CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT
The Perry Model Conference at California State University, Fullerton

The institution of a university is a remarkable thing. It is a place where thinkers gather, where real research is done. And so it was as key members of the Perry Network arrived at Cal State, Fullerton, on January 10 for a three-day conference, “Powerful Learning and the Perry Scheme of Ethical Development,” coordinated by our own Dr. JoAnn Carter-Wells. University President Milton Gordon’s welcome letter exquisitely expressed the university’s function here: “This innovative gathering also corresponds to our mission statement to establish an environment where learning and the creation of knowledge is central to everything we do through an integration of teaching, scholarly and creative activities and the exchange of ideas.” I attended this conference, moved to be associated with CSUF and its Reading Program as an alumna, awed to be in the midst of so many educators of renown. I intend to bring to our newsletter what is interesting to me, mindful of what will be useful to you. Thus, although the Perry Model focuses particularly on the adult learner’s progress along an intellectual/ethical/psychological/developmental route, and the majority of you teach K-12 students, R.E.G. readers are not the ones who attended the Reading Program simply to move up the pay scale, but are the dedicated lifelong learners who seek out research of import in numerous contexts. Therefore, I am eager to report on the content of this notable conference, as well as to esteem our alma mater for hosting it.

“Powerful Learning and the Perry Scheme . . .” was advertised in the CRLA newsletter and other forums, but I noticed that the people in attendance were primarily insiders, long-steeped in the precepts and implications of William G. Perry’s work. Most of them knew him personally; some had worked shoulder-to-shoulder; a few of us knew only the basics. To remind you of Perry’s theory of cognitive development or to introduce you to it, I will recap these basics before highlighting some of the conference presentations.

According to the May 1999 Harvard Gazette Archives, William Perry, Jr., 1913-1998, at Harvard University since 1946, was “college administrator, counselor to college students, supervisor to counselors-in-training, professor to graduate students of psychology and education, and researcher-theorist in college-age development.” As a result of observing the students he taught and counseled, he formed a taxonomy of the maturation of human knowledge (epistemology)—more esoteric than Bloom’s, but often far more enlightening. Four categories sum a nine-stage progression:
1. Dualism—knowledge is quantitative and absolute, only right or wrong; there is heavy dependence on Authority, who ought to supply “right” answers.
2. Multiplicity—the multiple perspectives of knowledge are subjective, “a matter of opinion,” each as valid as the other.
3. Relativism—knowledge is complex and contextual, its validity weighed by the merits of strong or weak evidentiary support.
4. Commitment Within Relativism—a perfect answer may or may not exist, but we must choose and commit to a position after evaluating the support, always open to new information and re-evaluation.

You undoubtedly recognize these characteristics in your adult students or colleagues or relatives or . . . self. What is amazing is how the naming of any troubling condition can go a long way to helping one tolerate it, especially realizing that the immature stages are just that: stages. In the same developmental way that children learn to share or to move from parallel play to one-on-one relationships, people can learn to think at higher levels, academically and in their personal lives. It is comforting to infer that recalcitrant students or over-opinionated colleagues or narrowed-minded Uncle Jack or we, ourselves,
can reach a more complex, richer view of knowledge and life. In the case of students, it is the task of educators to bring them to a higher developmental level, but, as Perry said, “You can’t make a plant grow by pulling on its leaves.” You do it with challenge and support.

With obvious correlations to “scaffolding” and the Zone of Proximal Development, challenge and support were the underlying themes of every presenter at the conference. They appeared to be an intellectually elite group who eschewed elitism as they created activities inviting attendees’ reflection and participation (although I am pretty sure they had to promise to say “epistemological” at least twelve times in their talks in order to be allowed to present). They focused not on mere pigeon-holing into Perry Positions, but with great compassion on how painfully difficult it is for students to let go of their orderly “black and white” lives and venture bravely into uncertain reality. With over forty concurrent sessions, I will not attempt to reconstruct every topic I heard, but will highlight a few, with directions for your own follow-up, all of which I think you will find relevant to reading, whether you know of Perry or not.

SUPPORT
Suzanne Renna’s concern for the Harvard students she advises about study skills targets reducing shame. “If the emphasis is all on knowing and not exploring, students will feel shame.” Students need permission to be learners. Vivian Rosenberg, too, considered the emotional components of learning, especially the “traumatic de-idealization” that accompanies movement from dualism when people start questioning their comfortable beliefs. Teachers must model flexibility and the willingness to live with uncertainty, to “tinker” with problems. In doing so, we are actually undoing the habits of our culture such as expecting a happy ending and simplifying complex issues, such as responding to terrorism with rigid dualism; of course there is resistance to the unsettling process of discarding simplicity for complexity. Says Rosenberg, perhaps the most helpful response to students in the uncertain transitions of intellectual development is, “Yes, it gives me a headache, too, sometimes.”

UNCERTAINTIES
Uncertainties are a key component in the work of Cindy Lynch and Susan Wolcott, whose Problem-Solving Model (identify, frame, resolve, re-address a problem) has been made part of the curriculum in most CSUF 290 (Critical Reading and Thinking) classes, so impressed were the 290 instructors with this model. Lynch and Wolcott exemplified “commitment in relativism” in action as they explained their ongoing revision of that initial model, now titled “Steps for Better Thinking: A Developmental Problem Solving Process,” coupling development psychology and content area learning to bring to light probably the most classroom-useful information I heard at the Perry Conference. Perry-like in its cognitive complexity, “Steps for Better Thinking” posits a foundation of knowledge and skills and moves through steps of (1) identification of the problem and attendant uncertainties, (2) exploration of interpretations, (3) prioritization of alternatives, and (4) integration and refining of limitations and implications of one’s choice of alternatives. But look again at Step 1. How often do we identify an issue’s uncertainties? Can you think of a text you use that entertains the possibility of uncertainties in its questions or answers? (If you can, Lynch and Wolcott want to hear from you!) What does ignoring uncertainties imply about knowledge and learning? Does it not lead us all down the dead-end path of dualism? And if the implications of Step 1 alone are cause for so much pondering, you can see why rather than continue any summary here, I suggest you contact these thoroughly approachable researchers for a copy of their most recent Idea Paper (#37) at www.WolcottLynch.com. Willing to share their work and to work with you to design assignments, whether for content courses or life problems, you will find an association with Cindy Lynch and Susan Wolcott most rewarding.

SCAFFOLDING
Craig Nelson, professor of biology at Indiana University, teaches an alternative approach to college biology, Intensive Frosh Seminars, wherein he assigns a difficult text (W. Anderson’s Reality Isn’t What It Used to Be). Reading it is no mean feat; that’s the challenging part. The support comes via study guides for required preparation (it is a zero for the day if a student comes unprepared) and teacher-selected, heterogeneous groups whose members are responsible for teaching each other. Nelson and a trained intern circulate/facilitate as the students practice answering questions and compare answers to simple but explicit criteria as they develop exemplar essays. There are no grades at first. Thus, what is challenge at
one level becomes support at another as, incrementally, the students move up the scaffolding to higher levels of understanding.

AHA!
I am fond of telling my students (both young and older adults) and myself that “Reading is thinking,” (Thorndike, 1906) as a maxim brief enough to remember, a reminder that the complex journey toward improving comprehension is not just decoding but is thinking that affects life decisions and relationships. However, I have felt myself edging toward what I knew to be an inductive fallacy, sadly concluding that if my students were poor readers, which they are, that they are, therefore, poor thinkers . . . which they may or may not be. The presentations by Jane Fishback, Kansas State University, and Anthony Manzo, CSUF, returned me to a more hopeful position.

Fishback’s research suggested that adult students’ stated purposes for learning are usually work-related and “dualistic,” but only because those answers are societally acceptable for their age (whereas being in school is a normal progression for 18-22-year old students). Teachers can quickly move these students to a more complex perception of and purpose for learning when we recognize and validate their life experience, connecting that life experience to the theory underlying our lessons, and providing practical opportunities for them to use the theory in their lives. “I knew that!” I said, as I thought of that stack of journal articles on adult learning that I had read but not acted upon.

Similarly, with Matt Thomas of Central Missouri State University and Ula Manzo, Anthony Manzo has investigated relationships between reading competency and intelligence, assessing not only literal and inferential achievement (reading the lines and between the lines), but also the interpretive levels of thinking (beyond the lines). Their findings revealed, if I may simplify, that many low-level readers were “terrific” thinkers—very supportive news for the challenge of teaching poor readers. (The formal title of this paper is “Literacy and the Perry Scheme: Proficient Reader Characteristics—Relationships Among Text-Dependent and Higher-Order Literacy Variables with Reference to Stage Theories of Intellectual Development,” the sophistication of which again calls to mind the remarkable nature of a university, particularly our university, and its mild-mannered professors who step into that phone booth of research and emerge cloaked in the important constructs that influence the theory and practice of our discipline. As well, for me, meeting Dr. Manzo, whose textbook, Literacy Disorders: Holistic Diagnosis and Remediation, I consult more than any other [it sits beside me now with six bookmarks in it] was something akin to meeting Paul McCartney if one is a Beatles fan.)

As you can see, the Perry Conference was a microcosm of challenge and support. I left it rather gratified for the aspects of my classes that encourage exploration, imagination, and multiple interpretations; rather concerned for the plans I’ve made for a better-constructed “box” and how I can persuade my students to climb into it. I have a lot to rethink—at a higher level, I hope!

SOME RELEVANT RESOURCES FOR GETTING STARTED
Numerous books, search engines, and databases have information on William Perry, Jr., and his work. At the conference, everyone had read:


A useful web site is http://www.cs.buffalo.edu/~rapaport/perry.positions.html

To contact the Perry Network:
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1505 Farwell Ct. NW
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360-786-5094 fax: 503-212-8082
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For information and an application to join Craig Nelson, featured speaker, at the Lilly Conference on College & University Teaching—Summer Institute, July 11-13, 2002, Ashland, Oregon, visit:
http://www.iats.com

To contact WolcottLynch Associates visit:
www.WolcottLynch.com


To contact me regarding this or another R.E.G. article, for email addresses of any of the presenters mentioned above, or to offer topic suggestions for future R.E.G. newsletters, please email me at jfabish@lbcc.cc.ca.us (soon to be lbcc.edu, but I don’t know when).

Faculty Footnotes

By Kathi Bartle Angus

The Reading Department faculty continues the tradition of active professional and academic involvement.

Drs. Ash Bishop, Andrea Guillaume, Brenda Spencer, Hallie Yopp, and Ruth Yopp are planning a Pre-convention workshop “Navigating the World of Books: Reading to Learn in the Primary Grades” to be presented at the International Reading Association Conference (April 28-May 2, San Francisco).

Dr. JoAnn Carter-Wells just completed hosting a conference on the Perry Model at CSUF (See Jordan Fabish’s column this issue.) and is now planning an assessment conference, to be hosted by CSUF, in March.

Dr. Barbara Clark Dygert recently received a grant of 500 paperback books from Scholastic Books for the clinic in Mission Viejo. She is also planning a mini-conference as part of the Professional Development (Read 585) class taught along with Mary Hansen for the Capistrano Unified School District.

Drs. Tony and Ula Manzo are working on four projects: 1. Revision of their textbook on Literacy Disorders by aligning it with California requirements and Reading Department Objectives; 2. Re-casting mental modeling and other teaching methods so that they take better advantage of the capacity to use “inner-speech” in self-regulation and self-teaching (See the title of the REG dinner talk.); 3) Tweaking some “experiential” learning simulations to better impart some challenging concepts to graduate students; and, 4) Returning attention to their ‘Internet Imps Project’ that will be part of an address at IRA’s Tech sequence at the annual conference.

Dr. Penny Chiappe is involved in a research project with William Labov, Bettina Baker and John Sabatini from the University of Pennsylvania. They have developed a reading program to help urban African-
American children with their decoding skills. This year the program is being piloted in three schools in southern California. In the next two years, the program will be refined for Spanish-speaking children.

Kathi Bartle Angus and JoAnne Greenbaum are in the final stages of drafting a document, “Rights of Adult Learners,” for the College Reading and Learning Association.

Drs. Ash Bishop, Hallie Yopp, and Ruth Yopp are continuing the editorial process on their new book, Ready for Reading: A Handbook for Pre-School Professional. The release date is now January 2003.

Hancock Fund

The Hancock Fund was established to honor Dr. Deborah Osen Hancock for her contributions to the field of reading and specifically to the Reading Department. The fund is solely for use by the CSUF Reading Clinic. Over the years, the fund has supplied books and technology for use by clinicians and students. REG would like to thank the following members for their generous contributions to the Hancock Fund:

Joan Beck
Denise Dale
Mary Hansen

REG Officers For 2002
Vacant Board Positions!!!

The following individuals have been nominated for Reading Educators Guild Board positions for 2002.

President Jan Bagwell
Vice-President, Membership Toni Chambers
Vice-President, Programs ____________
Treasurer Donna Padgett
Secretary Jan Lee
Graduate Liaison Jordan Fabish
Faculty Liaison Kathryn Bartle Angus
Newsletter Editor ____________
Web Page Coordinator JoAnne Greenbaum

As you can see, there are some Board positions that need to be filled. If you or someone you know would be interested in volunteering for one of these positions, please email jbagwell@fullerton.edu. And don’t worry... if you volunteer to be newsletter editor, you job is to edit, prepare, duplicate, and mail the newsletter. No writing is involved because the text contributors are already in place for you. Please consider one of the above positions and get involved with your alumni organization! The general election and membership approval for the new slate of officers will take place at the Winter Dinner on March 7, 2002.

REG Winter Dinner

When talking to yourself is a good thing
dr. Anthony Manzo
Researcher, Author, and Professor
CSUF Reading Department

Fullerton Marriott at CSU
2701 E. Nutwood Avenue
Fullerton, CA 92831

Thursday, March 7, 2002
6-6:30 p.m. Registration
6:30-9 p.m. Dinner & Speaker

RSVP
Please respond on or before March 1, 2002.
Make checks payable to REG and return to Donna Padgett CSUF, Reading Program -EC379.
800N. State College Blvd., Fullerton, CA 92834

Please include:
Name, Phone, Number of Reservations @ $29 per person
For Information Contact: Donna Padgett - (562) 693-4641 or (714) 278-2758, ext. 7
dpadgett@fullerton.edu or Profpadge@hotmail.com

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Reading Educators' Guild Newsletter Staff

Editor: Jan Bagwell

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The Reading Connection: Jordan Fabish

If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, by being a regular column writer or just an occasional article donator, please contact Jan Bagwell at jbagwell@fullerton.edu. We need all of you to help make REG great!