Book Review


Many "new editions" are only superficially new—a couple of chapters reshuffled, a few pages added, and a new cover. K-13 is not a new edition in that sense; it differs fundamentally from Moffett's 1968 K-13 curriculum. It is organized in an entirely different way; it contains dozens of suggestions for classroom use not in the original text; and it contains three new theoretical chapters ("Basic Concepts," "Means," and "Detecting Growth"). These chapters alone, had they been published separately, would have formed a modest-sized paperback. And, I feel sure, they would have immediately acknowledged as a major contribution to the field.

K-13, as a theoretical text, is superior to Moffett's earlier Teaching the Universe of Discourse. It represents an advance in both clarity and conception. Discourse is a collection of essays written at different times for different audiences; as such, it lacks the cohesion one would like in an exposition of theory. The authors of K-13 have achieved the cohesion the earlier work lacks.

The final chapter of K-13 deals with one of the thorniest problems for the language arts teacher—that of detecting growth. There is little point in urging a "growth model" unless the teacher has some clear idea of what "growth" looks like. The authors define 24 growth sequences that, unlike the "skill by skill" material commonly marketed, map out the naturalistic development of the language learner. A stunning chapter.

K-13 is also a rich source of classroom activities. They are presented in a way that reinforces one of the book's major principles—integration, the integration of oral and written language, the integration of literature and student writing. I especially like the authors' emphasis on written dialogues which allow the student both to rely on oral language skills and also to make a transition to written exposition and argumentation.

The teacher looking for a clear-cut sequential curriculum will not find it in K-13. The major divisions ("Basic Processes," "Literacy—The Basic Skills," "Developmental Reading, Speaking, and Writing") seem to me arbitrary and profoundly overlapping. Coaxing the material into anything approximating a sequence is a little like making an octopus walk a straight line. But maybe that's as it should be. An English curriculum (and a writing curriculum) should resemble a perambulating octopus.

—Thomas Newkirk
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Co-Director, Exeter Writing Project

TWO TECHNICAL REPORTS AVAILABLE

For researchers who will be using traditional comparative methods studies to investigate the effects of writing programs on student performance, Catharine Keech has prepared two technical reports, now available from BAWP to NWP site directors.*

1. "Comparative Methods Studies in Evaluating Writing Programs" describes a number of weak and strong models for such studies, discussing particular threats to validity as they apply to evaluating writing programs.

2. "The Method of Adjusted Averages" describes in non-technical language how to apply this simple statistical model from biology and agriculture to evaluating educational programs. It is based on an adaptation suggested by Leonard Marascuilo, professor of statistics at Berkeley, who recommends the model in place of analysis of covariance because it does not require such major assumptions about the data.

*Others please send $1.00 per copy with your order to cover copying and mailing costs.