collecting and analyzing real tasks assigned in academic classrooms, an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teacher could understand more clearly important issues such as audience, topic, task definition, and grading. Dan's qualitative technique was central to this study, but his insights garnered from the data are also enlightening. Two important conclusions which Dan made in this article have been repeated frequently in the literature. He wrote in the first:

1. Generally speaking, the academic writer's task is not to create personal meaning, but to find, organize and present data according to fairly explicit instructions. (1986c, p. 455)

By making this statement, Dan was asserting that genuine academic tasks are antithetical to the assignments and examinations in most writing classes: whereas prompts in writing classes often encourage student opinion and narrative, the tasks in students' academic classes require a much more objective view, purged of personal meaning.

A related finding was the following:

2. The most striking feature of the sample [of real tasks] was... the controlled nature of much of the writing called for. (1986c, p. 452)

Dan found, as others have, that whereas writing teachers tend to encourage as much creativity in terms of content and form as possible, instructors in academic disciplines often do the opposite. In many academic classes, Dan found, the thesis statement is provided, the audience is clear, the questions or topics to be covered are specified, the sources of the propositional material are obvious,

and there are a number of lexical constraints.

These findings, which contradict much of what can be found in published academic writing texts, have influenced a number of researchers in our discipline. In my own research, which attempts to discover students' difficulties with language and task representation as they confront new academic disciplines, I have found considerable evidence for the difficult transitions from the writing class to academic classes, to which Dan alludes.

For example, when my ethnically-diverse freshman students first entered the university, thoroughly grounded in the mandated process approach of our high schools, they predicted that their professors would ask for their opinions on essay examinations. The realities were quite different. One student, after her first essay examination, wrote in her journal that she had learned a few things about her new academic audiences:

> I have learned to distance myself when writing. [This course]...has taught me to write more about facts instead of my opinion, which I used to. (Johns, in press)

Another student, accustomed to open-ended responses that encouraged student creativity of form and flexibility in dealing with arguments, reevaluated his examination in this way:

> After looking over my [test] paper, I discovered that I need to spend more time in analyzing the question being asked. When I write papers, I tend to touch around the question, without answering it directly. This is an extremely bad quality, for on an exam the teachers going to want to focus on the main idea of that paper. Not just the ideas that touch around that main theme. (Johns, in press.)

These examples from my students' journals indicate that Dan's arguments should be considered seriously: only through actually interacting with academic tasks can we, and our students, understand their nature and demands.

The last of Dan's manuscripts of which I am aware was on John Swale's desk when Dan died. It will appear in *English for Specific Purposes 9*(2), a publication on whose editorial board Dan served for several years. I had seen this paper in one of its earlier

incarnations and had remarked to Dan that it was another of his "lightning rod" pieces which would stir up controversy and ruffle feathers, since it examines one of this year's popular themes, the teaching of literature in academic classes, for what it implies and excludes.

The argument in his paper "Fiction and Non-Fiction in the ESL/EFL Classroom: Does the Difference Make a Difference?" is that "the literature debate is really a microcosm of the discourse communities debate"; it is a debate about whether academic English teachers should be involved in assisting students in understanding writing in their academic disciplines (i.e., "training their students") or whether they should develop students' empathy and maturity through the teaching of literature (i.e., "educating").

The first position that Dan takes in the article is reminiscent of his earlier discussion of the process approach: the advocacy of the teaching of literature to "educate" students may be another attempt on the part of teachers to avoid facing up to their responsibilities. He suggests that instead of teaching literature, EAP teachers should assist students in understanding the specific demands of their academic classes by working with them in ferreting out the "secrets of the trade" in various disciplines (Swales & Horowitz, 1988). He acknowledges that the role of co-ethnographer in new academic cultures is a difficult one because teachers might "find themselves in the uncomfortable position of being less knowledgeable than their students" (Spack 1988, p. 37). However, Dan argues that "this is a position we are going to have to get used to—and I question the logic which says that since few ESL teachers are qualified to teach writing in the disciplines, we are therefore under no obligation to help our students to learn it themselves."

The remainder of the article takes up other arguments made by those who advocate the teaching of literature as central to the teaching of academic English. One argument, that literature requires more of the reader in "making sense" and "negotiating meaning" than does expository prose, is dealt with in a discussion of studies of non-literary work in which Dan makes it clear that all interpretation of text requires "making of meaning," and that much of this meaning-making requires understanding of the underlying

structure of a text and of the conventions which the text follows. He concludes the "meaning-making" argument by stating that "all discourse is a mixture of convention and creativity; all texts require rich interpretation; those readers who lack either the linguistic skills or the necessary background information will come away with impoverished interpretations."

Another claim made by the literature advocates is that study of fiction provides an excellent way to connect reading and writing. Though no one would argue with the importance of this connection, Dan points out that the way one reads—and writes—literature is very different from the "guerrilla warfare" fashion in which we undertake—and teach—the reading of expository prose. In fiction, we read from start to finish: the schemata we develop are story grammars for literature. In expository prose, we skip around, looking for signposts throughout the text, for graphs, for charts, and for the metalanguage which leads the reader through the discourse. In short, the way we read, and what we read for, differ greatly between literature and most of the expository prose our students will find to be central to their academic success.

In this *English for Specific Purposes* article, as in his previous ones, Dan exhorts teachers to avoid unthinking acceptance of what is currently in vogue and, instead, "think hard about how the actual activities performed in class fit in with their students' needs and wants." He suggests that teachers ask such questions as:

1. Are the students studying English as a second or foreign language?
2. Are they presently enrolled in university classes?
3. Are they undergraduates or graduates?
4. Are they learning English for professional or vocational reasons?
5. Do they have a strict time limit on their university studies?

Dan Horowitz's article ends, as did his others, with a plea to teachers:

> If we keep (these) questions in mind when we think about using literature in ESL/EFL classrooms, our profession—ever in search of the answer—may be able to avoid another in the series of wild swings of opinion that seem to plague us. It will be a sign

> of our growing maturity as a profession when new ideas—or old ones that have come calling again—are met not only with open arms but with a critical eye as well. (Horowitz, in press)

What has Dan left with us that we must heed? He asked us not to accept, but to investigate; not to surrender to what is easy, but to grow. He has inspired us to begin with classroom realities, and to use our common sense and dedication to teaching to create a classroom appropriate to student needs.

Many of my academic English colleagues and I are grateful for having had the opportunity to talk with, to read, and to learn from Dan Horowitz. Those who opposed his views respected him and dealt carefully with his reasoned arguments; those who agreed with him were encouraged and stimulated by his work. Whatever our theoretical and applied convictions, Dan's spirit of caution, skepticism, and intelligent enquiry will remain among us.

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