DIALOGUE AND COMPOSITION

The following paragraph was written by a young man for a remedial college composition course:

Today is the “Age of Computers”. Computers are being used by almost everyone today. I think people are depending too much on computers these days. People can do the same things computers can do, but the computer does it much faster. Computers are taking jobs away from people, because it is cheaper to run a computer than to pay somebody. I, personally, find computers difficult to use, and I don’t like to use them. I’m not totally against the use of computers, though. Computers have made life easier for man. I think computers should be used for hard problems, and not all problems.

Traditionally, we would think of this piece of writing in terms of its lack of organization, expansion and development. In working with the student we might begin with something like the following topic sentence: Do you see that as your main idea? Now all you need to do is a brief outline which includes some supporting data, and then simply go on and expand your essay.

Such a response on our part would assume that the text on the page before us indicated that an incomplete and confused message existed in the writer’s head. Such an approach assumes the student knows what he wants to say; he just has to go back and get it right this time.

But this analysis and response on the part of the teacher fails to capture what appears to be an interior dialogue taking place in the student’s head. Organized in this way, we could well imagine two people discussing computers, albeit not on a very high level.

A: Today is the “Age of Computers”. Computers are being used by almost everyone today.
B: I think people are depending too much on computers today.
A: People can do the same thing computers can do, but the computer does it much faster.
B: Computers are taking jobs away from people because it is cheaper to run a computer than to pay somebody.
A: I personally find computers difficult to use, and I don’t like to use them.
B: I’m not totally against the use of computers, though. Computers have made life easier for man.
A: I think computers should be used for hard problems, and not all problems.