



Sense or Censor

Author(s): Liz Newall

Source: *The English Journal*, Vol. 71, No. 3 (Mar., 1982), p. 64

Published by: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/817032>

Accessed: 20/02/2010 15:13

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An effective system for teaching grammar would be a system which implements rather than frustrates personal goals. As such, an effective system would be composed of exercises for which children would see some practical value. Every system of instruction presumably is designed to develop practical skills, but the exercises to develop those skills should be practical as well. I did not perceive a practical purpose for the choric reading, repetitive questions, spelling, or phonics exercises which constituted my second grade reading program. In frustration, I ate my book.

But I didn't eat my grammar book. As a result of my insight about the function of reading, I developed a sophisticated view of learning: one might be asked to learn about something, even though one didn't understand why one was learning it, and that information could be useful at a later time. Therefore I became a proficient sentence diagrammer. (I did not learn why I was diagramming until I was studying structural theories of syntax years later. Though I discovered a rationale for diagramming at that time, I also discovered that structural theories had been supplanted by transformational systems, which, alas,

did not support the use of diagramming as an effective learning technique.)

What are examples of grammatical exercises for which children can see the practical purpose? That is comparable to the question about what number of people can be crowded into an area before social systems deteriorate. The precise number is contingent upon other variables which differ from area to area. In the fourth grade, I adjusted quite successfully to instruction which would have frustrated me earlier. An effective system of instruction does not exist in abstraction. It can only be viewed against a specific child's level of social, emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and physical development. Given the complexity of such development, my elementary school teachers couldn't realistically be faulted for employing instructional techniques which I and all of the persons in the class didn't view as significant. However, isn't it equally unrealistic to fault children for not learning solutions to problems they don't even perceive?

Gerard Giordano teaches at New Mexico State University.

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Of Mice and Men
Just might offend,
And so could *Lady Chatterly's Lover*.

So tear out the pages
(Lest we corrupt young sages),
And throw away the covers.

And *Catcher in the Rye*
Should be stashed up high
Out of reach, so it won't start a rush.

But first it would be best
To censor the desks;
Their plots would make *Tom Jones* blush.

Liz Newall
Westminster High School
South Carolina
