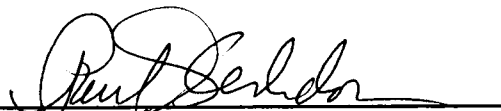


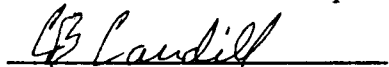
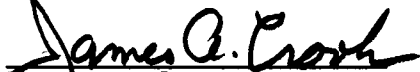
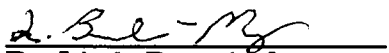
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by G. Robert Tobia entitled "A Journalism of Outrage: A Rhetorical Analysis of Books About Public Education, 1967-1991." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Mass Communications.



Dr. Paul Ashdown, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:


Dr. Ed Caudill
Dr. James Crook
Dr. Barbara Moore
Dr. Linda Bensel-Meyers

Accepted for the Council:



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

A Journalism of Outrage: A Rhetorical Analysis of Books
About Public Education, 1967-1991

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

G. Robert Tobia
December 1994

DEDICATION

To my mother Mary for her staunch faith and ongoing encouragement,

and

To the memory of my father Jerry whose unfinished doctoral work, the result of raising a family, is now brought to closure.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No task of this magnitude succeeds without the considerable help of others. To all who have assisted, I extend heartfelt thanks.

In particular, I wish to thank my committee members: Dr. Barbara Moore for much needed organizational alterations; Dr. Linda Bense-Meyers for theoretical and rhetorical insights; Dr. James Crook for journalistic grounding; Dr. Edward Caudill, for imparting a sense of rigor and precision; and Dr. Paul Ashdown, especially, who patiently shepherded the project with timely personal encouragement and vital editorial feedback and who, to a large extent, was the project's instigator and coordinator.

In addition, I am grateful to my daughter Elisabeth for listening and to Carla Tobia for her typing expertise, quick turnaround times, and eye for aesthetics which gives this final draft its professional appearance.

ABSTRACT

This study examines a group of public education narratives published from 1967 until 1991. Relying on an appeal to fairness, these texts documented and exposed the inequities in the distribution of educational resources, especially within the inner city. Using a variety of literary and investigative techniques, the authors supplied their own moral vision and ethos to create a journalism of outrage.

This study analyzed rhetorically nine select books from the period written by seven different authors with Jonathan Kozol as prototype. The authors used narratives to transform the acts, actors, and events "inside the classroom;" the analysis employed Kenneth Burke's dramatistic methodology to deconstruct the narratives. In addition, the research explored ways in which a reader-writer contract was formed. This contract heightened public awareness of the continued inequities in public education despite the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* which implied equal treatment of all public school children. The study found that while the authors failed to evoke significant change, they did gain widespread critical response. They also achieved a rhetorical and journalistic significance beyond reform because they documented the conditions of and spoke prophetically about public education thereby raising fundamental societal value questions in readers' minds. This study concluded that while universal reform of public school education has not occurred, a journalism of outrage is both significant and successful as a rhetoric.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

During the 1960s, a group of education reform writers appeared in the United States. These writers, almost exclusively from the East, professed to find "serious flaws in public schooling in the nation."¹

This study examines nine nonfiction works by seven different authors, written from the mid-1960s through the early 1990s, that employ the techniques of literary journalism and some aspects of investigative reporting and sage writing to dramatize inequities in the public school education system. (The nine books are detailed in Table 1-1, page 2.)

The analysis of subject books also employs Kenneth Burke's dramatic theory primarily for purposes of identifying the means through which the "story" of public school education is told. Primarily, this study breaks each chapter into one element of Burke's pentad thereby identifying and presenting through a rhetorical analysis of select writings about public education a journalism of outrage. In addition, a reader response theory as ethical criticism is applied to gauge the impact on the audience of the moral vision of the authors as displayed through their writings.

An interest in modern educational reform in this country coupled with heightened levels of expectations of fairness was spawned by the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* and the launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik in 1957. In ruling that separate but equal public school education was unconstitutional, the Court raised expectations of educators and laymen alike that

¹Gross, Beatrice & Ronald. (1969). Radical School Reform. New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 13.

Table 1-1: Public School Books, 1967-1991, To Be Analyzed

Title	Author	Published	Year
Death at an Early Age	Jonathan Kozol		1967
Our Children Are Dying	Nat Hentoff		1967
36 Children	Herbert Kohl		1967
The Way It Spoized To Be	James Herndon		1968*
How to Survive in Your Native Land	James Herndon		1971
The Water is Wide	Pat Conroy		1972
Among Schoolchildren	Tracy Kidder		1989
Small Victories	Samuel G. Freedman		1990
Savage Inequalities	Jonathan Kozol		1991
<u>*self-published in 1965</u>			

resources used in education would be more evenly distributed among all races, as well as urban, suburban, and rural school populations.² When a decade later, certain writers including former teachers, began teaching in or investigating public schools, they found conditions scarcely different from those before *Brown* and Sputnik. Angered by their own observations, these same writers described situations from within certain urban schools in particular which, in turn, increased public awareness and angered many because the spirit of the Court's decision a decade prior was being ignored and because parity with the Soviet Union had not yet been achieved.³

²In seeking to "catch" the Soviets' in science and technology, American educators, the media, and Congress formed what Ravitch terms "policy-making elites." This group sought to implement new programs to make-up for the alleged educational shortfall. Ravitch, Diane. (1985). *The Schools We Deserve*. New York: Basic, p. 41.

³Nor is the situation markedly different in 1994. The following comment by James Traub is typical: "But *Brown* didn't merely launch a thousand buses; by rooting the equality of black Americans in the constitutional guarantee of the equal protection of the law, the decision established civil rights as a fundamental American principle. . . . In the forty years since *Brown*, desegregation has not become irrelevant. But the *idea* of desegregation has been shaken by a crisis of faith, and by a contraction of sympathies."

The new movement among education writers was inaugurated in 1960 when A.S. Neill published *Summerhill*.⁴ The book soon became a best seller espousing a message of freedom and unconstrained sexuality based on its libertarian author's experiences in an English boarding school. There followed a number of authors of various persuasions such as Paul Goodman, Edgar Z. Friedenberg, John Holt, and reformers like Herbert Kohl, George Dennison, and Jonathan Kozol, all of whom tackled a variety of public education problems with a singular moral vision and individual writing style. While the influence of these writers' innovations on public education was limited, some achieved greater impact including the open education or "freedom" movement suggested by Joseph Featherstone in his 1967 *New Republic* articles.⁵ Charles Silverman's *Crisis in the Classroom* (1970) continued to popularize the open education movement, with extensive commentary on higher education as well, but by the mid-1970s, the open education movement was much less popular and publicized.

The open education movement demonstrates how a nascent educational concept moves through a number of stages before dying. Kohl, Dennison, Kozol and others, however, continued to intensify the public debate following *Brown* and Sputnik to suggest an agenda for action, namely fair distribution of resources, ultimately incorporating their ideas into engaging narratives. Their focus was less a "movement" and more a plea for fairness.

Increasing attention was drawn to public school education, in part due to the efforts of these select few writers. The spotlight seemed to focus on distribution of

Even Diane Ravitz, who has been studying and writing about public education for over two decades and who is referenced frequently in this research, has taken on the role of reformer. In a recent New York Times Op-Ed piece, she offered a four point plan for New York City schools that "would allow better schools to flourish and would close the doors of bad ones. . . . The system we have serves adults, not children. See Traub, James. (1994, June). "Can Separate Be Equal?" *Harper's*, 288, 36-47; Ravitz, Diane. (1994, June 27). "First, Save the Schools." *The New York Times*, A11.

⁴Neill, A.S. (1960). *Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child Rearing*. New York: Hart.

⁵Ravitz, Diane. (1985). *The Schools We Deserve*, p. 85.

resources, and secondarily on achieving educational "parity" with the Soviets. (This latter issue soon became the responsibility of post-secondary education.) Writer-reformers, especially more progressive ones, collectively came to the conclusion: "We have bungled badly in education."⁶ The collective guilt from segregation and the embarrassment from falling behind the Soviets thus helped spur a flood of reform-minded books.⁷

While many of these education reform writers offered their own criticisms and prescriptions for change, ranging from abandoning the curriculum and letting children set their own educational agendas to redistributing precious state and federal resources to make up for injustices of the past, a few chose to draw upon their own experiences as teacher/observers within the classroom and present their findings in narrative fashion. In a real sense, these teacher-authors adopted William Butler Yeats' opening line in his poem "Among Schoolchildren" as their *modus operandi*: "I walk through the long schoolroom questioning." These authors combined some of the more obvious literary conventions of the novel with a novice's approach to investigative reporting to produce the story of public school education as they saw it.⁸

⁶Gross, Beatrice & Ronald. (1969). p. 13.

⁷The early books in this study, "are essentially diaries of novice, middle-class, white teachers working in inner-city elementary schools;" the books are likewise "poignant and touching in their descriptions of children" . . . [as well as] "powerful and inflammatory, making most readers feel incensed at the ways in which poor, minority children are dealt with by the system." See Farber, Barry A. (1991). "Tracing A Phenomenon: Teacher Burnout and the Teacher Critics of the 1960s." Paper: American Educational Research Association, Chicago, p. 13. Part of the focus of this study will be to demonstrate how the book-length narratives evolved through the years. Nonetheless, it is a fair assessment to say the tone, then and now, in a journalism of outrage combines elements that are "poignant and touching," "powerful and inflammatory."

⁸Connery, Thomas B. (ed.) (1992). A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism. New York: Greenwood Press; Sims, Norman (ed.) (1990). Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century. New York: Oxford University Press. These author-reporters, of the 1960s especially, borrowed some of the conventions of "new journalism" which had experienced a revival in the early part of the decade. That style of journalism, which has subsequently been described as literary journalism, had been popularized by such writers as Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, and Truman Capote. Furthermore, besides sharing various literary techniques, these education reform authors shared other common traits with the literary journalists of the day. For example, most came from the Northeast, primarily the New York region. Also, many of the education authors, had served apprenticeship as writers in a few of the more literary magazines of the day, such as Atlantic, Harper's, New Republic, The New Yorker, and Saturday Review.

What Motivates Writers

In pressing his claim that journalistic imagination is "journalism's guilty secret" a necessary ingredient that transcends the routinized, ritualized practices of much of the profession, Michael Kirkhorn (1992) offers a revealing definition that may apply to the type of literary journalism which chooses public school education as its subject:

A truly imaginative journalism summons the public, quickens its understanding and interprets its interests as a process through which active citizens are created. *Good journalism requires steady attention to the public's best prospects* [italics added].⁹

Rhetorically, these writers chose a subject (public education) closely identified with an audience (decision-makers and a public concerned with education) for the purpose of highlighting a variety of inequities and bringing about reform. These same writers exercised their own unique voice (ethos) in order to move the issue to a higher level of public scrutiny in an effort to promote "the public's best prospects." In their efforts to describe their subject with compassion, most authors who wrote full-length books (as opposed to shorter articles and/or essays) on public school education attempted to stir an often lethargic public into recognizing how its own best interests might be served. Recounting conditions in schools and situations involving the human interaction of students, teachers, and administrators, the writer/author about public education became a journalist of the first order, "An observer who recognizes the true circumstances of human existence, however unhappily they are, may be found in daily life."¹⁰

Furthermore, the authors moved beyond mere objectivity (which Kirkhorn calls "journalism's orthodoxy") using their own individual imaginations to understand, interpret, reveal, and explain the minds of the participants (characters) within their

⁹Kirkhorn, Michael J. (1992). "Journalism's Guilty Secret." *Nieman Reports*, Summer, p. 41. Some may view this as the social responsibility theory of the press in action. After all, it was during the 1960s continuing into the 1970s that the old muckraking ways of the press were revived. Perhaps the Vietnam War served to coalesce many in the press around a reform agenda. It is noteworthy, however, that reform of education was already well established as a subject for journalists.

¹⁰Kirkhorn, p. 40.

educational narratives. Once again, this is the rhetorical equivalent of "creating" a scene within which change can occur. This, perhaps, helps explain how and why Tracy Kidder, for example, could reveal so tellingly the inner thinking of his chief character, Chris Zajac, in *Among Schoolchildren*:

She had no reason to believe the rumors, but she couldn't help thinking, 'What if they're true?' She wished she hadn't heard anything about Clarence's past at this early moment. She found it hard enough after thirteen years to believe that all fifth graders' futures lay before them out of sight, and not in plain view behind.¹¹

"She had no reason to believe?" "She wished?" "She found it hard . . . to believe?" How did Kidder know what the school teacher in this instance and other participants at other times were thinking? Were these merely fictional techniques applied to a style of reporting and designed to "enhance" the presentation? The answers, of course, explore what literary journalism is all about: the author's immersion in the subject matter at hand allows such a unique understanding of what he/she observes that the interpretive narrative which results seems quite natural.

Connery defines the reporter who engages in "immersion" or "saturation reporting" as "spending hours, days, weeks in the lives of his subjects."

Without this kind of reporting, he cannot hope to approach the texture of fiction--the subtlety of feeling and thought, of atmosphere and action . . . [i]n this kind of reporting, the distance between journalist and subject collapses. The subject easily forgets that all he says, all he does, is grist for the journalist's mill. The problem is especially worrisome if the subjects are not celebrities, and thus are not accustomed to the ways of the press.¹²

Simply, literary journalists of public education put the "heart" back into writing about a subject of broad, though inadequately understood, appeal. Their efforts incorporate the diligence of orthodox journalism and the imagination of literary journalism into a composite narrative type whereby writers of books on public education become journalists who "embrace the combination of spirit,

¹¹Kidder Tracy. (1989). *Among Schoolchildren*, New York: Avon, p. 9.

¹²Connery, *A Sourcebook*, pp. 267-8.

outlook, and technique that produce a journalism worth reading twice" and who likewise "understand how to produce a journalism worth reading once."¹³

But while Kidder achieved perhaps the broadest acclaim yet accorded a classroom presentation in book length form (until Kozol's 1991 book), those earlier versions in the 1960s and 1970s also displayed the same general traits which seem to be associated with all literary journalism efforts: journalism's orthodoxy signified by its interpretation of facts but the authors added their own *ethos* to highlight subject and appeal to audience.¹⁴

In line with their moral vision and sense of prophecy, the literary journalists of public education exercised a moral responsibility also, true to subject and self. The literary journalists of public education seemed to accept the responsibility for their words without getting pre-publication clearance; they felt free to interview students, teachers, and administrators and record the responses in an interpretive narrative which told the public education story. Theirs was not an effort to whitewash, but to let the facts and student voices (characters) within the classroom define the situation. In the spirit of Rachel Carson and Ralph Nader, the literary journalists of public education inquired about, then revealed, shortcomings in public education, leaving a certain sense of frustration, a hopelessness, even despair, in the wake.

Thus, techniques borrowed from literary journalism, an Eastern liberal orientation, and book format linked the literary journalists of the 1960s with this new group of education writers. But the most common association shared with the literary journalists of the day was the ability of the education authors to tell stories. In this trait alone, they shared a common purpose with the "new journalists" of the

¹³Kirkhorn, p. 36.

¹⁴A more thorough explanation of the rhetorical dynamics of writings about public education appears in Chapters Two and Five.

1960s who "found many of their stories in trends and events already transformed into spectacles by the mass media."¹⁵

Critics of Reform

No sooner had the books from "inside the classroom" amplified the debate over public school education when critics of reform began to appear. The criticisms generally revolved around the idea that, while many education authors were fine writers, their ideas were fatuous.

These writers are eloquent and super verbalizers, and able to deceive their readers. They write with great compassion and sensitivity and are able to deceive their readers into believing the big lie. They write convincingly and forcefully and are able to provide half a picture without many readers even realizing that the other half is missing. These people are able to turn judgments into 'facts' with their writing skills. These writers are published in visible and influential magazines, and this produces credence in their 'expertise'.¹⁶

Basing their findings on what they learned "among schoolchildren," and exploring a writing style fusing literary journalism with investigative reporting, these writers elevated the argument over expenditure of public resources on education as well as other issues. By raising their "voices," these education authors helped revitalize and, to a lesser extent, refocus perennial arguments over public education.

In reporting their observations and discoveries from within the classroom, the literary journalists of public education focused on a fundamental value dear to most Americans: fairness.¹⁷ Writers emphasized the inequities in the educational system. Describing conditions in classrooms and school buildings and portraying the children as victims, education writers attempted to awaken a moral vision in readers in hopes of changing present conditions. This idea of fairness and equity can be likened to Herbert Gans' "enduring values" concept in that education in a democracy had come

¹⁵Eason, David. (1990). "The New Journalism and the Image World," in Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century, Norman Sims, (ed.), New York: Oxford UP, p. 191.

¹⁶Orstein, Allan C. (1977). "Critics and Criticism of Education," Educational Forum, 42(1), p. 29.

¹⁷Protest et al. claim "Fairness a primary virtue" among "reformist impulses" of investigative reporters (Protest, David, et al. (1991). The Journalism of Outrage. New York: Guilford, p. 22).

to mean equal access to resources for all Americans regardless of race or economic condition.¹⁸

Furthermore, in writing "with great compassion and sensitivity," these "eloquent and super verbalizers" chose to introduce a sense of outrage into their writing. They argued that what they observed in person should not continue to exist in a democracy where "all men are created equal."

The narrative style coupled with the expansiveness of thought permitted in a book format lent an air of respectability as well to the presentation. Education writers were mirroring style and format techniques of their more renowned "new journalist" predecessors of the early 1960s. John Beard has addressed this aspect.

As news stories began to be interpreted in the developing New Journalistic styles of several experimenting reporters, these writers and the reading public seemed to discover a need for more detail and more time to explain the news. Hence, book-length works of journalism began to be more popular. The term 'saturation reporting' was invented to describe the technique of almost living with a developing story in order to have as much documented and recorded first-hand information as possible. After all, if the New Journalist intended to reproduce a complete "fiction" of exactly what the event had been like for him, then he had to experience most of it himself.¹⁹

Book-length was preferred for multiple reasons and education writers seized the opportunity. Many of these books were widely reviewed; some received coveted literary awards; one, *The Water Is Wide*, was made into a movie. All sold very well, if not nationally, at least in that region of the country where the form gained popularity (Northeast).

What the education authors did was exercise the type of investigative journalism that would become even more widely accepted a decade later when Watergate and other scandals rocked the nation. These authors forged a rhetorical link between seemingly unfair treatment "among schoolchildren" and a literary style

¹⁸Gans, Herbert J. (1979). *Deciding What's News*, New York: Pantheon, p. 206.

¹⁹Beard, John. (1985). "Inside the Whale: A Critical Study of New Journalism and the Nonfiction Form," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Tallahassee: Florida State University, p. 34.

which endorses a sense of outrage as its major form of discourse, all for the purpose of increasing public awareness and ultimately bringing about reform. The link between style and readership is explored by David Protess, et al., in *The Journalism of Outrage*.

[T]he journalism of outrage is a form of storytelling that probes the boundaries of America's civil conscience . . . Journalistic exposés that trigger outrage from the public or policy-makers affirm society's standards of misconduct.²⁰

The "standard of misconduct" could well be interpreted as the failure to distribute equally resources to inner-city schools a full decade after the *Brown* decision. The "who," "what," "when," "where," and "why" of the misconduct constitutes the story told by the education authors. It is the journalism of outrage applied to the story of public school education.

The "look inside the classroom" which began in the 1960s was accomplished by a specific few whose personal narratives of individual students dramatized what was going on. Foremost among these writers is Jonathan Kozol who, in 1967, "burst on the American educational scene with the publication of *Death at an Early Age*, establishing himself as a sensitive observer, a sharp critic, and a voice for reform."²¹ By 1991, Kozol had written seven books about public education, establishing himself as one of the most popular mass chroniclers of events in urban schools since the 1960s. Kozol's *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*, published in 1991, was, like *Death at an Early Age*, a best seller as well as a finalist for a National Book Critics Circle award. In it, Kozol appears to have "sharpened his knife"²² as he

²⁰Protess, David et al. *The Journalism of Outrage*, p. 5.

²¹Rabon, Jerome & Saunders, Lana. (1992). Review Essay, "The Legacy of Jonathan Kozol." *Educational Policy*, 6(3), p. 335.

²²"Jonathan Kozol." (1992, April). Interview. *Playboy*, 39(4), p. 51.

"documents the incredible abuse throughout the public schools of America"²³ and "leaves the reader with a sense of despair."²⁴

Kozol, foremost among a narrow list of public education narrative authors within the period from 1967 to 1991, captured the continued inequality in public school education with a passionate writing style that can readily be defined as one of rage as he sounds the alarm about education in America in the manner of a modern-day Jeremiah. Kozol's outrage, clearly visible in his prose, comes fully equipped with his own moral vision, a voice seeking to represent children as victims of a non-compassionate public system of education.

That moral vision (captured in an outrage of discourse) strikes some as "stretching the facts" and others as "lacking objectivity," but it has its own tradition as James Ettema and Theodore Glasser point out.

The moral vision of the contemporary historian . . . [and] the investigative journalist--is, then, more covert and ambiguous than that of the ancient narrator unencumbered by modern conceptions of objectivity. The messages of the modern tales are essentially moral nonetheless.²⁵

Protest, et al., speak to the motivations behind this type of writing, by noting "Investigative reporting exposes the shortcomings of American democracy, and, in doing so, is policy relevant."²⁶ Kozol makes no apologies for this rage: "I'd be sorry if

²³Rabon & Saunders, Review Essay: "The Legacy of Jonathan Kozol," p. 343.

²⁴Maeroff, Gene I. (1991). "Plea for Educational Equity," Christian Science Monitor, October 21, p. 13.

²⁵Ettema & Glasser. (1988). "Narrative Form and Moral Force: The Realization of Innocence and Guilt Through Investigative Reporting." The Journal of Communication, 38, 8-26.

²⁶Protest, et al., p. 11. According to Protest, et al., the concept, "the journalism of outrage" was developed first by James Ettema and Theodore Glasser (Protest, et al., p. 5, and FN 12, p. 25). The term "a journalism of outrage" is more appropriately applied in this study to education writers who assumed many investigative reporting techniques, including doing the journalist's work of gathering facts. In addition, that the subject of their efforts (story) was "something of reasonable importance to the reader" meets another investigative criteria established by Investigative Reports and Editors (IRE). That organization also denoted a third basic element: "that others are attempting to hide [these] matters from the public" (See The Reporter's Handbook [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983], "Forward" by Robert W. Greene, pp. vii-viii). In this study, it is doubtful the "unfairness" of resource distribution could be empirically demonstrated. Thus, whether this last criteria of investigative reporting applies to public education authors is debatable.

rage and anger were not there in my writing because a moderate response to immoderate injustice is a form of mental illness."²⁷

Kozol's two prototypical books, in uncovering abhorrent conditions and the lack of equitable distribution of resources in the public schools, hold up public education as scandalously administered, a stance which subjects him and others in this study "to exhibit an uncomfortable resemblance to law enforcement officers."²⁸ The power of an enforcer, however, if responsibly exercised, is really the performance of a service. In the book studied, techniques of investigative reporting applied to education are done in hopes of bringing about responsible change. Reform-minded education authors, observing and telling, use investigative reporting as a service, which "gives the journalistic method much of its power as a tool for understanding and as a force for justice and progress."²⁹

Furthermore, moral vision ("force for justice and progress") has its own impact as good journalism. For in opening the eyes of the public to conditions inside one of its most cherished institutions, the public school, education authors point toward the potential damaging consequences if change is not brought about. In looking ahead then, this type of journalism, a journalism of outrage, qualifies as good journalism in the sense that, as Ashdown contends, "all good journalism has a predictive quality about it, and in the course of time, some of their predictions are affirmed and others are denied."³⁰

In addition to Kozol, the other authors considered in this study have painted similar dismal pictures of public school education while employing many devices of

²⁷Kozol, Jonathan. (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

²⁸Stephens, Mitchell. (1988). A History of News, New York: Penguin, p. 250.

²⁹Stephens, p. 250.

³⁰Ashdown, Paul. (1985). James Agee: Selected Journalism, Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, p. xii.

literary journalism and investigative reporting. They all have echoed his despair, summed up best by Herndon in 1968:

What to do? You can read suggestions for change in a lot of recent books by serious and intelligent men. I suppose I could add mine. But frankly, I have almost no hope that there will be any significant change in the way we educate our children--for that, after all, would involve liberty, the last thing we may soon expect--and so I have thought merely to describe one time for you, parents, kids, readers, the way it is.³¹

Thus, two books by Kozol, two by Herndon, plus single entries by Hentoff, Kohl, Conroy, Kidder, and Freedman while all having been published since the mid 1960s, display a common thread: various levels of disappointment/despair that public school education has not fulfilled the promise of the 1954 Supreme Court decision. All nine books recount how *de facto* segregation still remains; all present vivid accounts of social and economic injustices within public school systems; all employ a variety of literary journalism and investigative reporting techniques to dramatize the failure of the promise of educational reform.

Why did a small, dedicated, perhaps even elite corps of writers, most teachers themselves, choose to become education journalists, yet fail to achieve significant lasting impact, despite some momentary popular acclaim? One might even argue that beyond calling attention to the plight of public education over the last quarter century, none of the published works analyzed here has yet to achieve the significance of other popular non-fiction in the literary journalism style made popular by Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, or Truman Capote. Considering the importance of public school education in a democracy, why have only a handful of writer-journalist-teachers tackled the subject inside the classroom? Why, in particular, has Kozol achieved best-selling status with his "works of enormous sensitivity and astute observation [that] have not influenced educational curricula, education philosophers,

³¹Herndon, James. (1968). The Way It Spoze To Be. New York: Bantam, p. 198.

and the everyday reading public?"³² Is it simply a matter of an angry writing style which has been characterized as "a sustained polemic"?³³ Is it the writer-journalist himself who is seen "as an empathetic observer of the human experience"?³⁴

Answers vary, but while all the books examined in this research address public school education in a variety of voices, Jonathan Kozol, especially in *Savage Inequalities*, took his writing to a distinctly different level, a type of controlled rage, because he "wanted to write a book that will keep rich people from sleeping easily until they act upon what I've written."³⁵

Literary Journalism and Education Reform

Many critics view the literary journalism of the 1960s as resulting either from the demise of the novel or as a reaction to sweeping social and political changes.

Ronald Weber decried fiction's inability to address the times:

Fiction appeared to many to be a nineteenth century diversion, historically valuable but no longer offering the voice needed to address the times adequately.³⁶

Other writers saw social and political forces as responsible for the rebirth of literary journalism. E.W. Johnson addresses the social context as an "attempt to record and evaluate history by keeping language and attitude closely attuned and responsive to the style of events."³⁷ These explanations of a style of literary journalism seem too facile when applied to public education writing because while incorporating many literary journalism devices, public education writers brought a number of unique traits of their own.

³²Rabon & Saunders, Review Essay, p. 335.

³³Maeroff, "Plea for Educational Equity," p. 13.

³⁴Rabon and Saunders, Review Essay, p. 335.

³⁵Kozol, Jonathan. Interview. *Playboy*, p. 56.

³⁶Weber, Ronald. (1980). *The Literature of Fact*. Athens, Ohio UP, p. 9.

³⁷Johnson, Michael. (1971). *The New Journalism: The Underground Press, The Artists of Nonfiction, and Changes in the Established Media*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, p. 46.

First, most authors of the books examined are indeed members of a select group of intellectuals, a sort of "ivy league" register of elites. Second, a number either experimented with or have since achieved success in the novel. Third, ascribing to social and political forces only the frustration and despair toward public education which began in the 1960s and continues to this day does not begin to address the heartfelt outrage of public education writers toward the failure of educational reform. (Some may see a journalism of outrage more as a symptom of the crisis in education. A less literate public [audience] requires more explicit prose to document the crisis. Rhetorically, voice augments/enhances subject for the purpose of enlightenment.)

What seems more likely to have involved these education writers in their chronicles was a vision, prophetic or imaginative, of what public education could be. John Hollowell, besides Ettema and Glasser noted previously, speaks of the "personal commitment and moral vision" of the new journalists of some 30 years ago, who adopted the "moral seriousness" of the novel while abandoning the conventions of "objective reporting" per se.³⁸ Kozol (his experience is not untypical) had lived abroad in the early 1960s, even attempting a novel. He returned to the United States, became a public school teacher, witnessed first-hand the deplorable conditions in a school, and used his own "moral vision" to write *Death at an Early Age*, his own impressions and vision for the universe of public education in a democracy; his own brand of "socially committed nonfiction" as Hollowell has called it.³⁹ It is this vision in Kozol and others coupled with various literary journalism devices that distinguishes these books.

³⁸Hollowell, John. (1977). Fact and Fiction: The New Journalism and the Nonfiction Novel. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, p. 11.

³⁹Hollowell, John. Fact and Fiction, p. 16.

Burke's Pentad

Emotion and drama serve important roles in the nonfiction about public school education. Public education authors, many teachers themselves, invest their prose with enhanced rhetoric, relying on their own *ethos* or credibility as witnesses to substantiate their claims. All this serves to dramatize the school *scene* in question making it both more appealing *and* understandable to an unsophisticated public often confused, ignorant or unconcerned about what goes on inside the classroom. Therefore, a dramatistic analysis predicated on the work of Kenneth Burke will be used to explicate the works. According to Burke

Dramatism is a method of analysis, and a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodological inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions.⁴⁰

Implementation of Burke's dramatistic analysis will allow each book in this study to be broken into the following pentad of essential dramatic elements:

Actors/Agents - All characters in a story are isolated and identified. How is the individual actor described? Does the actor appear to represent a larger entity such as a nation, religious group, government agency, or public? The role the actor plays is likewise helpful in analysis.

Rhetorically, the authors of the books in this study themselves serve as actors --participants or observers; they are vital to the story, indeed serve as characters in many instances in their own unique drama (see Chapter Six section dealing with the dismissals).

Act/Action - Any portrayal of action is important for this analysis. Word choice is crucial here, especially verbs. Distinctions between "said" and "claimed," for example, have important ramifications in the pattern of action within a story

⁴⁰Burke, Kenneth. (1968). "Dramatism." In D. Sills (Ed.), The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 7. New York: Macmillan, p. 445.

concerning its logic and assumptions, origins, and conclusions. Approaching this once again from a dual level of rhetoric, the "act" becomes both the author's writing the story and the characters' activities within that story. In the story, characters serve as actors; in each book, the author is actor/writer.

Scenes - What is the setting of the story? Is that setting described in any detail, and what is the quality of the description, foreign, familiar, friendly, forbidding? Is the scene involved in the action or peripheral? Is it unique or part of a larger scene? In other words, does the *schoolroom scene* described in a particular narrative reflect the far larger *cultural scene* in society? Many of the books analyzed herein make explicit reference to racial injustice (prejudice) as the fundamental root of school inequality indicating the schoolroom is part of the much larger cultural works.

Purposes - The motivations and intentions of the actors come into play here. Whether the actors express these purposes or they are offered by the author are important aspects to be ascertained. Whether the purposes are portrayed as positive, negative or neutral are also important factors. Nor should the author's intent or purpose be overlooked here. Public education authors, Jonathan Kozol in particular, make no secret of their design to afflict the comfortable members in society who think public education is operating fairly and smoothly.

Agencies - What are the means, tools, and channels used by the actors to pursue their intentions? Are these agencies successful or not and to what degree are they likewise positive, negative or neutral. To a marked degree, a journalism of outrage (a literary non-fiction of public education) serves as an agency, or means, in itself, a tool used by critic-authors to document the unfair circumstances of inner-city education especially.

Kozol, then, is the primary focus in this study because he has written the most books on education besides the two analyzed in this research. He also has penned numerous educational articles and made frequent speeches most focused on funding inequities. Supplementing a detailed analysis of Kozol's literary efforts with a broader presentation of the efforts of other writers will provide what Placzek (1993) calls a "collective perspective." In other words, the use of multiple texts beside Kozol's provides a way to analyze, describe, and ultimately, synthesize the various efforts as a means to set the stage for a better, more comprehensive understanding of how the devices of literary journalism and investigative reporting have been successfully applied to public education. A rhetorical analysis of the writing about public education in the mostly urban areas from the mid-1960s until now will show "education as a system which controls discourse."⁴¹

Thus, among the research questions to be considered are these:

1. How did select books document the "story" of public school education over the past quarter century?
2. From a dramatic perspective, what are the acts, actors, and settings of the narrative coverage of public school education?
3. What themes are common to all of the books analyzed?
4. To what extent is the process of investigative reporting used by the writers? Was the process aided by a type of documentary journalism?
5. What particular devices of literary journalism were employed in the writing of these narratives? Were these devices successful or not; how might that success or lack of it be measured?

⁴¹Plazek, Walter. (1992). "Children of a lesser education." Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, p. 237.

6. What do narrative portrayals say about the relationship between public education and literary journalism in general?
7. How do such portrayals affect the public perception of public school education as a system and the participants found within that system?

Chapter Two attempts to demonstrate that while the literature of literary journalism is plentiful, the genre does not yet enjoy any niche in literary criticism. That being so, this research must "cut new paths of investigation and interpretation by relying almost solely on the original works of the writers under consideration."⁴² This chapter likewise sets out the criteria by which the texts will be analyzed.

In Chapter Three, this study investigates the historical context that helped shape the writings on public school education.

Chapter Four seeks to establish the argument that education writers found their voice in a fusion of literary journalism and investigative reporting. Furthermore, these writers combined their writing abilities with the prophetic voice of the sage to inform and alarm readers to the disintegration of inner city education especially.

The theoretical underpinnings of the research are presented in Chapter Five. A variety of theoretical explanations are suggested with primary emphasis on a generic reader-response theory and the dramatistic analysis of Kenneth Burke.

The nine books of the study are more closely analyzed in Chapter Six. That chapter focuses, in part, on a common event described in three books: teacher firings. This method serves to accent a literature of rage found in various degrees in all the texts.

⁴²Connery, A Sourcebook, p. 3.

Finally, Chapter Seven summarizes the principal findings of the research, suggests additional avenues of study and argues that the "genre" of educational writing might ultimately be called journalism.

Applying a Burkean terminology to this research would clarify the rhetorical structure of the chapters. Chapter One establishes the rhetorical situation, relates how select authors use a *voice* of outrage (their own *ethos*) for the *purpose* of focusing attention on a *subject* of significance to a very large *audience* of decision-makers and the general public. Chapter Two would then investigate how author/actor-agents used their own experience in stressing the ethical appeal of the personal narrative. Chapter Three details the act of the author as book writer, and of the characters' acts within the narrative scene. Chapters Four and Five detail the means or agency employed to dramatize the scene from inside the classroom. Chapter Six examines the purpose and rhetorical effect achieved in each of the nine texts, while Chapter Seven summarizes the findings and suggests possible follow-up rhetorical studies as well. In terms of a pentadic approach, the focus of the school stories was the depiction of inequality and unfairness, with some emphasis on the public and political aspects of the events inside the classroom. Thus the *acts*--the actions and plot--usually centered on a public, crucial moment: interaction between teacher and student(s), dismissals of teacher, confrontation with recalcitrant teachers/administrators. The *scenes* always heightened the intimacy of the act, containing status details and usually, a full-length description of classroom setting. In other words, the author had to be present on the scene for days on end to have captured so much detail.

The *purposes*, intentions, and motivations of the *actors* were quite personal and sharply etched; through words primarily and occasional germane statistics, even

students writing/drawing, the sadness deprivation, victimage of the students and rage of the authors were all made known. The *agencies*--the channels by which actors voiced intentions or pursued purposes--were simple yet poignant expressions of human deprivation/misery: the silence of a student rebuked by an insensitive teacher, the ambiguous thinking of teachers evidenced through interior monologues (especially evident in third-person narration). With each stark and touching detail, the dramatistic analysis of the books on public education revealed the structure and the content of a narratives of inequality.

One important clarification needs to be made at this time, however. In no way is this research an attempt to evaluate the public education issue in the United States. This research's sole design/structure is aimed instead at examining one type of rhetoric of public school education evidenced in a select nine books which, in a variety of ways, are representative of the phenomena of a public education literature of rage from the mid-1960s to the present. This literature combines elements of literary journalism, investigative reporting, and sage writing.

Put another way, the unique narratives of public education over the past quarter century have become a "source of disturbance, not only to literary criticism in particular, but to the study of human relations in general, if one does not so discount it, but allows its terms to creep into one's thinking at points where issues should be studied explicitly in terms of rhetoric."⁴³ Burke was specifically referencing the subject of anthropology when he wrote this, but the words are applicable for our purposes here. The narratives of public education have provided their own "source of disturbance" in calling attention to deplorable conditions and unfair distribution of resources in many school districts. This research merely examines the narratives, not the truth claims of underlying conditions in the schools as described in the books.

⁴³Burke, Kenneth. (1950). A Rhetoric of Motives. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 40-41.

In the final analysis, this research proposes to view public school education writing as a journalism of outrage. By various criteria, it will be seen as literature; by other yardsticks, it will be viewed as journalism. Ultimately, however, the prophetic voice of the writer as sage characterizes the individual texts in this study. In presenting almost five pages of the history of education in the twentieth century, Kidder speaks to this idea.

On the whole, the reform movement of the 1980s lacked the moral and emotional force of the movement of the late 1960s. The cries of alarm from the earlier campaign still echo, particularly from one group of books that comprise collectively, a literature of rage.⁴⁴

Kidder admits "The history of education in America is the history of attempts to reform it," a direction both his own book and the authors he cites are moving toward, reinforcing to a large degree Hellmann's idea of the author-reader contract. But the important point, and the central thesis of this study, consists of this: There is a journalism of outrage in texts dealing with the issue of public school education in America. That journalism incorporates a variety of literary, investigative, and prophetic techniques in an effort to present to interested and concerned readers the narrative of public education in the United States.

Outrage or Rage

While the apparent origin of the term "journalism of outrage" is explained earlier in this chapter, a final clarification over the terms outrage and rage may be in order as well as the implied claim that this writing may be defined as journalism. For the first, Kozol himself will be the main reference. It would be fair criticism to say Kozol's "voice" is not held in the highest repute in many higher levels of the academy. Besides earlier citations critical of him, even after publication of *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol was mildly lampooned by critics such as former assistant secretary of education

⁴⁴Kidder. *Among Schoolchildren*, p. 301.

Chester E. Finn, Jr., who was professor of education and public policy at Vanderbilt.⁴⁵

But Kozol has been passionate and critical of public schools and the language they encourage. Almost 20 years ago, he wrote "There are many adjectives of pity, but few verbs of rage, within the dialogue of social justice as defined by text or teacher in the U.S. public schools." In the same article, Kozol attacks the "Low Key" domination in the U.S. literary world.

An entire set of critical terms exist which are, by definition, totally irrelevant to pain, yet govern our literature and neutralize our rage. . . . The language that we learn in public school is one of ethical antisepsis and of political decontamination. It is the language of an intellectual cease-fire while the victims are still dying.⁴⁶

When it comes to public school in America, Kozol's observations have been sounded through a voice of incredulous rage aimed at alerting the public in general and incensing educational elites to reform the funding process.

Journalism: Objective or Subjective

To address the implied claim that this type of writing is indeed journalism, a variety of references will be cited. Essentially, the education writers who deal with a variety of difficulties at the elementary and secondary public school level do so by means of a story, a narrative. True, there exists an element of subjectivity in their reporting; selectivity and some personal coloration is inescapable, particularly when we allow that most of these authors were teachers themselves at one time or another. In such a narrative frame, however, "the reporter becomes the artist fashioning his material in clever ways, imposing his views of 'reality' with greater license than the 'straight' reporter, mining in a degree of 'fiction.'"⁴⁷

⁴⁵Finn notes, "The present comeback of saurian ideas can probably be traced to the publication of Savage Inequalities, Jonathan Kozol's much-quoted volume . . ." (Finn, Chester E., Jr., September 20, 1993. "The Return of the Dinosaurs," National Review, 45, 51-54.)

⁴⁶Kozol, Jonathan. (1975). "The Politics of Syntax." English Journal, 64(9), 25, 27.

⁴⁷Murphy, James. (1974). "The New Journalism: A Critical Perspective." Journalism Monographs #34, May, p. 32.

"Objectivity," despite its sanguine appeal in "conventional" circles, involves judgment nevertheless. Writers of the story of public education could and did employ a variety of literary devices which constitute the exercise of judgment on their part--whether to use real or fictitious names of students, when to use flashback and other plot devices, when to inject their own impassioned observations. The judgments are no less true whether told by an actor in the scene of school life or in the voice of the narrator himself. Robert Wyatt and David Badger contend "Narrative . . . is the very essence of the New Journalism feature article . . . that exploits all the devices of fiction to achieve its purpose."⁴⁸ In suggesting "A more adequate typology of journalistic forms" by "an adaptation of a venerable model derived from rhetorical theory,"⁴⁹ these same authors note how the modes of composition (description, narration, exposition, argumentation, criticism) support a fusion of the journalistic and the literary:

When these five modes are combined with the objective-subjective continuum along with an understanding that objectivity and subjectivity are 'emphases,' not means of distinguishing among journalist forms, a more comprehensive typology of journalistic genres emerges. This typology further breaks down the assumption that journalism deals with 'fact' while literature deals with 'fiction.' It also recognizes that no single journalistic form is innately superior to another.⁵⁰

Finally, from the reader's perspective, the objective-subjective dialectic becomes one of critical interpretation. Ernst Cassirer in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* provides the theoretical underpinning for this claim:

Every *apprehension* of a particular empirical thing or specific empirical occurrence contains within it an act of evaluation. . . . Thus the limits between the objective and the subjective are not rigidly determined from the first but are formed and determined only in the progressive development of experience and its theoretical principles. It is through a constantly renewed intellectual operation that what we

⁴⁸Wyatt, Robert O. & David P. Badger. (1993). "A New Typology for Journalism and Mass Communication Writing." *Journalism Educator*, 48(1), p. 7.

⁴⁹Wyatt & Badger, p. 6.

⁵⁰Wyatt & Badger, pp. 10-11.

call objective reality changes its shape and is re-created in a new form. This operation has essentially a *critical* character.⁵¹

To translate theory into practice, Michael Kirkhorn's comments are worthy. Kirkhorn contends that through the use of imagination, journalists transcend the routine and sterile to produce outstanding writing.

Objectivity is journalism's orthodoxy, the orthodoxy of a craft whose heretics are its heroes. It is the attribute of journalism where one would expect to find diligence but not imagination. . . . Objectivity is the search for true facts, and nothing requires more rigor, patience, stamina, and courage. . . . Exact, dispassionate observation is both an act of moral imagination and a discipline that requires imagination to sustain it. . . . The quest for objectivity requires that journalists understand the minds of the distorters--and this itself is an act of the speculative, conjectural imagination.⁵²

Almost 20 years ago, James Murphy addressed the then "new journalism" and its inherent subjectivism. He held it was indeed "journalism because it applies these techniques (dramatic fictional techniques) to reporting events." In elaborating, Murphy set up the new journalists versus "conventional" journalists dyad, noting how important the reader becomes to the choice of one or another: "The writer's acknowledgement of his subjectivity puts more responsibility on the reader than does high-consensus 'factual' reporting."⁵³

One of the claims of this research is that the books about public education were a legitimate form of journalism, a legacy from the "new journalism" of the 1960s. Admittedly, this calls for a non-conventional appreciation of this form of writing, but by exercising "dramatic fictional techniques," books about public education deserve to be classed and appreciated as literary journalism. The emphasis, perhaps, should be less on journalism, more on the literary, because of the variety of techniques employed to which this research now turns.

⁵¹Cassirer, Ernst. (1955). The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. II, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955, p. 31.

⁵²Kirkhorn, pp. 40-41.

⁵³Murphy, James. "The New Journalism . . ." p. 35.

CHAPTER TWO

RHETORICAL AND LITERARY TECHNIQUES

A variety of writing techniques are employed by public education authors, borrowed from the areas of literary journalism, investigative reporting, and sage writing. This chapter will focus on explaining a few of the rhetorical and literary techniques. For example, Table 2-1 offers a checklist of literary journalism techniques in each of the nine books.

This research has described the tone, or "voice," of public school education writers as one of outrage, an approach that incorporates elements of investigative reporting in its fact gathering with devices of literary journalism in its stylistic presentation. Fundamental to this style is the narrative, the frame that "tells the story" of elementary and secondary education. As Ettema and Glasser have noted, "Narrative is an instrument for the assertion of moral authority."¹

In "exposing" the weaknesses of public education, authors drew the ire of those apologists for public education who would then accuse the writers of turning judgments into facts in a form of expose. Since James Gordon Bennett delivered the hyperbolic announcement of his impending marriage in 1836,² the expose, so closely associated with the present term "investigative reporting" (and its other vestige, muckraking), has been a regular feature of American journalism. Its presumed lack of objectivity has been the subject of debate.

¹Ettema & Glasser, "Narrative Form and Moral Force," p. 10.

²Stephens, p. 242.

Table 2-1: Literary Journalism Devices

Title/Author	Year	Dramatized Scene	Dialogue	Status Details	Point of View/ Character	Interior Monologue	Composite Character
Death at an Early Age/Kozol	1967	Yes	Some	Yes	1st Author	No	No
Our Children Are Dying/Hentoff	1967	No	Yes	Yes	3rd Principal	No	No
36 Children/ Kohl	1967	Yes	Some	Yes	1st Author	No	Yes
The Way It Spozed to Be/ Herndon	1968	Yes	Little	Yes	1st Author	Yes	No
How to Survive in Your Native Land/Herndon	1971	Yes	Little	Yes	1st Author	Yes	No
The Water is Wide/Conroy	1972	Yes	Yes	Yes	1st Author	Yes	Yes
Among Schoolchildren/ Kidder	1989	Yes	Some	Yes	3rd Teacher	Little	Yes
Small Victories/ Freedman	1990	Yes	Yes	Yes	3rd Teacher	Yes	No
Savage Inequalities/ Kozol	1991	Yes	Some	Yes	1st Author	No	No

That public school education authors' use of investigative fact gathering routines coupled with the stylistic devices of literary journalism would find mass appeal over the past 30 years should not surprise anyone. Earlier in the century, Upton Sinclair and Ida Tarbell chronicled and scolded upon observing a variety of social ills affecting large numbers of the population. Likewise, since the 1960s, the writer-teachers have been doing very much the same thing, only their subject matter has been the educational shortfall of the American democracy while their singular form has been the narrative. The use of the narrative format, investigative reporting, and literary journalism devices is further evidence of "another journalistic weapon . . . presented to the forces of reform."³ In addition, that "moralizing impulse" or voice of moral authority exercised by these education-authors "endows facts with relevance and stories with closure and coherence--the very features we use to judge the value and the truth of the stories we hear and tell."⁴ (While it may be argued otherwise, the reader ought not conclude that the "style" of the journalism of outrage is merely an invention, tacked on for effect. The style of writing analyzed in this study is the means by which education authors "create" a picture of what education has become.

Rhetorical Appeal Techniques

Among the more common devices employed by public education writers are those identified here as rhetorical appeals. These stylistic devices result in a variety of critical responses as the following pages reveal. Both favorable and unfavorable criticisms which follow demonstrate how the unique rhetorical appeals of public education have been interpreted.

³Stephens, p. 250.

⁴Ettema & Glasser. "Narrative Form," p. 11.

The attempt to reform public education has resulted in many writers being castigated for their club-like associations. In 1977, for example, Ornstein took the reformers to task for their associative efforts.

In recent years, they have praised each other in the dust jackets and contents of their books. This kind of 'back scratching' is common among the radical critics and these examples only touch the surface on the interlocking procedure of elevating each other to 'expert' status. Granted, other writers engage in the same kind of practice, but not to the same extent. . . . What this boils down to is that, for the greater part, we have a group of eastern reformers . . . who write for eastern magazines--purporting a view that . . . does not make sense in most schools across the country nor with the great majority of experienced school personnel.⁵

This criticism is merited and is evident in the jackets and covers of many of the books written during this period revealing the same "back scratching" efforts Ornstein addresses. This provides some partial insight into the unique rhetorical appeal of these books generated.

Furthermore, it was not uncommon for many of these authors to contribute their own critical book reviews or "reviews en masse" of fellow education writers. One such example was published in 1975 by Herbert Kohl. In an article written in *American Libraries* entitled, "Is It Enough to Change the Schools?", Kohl provided this rationale for his extensive review of many of the books on public and private education of that era:

. . . [T]he criticisms of school in the United States that have emerged since the Second World War are diverse, and the critics themselves represent different political, pedagogical, and philosophical traditions. In picking out the most outstanding books of social criticism of education in that period, it is important to separate these traditions and understand how they relate to different types of schools and modes of schooling that have emerged in the past ten years.⁶

Kohl goes on to review approximately a dozen books of the period and his specific comments about two other authors analyzed in this study are worth noting. "Among the most recent works, the storytellers like Herndon, Kozol, and me have been more

⁵Ornstein, p. 29.

⁶Kohl, Herbert. (1975). "Is It Enough to Change the Schools?" *American Libraries*, 6(3), p. 150.

widely read than the more abstract writers," Kohl opines.⁷ Writing reviews of one another's books then helps demonstrate how public education writers attempted to maximize the appeal of their books in the mass market.

The unique rhetorical appeal of a journalism of outrage stems also from the story-telling mode of the authors. Narrative, using Kenneth Burke's description, becomes the act whereby authors describe the culture of public elementary and secondary education. In summing up narrative as "a method of journalistic writing," Berner concludes "The result mirrors history and realistic fiction in that it attempts to tell how something happened. The narrative approach in journalism scorns the self of the writer for the drama of the event."⁸

But while criticisms of this group of education writers--reformers and radicals --were plentiful, and helps show how rhetorical appeal works, these writers also had their defenders who questioned the divergent voices "calling into question the relevance of the entire enterprise of formal education."

But despite these divergences, there is a spirit that informs this thought and action as a whole, and that spirit has some distinguishable components. The radical critics all start with some kind of radical criticism of America as a sick society. Their critique of the schools derives from the questioning of society, for they see the schools as mere agents of the society.⁹

What these radical critics find is "miseducation" in the schools that "additionally distinguishes the tone of their writings."¹⁰ Tone then becomes another stylistic device designed to augment the unique rhetorical appeal of these books.

Frank Lentricchia, in commenting on Burke's term "identification," describes the unique social and political forces which come into being through a rhetor's (education writer, public education critic) criticism:

⁷Kohl, "Is It Enough To Change the Schools?", p. 159.

⁸Berner, R. Thomas. (1986, October). "Literary Newswriting: The Death of an Oxymoron." Journalism Monographs, #99, p. 11.

⁹Gross, p. 17.

¹⁰Gross, p. 17.

The critical rhetor finds himself at the most delicate of all crossings, standing at a specific institutional site where any intellectual who teaches, whether as teacher in the conventional sense, or as writer, both dreads and longs to be, the place . . . where intellectuals already are.¹¹

Applying this scheme to a journalism of outrage, the "critical rhetor"/"intellectual" is the public education writer, primarily Ivy League educated with a Northeastern, liberal bias, who stands "at a specific institutional site" and serves as both teacher and writer. Burke himself has long been understood as an advocate of social change through his rhetorical criticism. Public education writers assume a similar stance seeking change in the distribution of resources within the institution of public education. These writers use a variety of rhetorical approaches, centered on their ethical criticism, to forment change and bring about reform. Again, Lentricchia's focus on Burke, helps solidify the claim here:

[I]n Burke's theory of rhetoric, the rhetorician is the not-always-knowing carrier of historical and ideological forces, while at the same time he acts within and upon the present and thereby becomes an agent of change.¹²

Foremost among the authors who have served as educational change agents is Jonathan Kozol, who stands out as someone angry with "a dual schooling system in this nation."¹³ Since 1967, with the publication of *Death at an Early Age*, Kozol has continuously raged at the inequalities and inequities of public education. Kozol argues that the property tax and a lessened federal presence in education have resulted in a significant funding gap between the relatively few public school districts that are meeting the needs of their student populations and the overwhelming majority of public schools located mostly in urban areas whose students are inadequately served. This fundamental inequity, in Kozol's view, is the core problem facing primary and secondary public education. Kozol has written four additional

¹¹Lentricchia, Frank. (1983). Criticism and Social Change. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 149.

¹²Lentricchia, p. 160.

¹³Maeroff, Gene. (1991, October 21). "Plea for Educational Equity," Christian Science Monitor, p. 13.

books since 1967, the most recent one, *Savage Inequalities* (1991), detailing conditions in six urban school areas and comparing them with schools in more affluent suburbs. Throughout, Kozol maintains a sense of outrage that such conditions could continue to exist in a democratic society. Kozol's anger and rage, while considered "misplaced" by some¹⁴ and "sustained polemic" by others,¹⁵ has nonetheless drawn considerable attention to public education with a literary style that reprises the literary journalism popularized in the late 1960s.

But Kozol would be merely a "voice in the wilderness" had he not been joined by other writers. Using a narrative style, Nat Hentoff, James Herndon, Herbert Kohl, Pat Conroy, Tracy Kidder, and Samuel G. Freedman have added their concerns and raised their own more muted voices with Kozol's to bring greater attention to the plight of public elementary and secondary education. A subtext in most, and here Kozol is especially forceful, is that the alleged gap in education of America's schoolchildren has racial underpinnings. Kozol presents the most forceful and passionate attack on the inequality between the races in the distribution of resources. Kozol sees the inequity of the property tax as a primary means of financing education. Kozol suggests the racial motivation of this inequality, and he also articulates the potential consequences of continued neglect of education for minorities. Finally, Kozol uses the devices of literary journalism to express his rage over this neglect, sounding much like a modern-day Jeremiah.

Anger/Empathy As Rhetorical Devices

Since the books in this study constitute serious critiques of education during the 1960s and 1970s, a current of angry concern through the narratives may not be unexpected, given the "crisis" history of education since the 1950s. But what is

¹⁴Rabon & Saunders, p. 335.

¹⁵Macroff, p. 13.

notable is the anger's recurrence in book after book, sometimes reaching a state of resigned defeat. For instance, James Herndon, who wrote about public school education for many years, in his 1967 book, *The Way It Spoized To Be*, ends on a very pessimistic note:

But frankly, I have almost no hope that there will be any significant change in the way we educate our children--for that, after all, would involve liberty, the last thing we may soon expect.¹⁶

A later book by Herndon, *How To Survive in Your Native Land*,¹⁷ is no more hopeful, and indeed expressly raises one of the preeminent questions asked in some form, at least, in all the books: "Could you really teach anyone, or help anyone to learn something, in a public school?"¹⁸

That question had been given a more hopeful slant in a book by Nat Hentoff, *Our Children Are Dying*.¹⁹ While the title is, by far, the most ominous of all the books in the study, Hentoff shifts the focus away from students per se and on to an administrator at a central Harlem public school. The consequence is a book, which more than the others, strikes the possibility that some children can survive urban schools. Seen through the eyes of a gifted principal, Hentoff details, nonetheless, the desperate situation of the children of urban minorities. Hentoff thereby employs something of the composite (representative) character technique, one used by Kozol (1967) and, much later, Tracy Kidder (1991) as well.

That technique--providing status details through a third person--is used much more expansively by another teacher turned author. In *36 Children* (1967), Herbert Kohl goes to considerable length to describe life during a year in a ghetto classroom. Kohl makes extensive use of the in-class written, creative products of his students in

¹⁶Herndon, James. (1968). *The Way It Spoized To Be*. New York: Bantam, p. 198.

¹⁷Herndon, James. (1971). *How To Survive in Your Native Land*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

¹⁸Herndon, James. (1971). *How To Survive in Your Native Land*, p. 158.

¹⁹Hentoff, Nat. (1967). *Our Children Are Dying*. New York: Viking.

an effort to "document each child's problems and pains." That he succeeds, in what is often a crude, inelegant sort of book, is testimony sufficient to the power of the voices of 36 children as well as damning evidence of the racist quality of public education at the time in that school. The sad, poignant writings of the students in Kohl's class serve to dramatize and underscore the sufferings of the racial underclass who inhabit the ghetto neighborhood around the school. The writings serve further as "symbolical grotesques" and force "upon the reader the immediate need to understand what is not ultimately understandable--the presence of pain and suffering in human existence."²⁰

That same technique--student writing--is used in a book published in 1971 titled *Can't You Hear Me Talking To You?* Only in a brief forward and afterword by Caroline Mirthes do we get the impression and commentary of the author. The rest of the paperback presents the ideas of children-writers who range from 11 to 14 years of age. As Mirthes explains her students' composition project, "The writing lessons were noisy ... [B]ut the excitement was about their own ideas."²¹ What emerges is another sad commentary on public school education where the classroom becomes "For the ghetto child, not only inadequate, but totally irrelevant in focus, subject matter, materials, and patterns of student-teacher relations."²² In another example, one derivative type school, or "mini-school," proves an intriguing school narrative. *The Lives of Children*²³ describes the 23 children of First Street School on New York's Lower East Side. This libertarian, community school narrative chronicles "how the educational function does not rest upon our ability to control, or our will to instruct, but upon our human nature and the nature of experience."²⁴ The book

²⁰Landow, George P. (1986). *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, p. 83.

²¹Mirthes, Caroline. (1971). *Can't you hear me talking to you?* New York: Bantam, p. xi.

²²Mirthes, p. 136.

²³Dennison, George. (1969). *The Lives of Children*. New York: Bantam.

²⁴Dennison, p. 246.

demonstrates how alternative instruction methods were applied during the school's brief life in an inner city environment, yet apparently did little to alter the tensions and anger among students and between students and faculty. More pointedly, *The Lives of Children* which contains some literary journalism devices, shows how reform of education in general was a lively topic for progressive education author/teachers in the 1960s especially. Further, the lives--educational and professional--of minority schoolchildren who make up the majority of the "case studies" developed in the narrative of public education were the usual focus of the writer's observations.

Literary Journalism and Scholarship

Many of the literary journalists whose subject matter was public education are excellent studies themselves in the possibilities for this nonfiction genre. Although in this research, the issue of public education is identified specifically, the writers nonetheless exhibit precise and imaginative vocabulary, often times graceful sentences, and a surface richness and complexity of detail that serves to impress readers no matter what issue is being discussed. And while the presentation itself is usually entertaining, informative, and readable, the seriousness of the school issue itself imparts a sense of urgency aided by the writer's voice which assists understanding in this reader-writer contract.

Only one of the nine books chosen, Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren*, has ever appeared in any previous listing as part of the literary journalism genre. Connery in his 1992 *Sourcebook* has a specific section devoted to Kidder in which critic John Coward reviews a number of Kidder's writings, including *Among Schoolchildren*. The fact that this book was on the best-seller lists when published in 1989 and its obvious use of a number of literary journalism techniques were among reasons for its inclusion here.

When praised at all, literary journalists are most often admired for their ability

to orchestrate fact, detail, anecdote, history, dialogue and biography into subtle, complex, yet eminently readable articles and book-length stories of diverse yet always intriguing subjects.²⁵

Despite the reputations of many of the writers considered in this study, the subject of writing about education through the eyes and techniques of literary journalists has not been the subject of scholarship. Beyond specific book reviews, sidebar interviews and the like, few articles have specifically examined the literary journalism of public education. Still, "bookstore shelves fairly bulged with apocalyptic predictions about the imminent demise of schooling"²⁶ during the entire quarter century of this study as "American educational policy [continues to be] pulled from extreme to extreme every ten years or so, in response to changes in the social and political climate."²⁷ Lack of critical scholarly treatment of the link between literary journalism and public education, notwithstanding, the issue of public school education remains firmly etched in the public consciousness as a result of media attention including books whose subject-narrative is public school education.

At times, Kozol considers himself a journalist. (In *Children of the Revolution*,²⁸ he refers to himself in that term.) But it was as a teacher that he first came in contact with deplorable conditions in public education and determined to document them advancing his own literary style to do so.

Reading writers like Kozol, Kohl, Herndon, Kidder, Hentoff, Conroy, and Freedman offers persuasive evidence that, as Hollowell notes, literary journalism is a

²⁵Giddens, Elizabeth J. (1990). "John McPhee's Rhetoric of Balance and Perspective," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee, p. 4.

²⁶Ravitch, *The Schools We Deserve*, p. 35.

²⁷Ravitch, *The Schools We Deserve*, p. 89.

²⁸Kozol, Jonathan. (1975). *Children of the Revolution*. New York: Crown, p. xviii.

"rebellion against formula,"²⁹ and literary journalists "tend to admit the inevitability of imparting their own vision to the world" as James Murphy suggests.³⁰ Both tendencies are embraced by the authors of books on public school education.

Techniques of Moral Vision and Authority

From Kozol to Kidder, Hentoff to Conroy, Kohl to Herndon to Freedman, readers often catch glimpses of the "righteous indignation" coined by Ida Tarbell almost a century ago. There are facts; there is recall; there is the telling of a story. But, foremost, there is the articulation of a decline in the quality of public school education which the authors experienced, especially in the inner city. By writing about it, they "acknowledge that their connection to a community and its moral order allows them to identify outrages against that order."³¹ In Burkean terms, this is the principle of "identification" in operation. Education authors, many as teachers within a "crisis-ridden" institution become spokespersons or advocates for students as victims of that institution. Many authors, as seen in Chapter Six, become victims themselves when the institution fire them. But social change is brought about through "identification."

To exist socially is to be rhetorically aligned. It is the function of the intellectual as critical rhetor to uncover, bring into the light, and probe all such alignments. This is part of the work of ideological analysis. Only when such political work of identification is understood, when our various and devious identities are put on the table, when our involvements are brought thus bluntly before us, in all their significant detail: only then can the rhetorical work of transformation realistically begin.³²

Education writers assume an advocacy position, using their skills as writing stylists and raising their voices to protest levels in an effort to represent the children being observed. That advocacy spirit was summed up well by Connery in writing about Gay

²⁹Hollowell. *Fact and Fiction*, p. 50.

³⁰Murphy, "The New Journalism: . . ." *Journalism Monographs* #34, p. 24.

³¹Glasser & Ettema. (1989). "Investigative Journalism and the Moral Order," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 6(1), p. 9.

³²Lentricchia, p. 149.

Talese. Connery contends that Talese presents what he knows to be true "*on his own authority*" [italics added]. He comes through as a sophisticated observer; he knows a lot. He's been around."³³ These writers speak on their own authority; they are sophisticated observers as they compile their information; they do know a lot about education, most having been teachers themselves; and they get around enough to discern that something is tragically wrong with the public education provided racial minorities and the poor, especially in urban environments. In other words, they speak with ethical authority.

The ethical authority surfaces to some degree in the literature of the sage, a tradition George Landow distinguishes in *Elegant Jeremiahs*. Landow states the many devices of the sage throughout history include:

(1) a characteristic alternation of satire and positive, even visionary statement, that is frequently accompanied by (2) a parallel alternation of attacks upon the audience and attempts to reassure or inspire it; (3) a frequent concentration upon apparently trivial phenomena as the subject of interpretation; (4) an episodic or discontinuous literary structure that depends upon analogical relations for unity and coherence; (5) a reliance upon grotesque contemporary phenomena, such as the murder of children, or grotesque metaphor, parable, and analogy; (6) satiric and idiosyncratic definitions of key terms; (7) and an essential reliance upon *ethos*, or the appeal to credibility.³⁴

Public education writers, in various circumstances and under certain conditions, employed many of these prophetic devices of the sage. This will become more apparent in the analysis of the books found in Chapter Six.

John M. Coward's comments about Tracy Kidder help refine further the concept of moral vision linked with ethical authority:

[B]y rooting *Among Schoolchildren* in one classroom, Kidder celebrates the particular and frames the debate over public education in human terms, a refreshing change from the doublespeak that frequently overtakes this topic.³⁵

³³Connery, Thomas B. (ed.) (1992). *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*. New York: Greenwood Press.

³⁴Landow, George P. (1986). *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 28-29.

³⁵Coward, John M. (1992). "Tracy Kidder." in Connery, *A Sourcebook*, p. 385.

And while Coward finds "no overt personal or ideological agenda to advance in his [Kidder's] writings" (unlike some literary journalists including Norman Mailer and Hunter Thompson), he clearly views Kidder as well within the genre:

By immersing himself in Chris Zajac's routine and shadowing her and her pupils as they plod through the school year, Kidder again highlights the extra-ordinary textures of ordinary life. And by focusing so intensely for so long on one teacher, Kidder's portrait of Chris Zajac reaches a level of psychological truth unmatched in his other books.³⁶

These "extra-ordinary textures of ordinary life" gain much of their appeal through writers' use of varied literary techniques. Select devices of literary journalism--immersion, status details, point of view--as Coward suggests, provide public education writers with the semblance of objectivity in their writing. The "moral vision" they display is drawn from their own investigative reporting. The combination of objectivity and "moral vision,"³⁷ in turn, creates the mass appeal of many of their books. It likewise creates the "dilemma of moral craftwork within the culture of objectivity" which, as Glasser and Ettema contend, yields its own mass appeal.

The solution to this dilemma is often an appeal to common decency, an appeal that provides essential moral energy to even the most elaborately objectified story. This appeal differs from the others because it is not an explicit enumerating of objective standards but rather an implicit invocation of commonsensical standards. The authority of this appeal lies not merely in its embedding of widely shared interpretations within the facts of the situation. This appeal is powerful precisely because it is implicit. It is made within and through an 'objective' description of the situation, a story in which the facts seem to speak for themselves.³⁸

This explanation parallels the tacit point of agreement--the assumption--in rhetoric.

A wonderful example of this insight (and of rhetorical appeal) into moral common sense occurs when Kozol, in *Savage Inequalities*, invokes the Pledge of

³⁶Coward, in Connery, *A Sourcebook*, p. 384.

³⁷"Moral vision" used in the context here relates well to the prophetic voice concept espoused by George Landow in his book *Elegant Jeremiahs*. More references will be made to the concept in later chapters.

³⁸Glasser and Ettema. "Investigative Journalism," p. 14.

Allegiance with its "one nation indivisible" phrase to underscore the irony in the use of educational resources:

The nation is hardly "indivisible" where education is concerned. It is at least two nations, quite methodically divided, with a fair amount of liberty for some, no liberty that justifies the word for many others, and justice--in the sense of playing on a nearly even field--only for the kids whose parents can afford to purchase it.³⁹

Kozol's appeal--the ironic use of the Pledge of Allegiance--is a call to a bedrock principle of American democracy: All are created equal, and subsequently, should have the same advantages under the law. Once again, from a rhetorical perspective, Kozol's writing provides a literal example of tacit agreement on the part of readers. Kozol assumes his readers are quite familiar with the Pledge of Allegiance and the core values which underly its rhetoric. Kozol, whose "rage is so general and so often misplaced,"⁴⁰ admits to having literary journalist Truman Capote, for one, as a particular writer model.⁴¹ The linkage then between the select public education writers in this study and the genre in which they write is that all make use of a variety of the devices of literary journalism and investigative reporting for whatever reasons. All have found the combination useful to highlight the lack of progress in public school educational reform among poor and minority groups especially.

Literary Techniques

If through a variety of rhetorical and other literary devices, public education writing seeks to challenge prevailing social outlooks, and if public school education remains at the forefront of American consciousness, the literary journalism of public school education between 1967 and 1991 would seem to speak to the issue of inequitable distribution of resources. How do certain contemporary American education writers of the period from 1967 to the present address the inequities of

³⁹Kozol, 1991. *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. New York: Crown, p. 212.

⁴⁰Rabon & Saunders, p. 335.

⁴¹Kozol, Jonathan. (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

public education and its continued inequality? What implicit or explicit statements are made regarding the role of the formal educational system and its influence on various cultural entities especially minorities and the poor? How do select books use literary journalism's observational and textual techniques to highlight perspectives and bring about change? These questions are examined (explored) as analyses of representative works which emphasize dramatic techniques of the authors; further, the analyses locate the authors' thematic approaches to education within a democratic structure which embodies such broader issues as identity and empowerment.

A primary concern among these writers is establishing a sense of connection with their subject, or in Burkean terms, "identification." These books involve a level of intensity perhaps because most of the authors have been teachers themselves. (In other words, author and subject are closely identified.) Sims notes "Literary journalism wasn't defined by critics; the writers themselves have recognized that the craft requires *immersion, structure, voice, and accuracy*" [italics added].⁴² As teachers, most education writers were immersed in their subject on an ongoing basis, not just for purposes of writing a book (*ethos*). That immersion, in turn, lent itself to a representative portrayal of conditions within schools and classrooms, accurate insofar as it was an eyewitness account. As Coward, again, has noted about Kidder in *Among Schoolchildren*, "Kidder is the hidden but nearly omniscient observer, emphasizing the small but important lessons. . . ."⁴³ Immersion, accuracy, and another literary journalism device, status details, seem implicit in Coward's view, all helping to demonstrate the writer's identification with subject.⁴⁴

⁴²Sims, Norman (ed.). (1990). Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century. New York: Oxford University Press, p. 8.

⁴³Coward, in Connery, A Sourcebook, p. 385.

⁴⁴Sheer speculation would suggest that a teacher turned author becomes an inquiring moral agent seeking to address or change policies which negatively affect children.

Structure might be a bit harder to pin down, not only with respect to the authors in this research but to the entire genre. To describe it, as Norman Sims does, as the "structural design that gives order, balance, and unity to a work, the elements of form that relate the parts of each other and to the whole"⁴⁵ says little. If, however, *structure* can be more specifically grounded in story and plot, then Weber's lengthy construction is clearly widened in the literary journalism of public school education:

A story is a narrative of events arranged chronologically; this happened and then this happened. A plot is also a narrative of events, but with an emphasis on causality; this happened and then this happened and for this reason. A story requires only curiosity on the reader's part, but a plot demands intelligence and memory and so is a more elevated way of treating events.⁴⁶

But while *structure* as a technique has often been poorly defined except when associated with story and plot, the device of *interior monologue* has drawn considerable comment, much of it negative, and, in part, seems the reason why literary journalism, especially and in general, is held suspect by some of its critics. Simply defined, interior monologue means being inside the consciousness of a character; some literary and journalistic purists hate it because of a presumed lack of objectivity; they seek a form of scientific pragmatism instead. Yet those who practice it contend that asking the right questions at the right time produced insight into a character's thoughts.⁴⁷ This technique is much less widely used by the authors in this study, with the exception of Kidder. The following extended selection at the very beginning of *Among Schoolchildren* demonstrates its effectiveness, nonetheless:

Mrs. Zajac wasn't born yesterday. She knows you didn't do your best work on this paper, Clarence. Don't you remember Mrs. Zajac saying that if you didn't do your best, she'd make you do it over? As for you, Claude, God forbid that you should ever need brain surgery. But Mrs. Zajac hopes that if you do, the doctor won't open up your head and walk off saying he's almost done, as you just said when Mrs. Zajac asked you for your penmanship, which, by the way, looks like who did it and ran. Felipe, the reason you have hiccups is, your mouth is always open and the wind

⁴⁵Sims, *Literary Journalists*, p. 14.

⁴⁶Weber, Ronald. (1980). *The Literature of Fact*. Athens: The University of Ohio Press, p. 74.

⁴⁷Weber, *The Literature of Fact*, p. 29.

rushes in. You're in fifth grade now. So, Felipe, put a lock on it. Zip it up. Then go get a drink of water. Mrs. Zajac means business, Robert. The sooner you realize she never said everybody in the room has to do the work except for Robert, the sooner you'll get along with her. And . . . Clarence. Mrs. Zajac knows you didn't try. You don't just hand in junk to Mrs. Zajac. She's been teaching an awful lot of years. She didn't fall off the turnip cart yesterday. She told you she was an old-lady teacher.⁴⁸

However, despite the "facts" conveyed in this example, criticism of interior monologue, also known as point-of-view, abounds. John Tebbel's belief that the personal style of the writer intrudes into the scene is representative.⁴⁹

By far the most persistent literary journalism technique among public school authors, however, is *voice* rhetorically defined as *ethos*. Whether that voice is characterized by the general rage and anger of a Kozol, the specific criticism of teachers leveled by Hentoff, the steady banter with himself introduced by Herndon, the confessional tone of Kohl, the self-righteous style of Conroy or the quiet, unobtrusive observations of Kidder and Freedman, voice stands out as though these writers individually are using their respective talents as advocates for the underdog. The voice is usually strengthened by use of the personal pronoun "I." Sims believes literary journalists are no longer worried about "self," but are more concerned about tactics for effective telling which may require the varying presence of an "I" from time to time. Sims further holds that "Frequently, the writer's decision to use a personal voice grows from a feeling that publicly shared manners and morals can no longer be taken for granted."⁵⁰ This "restatement" of common values becomes the overt purpose behind the use of first person.

Put another way, it's as though the personal voice of the writer signified through frequent use of the pronoun "I" attempts to enunciate a sense of personal shame or guilt at conditions described. In so doing, the writer attempts to

⁴⁸Kidder, *Among Schoolchildren*. p. 3.

⁴⁹Tebbel, John. (1971, March). "The Old New Journalism," *Saturday Review*, 13, p. 96.

⁵⁰Sims, *Literary Journalism*, pp. 17-18.

re-establish a value, or values, that can be recognized because they were once commonly shared with the reader and should be again. The use of first person narrative also adds the weight of authority, or experience as paradigm, as an eyewitness. In addition, the reader is apt to identify more closely with the writer, if for no other reason than the emotional intensity delivered through first person.

Documenting Techniques

The education authors in an attempt to document children as victims, tell the story of public education in very human terms, to put the reader "in the shoes" of the participants in the human documentary drama of public schooling in ghetto America. The feeling, or emotional value associated with the human documentation thus becomes the reader's rationale, in part, for reading them. But by documenting the victims of public school inequities, these education authors are also providing a form of social commentary which they show in a variety of ways, from direct quotes, to published facts and statistics, to their own powerful, outraged voices. The writers provide what William Stott calls "Social documentary . . . [which] shows man at grips with conditions neither permanent nor necessary, conditions of a certain time and place. . . . One might say truly that a human document deals with natural phenomena, and social documentary with man-made."⁵¹ The following extended description from Herbert Kohl's *36 Children* is a masterful example of documenting the social environment of inner city schools. Kohl has asked his 6th grade class to write, as homework, a description of "what their block was like, what they felt about it." Two days later, he had his responses.

The day after we talked about them. I had asked for the truth and it presented its ugly head in the classroom, yet I didn't know what to do about it. That was all I could say to the children--that I was moved, angry, yet as powerless to change things as they were. I remembered *How We Became Modern America*, the books I couldn't use, and felt dumb, expressionless--how else can one put up with such lies of

⁵¹Stott, William. (1973). Documentary Expression and Thirties America, New York: Oxford UP, p. 20.

use, and felt dumb, expressionless--how else can one put up with such lies of progress, prosperity, and cheerful cooperation when we do face problems? The next day the children wrote of how they would change things if they could.⁵²

After reading this second set of papers, Kohl responds in his own voice of outrage and frustration.

How we became modern America, how we became modern man--that was our problem, my problem to teach, but where to start, at what moment in history does one say, 'Ah, here's where it all began'? How could the children get some saving perspective on the mad chaotic world they existed in, some sense of the universality of struggle, the possibility of revolution and change, and the strength to persist? That, if anything, was my challenge as a teacher--it was spelled out before me unambiguously. Could I find anything in human history and the human soul that would strengthen the children and save them from despair?⁵³

Perhaps the reason this works, as documentary, so effectively is because

Documentary deals with people 'a damn sight realer' than the celebrities that crowd the media. These people, far from being the society's rulers, are often its most deprived and powerless subjects. They often feel (often with reason) overlooked, unheard. . . . [Documentary] gives the inarticulate a voice.⁵⁴

Kohl's muffled outrage seems to focus on a particular set of values which only part of the population shares and enjoys, perhaps under the general rubric of "the pursuit of happiness." In exposing the debasement of certain values, then using his own anguished voice to interpret them, Kohl provides first rate evidence of what Glasser and Ettema call the

paradoxical nature of news that the ideological consequences of a press seeking to be the 'custodian of conscience' is an intimate, if always tentative, connection between the press and the moral order. We also recognize, however, that the consequence of a press seeking, at the same time, to be a detached observer is a devalued, censored, and repressed connection between the press and the public conscience.⁵⁵

For his part, Kidder admits "The history of education in America is the history of attempts to reform it," a direction both his own book and the authors he cites are moving toward, reinforcing to a large degree Hellmann's idea of the author-reader

⁵²Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 49.

⁵³Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 51-52.

⁵⁴Stott, *Documentary Expression*, p. 56.

⁵⁵Glasser & Ettema. "Investigative Journalism and the Moral Order," p. 19.

nonfiction convinces the reader that the work is "adequate as history" and also presents the material "in the name of fiction," then "the result can be a special reading experience, combining the absorbing power of fact with the special resonance of fiction."⁵⁶ Wayne Booth helps inform the point.

Each narrative, fictional or historical, provides an alternative story in a created 'world' that is itself a fresh alternative to the 'world' or 'worlds' previously serving as boundaries of the reader's imagination.⁵⁷

These traits are not theory and only serve to quantify the genre. Besides, merely characterizing the genre in this fashion, as Foley says, "evades the question of generic identity."⁵⁸ A reader-writer contract theory of literary journalism, however, begins to move beyond the realm of mere listing of techniques. It taps a common theme underlining many of these same critics' analyses of the genre, namely that reader involvement is an intimate component of any literary journalism text. It furthermore highlights the author-reader dyad as crucial to any understanding of literary journalism. As Feehan has stated,

Artists abstract out of the continuum of everyday life the key values in social conflict and transform them *for purposes of audience response* into esthetic 'superstructural' elements⁵⁹ [italics added].

This appeal to the public conscience at the expense of establishment morality using personal voice is quite evident in Kozol who makes no excuses for it: "What the upper crust [society's elite] calls civility [in discourse] the poorer classes would term 'psychotic'."⁶⁰ The voices of literary journalists of public school education have taken on "a journalistic style that aimed to sensitize its audience to the experience of others by exploring the universalism of their humanity."⁶¹

⁵⁶Weber, Ronald. (1979). "Art-journalism revisited." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 78(3), p. 289.

⁵⁷Booth, Wayne. (1988). *The Company We Keep*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 17.

⁵⁸Foley, Barbara. (1979). "Fact, Fiction, and 'Reality,'" *Contemporary Literature*, 20(3), p. 394.

⁵⁹Feehan, Michael. (1979). "Kenneth Burke's Discovery of Dramatism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65(4), p. 408.

⁶⁰Kozol, Jonathan. (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

⁶¹Evensen, Bruce J. (1992). "Abraham Cahan," in Connery, *A Sourcebook*, p. 91.

taken on "a journalistic style that aimed to sensitize its audience to the experience of others by exploring the universalism of their humanity."⁶¹

There are limits, of course, to the exercise of voice among all literary journalists. Weber sees the writer of literary nonfiction as "finally restrained by his commitment to the facts."⁶² In this sense, literary journalists of public school education are, at root, reporters. One in particular, Samuel G. Freedman, spent many years in just that capacity as an investigative reporter for *The New York Times* before taking time off to research and write the account of one year in the life of a New York City public school teacher. His book, *Small Victories*, is analyzed in a later chapter. As investigators reporting school issues of the day, the "reporter explores a hidden world or provides an insider's view, and when his writing is supported by careful research, then the new [literary] journalist can convey his insights powerfully to a receptive audience."⁶³

It is voice then (rhetorically defined as *ethos*), coupled with documented facts that have added much more legitimacy to the argument made by public education writers that educational reform, in general, has failed. This voice of anger and rage was tempered with more documentation in the 1990s, causing former critics of authors like Kozol to see him in a different light. "Unrelenting dogmatism" of old is gone because "He documents the incredible abuse throughout the public schools in America" and "brings a voice to his analysis of the causes for this human degradation that is solid, resonant, and moving."⁶⁴ From an individual writer's perspective, that newly acclaimed legitimacy may have as much to do with his maturity as a writer, less

⁶¹Evensen, Bruce J. (1992). "Abraham Cahan," in Connery, *A Sourcebook*, p. 91.

⁶²Weber, *The Literature of Fact*, p. 45.

⁶³Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction*, p. 151.

⁶⁴Rabon & Saunders, pp. 337, 343-344.

I wonder if people will read what I write 100 years from now, so I'm focusing not merely on the moment and particular issue, be it education or the homeless, but on human nature in general. Phrasing, for one, has become more important to me.⁶⁵

Mas'vd Zavarzadel, in 1975, stated: "The nonfiction novel is the 'fiction' of people who have lost faith in any single interpretation of reality. For them, the only authentic 'fiction' is the fiction of facts."⁶⁶ There is heavy reliance on facts among public education literary journalists. This has helped confirm their voices in the eyes of the more scholarly critics while raising the argument of the failure of educational reform to a higher plane in the mass market. At the same time, public education book authors have shown that "Journalism can be enriched by the judicious use of techniques of the fiction writer; it is when the journalist starts to borrow the prerogatives of the fiction writer that he gets into trouble."⁶⁷ Based on this research, the authors here have not crossed the line over to "prerogatives," but have stayed with the "techniques" outlined in this chapter. The techniques--rhetorical and literary--may be summarized as follows:

- rhetorical: moral vision, voice, use of first person, tone, ethos, credibility;
- literary: immersion, status details, direct quotes, interior monologues, structure, point of view, documentation.

The authors of these books about education made frequent use of a variety of these techniques which aided in creating awareness, promoting a value, and producing reform.

⁶⁵Kozol, Jonathan. (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

⁶⁶Zavarzadel, Mas'ud. (1975, April). "The Apocalyptic fact and the eclipse of fiction in recent American prose narratives." *Journal of American Studies*, 9, p. 77.

⁶⁷Fishkin, Shelly Fisher. (1985). *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, pp. 9-10.

Selection Criteria

The books chosen for study provide only a sampling of the hundreds of education books published each year since 1967. Their selection was based on these criteria: 1) written as a narrative or story; 2) published between 1967 and 1991; 3) focused (at least in part) on the victimization of poor, minority children; 4) implied unfair distribution of resources; 5) employed a variety of literary, investigative, and sage writing techniques.

Some outstanding books were eliminated using even such broad criteria. For instance, two philosophically extreme yet lively and popular books--Paul Goodman's *Compulsory Miseducation* (New York: Horizon, 1967) and Edgar Friedenburg's *Coming of Age in America* (New York: Bantam, 1963)--were not selected. Both were published before the time frame for this study and did not focus primarily on unfair distribution of resources. Their radical stance also separated them from the reform bias of most authors chosen. (This distinction--radical versus reform--could be one without much difference if the distinction is based solely on the question being asked, e.g., "Should something be done?" becomes radical when phrased "How should it be done?")

The literary and rhetorical techniques standard eliminated two excellent studies of public school education during the period in question, Charles Silberman's *Crisis in the Classroom* (New York: Random House, 1970) and Theodore R.Sizer's *Horace's Compromise* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984). Both of these books are far more descriptive than narrative in format and make little use of interior monologue, status details and immersion, for example.

This set of criteria, as limited as it is, results in the selection of nine books written by seven authors, all white males. No purposeful attempt was made to limit

the study in this manner nor was an effort made to exclude books written by women and minorities. Such books undoubtedly exist, but none were found especially during the early part of the time frame for the study, the 1960s. Certainly no other texts achieved the measure of public commentary, for and against, that the books by Kozol, Kohl and Herndon did during the 1960s, nor have any others been recognized as National Book Award winners like Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren* (1989) and Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* (1991). To summarize then: the books about public education researched were narratives telling the story of unfair treatment of poor, minority children. These books used a variety of literary and rhetorical techniques and were published between 1967 and 1991, a period in which many informed citizens realized the public schools had not achieved the promise set out in the *Brown* decision. The research next provides some historical perspective on why these books were written.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: BACKGROUND AND RESPONSE

In April 1983, the National Commission on Education in Excellence opined, "Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them." "A Nation At Risk," the celebrated formal report of the Commission, warned the nation of a "rising tide of mediocrity" in its schools sparking further debate over the reforms necessary to correct the problem.

At about the same time, education historian and commentator Diane Ravitch was telling Americans,

Every nation gets the schools that it deserves, and we have today a system that reflects our own conflicts about the relative importance of different social and educational values.¹

But the cries and concerns over the nation's schools have been part and parcel of the written history of education particularly since the 1950s. The nation's first educational crisis in the postwar era emerged in the early 1950s in reaction to the tenets of progressive education. Critics of progressive education charged that it fostered poor classroom discipline, de-emphasized mastery of basic subject matter, abandoned the study of Western culture and failed to teach respect for hard, sustained work. Always, books were part of the "crisis" mentality which sought to direct attention to and reform education.

¹Ravitch, Diane. (1985). The Schools We Deserve, p. 46.

Influential books, such as Arthur Bestor's *Educational Wastelands* (1953) and Albert Lynd's *Quackery in the Public Schools* (1953) took educators to task for abandoning rigorous intellectual training. Others picked at various teaching methods. For example, Rudolph Flesch started a national debate in 1955 with the publication of *Why Johnny Can't Read*, an attack on the "look-say" method of reading instruction. Flesch maintained that the only way to make children independent readers was through a "phonics first" approach.²

The point is that whenever one tracks the history of education in this country, especially from the 1950s on, one of the best methods is to note the list of published books on the subject. An equally effective tracking mechanism is to record the titles, or summarize, official government publications of various appointed commissions, or simply to follow the progress of federal legislation.

For example, by the time the Soviets launched the first earth satellite in October 1957, the United States was primed for change. Sputnik became a symbol of the cost of indifference to educational excellence. Broad public support for a federal response to the Soviet challenge led Congress to pass the National Defense Education Act of 1958 to encourage college students to study science, mathematics and foreign languages. As Ravitch has noted:

The orbiting of Sputnik in 1957 marked a new crisis when Americans discovered the costs of neglecting science, mathematics, and foreign languages in the secondary schools. Meanwhile, the prolonged struggle against racial inequality, both before and after the *Brown* decisions, provided a recurrent source of strife. And then, in the mid-1960s, schools were again under fire, this time because of student protests and reformers who advocated such innovations as open classrooms, schools-

²"Illiteracy in America," (1983). Educational Research Reports, Vol. 1, pp. 475-490.

without-walls, experiential learning, deschooling, and other arrangements whose common denominator was greater student choice and diminished adult authority.³

The reform books of that era, beginning in 1967, continuing down to the present are classified as "a journalism of outrage" for our research purposes here. Credit for that term belongs to David Protess and others who in 1991 published their own explanations of how investigative reporting helps build agendas in America for various issues of public concern.⁴ The public school education writers in this study certainly helped build an agenda for education during the period under study in this research, but they also drew serious criticism from educators of different persuasions who felt the agenda was wrong-headed or extreme. Again, Ravitch's comments are worth noting, though she is not the only voice of opposition.

From the mid-1960s until the late 1970s, radical attacks on the schools were commonplace; the bookstores teemed with intemperate denunciations of the schools But who was listening to these calumnies? Consider the gap between elite and mass opinion in the late 1960s.⁵

What Ravitch refers to is the gap between the public's perception of education problems and diagnoses of the ills facing schools made by "elite" writers and policy-makers. For example, lack of discipline was the highest priority according to the 1969 Gallup Poll's first survey of public attitudes toward education, while the "policy-making elites were looking at more esoteric priorities."⁶

Another critic of the reform movement of the 1960s, Allan C. Ornstein, drew some even more striking conclusions.

³Ravitz, The Schools We Deserve, p. 46.

⁴Protess, David, et al., The Journalism of Outrage. Also see FN 26, p. 11 of this study.

⁵Ravitz, The Schools We Deserve, p. 13.

⁶Ravitz, The Schoos We Deserve, p. 13.

The radical critics were concerned about how obedient, passive, and mechanical students were in the classroom. Academic excellence and vigorous thinking no longer mattered; awareness of social problems and the need for humanizing schools were considered of vital importance. To excite matters more, a number of novice teachers within this group began writing about their short-lived experiences in ghetto schools--in one swoop, condemning *all* teachers (except themselves, of course) in these schools for their 'incompetency,' 'insensitivity,' and 'racism.' Although these critics were not Black or Chicano, the messages they sent were not lost among minority groups, and this was at a time when people in the ghettos became aroused and militant.⁷

Ornstein's comments are well chosen insofar as they address the fact that it was novice teachers who helped build an agenda for school reform and focus attention on the inequitable distribution of resources in ghetto schools "writing about their short-lived experiences" in narrative form.

The "crisis" syndrome in education was echoed again in the late 1960s when Charles E. Silberman's best seller *Crisis in the Classroom* popularized the notion that the pendulum had swung too far toward academic rigor at the expense of those being taught. Silberman and others held that schools rewarded students for being docile and obedient, not for thinking and acting independently.

Often overshadowing the debate on instruction, however, was the struggle to provide equal educational opportunity to the nation's minorities, women, the handicapped and bilingual children. The U.S. Supreme Court outlawed state-mandated "separate but equal" public schools in its *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of May 17, 1954. But the Court left it to lower courts to implement desegregation and the pace was slow. By 1964, less than two percent of black pupils in the former Confederate states were attending desegregated schools. To help

⁷Ornstein, Allan C. (1977). "Critics and Criticism of Education," *Educational Forum*, 42(1), p. 23.

speed desegregation, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which made technical and financial assistance available to desegregating school districts and, for the first time, allowed the federal government to withhold funds from any school district practicing discrimination.

In all, the literature surrounding public school education from the 1950s to the 1980s moved from "crisis to crisis" with reformers, progressives, radicals, and most others in between having their say as to what constituted, in Ravitch's words, the "good school." The dynamics of what constituted the "good school" were described, reviewed, and explained in many of the published books of the period. The reality of mostly urban, mostly ghetto, always underfunded public schools was told through the narratives, "books that shared a similar sensibility, attacking the oppressiveness and conformity of the traditional school and calling for teachers who encouraged spontaneity, compassion, sensitivity, and self-expression, rather than competition for grades and test scores."⁸ That spirit of progressivism continues only now, it has added to it the moral vision which demands that all public schoolchildren, regardless of race, share equally in the distribution of education resources. As David Boaz recently asked,

How many more generations of American children, especially in our inner cities, are we going to condemn to a poor education, while politicians and school administrators proclaim their good intentions?⁹

In American society during the period under study, the role of the formal educational system proved a central issue of social concern. Various parties, often

⁸Ravitch, *The Schools We Deserve*, p. 84.

⁹Boaz, David. (1993, July 5). "School Reform Was a Failure: Try Vouchers." *Insight*, 9, p. 18.

with varying interests, used judicial, legislative, and media venues to confront and debate issues of education. Court decisions involving education received much attention, especially those relating to the economics of school budgets. As of September 1992, 23 states were engaged in lawsuits based upon differences in spending between school districts or alleged inadequacies of funding.¹⁰

Historically, property taxes have been the major funding mechanism for public school education in a majority of states, though "over the long haul they have dropped in importance." Since 1965, when it was 44.1 percent, for example, the property tax as a percentage of all state and local taxes, has dropped to 32 percent. In part, the drop is attributable to legal challenges to property taxes with 29 states faced with such challenges as of June 1993.¹¹ Legislatures struggle with the issue. For instance, the Texas Legislature, after courts ruled against several of its proposals, recently approved an amendment to the State Constitution authorizing the redistribution of funds from wealthier school districts to poorer ones. Yet the amendment still must be approved by public referendum; proponents argue that the funding measure would satisfy judicial concerns, while critics claim the plan would not remedy educational inequities. Parents and local school boards also continue to demand improvement in student test scores. That such books as Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* or Jonathan Kozol's *Savage Inequities* should make best-seller lists indicates the interest of the general public in educational issues. The American public grants a special place to education and acknowledges its crucial role

¹⁰Cellis III, William. (1992, September 2). "23 States Face Suits on School Funds." New York Times, Natl. ed., p. A13.

¹¹Horowitz, Carl. (1994, April 7). "Property Tax in Full Retreat," Investor's Business Daily, 10(23), p. 1.

in the development of the social order, including narratives incorporating literary journalism techniques.

Education and the Gallup Poll

Two education issues, in particular, suggest the possible influence the published accounts under review here may have had and thereby help inform the historical perspective of these public education books. In the 25th Annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools published in October 1993, equal funding of public schools and improving inner-city schools received widespread support.¹²

Among issues addressed were school funding, education reform, academic achievement, and paying tax towards education. (Any statistical information in this chapter is derived from this poll unless otherwise noted.) Among the poll's major findings were these two:

- 1) In 1993 lack of proper financial support has clearly emerged as the number one public school problem ... Significantly, the respondents who most clearly recognized the inadequacy of school financing were college graduates, upper-income and professional and business groups, and public school parents.

Statistically, the poll found "A sizeable majority," some 68 percent of more than 1300 persons surveyed felt that the quality of public schooling does depend "a great deal" on how much money is spent. Even more remarkable, 90 percent of the

¹²For a complete review of applicable figures supporting this claim, reference is made to Stanley M. Elam, Lowell C. Rose, and Alec M. Gallup, (1993, October). "The 25th Annual Phi Beta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan, 75, 137-152. In drawing its results, the poll used the Gallup Organization's standard national telephone sample, meaning an unclustered, directory-assisted, random-digit telephone sample, based on a proportionate stratified sampling design.

respondents felt more needed to be done "to improve the quality of public schools in the poorer states and poorer communities." It is worth noting that among the more vocal issues raised by the authors of a journalism of outrage, especially Jonathan Kozol, was the lack of equal funding of public schools.

- 2) Alarm about the condition of America's inner-city schools has been growing rapidly in recent years, as many of these schools continue to deteriorate. The concerns of educators who are familiar with the problem have been *graphically described in Jonathan Kozol's most recent book, Savage Inequalities* (italics added).¹³

The poll found 81 percent, again "A large majority," felt it very important that inner-city schools be improved, an increase from 74 percent when the question was first asked. The question to be asked, then, is this: How much of that increase is attributable to Kozol's book? But even more significantly, 60 percent of those surveyed compared to 38 percent four years earlier were willing to pay more federal taxes to improve quality in the nation's inner schools. Need the point be made that seven of nine books in this study deal with inner-city schools as the focus of scene? Furthermore, need we be reminded that it is the outrage at inequities in funding and the lack of resources available to racial minorities in public schools which generated the voice of outrage inherent in *all* the books under study here?

Very simply, the cycle of reform and criticism which inhabits the historical discourse surrounding public education in this country suggests the subject is a lively one understood from a variety of perspectives, each seeking to create a higher level of awareness for its respective position. The overall impact of the public debate

¹³For purposes of additional review, tabular results of both issues just discussed--equal funding and support for inner-city schools--are presented in Appendix A. All data is taken, verbatim, from the Gallup Poll results as published in October 1993.

would seem to have raised the issue of public education to a more salient level if Gallup Poll results are any indication.

CHAPTER FOUR

EDUCATION WRITERS: INVESTIGATIVE SAGES

Unlike some of the best known writers of literary journalism, those who have written about public education from "inside the classroom" have not laid claim to creating a new genre; rather, the writers found in this study have focused on using their talents to raise the issue and its inherent inequalities to a higher level of public consciousness. Calling attention to the genre itself isolated from any particular issue has been left to the early practitioners of the style, writers like Capote and Wolfe, who have been able to gain much scholarly acclaim and attention for nonfiction journalism. Mailer and Thompson have also gained public attention for the genre, as much by the force of their personalities as by the quality of their writing.

Other writers were more subtly using the same genre to examine and expose the inequities of public education. Why then should the efforts of popular 1960s literary journalists overshadow similar literary efforts engaged in by public school education writers--the likes of Herndon, Kohl, and Kozol? First, subject matter devoted to mass murder or a massive march on Washington alone would bear more popular "fruit" than public schools. As Ravitch points out, "Usually, education is taken for granted as a public service that is available on an 'as is' basis."¹ Education just didn't have the popular mass following that the mainline literary journalists of the 1960s found for their respective subjects.

¹Ravitch, The Schools We Deserve, p. 3.

Secondly, the mass market literary journalists wrote for popular literary/mass market magazines of the day. Their names drew quick recognition. Furthermore, in a few cases, they chose to write about the very type of writing they were producing. This meta-literary commentary helped spark the revival of literary journalism (non-fiction) which, in turn, spawned follow-up critical studies of a more scholarly nature. Public school education writers rarely used their prose to comment on how they wrote; there is no comment within the books as to the individual writer's writing process. The subject matter was too important, the conditions too outrageous to allow for anything less than exposition and analysis of the education phenomenon.²

Kozol turned to similar literary techniques a quarter century later, writing *Savage Inequalities* in which he detailed funding inequities and a seeming racial bias in a number of urban school districts around the country. In an interview in *Playboy* in 1992 shortly after the publication of *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol made no references to the form of literary journalism but rather continued to articulate his main theme of racial and funding imbalances in the public schools he visited. Unlike earlier writers in the genre, Kozol focused on the issue of public education as a form of culture study; his own instructional posts mattered less. The outraged voices raised at what was going on inside the classrooms of America effaced the writer's own sense of self-importance in bringing the matter to public attention and, perhaps, scrutiny. This voice of outrage serves ultimately as the distinctive feature in the literary journalism of public school education and distinguishes it from other forms of literary journalism. In this, Kozol and many of the other education authors display traits of

²In a telephone interview, October 12, 1993, Jonathan Kozol made some specific, though brief, comments about his writing process. He admitted that through the years of maturing as a writer, he thinks more carefully of the "literary qualities of my writing." He also works through considerably more revisions with each book. Having once studied English Literature at Harvard, he contends, of recent efforts especially, "I've come back to my roots: literary criticism."

"Modern sages . . . [who] necessarily present themselves as groping toward the truth."³

In *Savage Inequalities*, Kozol continues "groping toward the truth" as he draws a specific connection between cultural history and the failure of public education. Describing the situation in Paterson and Camden, New Jersey, Kozol addresses what few choices poor children especially have:

Paterson . . . was the home of the poet William Carlos Williams. But students at East Side High will get to know no more of William Carlos Williams than their peers at Woodrow Wilson High in Camden know about the writings of Walt Whitman.⁴

Kozol's two books frame the time period for this study. That also proves to be ideal for a comparison of how techniques of literary journalism evident in public school education books have undergone their own metamorphosis in the same manner that the writers, Kozol in particular, have. Not only have the obvious physical features of the books themselves been altered (for example, many of the early ones were paperbacks only), but the level of content documentation has also grown more scholarly. Even more significantly, the voice level contains a tinge of outrage reminiscent of the best prophetic voices of the past. This voice has all the "sound" of credibility because "I was there; I saw this unfair treatment of children." For Kozol and others, it is an *ethos*, which "becomes the major effect and not merely a subsidiary or contributing one."⁵

Nor are facts neglected. For example, Kozol's first book, *Death At An Early Age*, totaled 20 chapters, was minus an index and contained but five pages of documentation and explanatory notes. *Savage Inequalities*, addressing the public

³Landow, George P. (1986). *Elegant Jeremiahs: The Sage from Carlyle to Mailer*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, p. 35.

⁴Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, p. 161.

⁵Landow, p. 40.

school situation 25 years later, contains only seven chapters though just as many pages, a six-page index, and 17 pages of notes. On the surface, the conclusion might be that in terms of format and research much has changed. But while that is arguable, one is struck by the consistency of tone, always one of outrage, which marks the two books, and in a very real way, seems to recur and characterize all the primary sources of this study. In other words, education writers fuse methods of literary journalism and investigative reporting in a journalism of rage which combines the moral stance of a sage with the observational acumen of a reporter to call to attention various inequities in public school education.

The "fusion" of literary journalism and investigative reporting--indeed the answer to whether any of the books in this study is true reporting--may be evidenced in two recent books, *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol, 1991) and *Among Schoolchildren* (Kidder, 1989).⁶ These two books present some unique contrasts in the evolution of the literary journalism of public education. Kidder's book, in particular, "is an observer's book--dispassionate and distant--and very different from the rousing classroom exposés of 20 years ago."⁷ If, as Connie Leslie suggests, the earlier works of Kozol, Kohl, and Herndon are "screams in the night from former teachers, desperate bids for attention to the failures of inner-city schools,"⁸ then *Among Schoolchildren* allows the journalist to present the story of public education in one particular urban setting much more from the point of view of the teacher, as a non-journalist. That alone will bring to bear one of the unique characteristics of the literary journalism of more recent vintage: the story told through third person

⁶This "fusion" may likewise be a unique trait of public education writing though consistent evidence of the phenomena is lacking.

⁷Leslie, Connie. (1989, September). "From 'House' to Schoolhouse." *Newsweek*, p. 67.

⁸Leslie, p. 67.

narration by a participant who is not the writer. Up until Kidder, and more recently Freedman, the story of public education was seen mostly through the eyes of a participant and an observer who were one and the same. Kidder immerses himself as observer in the scene at hand, then allows an actual participant or third person to tell the story, using dialogue and the possible recreated thoughts of that narrator (interior monologue) to move the narration along. In all, the style is less angry in tone and more reminiscent of literary journalism.

The primary focus here however, remains on Kozol's efforts and a style of writing that will be directly linked to sage writing. The linkage, in Kozol's case especially, is necessary, and possible, because his literary style tends to dramatize events in order to involve the reader more. In a sense, Kozol seems to be aligned with Dewey's concept which views society as a function of education. Rhetorically, the same general idea is ascribed to Burke.⁹ Such intensive reporting (bordering on rage in all too frequent instances) has drawn criticism from some as "misplaced" or relating only to extreme cases. Naturally, Kozol sees it differently; his purpose is to draw an angry response that will alter conditions in urban schools in particular. As he said of *Savage Inequalities* in a *Playboy* (1991) interview: "I wanted to write a book that will keep rich people from sleeping easily *until they act upon what I've written* [italics added].¹⁰ Kozol's intent is supported by strong persuasive rhetoric, which nonetheless, falls within Murphy's definition of "reportage" as

... interpretive reporting which goes beyond the facts to draw from the reader an emotional reaction similar to the writer's own, as with the devices of the novelist or short story writer.¹¹

⁹Lentricchia, p. 1.

¹⁰Kozol, Jonathan. Interview, *Playboy*, p. 56.

¹¹Murphy, "The New Journalism . . .," p. 15.

What Kozol does (along with a few of the other writers in this study) is enhance the facts or news story of public education, not with manufactured sequences, but partly through his own sense of outrage at what he has observed. (This enhancement, because of its inherent sincerity, makes it not mere sophistry.) This "feel" for the facts then takes on the more formal appearance of educational (as well as social and political) commentary; Kozol is using written discourse, or rhetoric, to highlight the limitations of the educational system in providing opportunities for all schoolchildren, especially those in urban areas. Kozol also invokes the democratic ideal, which, more than likely, further antagonizes many readers:

What we're seeing is the end of the Jeffersonian dream. We're seeing the end of any pretense at all of providing equal opportunity to rich children and poor children in this country. That is an extraordinary development in a democracy. The children of the poor have only one chance in a thousand of ever rising beyond their class. Their destinies have been determined before they enter school. There could not be a darker scenario for the United States.¹²

Clearly, this is "prophet as forthspeaker rather than foreteller"¹³ and is an effort to alert the audience to the consequences of continued inaction, not in school alone, but throughout the land. The country has built itself on cherished democratic principles. Invoking the "Jeffersonian dream" recalls the link between education for all and the "one nation indivisible" concept, a piece of wisdom the people have ignored to the peril of inner city schoolchildren. Kozol sounds the warning because "When a people ignores the wisdom that lies at the heart of its society and institutions, then the sage recalls that people to it."¹⁴ These strong words, and angry tone, are a prophetic voice, yet Kozol has been able to carry that anger into book-length prose in a style

¹²Kozol, Interview, *Playboy*, p. 60.

¹³Landow, p. 25.

¹⁴Landow, p. 23.

that is also literary. The often "nonlogical form of argumentation"¹⁵ raises ire, especially among journalistic traditionalists, but Kozol himself has stated interpretations of the public school universe are necessary to jar an often unaware public citizenry.¹⁶ His claims (and those of his fellow authors) may be outside the mainstream and may be dismissed as eccentric by more scholarly types, but

one cannot fully appreciate the importance of the works in this genre until one tracks them all down and discovers all the ways in which the words of these elegant Jeremiahs take form and the possibly strange and unexpected effects they produce.¹⁷

One may also conclude the traditions of investigative reporting are at work here, since

1) investigative journalism is capable of mobilizing public opinion; 2) the public continues to be the linchpin of American democracy; 3) an outraged public can generate government action against the abuses revealed by media muckrakers.¹⁸

Kozol's First Effort

In *Death At An Early Age*, Kozol recounted eight months as a teacher in a Boston ghetto public school and his subsequent firing for reading a Langston Hughes poem to his class. The experience soon made Kozol "a major voice in the movement for school equity and integration of the late 1960s and early 1970s."¹⁹ Kozol has continued to be a major "voice" on the subject of public school education and, in the process, has been otherwise favorably compared to the likes of Upton Sinclair, who in 1906, wrote about the deplorable conditions in Chicago's meat packing industry. Albert Shanker compares Sinclair with Kozol: "More than three-quarters of a century later, Jonathan Kozol has published a book about the disgusting conditions in

¹⁵Landow, p. 19.

¹⁶Kozol, Jonathan. (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

¹⁷Landow, p. 191.

¹⁸Protess et al. (1991). p. 17.

¹⁹Schrag, Peter. (1991, December 16). "Savage Inequalities: The Case Against Jonathan Kozol." The New Republic, 205, p. 18.

the schools our poor children attend that ought to inspire similar outrage and action."²⁰ Shanker went on to call the book "powerful stuff, made all the more powerful by Kozol's picture of the kids who are victimized."²¹

This authorial sense of umbrage and incredulity works better in a literary journalistic style of reporting. The author's immersion in the subject, as observer or participant/observer, ensures the passion generated in the gathering of information will somehow be translated into the narrative and, thereby, conveyed to the reader. One recent critique of Kozol's work alone speaks to this passionate presentation:

Kozol's messages humiliate and shame the readers of his texts rather than inspiring, teaching, and leading them. His rage is so general and so often misplaced that the reader runs for cover rather than wanting to understand what is revealed. In the end, we are left with a sense of Kozol's moral superiority rather than with a moral hope for all humanity.²²

This captures to a great degree the underlying tone of most of the books contained in this study. Although the various authors display their own singular sage writing style, the tone in most emerges as one of urgency bordering on rage that the conditions observed and reported should have gone on for so long and, worse yet, that they would be unlikely to change over the near term. In recounting the conditions of public school education, Kozol and others employ "one of the sage's chief techniques: he acts as a ventriloquist, providing an eloquent voice for inanimate phenomena and inarticulate masses. The sage proceeds by turning 'dumb facts' into speaking voices."²³

But despite Kozol's socially committed prose, timely topics, and sense of outrage, Kozol remains relatively obscure in the U.S. academic canon, a point Lois

²⁰Shanker, Albert. (1991, December 30). Book Review. *Savage Inequalities*, in *The New Leader*, 74, p. 6.

²¹Shanker, p. 7.

²²Rabon & Saunders, p. 335.

²³Landow, p. 42.

Zamora makes for another "outrageous" chronicler of events, Ambrose Bierce. In distinguishing between journalistic traditions in Latin America and the U.S., Zamora points to Bierce as among the first to consistently combine "journalistic structures and narrative strategies" in the U.S. Yet he remained relatively obscure, perhaps, Zamora speculates, reflecting "our attitudes toward the social and political function of the writer, and hence toward journalistic writing."²⁴ Zamora contends the objectivity "hang-up" of U.S. literary critics prevents them from examining closely the far more global implications of journalism.

The ideal of objectivity (however unobtainable) is widely held in the U.S., and for good reason, but it is a journalistic ethic and aesthetic that has effectively limited intellectual argument and literary creativity to the editorial pages of U.S. newspapers--or displaced them into literary magazines, quarterlies, reviews.²⁵

Zamora notes such a tradition doesn't hold true in Latin America. She then adds an observation which might be applied to Kozol's case.

The writers whom we have placed in positions of greatest prestige among U.S. modernists ... have generally preferred not to mix fictional and non-fictional media, but rather to distinguish their own novelistic enterprise from what have been considered the more public, impersonal, conventional,--hence, lesser--forms of journalism.²⁶

Like Bierce, Kozol has some Latin American experience, having visited Cuba in the 1970s and written *Children of the Revolution* in which he praises the Cuban government's experiment in public education. Ironically, it is in this very book where Kozol, for perhaps the only time in his career, refers to himself as a journalist.²⁷

Further along, Zamora makes her main claim: "The writer's sense of political and social responsibility will affect his or her journalistic activities, and his or her

²⁴Zamora, Lois Parkinson. (1989). "Novels and Newspapers in the Americas." *Novel* 23:1, Fall, p. 53.

²⁵Zamora, p. 54.

²⁶Zamora, p. 55.

²⁷Kozol, *Children of the Revolution*, p. vi.

literary uses of journalistic discourse."²⁸ Kozol, and all the authors of public school education books analyzed in this research, ought better to be understood with this rubric in mind when being evaluated critically. In a real sense, they exhibit a form of writing identified as "testimonial literature" by Ellie Weisel: "It bears witness to events not only in the sense of observing and documenting them, but also in the juridical and religious senses."²⁹

Whether all this posits a new genre, testimonial journalism, or not, for our purposes it helps explain further how and why Kozol, et al., write with such a sense of moral outrage after having gathered the "mere facts" of public school education. Once again, it is worth remembering the "moral vision of the contemporary historian [and] the investigative journalist" offered by Ettema and Glasser (noted in Chapter 1) as this research suggests the link between literary journalism, investigative reporting, and sage writing. Kozol et al. often sound like modern day Jeremiahs, moralizers, calling attention to the ills of latter 20th Century public school education. But, "It is the 'moralizing impulse' that endows facts with relevance and stories with closure and coherence--the very features we use to judge the value and the truth of the stories we hear and tell."³⁰

A recent interview between Kozol and this researcher focused primarily on the author's writing style and what, if any, changes he has made through the years. The initial book, *Death At An Early Age*, emerged from a diary he kept while teaching in the Roxbury (Mass.) Public Schools. As such, there was no attempt at literary strategy. "I never asked myself the question 'How do I want to write this book?'"

²⁸Zamora, p. 56.

²⁹Zamora also introduces related information about Wiesel, calling him "a major contemporary writer" with distinct ties to [James] Agee in the sense both see an "absolute separation of fiction and non-fiction," p. 61.

³⁰Ettema & Glasser. "Narrative Form," p. 11.

Contrast that with *Savage Inequalities*, in which he contends he purposefully withheld an attack on public school funding until well into the text, because "Phrasing has become more important to me."³¹ This would indicate an intent to become more of a stylist than earlier in his career.

As for writer models, Kozol said that Truman Capote impressed him as a literary craftsman, especially in *In Cold Blood*. "But I learned more from William Styron than all the others," he contends. "Essentially, you live up to writers you revere," he now holds. His movement seems to be towards a form of writing he calls "ecumenical," a type whose "sum total is that which makes life what it is." While Kozol's efforts seem to have attracted a wider popular following than other writers on the subject of education, Kozol is reluctant to claim such or even advance any reason in response to queries. All he'll say is that "the story telling format may have something to do with it (popularity)."³²

Savage Inequalities, which contains some story narrative, also contains 17 pages of documentation in appendices, as well as liberal use of factual data in the main body of text. Of that, Kozol says, "I tend to absorb the documentation into the narrative, not so much to create a popular form, but to bridge the world of popular literature and the academic variety."³³ (Kozol implies by this he is sensitive to some lack of scholarly acclaim for his writing. He was especially proud of the fact that some of his texts, including *Death at an Early Age*, are now required reading in a limited number of college courses.)³⁴

³¹Kozol, (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

³²Kozol, (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

³³Kozol, (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

³⁴Kozol, (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

Far more concrete data is available now than when Kozol first started in 1967 to comment on public education. Thus, more documentation is warranted. This coupled with a conscious effort on his part to reach a wider audience may help explain Kozol's popularity which keeps him in the public eye via such TV shows as "Nightline" ("about twice a year") and "The MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour" on Public Television.³⁵

This effort to reach the "ordinary person with a conscience" prompted and, at the same time, convinced Kozol to accept an interview invitation from *Playboy*, his own doubts assuaged "when I learned Malcolm X had also been interviewed. If it was okay for Malcolm, it was okay for me," he stated,³⁶ seeking an even more popular forum to trumpet his warning and echo the sage.

Pat Conroy and Rural Education

Only one book details a picture of public education in a rural environment. In *The Water Is Wide*,³⁷ Pat Conroy offers his account of a year on Yamacraw Island, off the coast of South Carolina, where he taught an all-black student population in the island's one and only public school. The administrative politics and lack of investment in "separate but equal" public education rival the situations described in the books about the urban educational counterpart. In addition, there is an anger that such inequities continue to thrive in an overall system which purports to be other than it is. Indeed, the river which Conroy had to cross to reach his charges physically serves metaphorically for the gulf that separates all the schoolchildren described in the books studied from their student counterparts in more prosperous, white

³⁵Kozol, (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

³⁶Kozol, (1993, October 12). Telephone Interview.

³⁷Conroy, Pat. (1972). *The Water Is Wide*. New York: Bantam.

dominated public school districts. A metaphor recalls as well the sage's technique in making an appeal.

What perhaps Conroy's story from the others is its tone. Anger exists, but it is diluted with a measure of self-righteous humor not witnessed in the other books, whose authors all tend to take themselves more seriously. Conroy knows and unveils the system ("I saw the necessity of living and accepting bullcrap in my midst."); he also acknowledges his shortcomings ("I lacked diplomacy and would not compromise."). All of this makes his efforts more readable, even understandable (probably more tolerable in the eyes of some critics) than those of some other authors in this study. It likewise contributes to the writer's ethos and reminds the reader of how satire functions in a sage's writing.

Nonetheless, though strident, even ponderous in their certainty, public education writers, most with classroom experience, have all compiled gripping, first-hand warnings of the plight of public education during brief periods (school year) at the task. Notwithstanding Conroy's more humorous approach, an analysis of all nine books leaves the distinct impression that public education in this country is in serious straits during the period from the 1960s to the present day. That it remains so, particularly in urban situations in 1994, is a stark reminder of the true observations, commentaries, and narratives of these modern day Jeremiahs who dare to voice their rage and anger at a system which impoverishes racial minorities especially. No amount of passion on their part seems to have changed the system. But, less passion would have trivialized one of our society's foremost challenges: the education of its youth.

CHAPTER FIVE

READER RESPONSE AND DRAMATISM

In an effort to better understand the genre and allow for further research, communication scholars have attempted to attach some theoretical frame to literary journalism. The problem with this approach has been that theoretical efforts will be less than successful because this "genre" of journalism doesn't fit neatly into a specific, let alone rigorous, set of creative principles. In addition, a form of writing which includes Mailer and Talese, Thompson and Kozol, Didion and Dillard, holds a similar challenge. Can a single set of assumptions be used in criticism? Indeed, proposing a theory of literature (and literary journalism) contains its own perils for few critics can even agree on a definition of literature:

Propounding a valid formal definition of literature is as fruitless an endeavor as attempting to give rules, rather than rules of thumb, for the personal essay or naturalistic novel. It is generally accepted that there are such categories; readers can in most cases agree which texts belong in a category; but listing the salient differentiae, so that all members of the class will be included and no non-members, is the sort of futile exercise that sometimes makes scholars outside the field of literary studies wonder about the epistemologies, methods, and goals of those inside the field.¹

Furthermore, any effort to begin a critical analysis of the literature of public school education must first address the question of whether this genre can even be classified as literature. An expanded conceptualization of the

¹Winterowd, W. Ross. (1990). The Rhetoric of the 'Other' Literature, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, p. 32.

term is indeed called for, and to assist that purpose, a passage from Frank Lentricchia may be helpful.

Literature is inherently nothing; or it is inherently a body of rhetorical strategies waiting to be seized. Anybody can seize them. Literature is not Keats. The literary is never only the elite canon of great books; it is also what we call 'minor' literature and 'popular' literature. But it is more even than what this expanded definition would allow. *It is all writing considered as social practice* (italics added), all writing viewed in its material circumstances and in its purposiveness. It is power as representation. The literary is all around us, and it is always doing its work upon us. It bears the past in many complex ways, but it does its deed, makes its mark, marks us, here and now.²

Lentricchia's formulation of rhetorical critics' definition addresses the literary journalism of public school education from its "social practice" side, thereby informing the suggested tie between the rhetoric produced by education writers and the response generated among various reading communities.

In addition, given the techniques of literary journalism, investigative reporting, and the sage writing discussed at length in the preceding chapters, a specific theory applied to the books on public school education seems ill-advised. What might result in "good practice" is a "good generic theory" which allows for a diversity of interpretations of these authors and also includes the response of the audience through an ethical criticism. Landow suggests

A major benefit of generic theory lies in the fact that it enables one to perceive connections and continuities within a body of works, including those not usually considered as obviously having much in common.³

For instance, it would be comforting to know that nine books analyzed herein fit into certain rigid categories; it *would* be comforting, but it is impossible. These authors responded to the school *scene* as their first-hand observations demanded. The "spectrum of comments and galaxy of criticisms" these books

²Lentricchia, p. 157.

³Landow, p. 20.

enjoyed came about because of the diversity of style and voice of the writers, not because they shared a set of pre-ordained literary principles. Their only common trait was an awareness of and willingness to criticize the inequities of public primary and secondary education.

To a real degree, what this chapter and the next attempt to formulate is a generic literary theory and method of criticism of the books on public education contained in this study. Such a theory and criticism cannot be too narrowly defined, however, since the books present "truth" in both a subjective and objective light. Kenneth Burke offers a pragmatic criticism which seems to address the inherent ambiguity associated with the "subjective" and "objective" argument. Burke places a major emphasis on the critic or reader of a text. To Burke, language itself is an activating force through which issues of the day are addressed by writer and reader. As Barry Brummet contends, "Burke anticipates by several decades those critical theorists who are currently at work showing the circularity or undecidability of meaning."⁴ Or as Burke himself has stated, "The main idea of criticism, as I conceive it, is to use all that is there to use."⁵ Esslin also seems to address this point especially well.

There is not, nor can there be, one all-embracing method of criticism simply because there is no objective truth to be uncovered; there is instead a multiplicity of motivations and intentions in the discourse about art.⁶

⁴Brummet, Barry. (1993). "Introduction," Landmark Essays of Kenneth Burke, David, CA: Hermagous Press, p. xv.

⁵Burke, Kenneth. (1943). "The Tactics of Motivation," Chimera, I, p. 28.

⁶Esslin, Martin. (1981). "A Search for Subjective Truth," in What is Criticism? Paul Hernadi (ed.), Bloomington: Indiana UP, p. 204.

The criticism generated may seem, at times loosely applied, the analysis less than precise, not so much due to the subject matter's density or obscurity, but owing to the "ideas, values, attitudes [that] will to a very considerable extent be determined by the texts."⁷ Ultimately, what these next two chapters attempt is not a rigorously narrow presentation of how and why public school education writings "fit" a genre of literary journalism, investigative reporting, or sage writing, but a comprehensive analysis of nine books which, among others in the period in question, "were not esoteric, high-brow literature [but] were popular, 'high-profile' works"⁸ used purposefully by the authors as agencies of reform. The criticism which follows, and the theory which helps inform it, must therefore be viewed in a more holistic sense for "What is essential in criticism is not the particular strategy but the whole idea of transforming one's inward, personal, intimate gut reaction toward something external, something shared by the other."⁹

The social nature of the books in question, the particular devices of literary journalism and investigative reporting used to present them, the sage's prophetic voice, and the individual effects generated in reader/critic all lend themselves to this approach. Booth sums it up well.

What we can never have too much of is a criticism that teaches us the subtle arts of appraisal. Such arts can never be confined to a single list; they will always be controversial. But in learning to practice them we find our best

⁷Esslin, p. 211.

⁸Farber, Barry A. April (1991). "Tracing a Phenomenon: Teacher Burnout and the Teacher Critics of the 1960s." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago: p. 23.

⁹Holland, Norman M. (1981). "Criticism as Transaction," in What is Criticism?, Paul Hernadi (ed.), p. 244.

hope of building some sort of bridge between our theories and our various publics, inside and outside the university.¹⁰

Various critics of literary journalism, for example, have developed theories so as better to analyze it. Some half dozen (or more) of them could be discussed, though not one alone seems completely satisfactory. Through many of these theories run two rather common themes which may, however, be helpful as a means of presenting a satisfying, all encompassing theory. The two themes are the relationship of literary journalism to the created expectations of the reader, and the dramatization of the subject matter in the text. As a consequence, this research will first consider a writer-reader "contract" theory of literary journalism before proceeding to an analysis of dramatic content in the books herein.

Reader-Writer Contract

The writer-reader contract is similar to an earlier rhetorical cooperative principle recalled by Winterowd. What it entails is "a tacit agreement about what the writer can and cannot do and the parameters of reader response."¹¹

Almost all criticisms and reviews of individual works of literary journalism note the unique view of social reality presented by individual authors, the "more imaginative use of information" as John Beard suggests.¹² Many criticisms either have trouble with, or make a strong point of emphasizing, the so-called objectivity of individual authorial views of that

¹⁰Booth, Wayne. (1981). "Criticulture: Or, Why We Need at Least Three Criticisms at the Present Time," in What Is Criticism?, Paul Hernadi (ed.) p. 177.

¹¹Winterowd, The Rhetoric of the 'Other' Literature, p. 32.

¹²Beard, p. 36.

reality. This is another link to the reader, for who among us does not begin to question virtually anything we read from an authorial standpoint? How many of us see a bylined article and wonder immediately who the author is? And if we know the author's credentials, do we not then make some general assumptions as to the objectivity standards, or credibility of that author? As Booth suggests in *The Company We Keep*, ". . . we simply read differently when we believe that a story claims to be true than we do when we take it as 'made up'."¹³ The process is very much like that of a teacher who, upon reading repeated themes written by a group of students, begins to assess the qualities of each student based on prior work. Thus, the intelligent reader brings a great deal of insight about the particular credibility and objectivity of individual authors, certainly one reason alone to suggest a reader-writer contract theory of literary journalism. As Winterowd points out,

If we take the writer to be reliable, we accept even his or her obvious fictions as honest. Attempts at interpretation, which is why the conventions of invented dialogue or internal monologue do not annihilate authorial credibility [sic].¹⁴

When Eric Heyne refers to a performance definition of literature "for which there are no universal criteria for literary value,"¹⁵ he is stating that the reader ultimately determines the factual/fictional basis of a particular book or article. As children, many of us were comforted by soothing words that what we read "was only a story" and therefore incapable of harming us because "it wasn't true." As adults, do we not likewise comfort ourselves with a decision as to how "true" a book or article is primarily on the basis of who wrote it?

¹³Booth, *The Company We Keep*, p. 16.

¹⁴Winterowd, *The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature*, p. 34.

¹⁵Heyne, Eric. (1987). "Toward a Theory of Literary Nonfiction." *Modern Fiction Studies*, 33(3), p. 487.

Although this shift from *truth value* to *ethos* in the previous example may seem strained, it helps demonstrate how all readers approach a text with their own critical eye predicated on a variety of values.

Wayne Booth, for one, has advocated an intimate reader-writer narrative that creates as it progresses an understanding, a commonality, a consensus. In *The Company We Keep*, he finds that rhetoric has multiple virtues approximating whole human truth through pluralism and by developing friendships through a text. As he states in the Preface,

The book now aims, first to restore the full intellectual legitimacy of our commonsense inclination to talk about stories in ethical terms, treating the characters in them and their makers as more like people than labyrinths, enigmas, or textual puzzles to be deciphered; and, second, it aims to 'relocate' ethical criticism, turning it from flat judgment for or against supposedly stable works to fluid conversation about the qualities of the company we keep--and the company that we ourselves provide.¹⁶

While some may argue that Booth's comments were intended for the reading of fiction, the fact literary journalism borrows many fictional devices in its construction would seem to make it fair game for the ethical criticism suggested by Booth. Public school education authors wrote books that were "essentially diaries of novice, middle-class, white teachers working in inner-city elementary schools . . . poignant and touching in their descriptions of children . . . powerful and inflammatory, making most readers feel incensed at the ways in which poor, minority children are dealt with by the system."¹⁷ To which, Booth would add

¹⁶Booth, *The Company We Keep*, p. x.

¹⁷Farber, p. 13.

But if the powerful stories we tell each other really matter to us--and even the most skeptical theorists imply by their *practice* that stories do matter--then a criticism that takes their 'mattering' seriously cannot be ignored.¹⁸

John Hellmann speaks of the direction of a particular text and is one of the few critics who actually names a reader-author contract when the subject is a particular work of literary journalism. The author's own authenticity, even integrity, is rightly assessed by individual readers. Further, while others choose to examine the manner in which new (literary) journalism polarizes (seduces) an audience, Hellmann believes a reliable theory must be based on observation of exactly what is happening in the texts. To this end, if textual elements point to the external world solely, then the text is assertive. If, on the other hand, elements are selected and arranged in accordance with their relationship to each other, the text is literary. Hellmann clearly believes that new journalism falls in the latter category because "it has an aesthetic form and purpose making its 'final direction' inward."¹⁹ He, nonetheless, qualifies new journalism, noting that it too possesses an outward direction in terms of its use of observation and primary sources as a means of distinguishing it from genres of fiction (i.e., realistic novel, romance). This, in turn, leads to what he calls the author-reader contract, "an assertion by the author and acceptance by the reader of the particular relation of the text to the external world."²⁰

Barry Farber took a somewhat different viewpoint, in seeing many of the books in this research as affecting the teaching profession, and individual teachers who read them.

¹⁸Booth, *The Company We Keep*, p. 4.

¹⁹Hellmann, John. (1980). "The Nature and Modes of the New Journalism: A theory." *Genre*, XIII, p. 520.

²⁰Hellmann, p. 522.

These books did not, by themselves, cause any teacher to give up or burn out. It is doubtful that any teacher resigned as a direct result of reading any of them. These books did, however, constitute yet another source of stress for teachers, another unwelcome burden. The indictments in these books suggested that teachers' efforts were useless or even harmful.²¹

When Weber and others speak of the self-display of individual literary journalism authors as a means of achieving credibility (author involvement being an agreed upon characteristic of the genre), who alone makes this credibility decision if not the reader? While recognizing that books which contain authorial self-display "severely tax both reader and writer," Weber points out that so long as the writer of literary nonfiction convinces the reader that the work is "adequate as history" and also presents the material "in the name of fiction," then "the result can be a special reading experience, combining the absorbing power of fact with the special resonance of fiction."²² Again, Booth helps inform the point.

Each narrative, fictional or historical, provides an alternative story in a created 'world' that is itself a fresh alternative to the 'world' or 'worlds' previously serving as boundaries of the reader's imagination.²³

Literary Criticism

The problem with all too many critical reviews of journalism texts is that, rather than posit theory, inevitably each critical review points to any number of characteristics or traits which mark the particular genre. These traits, however, are not theory in and of themselves and only serve to quantify the genre. Merely characterizing the genre in this fashion, as Foley says,

²¹Farber, p. 22.

²²Weber, Ronald. (1979). "Art-Journalism Revisited." *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 78(3), p. 289.

²³Booth, *The Company We Keep*, p. 17.

"evades the question of generic identity."²⁴ A reader-writer contract theory of literary journalism begins to move beyond the realm of mere listing of traits. It taps at a common theme underlining many of these same critics' analyses of the genre, namely that reader involvement is an intimate component of any literary journalism text. It furthermore highlights the author-reader dyad as crucial to any understanding of literary journalism. As Feehan has stated,

Artists abstract out of the continuum of everyday life the key values in social conflict and transform them *for purposes of audience response* into esthetic 'superstructural' elements²⁵ [italics added].

Here then is a qualitative theoretical construct, a sort of "the eye of the beholder" approach to literary journalism texts. It is far more in accord with principles espoused by many rhetoricians who recognize how important the reader is, not only to an appreciation of a text, but to its basic understanding and interpretation. It is the reader who passes judgment not only on what the author writes but also on the very credibility of an author. All readers do the same thing. To Winterowd

reading involves a tradeoff between information and eloquence: the more we want information, the more we become annoyed by texture, and the less information we demand immediately, the more we enjoy eloquence for its own sake.²⁶

Reporters/journalists, too, are far more adept at couching facts into a story. After all, the mere listing of facts hardly qualifies as a "report," let alone "story," of an event. The narrative structure contains the facts made intelligible, meaningful to the reader, even interesting through that structure.

²⁴Foley, Barbara. (1979). "Fact, Fiction, and 'Reality,'" *Contemporary Literature*, 20(3), p. 394.

²⁵Feehan, Michael. (1979). "Kenneth Burke's Discovery of Dramatism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65.4, p. 408.

²⁶Winterowd, *The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature*, p. 65.

The story does not exist in nature (reality); just facts do. When the reporter/journalist writes the narrative and includes the facts, the result is "the interaction of 'new' events with the publicly available schemas for typifying the events."²⁷ In effect, the story "evaluates" the facts.

The "new journalism" of the 1960s had its rebirth when a changing social order, ambiguous events and precarious relationships spawned a host of book length narratives that used a factual base assisted by an interpretive story. In writing about public school education, the authors were attempting to make some sense out of an inequitable system, even make sense out of an unreasonable educational order. In this, they echoed with their narratives what Frank Leutricchia sees as a purpose of education.

I come down on the side of those who believe that our society is mainly unreasonable and that education should be one of the places where we can get involved in the process of transforming it.²⁸

In a very real way, so did the public school education authors in this study try "transforming" an "unreasonable" society. By writing "a literature of rage," Kozol, Kohl, Herndon, and others were reacting to what Trilling calls "the morality of habit and biology, the *morality of inertia*."

The dull daily world . . . is aware of the morality of inertia, and its function as a social base, as a social cement. It knows that duties are done for no other reason than that they are said to be duties; for no other reason, sometimes than that the doer has not been able to conceive of any other course, has, perhaps, been afraid to think of any other course.²⁹

Literature, as Trilling notes, attempts to paint morality in positive terms, even as the more impassioned public school education authors

²⁷Eason, "Telling stories," p. 126.

²⁸Leutricchia, p. 2.

²⁹Trilling, Lionel. (1956). A Gathering of Fugitives. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 38.

attempted to point to a better way, a reformed method of education, by describing in great detail the conditions they found. Kozol serves as a case in point.

In very few cases, in discussing the immiseration of this city, do Illinois officials openly address the central fact, the basic evil, of its racial isolation. With more efficient local governance, East St. Louis might become a better-managed ghetto, a less ravaged racial settlement, but the soil would remain contaminated and the schools would resemble relics of the South post-Reconstruction. They might be a trifle cleaner and they might perhaps provide their children with a dozen more computers or typewriters, better stoves for cooking classes, or a better shop for training future gas station mechanics; but the children would still be poisoned in their bodies and disfigured in their spirits.³⁰

Even Kidder, who rarely resorts to overt criticism of public school conditions or individuals, presents something of a moral tone, ("meaning" to the reader) by way of select details which convey a certain inevitability, as though this is the way it is, unlikely to change.

Olive carpeting covered the hallways of the classroom wing. The carpeting suppressed some noise, but the architect had made the walls between rooms collapsible and very thin. Teachers could take some solace from that. They could hear from their own rooms that colleagues had trouble getting work from their pupils and lost their tempers, too. The adjacent administrative wing had air conditioning, and the classroom wing didn't. No one who worked there knew why.³¹

Further along, Kidder addresses the resigned attitudes of teachers in general.

One lunchtime, the conversation drifted onto the dangerous subject of troublesome students. One teacher, new to the school, remarked, 'I think you have to be patient with children.' And another, a veteran, replied from the side of her mouth, 'Some you don't have to bother with.' Chris wondered if she shouldn't stick up for the new teacher, but Chris held her tongue. 'If I worry about what everyone else is doing around here, I'll go out of my mind,' she told herself as she headed back for the lonely but safe and sealed-off domain of her own classroom.³²

³⁰Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, pp. 38-39.

³¹Kidder, *Among Schoolchildren*, p. 45.

³²Kidder, p. 49.

In the portrayal of details within the school, public education authors can't help but provide their own insights into the moral inertia which characterizes all too many people, teachers and administrators. And while Trilling has noted "the morality of inertia is not to be praised, but it must be recognized,"³³ authors prefer to exercise their own moral judgment/vision bordering on a rage which condemns, in part. They see the public school situation in the last 30 years as undergoing profound changes which have only served to intensify the underlying inequities in funding and distribution of resources.

In addition, the very proximity of the author/teacher to the subject of education/students appropriates a special bond. As Sims notes, "Critics of nonfiction tend to neglect the personal relationships the author has with his material."³⁴ Granted, much of the story could appear anecdotal to more traditional critics, but as one chronicler of her experience has put it,

None of the anecdotes is contrived. Each is recorded as it occurred to demonstrate the interaction between the trainees and me and the application of the principles I espouse. The names used are those the students chose.³⁵

This dual ethos--author and characters--proves convincing to most readers. The author relies on his own observational stance--"I know, I was there." Likewise, the author uses characters, usually students, who through their own voices attest to the legitimacy of conditions (scene) in the

³³Trilling, p. 40.

³⁴Sims, Norman. (1992). "Joseph Mitchell." in Connery, *A Sourcebook*, p. 210.

³⁵Dawson, Helanie. (1970). *On the Outskirts of Hope*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 9.

classroom. The *ethos* of a "constituted self" becomes the *ethos* of a "constituted cause" where the word "constituted" means created.³⁶

All of the authors in this research made use of the story format, present tense, in part or whole. Many of them overtly referred to it in preliminary material. Kozol's rendering is typical

The events in this book take place for the most part between 1988 and 1990, although a few events somewhat precede this. Most events, however, are narrated in the present tense The names of students in this book have sometimes been disguised at their request or that of school officials.³⁷

Although John Hollowell was referring primarily to Wolfe, Mailer, Breslin, and others, his comments regarding "reporters" of the 1960s is also applicable to the educational writers of then and now: "The best reporters of the sixties actively sought out 'the story' and often made news themselves in the process."³⁸ Education writers who became the chroniclers of continued segregation and inequitable distribution of resources didn't wait for "news to happen," but rather went out and "found" their stories, in most cases right under their noses as teachers.

One could, of course, adopt a more cynical approach to the entire matter of the literary journalism of public education. All the writers may merely have been obsessed with writing the "great novel" and thus chose education as the subject and literary journalism as the form for so doing. Weber hints at such:

³⁶Credit here belongs to Wayne Booth (*The Company We Keep*) for exploring the metaphoric link between what authors who involve themselves in the narrative do when they interact with characters (composite or real) in the story. See *The Company We Keep*, pp. 327-331.

³⁷Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, p. ix.

³⁸Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction*, p. 53.

The crown the feature writers were competing for was the novel, and many of them were only in journalism until they could write one; in the meantime, the best they could do was write a form of journalism that read like fiction.³⁹

Wolfe claimed as much for himself and others who saw journalism as a means of gaining access to the profession of novel writing.

The idea was to get a job on a newspaper, keep body and soul together, pay the rent, get to know "the world," accumulate "experience," perhaps work some of the fat off your style--then, at some point, quit cold, say goodbye to journalism, move into a shack somewhere, work night and day for six months, and light up the sky with the final triumph. The final triumph was known as The Novel.⁴⁰

Obviously, some reporters *were* becoming journalists in anticipation of later becoming novelists, but the bulk of them, Talese, Breslin, Wolfe, and those in this study, considered themselves non-fiction writers first; or at least nothing to the contrary has ever been demonstrated. Furthermore, any such suggestion is cast into considerable disrepute when one considers how extensive the matter of education reform has been and continues to be in the United States. In other words, with a new "crisis" every decade or so, there was plenty of grist for the literary mill.

As for making news themselves, Conroy, Kozol, and Kidder have all found widespread publicity for their efforts. Perhaps Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* provides the most graphic example. Kozol's pointed prose made the book a finalist for a National Book Critics Circle award and most impressively, from a public relations standpoint, prompted a front cover letter

³⁹Weber, "The Literature of Fact," p. 18.

⁴⁰Wolfe, Tom. (1973). *The New Journalism*. New York: Harper and Row, p. 5. Wolf continues to trumpet the ascendancy of nonfiction: "Unless some movement occurs in American fiction over the next ten years that is more remarkable than any detectable right now, the pioneering in nonfiction will be recorded as the most important experiment in American literature in the second half of the twentieth century" (Wolfe, Tom. [1989, November]. "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," *Harper's*, 279, p. 56.) Wolfe thereby remains the most important critic and spokesperson for literary journalism, of which he is likewise an ongoing writer as well.

in *Publisher's Weekly* demanding that President Bush read the book. Kozol still crisscrosses the nation, speaking and writing extensively on the subjects of continued segregation and inequality in resource allocation in the public schools, while Hentoff and Kohl are regular newspaper columnists.

Voicing Rage

Part of the "privilege" of narrative involves what Hollowell calls a "close-to-the-skin" form of reporting. This might best be described as an attempt to transport the reader along through the eyes, and mouths of the characters in the "story." It may also be called "substitutionary narrative," and offers not direct speech but an imitation in parody of an individual's speech patterns. Cadences, inflections are used in an effort to capture an individual's character, even his/her values. Wolfe used it well in the 1960s, and there were copy-cat versions of it. Herndon's title, *The Way It Spozed To Be*, is reflective of it. Scholes and Kellogg prefer to cite this as a "histor," a speaking voice assumed in the narrative though not an actual character in the narrative. What it does is allow for evaluation and presentation of perceptions as though these were revelations.⁴¹

Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in Conroy's *The Water is Wide*. Consistently, the author makes use of the native language of his students on Yamacraw Island, off the coast of South Carolina. It seems parody in a way, but perhaps denotes an acceptance of, and skill in the use of, the dominant language system on the island. Although Conroy himself has apparently not commented on that facet of the book, one infers that he views

⁴¹Scholes, Robert & Kellogg, Robert. (1966). *The Nature of Narrative*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 141-142.

the educational system on the island as one which controls discourse, upholds the dominant white power structure, and further isolates the students from even being mainstreamed into standard spoken English.

Put in broader Burkean terms, this may be viewed as a "profounder kind of mystification" which is implied "in the very act of persuasion itself." Even though Conroy's tone borders on hyperbole and his language mimics the characters in his narrative, such "*superficial* uses of persuasion . . . do have in them the *ultimates* of persuasion, however these may be concealed [Burke's italics]."42

Put another way, the language of public school education assumes its own power, the strength of which is carried through the ethos of the individual author-teachers and "voices" of others who report on conditions witnessed in school. As readers, we focus our judgments of activities and events narrated by an implied author.

The implied author's comments, in other words, provide necessary pointers to the reader, which, even if they do not change his mind completely about any particular moral or other judgment, nonetheless orient him and in this way inform him how to interpret a particular set of actions and ideas.⁴³

Thus, language is used on behalf of altering social conditions within the school, language thereby assuming a power of its own. In essence, "The literary act is a social act," for "all literary power is social power."⁴⁴ In a very real sense, the voices raised on behalf of the less fortunate children are meant

⁴²In *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), Burke devotes some comments to the idea of "mystification," or the use of language to deceive. While Burke does not exclude the outright lie possibilities inherent in language, his intent seems to privilege a higher standard for discourse, "a hierarchy implicit in the route from persuasion to science." See pages 178-180.

⁴³Landow, *Elegant Jeremiahs*, p. 160.

⁴⁴Lentricchia, p. 19.

to empower those children and bring their plight to the attention of a variety of publics. So the "literary act" becomes a "social act," as it did in the 1960s, when these books brought out the inequities of the system and, in many instances, laid considerable blame at the feet of teachers. Farber addresses, in particular, the social impact of these texts. He holds that

The sentiments of these books at face value [led readers] to believe that in the mid-1960s there were no children with problems outside of the school environment [thereby] reinforcing the perception that schools were malevolent places, run by authoritarian and gloomy caretakers who cared little about children in general and even less about black or Hispanic children.⁴⁵

Consequently, "it may be argued that they performed an invaluable service in raising the consciousness of this country to the plight of minority children."⁴⁶ Raising the "consciousness of this country" which these authors tried to do, serves as strong evidence that "the literary act is a social act."

While native language was used in isolated instances by the authors in this research, consistent use of narrative by all was the hallmark. That the use of native language, or anecdotal information, or composite characters also found their way into the text only amplifies the narrative format. The authors became observers to an event and recorded their impressions supported by hard evidence and their own "more imaginative use of information."⁴⁷

Although not describing them, Mary McCarthy has provided a useful description of the efforts of this band of public school book authors. In "Settling the Colonel's Hash," she wrote,

⁴⁵Farber, p. 14.

⁴⁶Farber, p. 14.

⁴⁷Beard, p. 36.

[T]he writer must be, first of all, a listener and observer, who can pay attention to reality, like an obedient pupil, and who is willing, always, to be surprised by the messages reality is sending through to him. And if he gets the messages correctly, he will not have to go back and put in the symbols; he will find that the symbols are there, staring at him significantly from the commonplace.⁴⁸

Honed by years of experience in the classroom, virtually all the authors examined were listeners/observers and faithful recorders and storytellers of the plight of the poor and minority schoolchildren they taught.

Jacques Lacan has stated, "It is the world of words that creates the world of things" and not the reverse.⁴⁹ If we accept this premise, then the writers of public education books have created a world of school as they witnessed it, either as teachers themselves or as investigative reporters examining the "demise" of public education during the period of this study. A useful method of analysis would be to see these texts as forms which embody a message, not as referential, that is referring to an objective world which must exist exactly as described. In other words, an analysis which focuses on the message for its own sake is a valid *and* a literary means of interpreting a text.

Lois Zamora has addressed the narrative aspect by contending that "the explicit integration of journalistic discourse into literary narration tends to foreground the truth claims of the work and raise pointed questions about narrative referentiality."⁵⁰ When the writers of public education books "speak" through interior monologue, status detail, or even through extensive statistical data (as a few of them do), we as readers are witnessing that

⁴⁸McCarthy, Mary. (1990). "Settling the Colonel's Hash." In Sims, The Literary Journalists, p. 260.

⁴⁹Lacan, Jacques. (1977). Evrits. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock, p. 65.

⁵⁰Zamora, Lois Parkinson. (1989). "Novels and Newspapers in the Americas," Novel, Fall 23:1, p. 44.

"integration" to which Zamora refers, designed to enhance/promote a moral understanding of the subject.

Furthermore, there are some obvious implications from the reader's standpoint, if we follow through on this line of reasoning. No longer is a text read as an effort to discern whether the author has captured "reality" or a mirror image of the truth. Instead, nonfiction writings are viewed by readers as "efforts to produce a plausible, convincing version of ideas or events, of which there are many other possible versions."⁵¹

From the reader's perspective then, the narrative or story becomes less a matter of relating description to actual factual data than in analyzing how plot keeps us focused as readers on the use of language to create a version of "what really happened." McCord elaborates further on how this method of analysis can help in nonfiction criticism.

Traditional criticism of nonfiction does not encourage evaluation of the means or the methods of telling the story, but accepts the content as though it were already verified by the mere fact that the basic outline of events can be inferred from other narratives: news stories, witness accounts, the "historical record." The reason it is so important to evaluate the plot, that is, the nonfiction narrative's composition, is that these "authoritative" versions (especially newspaper and other periodical accounts), which may not have been questioned or verified, are routinely accepted into the archival record and form the "facts" which later historians will use to describe "what really happened."⁵²

Thus, words create a version (analyze or evaluate facts) of the scene, the scene of public education, Vietnam War protests, or anything for that matter. Given the fact writers, use a variety of plot devices, including one

⁵¹McCord, Phyllis F. (1985, November). "Reading Nonfiction in Composition Courses: From Theory to Practice." *College English*, 47(7), p. 751.

⁵²McCord, p. 754.

Mailer terms "the oldest device of the novelist,"⁵³ the temporal disjunction or "flashback," we as readers need to remind ourselves that the device is "there not only to interest us in going forward but to remind us that this is not a record of things, but of the recording mind, a sort of "internal" cause-effect logic."⁵⁴

James Kineavy has suggested that expository prose pieces are dominated by cause and effect.

In reviewing any narrative (the dominant paradigm in a culture imbued with the sense of chronological order), the reader should take into account that the chronology, or cause-effect, is always imposed by the writer/narrator.⁵⁵

That is to say, natural events don't exist as an inevitable succession of cause-effect relationships; they are imposed through language or as McCord further states: "There is no cause and effect occurring naturally in the world, separate from the explanation, the narrative structure that creates it."⁵⁶

Other literary journalism critics offer similar ideas. When Eason points to the metonymy of literary journalism, how it stands for something beyond itself, who, in the final analysis, is to determine just what the referent is if not the reader? In essence, when the emphasis in commercial journalism (and literary journalism seems to fit here) is on the relationship of report to reader, the story model is being used. The focus of the story model, as Eason suggests, is on confirmation in the mind of the reader. Narrative strategies

⁵³Mailer, Norman. (1968). Armies of the Night, New York: NAL, p. 152.

⁵⁴McCord, p. 755.

⁵⁵Kineavy, James P. (1983). "Writing Across the Curriculum." ADE Bulletin, 76, p. 20.

⁵⁶McCord, p. 756.

are thus used to create empirical realities in an effort to relate to the audience's perception of those realities.⁵⁷

According to Eason, the practice of literary journalism when viewed as a theoretical statement "provides a rather explicit conception of reporting as a linguistic and culture act." Relating narrative strategies to what constitutes empirical realities and to how the audience views those realities, literary journalism "raises up language as the foundation of reporting and articulates a 'philosophy' of reporting as a literary practice."⁵⁸ Language incorporated into a narrative is a means of constructing meaning out of the culture. We tell stories of events in order to create a meaning for the reader.

Commercial journalism, since the 1960s especially, has thus come to be seen as operating under "two imperatives," according to Eason: informational and story. The former relates the report to the event, while the latter relates the report to the reader. Each draws a different set of questions, the informational seeking validity and objectivity only, while the "story" form responds more to the aesthetic dimension. Starting in the 1960s especially, multiple realities replaced, or at least augmented, the shield of society as one legitimate reality. No longer was reality static, one dimensional, as far as reporting events was concerned. Thus, writer and reader entered the common ground of culture with language as the tool for the making of meaning. This process came to be understood as the "new journalism" and has come down to the present in other synonymous descriptors, including literary journalism and literary nonfiction.

⁵⁷Eason, David L. (1981). "Telling Stories and Making Sense." *Journal of Popular Culture*, 15(2), p. 126.

⁵⁸Eason, "Telling Stories . . .," p. 125.

Perhaps no one addresses literary journalism specifically from a rhetorical standpoint better than W. Ross Winterowd:

A study of this extraordinarily rich body of literature is well worthwhile: 1) it has much to tell us about contemporary literate culture, 2) it gives us a new angle on poetics and rhetoric, and 3) it takes us directly into the history and politics of the literary establishment.⁵⁹

Literature itself is "underdefined and indefinable, but knowable in a rough and ready way," says Winterowd, who adds, "I take the latitudinarian, somewhat old-fashioned view of literature as texts that 1) communities of readers value for their intrinsic worth, and 2) have staying power or appear likely to have it."⁶⁰ Winterowd, in effect, joins Burke, Booth and a whole tradition of rhetorical critics who attempt "to use appropriate cogent rhetoric to revalue a body of texts [including literary journalism texts] *that current-traditional literary theories devalue* [italics added]."⁶¹

In other words, Winterowd as the rhetorical critic, seems to be close to Eason as the communication theorist in views on ethnographic reality and cultural phenomenology. In the first, the observer serves as a means only, akin to the traditional distancing of a reporter covering an event. In cultural phenomenology, however, fantasy and reality become blurred as the observer becomes participant-reporter. This is exactly the case with all of the books analyzed in this study. As Eason contends, narrative acts as a cultural symbol, in such a way that "New Journalists [in the 1960s] found many of their stories in trends and events already transformed into spectacles by the mass media."⁶²

⁵⁹Winterowd, The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature, p. 3.

⁶⁰Winterowd, The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature, pp. 3, 6.

⁶¹Winterowd, The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature, p. 22.

⁶²Eason, David. (1990). "The New Journalism and the Image World." in Literary Journalism in the Twentieth Century, Norman Sims (ed.). New York: Oxford University Press, p. 191.

The very fact that many authors of books about public school education were teachers themselves, or at the very least, spent considerable time researching in the classroom, qualifies them as participant-reporters. In effect, they presented their information embedded in a narrative which helped explain the cultural symbolism of public school education, meaning its inherent failure.

Dramatistic Analysis

This look at a rhetorician (Winterowd) and a communication theorist (Eason) and how much their efforts appear to complement one another is preliminary to the primary theoretical approach to the books dealing with public school education. For that purpose, we turn to the works of Kenneth Burke for whom "writing is . . . a progress of sharing."⁶³ Burke's rhetorical theories help provide a method that allows "a very broad view of the techniques and ends of rhetoric."⁶⁴ Burke sees rhetoric as including all situations (*motives* he calls them) that involve all human communication. Or put another way,

one starts to account for the purpose and effect of any given text by considering the situation that creates it and then by looking closely at the terminology and structure chosen to represent that situation to the reader.⁶⁵

To Burke, words were never simple referents; rather they were symbols having rhetorical content, ethical, pathetic, and logical. Burke believed that rhetoric

⁶³Comprone, Joseph. (1978). "Kenneth Burke and the Teaching of Writing," College Composition and Communication, 29, p. 340.

⁶⁴Giddens, p. 29.

⁶⁵Giddens, p. 79.

*is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols*⁶⁶ [his italics].

His dramatistic analysis offers a unique way of looking at these books offering a five-part division into act, actor, scene, purpose, and agency. Burke's analysis examines the latent content and structure of a text, not to subsume the meaning of the individual story, but to understand more fully the meaning of the story. As Burke himself disclosed, "My job [in formulating the pentad] was not to help a writer decide what he might say to produce a text. It was to help a critic perceive what was going on in a text that was already written."⁶⁷

The implications of writer as artist persuading an audience are underscored in this passage from a Michael Feehan essay dealing with Burke.

Dramatism will be concerned with how people live, objectively, but it will recognize that artists perform a realistic formal act in constructing their works. Artists abstract out of the continuum of everyday life the key values in social conflict and transform them for purposes of audience response into esthetic 'superstructural' elements.⁶⁸

Dramatism also makes analysis of the reader's involvement possible. As Giddens notes, with dramatism

[T]he author attempts to enable the reader to experience perceptions, emotions, attitudes, and responses comparable to a participant's by involving him or her as thoroughly as possible in the people of the situation.⁶⁹

⁶⁶Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, p. 43.

⁶⁷Burke, Kenneth. (1978). "Questions and answers about the pentad." *CCCC*, 29, December, p. 331.

⁶⁸Feehan, Michael. (1979). "Kenneth Burke's Discovery of Dramatism." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 65(4), p. 410.

⁶⁹Giddens, p. 90.

Drama and story are both emphasized. Perhaps no modern writer has developed the implications of drama as much as Burke. In many works, he explored the concept of dramatism, an understanding of man as a symbol-using animal who *acts* in the world on the basis of meaning that symbols hold for him. For Burke, man is the only organism capable of *action* rather than motion. In this sense, drama is not a metaphor for action but a real description of human action. "In this sense," Burke wrote "man is literally as an animal characterized by his special aptitude for 'symbolic action,' which is itself a literal term. And from there on, drama is employed, not as a metaphor but as a fixed form that helps us to discover what the implication of the terms 'act' and 'person' *really are*"⁷⁰ (his italics).

The dramatistic pentad may then be seen as one method with which to approach an ethical criticism of public education writing. Nor are the five terms of the pentad, necessarily, the crucial elements in the analysis. Burke himself said "my stress is less upon the terms themselves than upon what I would call the 'ratios' among the terms."⁷¹ Furthermore, while Burke found the pentad useful for analyzing literary text, he likewise held it as "a serviceably overall structure" for analyzing human relations in general.⁷²

With the dramatistic pentad as method, any text can be deconstructed into a select group of elements thereby providing a more incisive understanding of the text's meaning. But beyond that, the pentad (Burke later "hexed" the pentad by adding *Attitude*) provides a more precise tool for

⁷⁰Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives*, (1976). p. 11.

⁷¹Burke, "Questions and Answers," p. 332. (A fuller explanation of these ratios is provided at the end of Chapter 6 using the first chapter of Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren* for analysis purposes.)

⁷²Burke, "Questions and Answers," p. 334.

analyzing the human conditions "*Among Schoolchildren*" which prompted education authors to write their books in the first place. The conditions which victimize children stir a high level of empathy in the reader--in Burke's term, an identification of writer and reader, or as Joseph Comprone contends,

In the final stages, the writing is reread and redone to assure that, however obvious the general purpose, the writer has interrelated generality and detail in a form that assures *Consubstantiation*--that term drawn from religious rhetoric in which reader and writer remain simultaneously separate and joined together.⁷³

With Burke's conception of dramatism, news can be studied as a symbolic act, the dramatic portrayal of a dramatic event. The study of news (and for our purposes here, public school education as news) as drama was first suggested in the writings of Lippmann. News, Lippmann said, "is not a first hand report of raw material. It is a report of that material after it has been stylized."⁷⁴ News puts "pictures in our heads,"⁷⁵ simplified narratives that attempt to explain the complexities of events through drama. The philosopher George Herbert Mead also recognized the news as drama. "The vast importance of media of communication such as those involved in journalism is seen at once," he wrote, "since they report situations through which one can enter into the attitude and experience of other persons. The *drama* has served this function in presenting what have been felt to be important situations."⁷⁶

In dramatistic analysis, a means of detailed consideration and categorization of integral elements within the story is provided. In essence,

⁷³Comprone, p. 340.

⁷⁴Lippmann, (1922). *Public Opinion*. New York: The MacMillan Company, p. 347.

⁷⁵Lippmann, p. 3.

⁷⁶Mead, George H. (1934). *Mind, Self, and Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 257.

the structure and content of a text is laid bare and seems especially applicable to an analysis involving news content. In this sense, this type analysis provides a unique way of comparing the five elements of the pentad with the traditional journalistic practice employed with the inverted pyramid. Burke said, "Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the Fall," adding, "the basic function of rhetoric [is] the use of verbs by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents."⁷⁷ Writers, in other words, have rhetorical motives and seek to represent the political/social through the aesthetic in an effort to make something happen, to bring about change. As Frank Lentricchia notes in explaining Burke, "literature makes something happen, that the literary is always the taking of position and simultaneously the exercising of position within and upon the social field."⁷⁸

This chapter ends with an explanation (Table 5-1) of a typical way the pentad serves to operate in analyzing story (level one) and author-reader symbolism (level two).

⁷⁷Burke, Kenneth. (1950). A Rhetoric of Motives. Berkeley University of California Press, p. 40.

⁷⁸Lentricchia, p. 156.

Table 5-1: Dramatistic Analysis Model

Level One (L-1) - Within Story	
Actor/Agent -	<u>Who</u> is acting? Who are the characters? Who is the writer? Who are the speakers?
Action/Act -	<u>What</u> happened? What is said in dialogue? What do <u>actors</u> do to/with one another? What conflicts arise?
Scene -	<u>When/Where</u> does the story take place?
Purpose -	<u>Why</u> did <u>action</u> take place? What are the reasons for the conflicts?
Agency -	<u>How</u> is the action, actors, scene described? How are conflicts resolved?
Level Two (L-2) - Writer-Reader Symbolic Interaction	
Actor/Agent -	<u>Who</u> do readers perceive writer to be? How do they judge her/his credibility? What audience does writer address? What judgments does she/he make about readers?
Action/Act -	<u>What</u> do readers "hear"? What is writer really "saying"? What meaning is intended, what conveyed?
Scene -	<u>When/Where</u> does the context evolve? Is it micro centered, school only? Is it symbolic of society as a whole (macro centered)? What multiple perspectives about school/society are intended by writer? What perspectives are interpreted by readers?
Purpose -	<u>Why</u> was the story written? What reaction does writer seek? Is she/he agenda building, anticipating reform? Or seeking to avenge self/motives?
Agency -	<u>How</u> do writers achieve their motives? What means do they use? What style (voice, language, tone, attitude) do they employ? Are they consistent?

CHAPTER SIX

THE DISMISSALS: RAGE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

Perhaps no other common experience in this study demonstrates both the individual writing styles and literary journalism techniques as the dismissal of three author-teachers. Three authors--Kozol, Conroy, and Herndon--were released by their respective school administrations for a variety of reasons. All three chose to incorporate the description of these firings into their texts, though by means of different methods and styles. While anger was a common emotion in all three cases, rage at the system and even a bit of self-righteousness crept into the writing. In addition, the authors chose variant literary techniques to describe the experiences.

These dismissals are also useful as a means of demonstrating the dramatistic nature of the rhetoric in the books. Table 6-1 provides graphic analysis of the firings, which are also further explained within the text. The Table 6-1 uses two levels (L-1, L-2) explained in Table 5-1, page 101, to analyze the dismissals. Level One concerns the individual narrative book of each teacher-author fired, in other words, the actual story told. Level Two presents an examination of the symbolic action and terministic screens used by the authors to make their cases rhetorically. Appendix B offers a dramatistic analysis of story/text using the first chapter of Tracy Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren* as example.

Kozol's experience serves as a prototype for the other two authors fired and provides a useful example of dramatistic analysis. Kozol (Actor) increasingly adopts a pro-child stance (Act) [Agency for a greater goal] in an ongoing battle, measured in angrier tones with first a Reading Teacher (Actor), then with the entire city school

TABLE 6-1: The Dismissals - A Dramatistic Analysis

	Action-Act		Scene		Actor(s)/Agent(s)		Agency		Purpose	
	What		When/Where		Who		How		Why	
	L-1	L-2	L-1	L-2	L-1	L-2	L-1	L-2	L-1	L-2
<u>Kozol</u> Death at an Early Age	Fired, Violated Curriculum Policy	Write Book	Inner City Mass. 1964	Re-creation Notes, Recall; Cultural Climate of time	Students, Teachers, Administra- tors	Teacher- Observer, Author- Critic	Informed Personally before end of semester	Anger, Incre- duly, warning to audience, Rage	Violate Policy, Teach Poetry	Alert/ Inform Public, Criticize System, Teachers; Promote societal values
<u>Conroy</u> The Water Is Wide	Fired, Insub- ordinate	Write Book, Movie	Rural Island, S.C. 1970 Elementary	Re-creation, Notes, Recall	Students, Teachers, Administra- tors	Teacher, Observer, Author- Critic	Informed Personally before end of semester	Anger, Indig- nation, Self- right- eous, Humor, as appeal to audience	Insub- ordinate, Unauthor- field trip	Avenge self, Confess flaws, Point fingers; Impact audience, Produce reform
<u>Hemdon</u> The Way It Spozed To Be	Fired, Unable to control class; Hitting a student	Write Book	Metro- ghetto, California 1960 Junior High	Re-creation, Notes, Recall	Students, Teachers, Administra- tors	Teacher, Observer, Author- Critic	Forced resignation	Anger, Humor, Reflec- tion aimed at raising expectations	Lack of discipline, Strikes child, "per- sonality conflict" "unfit"	Expose system, Press for freedom, Avenge, Appease self; Entertain/ Impact audience

board (Actors). In his one year as teacher at a Roxbury (MA) inner-city elementary school (Scene), Kozol is motivated by an intention to expand the curriculum offerings (Purpose) to his class by reading certain select poets (Agency), including Robert Frost and Langston Hughes. The instruction (Act) proves popular/successful with his students (Actors) but runs into opposition from a principal (Action) and ultimately school board (Actors) increasingly portrayed as incompetent and racist (Actor). The Outcome: Kozol loses his job at the end of the Spring Semester. This, admittedly, is a much simplified version, but serves as a means of introducing a method of analysis applicable to greater or lesser extent to all the texts in this study.

Jonathan Kozol

Kozol's release from the Roxbury school district toward the end of his first year of teaching was captured vividly in print, both his own words and those of others who chose to respond in the public press to his firing. In the last 50 pages of *Death at an Early Age*, much of his description, story-telling, commentary and criticisms are framed around the firing.

As he begins, he notes the precarious position of new teachers:

A young teacher without powerful connections or impressive affiliations does not last long in the Boston school system unless he learns to remain relatively silent about the things that he sees.¹

Kozol moves on through a lengthy commentary on the quality of teachers, presumably based on his observations of fellow instructors. He saves some of his more scathing comments for the administration, noting he clearly favors the children.

The real reason that I was able to get on with those children in the state in which I found them is that I came into that room knowing myself to be absolutely on their side I went in there . . . in a manner that they soon detected, with loyalty only to them for their nerve and for their defiance and with an obvious and openly expressed dissatisfaction with the stupidity of a school system that had cheated them.²

¹Kozol, *Death At An Early Age*, p. 155.

²Kozol, *Death At An Early Age*, p. 158.

Then begins a steady buildup of the individual occurrences that led to his firing. In particular, he focuses on the lack of what he considered suitable reading material for the children and the recalcitrance, in particular, of the reading teacher who had a propensity toward optimistic ("All of the adjectives [she used on a list] were laudatory.") phrasings. He sums up his view of this teacher's violations of the student's integrity thusly:

The word, all too clearly, had been divorced from the world, and the application of the correct pat adjective need have nothing in particular to do with the child's idea about the book. . . . [T]he Reading Teacher was able to rise above the painful matter that she had effectively taught them to be good liars and in fact had equipped them with a set of tools to keep themselves at as far as possible a distance from the truth.³

These details are handled by Kozol without, for the most part, the benefit of direct quotations. In fact, that is one of the marks of his first book: reliance on indirect quotations and character description.

From the Reading Teacher⁴ as metaphor for poor teachers, Kozol branches to the book list which the school supplied and his efforts to introduce some newer readings more appropriate for the particular students he taught. Of the 606 books in the room, half were older than ten years, and in most cases, there were not enough to go around of any one version. From there, he goes to the school's "Course of Study," something of a catechism of permitted reading material. It was Kozol's divergence from this "reading list," if you will, which eventually got him fired. Although he finds some good in the Course of Study ("The book set out with good intentions."), Kozol quickly finds evidence for criticism, especially the reactions of his own students to some of the prescribed poetry selections and their own lives.

³Kozol, *Death At An Early Age*, pp. 164-165.

⁴The Reading Teacher takes on many of the characteristics of grotesque metaphor enumerated by Landow in *Elegant Jeremiahs*. In this instance, Kozol appears to make the case the Reading Teacher somehow incorporates all of the worst traits of the insensitive, non-caring, burned out public school teacher who is a borderline racist. (Kozol capitalizes the words "Reading Teacher" in the book.)

The possibility of its having anything to do with your own life or sufferings, or with your own joys and exaltations, was not even in the picture.⁵

At that point, Kozol introduces half a dozen poems by Langston Hughes to his class to which, by his words, the students respond enthusiastically. Note, in particular in the extended quote that follows how the narration, or "story," of this incident is embedded with a sense of wonder, even amazement, that his black students came alive to one of their own.

I made a tape-recording of part of my morning in that class. No transistor radios reappeared or were turned on during the next hour and, although some of the children interrupted me a lot to quiz me about Langston Hughes, where he was born, whether he was rich, whether he was married, and about poetry, and about writers, and writing in general, and a number of other things that struck their fancy, and although it also was not a calm or orderly or, above all, disciplined class by traditional definition and there were probably very few minutes in which you would have been able to hear a pin drop or hear my reading uninterrupted by the voices of one or another of the girls, at least I did have their attention and they seemed, if anything, to care only too much about the content of that Negro poet's book. I felt uncertain while I was with them, and not at all sure if I was really getting anywhere or not. But, when I came home, I played back the tape and I recognized that it had been an extraordinary day. Since that time I have sometimes met two or three of the children who were students in that class. All of them remember the green book of poetry that I read with them that day and, while most of them forget the name of the man who wrote the poetry, they remember the names of the poems he wrote, and they remember something else. They remember that he was Negro.⁶

Kozol warms to the challenge rhetorically. Threatened with a booklet published by the Boston Public Schools titled, "A Curriculum Guide in Character Education," he explicates many sections of it and interjects frequently his anger at its propositions. Using ancient Greek and Talmudic references thereby establishing himself as one familiar with the ultimate "moral voice," Kozol paints an insidious picture of the booklet and the intentions of its designers.

There is too much respect for authority in the Boston schools, and too little respect for the truth. If there were more of the latter, there would be less need of the former and the atmosphere of the Boston schools would not have to be so nearly what it is today: the atmosphere of a crumbling dictatorship in time of martial law. The

⁵Kozol, p. 173.

⁶Kozol, p. 174.

emphasis in this one booklet and in the words of the school administration in general upon the need for dumb obedience belies its deepest fears.⁷

Motivation of students seems at the core of the booklet and Kozol reserves some of his most scathing attacks for the aphoristic banality found in the curriculum guide.

It cannot be expected that motivation becomes the all-important obstacle (to sound education) when the material is so often a diet of banality and irrelevance which it is not worth the while of a child to learn or that of a teacher to teach.⁸

Such comments are suspect by traditional journalistic criterion. But the veracity of the comments depends in large degree on the *ethos* enhanced by the credibility (character) of the writer. Or as Berner states, "Authority comes not from sources in the story but from the quality of the reporting and writing."⁹ This appeal to credibility often plays a part in most writing, "but only in the writings of the sage does *ethos* become the principal effect, and not merely a contributory one."¹⁰ Authorial commentary dots the pages of education texts, helps readers get to know the author. How appropriate is such commentary? It is "appropriate" certainly to the sheer enjoyment of reading a text, and appropriate to each text judged as a whole work. As Booth contends, "we are forced to ask ourselves what the 'whole work' is when dozens of pages have already been devoted to commentary. We do not experience these 'intrusions' as independent outbursts; they are continuing steps in our acquaintance with the narrator."¹¹ Michael Johnson put it another way in calling the literary journalists of the 1960s "hystorians," or writers who fight normal journalistic conventions through use of personality. The "hystorian" asserts the importance of his impression and his vision of the world. He "embraces the fictional

⁷Kozol, p. 178.

⁸Kozol, p. 180.

⁹Berner, R. Thomas. (1986, October). "Literary Newswriting: The Death of An Oxymoron," Journalism Monographs, #99, p. 17.

¹⁰Landow, p. 155.

¹¹Booth, Wayne. (1961). The Rhetoric of Fiction; Chicago: Univeristy of Chicago, p. 208.

element inevitable in any reporting and tries to imagine his way toward the truth, instead of allowing the clichés of journalism to shape assembled facts into 'news'.¹²

Composite Child

Kozol's own situation begins to unravel as he introduces additional works of poetry in his class and draws a visit from the deputy superintendent. He continues to comment liberally on the policies and mandates which he faced, perhaps a self-justifying reflex, but more properly in an effort to show their stupidity. He then adopts a device common in some literary journalism: the composite. Using a "child" from his class, he tells how she was affected by the poems and other material he introduced. "Try to imagine, for a child, how great the gap between the outside world and the world conveyed within this kind of school must seem. A little girl, maybe Negro, comes in from a street that is lined with car-carcasses." Putting himself (and the reader) in her shoes, Kozol attempts to capture what the school experiences involving reading are for this girl. Noting how well she responds to his poetry selections in particular, Kozol then alerts us to the composite: "This was a child in my class. Details are changed somewhat but it is essentially one child." In that word *essentially* we catch what must almost certainly be a composite character.

Reacting to the "child's" reaction, Kozol finds justification:

It was all I needed to know to confirm for me the value of reading that poem (Hughes "Ballad of the Landlord") and the value of reading many other poems to children which will build upon, and not attempt to break down, the most important observations and very deepest foundations of their lives.¹³

Reading poetry, then, led to Kozol's abrupt firing which, using primarily indirect discourse, he describes in the remainder of the book. He includes an attack by a parent, "A white man whom I had never seen before," and subsequent meetings with the principal and the deputy superintendent. Ultimately, in his own anger,

¹²Johnson, Michael. (1971). The New Journalism. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, p. 46.

¹³Kozol, Death at An Early Age, p. 191.

Kozol reverts to his own literary training in informing them both "that I thought myself a better judge of poetry" Then eight days before the end of school, "She told me I was fired." Although he was led to believe the firing authorization came from higher up, Kozol explains later this was most probably not so. He leaves the school without saying goodbye to any of his students (something he later regretted), on the instructions of the principal: "I regretted very much now that I had not disobeyed the Principal's last order, and I wished that I could have had one final chance to speak to all my pupils."¹⁴

Meetings follow with various school officials, all recorded via indirect discourse. Paragraphs become long and sometimes difficult as Kozol moves through the inane responses of school officials to his questions about the firing. In terms of some of the conversations, he offers his method of recording the gist of conversations: "I left her office but, before I left the building, I stopped at a table and took out a pad of paper and wrote down what she had said."¹⁵

So incensed was Kozol at the time, that he "went public" with the incidents. He found support, especially among parents of his students. These parents boycotted the school by withholding their children from school and conducting a sit-in as well.

In the days after that meeting, there were a number of demonstrations at the school which had a disruptive effect on certain classes. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing, many people may not be sure. The question is whether it is a real loss to miss one or two or even three or four days of school when none of the days that you are spending in school is worth much anyway.¹⁶

As we shall read shortly, Pat Conroy also engaged public support among his students and their parents when he was fired from a South Carolina school district.

¹⁴Kozol, Death at an Early Age, p. 197.

¹⁵Kozol, Death at an Early Age, p. 199.

¹⁶Kozol, Death at an Early Age, pp. 201-202.

The tactic, as in Kozol's case, had little lasting effect on the administration. Kozol, also reserves some of his strongest language for fellow teachers who remained.

[I]f they were dedicated, then what they were dedicated to above all was the extension of their own personalities and the perpetuation of their own code of values in the hearts and minds of children. You do not get something for nothing, I am afraid, and I do not really think we are ever going to get a good school system until we can deal effectively with the problem posed by the veteran teachers of that sort (Reading Teacher). All the fables in the world of how dedicated and devoted they are cannot change this single overriding fact.¹⁷

As Barry Farber so well notes,

Kozol's message . . . is far easier to accept--and far fairer. Some teachers were, and some undoubtedly still are, racist, caught up in the currents of an inexcusable part of American history. Kozol's rage was at racism and the ways it manifested itself in schools. But despite the painful truth of many of Kozol's assertions, he . . . fell into the trap of imagining that schools are the only influence on children's behavior.¹⁸

Kozol's book closes, noting the political climate in Boston at the time seen in the return to power of "all four bigots on the Boston School Committee." Then follows a "documents" section in which the author presents, verbatim, the statements of the school committee, a school official, and two letters to the *Boston Globe* critical of him. Ironically, he ends the text with a reprinting of the Hughes poem, "Ballad of the Landlord," testimony to the seeming innocence of that poem yet its perceived threat by authorities and their use of it to fire him.

As he points out to many Americans the inequities of public education, Kozol displays the kind of rhetoric and sense of vision which affects readers. His turn of phrase and sense of outrage have had long-term effects as well, for at least one reader.

If *Death at an Early Age* (Plume), by Jonathan Kozol, does to future generations of young Americans what it did to me in 1965, then public education could well be the beneficiary. This book made me an organizer, launched me on twenty-five years of unbroken activism and finally booted me into political organizing for Vermont's largest union--the school employees' union, Vermont-NEA.

¹⁷Kozol, *Death at an Early Age*, p. 207.

¹⁸Farber, pp. 9-10.

Was it Kozol's anger, his icy clear indictments, his hortatory wrath . . . or was it his appeal to the smoldering brushfire of defiance that all young people nurse? Whatever it was, back in the middle 1960s I was grabbed by the windpipe and whipped into a fury of deep feeling. The luminous moment of connect that sometimes occurs in grass-roots outreach, the glimpse of bigger forces and that connection to a rich human tradition of hope, all came upon me when I grabbed *Death at an Early Age* as my first organizing tool. And I haven't stopped; Kozol hasn't let me.¹⁹

Kozol's ethos evokes a pragmatic political vestige.

Pat Conroy

In *The Water Is Wide*, Pat Conroy doesn't build toward a climactic firing. Instead, he presents his student interaction routines on Yamacraw Island with little hint of what might happen. Furthermore, he relies on direct quotations when the event takes place and during subsequent meetings as well. This distinguishes him in two respects from Kozol. Conroy, also, weaves a certain element of self-righteousness into his prose; more so than Kozol, thus, while displaying anger over his firing, he engages the reader with a certain justificatory language as we shall see.

Shortly after he was fired, Conroy describes the experience using considerable hyperbole to communicate his emotion.

I sat in a chair across from his staring back. And in that single moment I realized something very important. Piedmont could not scare me. Nor could Bennington. Nor could the assembled board of education in all its measly glory. For in crossing the river twice daily I had come closer to more basic things. I had come to know the singular powers of a river advancing toward the open sea and the power of tides regulating that advance. I had seen how fog could change the whole world into its own image. The river, the tides, and the fog were part of a great flow and a fitting together of harmonious parts.²⁰

So much of Conroy's text is full of such figures of speech that it comes closer to a truly "literary" style than many of the other books examined.²¹ His "voice" remains strong throughout moreover as he makes use of extensive direct quotation to

¹⁹Friedman, Ellen David. (1992, September 21). Book Review, *Death at an Early Age*. *The Nation*, 255, p. 303.

²⁰Conroy, *The Water Is Wide*, p. 227.

²¹Such figures and tropes are primarily part of the literary world of fiction. Their appearance in Conroy's book are almost routine and far exceed their use by any of the other authors. One might conclude Conroy's own ethos suffers due to the too frequent use of imaginative language.

document the details following his release, though very often, a self-righteous quality intrudes.

'I know an awful lot about what goes on over at your schoolhouse. A lot more than you think I know,' he said defensively.

'Sure. You get your information from Bennington, who gets his from letters from Mrs. Brown, his hired stool pigeon. Bennington whispers in your ear that I am an impudent punk who's going to make trouble. Bennington is the same guy who was in charge of that island for forty years, Doctor Piedmont. Forty stinking years he was the king of the dump. And he didn't do crap, but let those kids rot over there.²²

Conroy thereby implies he alone has made an improvement on the island. He casts himself in the "good guy" role, relying on direct quotes and informs, "I have only recorded the essence of the conversation." His pleas become quite indignant.

I wanted to return to the island desperately, but I also felt a substantial obligation to bring the board out of shadow into the clear light of day. I felt it should know and understand the real problems of the island without the benefit of Piedmont or Bennington's interpretation. Piedmont, on the other hand, smelled a rat in his system and wanted me exterminated as cleanly as possible.²³

Scene-by-scene construction and elaborate details are also in evidence in this "firing" section of Conroy's book.

It was a hot, sticky night when the board convened to hear my arguments about the price of gas and education in America, but the board room was new and air-conditioned, with yellow carpets surging along the floors and bright colors flaming along the newly erected walls. On a borrowed Ping-pong table I placed thirty photographs of this island directly across from where the board members would sit. I wanted to suggest to them that the discussion tonight would concern a place without yellow carpets and pasteled walls. I wanted them to stare at a few rags, a few shacks, and a few skinny kids while they pondered the weighty decisions of the evening.²⁴

Conroy then launches into perhaps his most angered, self-righteous best.

I started my speech by telling the board I had gotten a haircut for their edification and to insure that they would listen to what I had to say. In a voice rather creaky and unimpressive, I traced my background on the island very briefly. Then I told them: I am not here tonight for the love of the school board. I have been on the island and have seen conditions there. You have been presiding over an educational desert. Children who grow up on that island don't have a prayer of receiving an adequate

²²Conroy, p. 221.

²³Conroy, pp. 230-231.

²⁴Conroy, p. 232.

education. They grow up without hope. They leave the island without hope. They drift into the big cities of the East Coast and rot in some tenement slum--without hope. They are not taught to read, to write, to speak, or to be proud of themselves or their race Yamacraw requires sweeping reform of your thinking Think instead about children. People. Human beings. Feel for once that education is about people--not figures.²⁵

This extended section from the text sounds very much like the impassioned plea of a Kozol, but with specific blame assessment as well.

The narration then proceeds through this particular meeting as Conroy details each attack and counterattack in successive paragraphs. Following an executive meeting of the board, Conroy learns "the board had voted to give me the gas money. I had won." But he lapses into an extended lament sprinkled with more metaphoric language, which, while literary, seems just more of an effort to paint himself as the only sane, rational person in the scene. Note the Biblical allusions.

But the victory, if one could call it that, was ephemeral and elusive, a brief and strident shout atop a mountain that was more noise than substance, more smoke than flames The victory strengthened my belief that a man could speak the truth to his elders, to the new scribes and pharisees, and not be crucified or vilified because of it. My faith in the democratic system was renewed But that was when I was young. I underestimated the dark part of mankind that is rarely seen in the light of day. I failed to reckon with the secret beasts that reside in the lightless forest of men's souls.²⁶

Because this is such inflamed rhetoric it has all the more resonance of self-righteousness about it, and from a reader's standpoint, sounds good but lessens the impact of what really happened. Eventually, Conroy gets to his own firing, at which point, "it was war." In a bit of self-deprecation, he admits, "I do not react well to crisis." After dismissing outright violence, Conroy considers "going public" because "I wanted public opinion to be stirred up, whether for me or against me."²⁷ He attempts to gain support from Beaufort politicians, but lapses into acceptance: "It

²⁵Conroy, p. 234.

²⁶Conroy, p. 236.

²⁷Conroy, p. 243.

was very instructive. I could probably have enlisted more action from a bleached jellyfish washed ashore in a seasonal storm."²⁸

But even though he gets no "official" help, he turns to a "trump card," a meeting of the people of the island. He gains almost unanimous support from them as they promise to withhold their students from the island school starting the very next day. He reacts to this: "I issued a warning about the danger of a boycott." Despite the warning, the parents proceed as planned, but are effectively countered by administrative threats. Just as a reporter is about to break the story, Conroy is reclassified by his draft board. Then, "On Friday I called off the boycott completely."

As he recounts his final, feeble efforts at self-defense, Conroy again resorts to a self-righteous tone.

I tried to get them (his students) to drop prejudices and conditioned responses from their thinking. In essence, I tried to teach them to embrace life openly, to reflect upon its mysteries, rejoice in its surprises, and to reject its cruelties. Like other teachers, I failed. Teaching is a record of failures. But the glory of teaching is in the attempt. I dislike poor teachers. They are criminals to me. I've seen so much cruelty toward children Before you fire me, ask yourself these questions . . . in the analysis of any teacher Did he love his kids? Did he love the act of teaching? Did his kids love him? If you answer negatively to any of these questions, I deserve to be fired.²⁹

While touching, noble, and literary, these sentiments merely serve to set up what appears to be Conroy's thrust throughout the book: his battle with the overwhelming forces of administrative intransigence intent on maligning and holding back legitimate resources from racial minorities. One must also note the similarity with Kozol: both Conroy and Kozol take their anger out, in part, on the incompetent, "poor teachers" in the profession.

Conroy's final chapter, post firing, is surprisingly free of any posturing. He appears even somewhat confessional.

²⁸Conroy, p. 244.

²⁹Conroy, p. 251.

I could be so self-righteous, so inflexible when I thought that I was right or that the children had been wronged To survive in the future I would have to learn the complex art of ass-kissing Survival is the most important thing I could probably still be with the Yamacraw kids had I conquered my ego.³⁰

Still, the metaphoric language remains.

I wanted to tell them about the river that was rising quickly, flooding the marshes and threatening the dry land. I wanted them to know that their day was ending. When I saw them at the trial, I knew that they were soldiers in the rear guard, captains of a doomed army retreating through the snow and praying that the shadows of the quick, dark wolves, waiting in the cold, would come no closer. They were old men and could not accept the new sun rising out of the strange waters. The world was very different now.³¹

This is very pretty prose. But what is the allusion? Considering the heat of the debate earlier, as well as the typically hot, humid weather off the coast of South Carolina, perhaps the language was ill-chosen, the metaphors mixed. Finally, Conroy concludes with his own lamentation over his performance.

Of the Yamacraw children I can say little. I don't think I changed the quality of their lives significantly or altered the inexorable fact that they were imprisoned by the very circumstance of their birth. I felt much beauty in my year with them. For them I leave a single prayer: that the river is good to them in the crossing.³²

The continual use of figurative, lofty language, throughout *The Water Is Wide* attracts the reader. Given the fact that Conroy was an *actor* in the drama of the school (according to Burke's definition), his purpose, both expressed and inferred through prose, seems to call as much attention to himself as to the problems of education on Yamacraw Island.

James Herndon

Another *actor* in the drama of the schoolroom who also wound up being fired was James Herndon. The details of that firing are to be found in his first book, *The Way It Spozed To Be*. Herndon, however, displays no self-righteousness in developing

³⁰Conroy, p. 255.

³¹Conroy, p. 256.

³²Conroy, p. 258.

the story of his first year as a teacher. There is a display of anger, including the time he strikes a child.

Once started though, I couldn't get over it that easily, and when I heard someone begin to giggle over to my left I hauled off without looking and slammed whoever it was backhanded across the head.³³

Herndon's anger is described as of the "'tcch-tcch' variety" compared to others. According to Farber, "What also makes Herndon's book somewhat distinctive among those of this genre is his willingness to acknowledge that outrageous behavior could be exhibited by students as well as teachers."³⁴

Herndon's offense was inability to control his class. He spares the reader, however, many of the details of the procedure and also resorts to indirect quotation for the most part. In addition, his short- chapter book presents a series of classroom incidents with some additional details of interaction with teachers.

In this book I'm trying to tell about my year teaching--learning to teach--in a public school, a year spent in a particular school, at a particular time, and with particular students. These particulars are my anecdote This is why I write down whatever circumstances and events I clearly remember in such detail as I remember, including cause, effect, and consequence if possible, hopefully without extravagance of any sort. But also to relate only what I remember.³⁵

When it came to the details of his release, Herndon's approach remains the same.

To his credit, he granted me a long interview and listened to everything I had to say. It's tempting now to write down a long conversation which I suppose I must have had with him, what he said, what I said--but I'd have to make it up. I really don't remember much that we said.³⁶

Succeeding paragraphs outline, through means of indirect discourse, what went on. "I had to talk about results," "He wasn't impressed," "It was right then that I really understood I was being fired," "It seemed a matter of ideas of order." Herndon's

³³Herndon, p. 181.

³⁴Farber, p. 15.

³⁵Herndon, p. 6.

³⁶Herndon, p. 172.

prose is much more matter-of-fact, much less reliant on Conroy's metaphors or even Kozol's rage.

I spent the hour walking around the streets nearby; I'd suddenly had enough of GW Junior High. I began to imagine myself what Grissum had seen when he looked in my room during "Cinderella"--when he looked at a scene which I was offering up as some great achievement!³⁷

In the waning days of his one year, Herndon reflects even more, becomes almost totally philosophical as he ponders his own personal growth, with little of the prosaic rage exhibited by Conroy in his self-righteousness or Kozol in his indictment of the system itself.

I was brooding about the position I found myself in. I felt that if I'd been fired up there in the mountains near Yosemite, it wouldn't have mattered much to me. I hadn't thought of that job as a permanent situation or a serious matter. I hadn't considered how to teach, I'd had no goals for my classes--it had been a job. Now at the end of this year, I was aware I really was a teacher; whether good or bad didn't enter into it. I couldn't remember when I'd worked so hard or concentrated what intelligence and energy I possessed so seriously on any one effort.³⁸

By acquainting the reader with so much of his *actor's* role in the drama of the classroom, Herndon builds up a good deal of credibility. His weaknesses and his strengths show and there is little attempt to become sanctimonious over it all. His tone is far more reflective because "Herndon's main point was that teachers and schools are too obsessed with order."³⁹ Indeed, in the Epilogue, Herndon reflects from the distance of eight years removed after being fired. He has managed to keep his teaching interest alive through some part-time efforts. Once back to full-time teaching, "I began to think about settling accounts with GW, and I wrote this book." But in "settling accounts," and recording his experiences, including getting fired, Herndon ends with this pessimistic indulgence.

What to do? You can read suggestions for change in a lot of recent books by serious and intelligent men. I suppose I could add mine. But frankly, I have almost no hope

³⁷Herndon, p. 179.

³⁸Herndon, p. 191.

³⁹Farber, p. 15.

that there will be any significant change in the way we educate our children--for that, after all, would involve liberty, the last thing we may soon expect--and so I have thought merely to describe one time for you, parents, kids, readers, the way it is.⁴⁰

Focus On A Principal

When Nat Hentoff's book appeared in book form in 1966, a dedication to William Shawn, the editor of *The New Yorker* at the time, an introduction by education writer John Holt, and the author's own introductory note were included.

Holt, whose credentials as a educator and writer on the subject were widely recognized and criticized, has been called "the most well-renowned and persistent critic" of the American public school system and criticized in that "he maligned schools and teachers in ways that consistently ignored the complex nature of educational and social systems."⁴¹ Holt interweaves his own philosophy of education into his comments about Hentoff's book in question. He also notes the influence of an administrator on the process of education.

What the good teacher can do for children, the good administrator can do for his teachers--create and maintain an environment in the highest degree favorable to their learning and growth.⁴²

Holt praised the book as helping to "refute some currently fashionable ideas about the education of slum children," primarily that the fault lies in the children themselves. Or, as he said, "The most important reasons for the failure of slum children's education lie not in the children but in the schools."⁴³

Hentoff himself chooses as his subject Dr. Elliott Shapiro, principal of P.S. 119 in New York City. Shapiro represents Hentoff's ideal school leader and in a departure from the other books in this study, the author focuses his journalistic efforts in explaining the man and his mission in the school, rather than making the

⁴⁰Herndon, p. 30.

⁴¹Farber, pp. 3-4.

⁴²Hentoff, Nat. (1966). *Our Children Are Dying*, New York: Viking, p. ix.

⁴³Holt, John. (1966). Introduction, *Our Children Are Dying*. New York: The Viking Press, p. ix.

children the major *actors* in the drama. Shapiro, according to Hentoff, demonstrates real concern for the children of P.S. 119 and they recognize it. "Accordingly, they respond to him not as an abstract authority figure but as the man he is," Hentoff exudes, and then proceeds to reveal "the nature of that man" as the "subject of this book."⁴⁴

Hentoff manages to chronicle the "nature" of Shapiro, in the principal's own words, using extended quotes to move the reader through the narrative. The extended quote is the primary descriptive technique used throughout, with very little commentary by the author. One might well wonder how Hentoff obtained such lengthy direct information; whether via tape recorder or shorthand, he does not say.

Extended direct quotations from teachers are also introduced, especially in terms of classroom pedagogy, their influence on particular students, the school itself, and, of course, the character and style of Shapiro. Few student comments are recorded, though occasional dialogue is a useful device for injecting students' views.

Typical of many of the books in this genre, however, is the role of that unique student who seems an *agent* to help "carry" the narrative, or serve as metaphor for the school/system's ills. In this case, the student's name is John, a highly intelligent but disturbed youth, who seemingly has been given free reign to move through P.S. 119 in his own way and time. Whatever restrictions are placed on John are generally meted out by Shapiro. In the principal's words,

There's a remarkable boy. 'Shapiro looked after him.' He's in the sixth grade and reads at an eleventh-grade level. I don't really understand how it happened. He doesn't know who his mother was. He does know he has a father somewhere who has no interest in him. Some years ago, he was picked up by a woman who became his mother. She was an alcoholic and a quasi-prostitute, but she gave the child real warmth.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Hentoff, p. xv.

⁴⁵Hentoff, p. 19.

And this is but part of a very long paragraph, (all in quotation marks) in which Hentoff uses Shapiro's own words to detail the scene at the moment.

The use of John in Hentoff's book recalls similar character/student profiles in other books under study here: Clarence in *Among Schoolchildren*, Stephen in *Death at an Early Age*. Focusing on one particular student seems to provide the author with repeated opportunities to structure the narrative, in a sense, through the "documenting" eyes of a student. But while a reader might expect, as in the typical romantic tale, to witness a personality change in the protagonist by end of story, that does not happen in these books. The child either leaves or drops out of school, is sent to a special school, or worse. The point seems to be that there are some students who, even though given special treatment, cannot respond.

Non-Teacher Authors

Nat Hentoff along with Tracy Kidder, and later Samuel Freedman, are the only non-teachers writing about the subject of education. Whether this means their perspective as observers of the public education scene is more objective is speculative at best. But that difference aside, Hentoff shows far more commonalties with other writers in the genre even while focusing more on an administrator than on teachers or students as subject matter. Thematic use of school board recalcitrance, immense lack of resources, weak-hearted efforts to change, or buck, the system in general are common in all the books under study, and Hentoff avails himself of them.

One technique that attracts some writers is the inclusion of student-generated papers within the text. Essays written in a variety of classes often appear in part or whole. Hentoff uses a teacher's assignment of an essay, "If I Was Boss on My Block," as a jumping off point for an extensive review of the classroom scene at P.S. 191 through the eyes of a teacher named Stephenson. After recording four excerpts from

student papers, Hentoff lets the teacher speak in four successive paragraphs,⁴⁶ not so much in an effort to let any particular instructor indict himself, but as a means of showing how well, for the most part, Principal Shapiro interacts with his faculty and staff. In other words, the teacher's own words reinforce the "nature of the man" Shapiro is. It is a marvelous device with minimal commentary from Hentoff and seems to add its own air of authenticity.

The extended source quote turns out to be Hentoff's primary journalistic device throughout as the last third of his book relates quotes from teachers and Shapiro. In this strategy, Hentoff is the truest "chronicler of events" in the school as his own voice is muted at best with none of the anger or rage witnessed in other books. In the final analysis, what he offers are the events of a year in the life of P.S. 191 seen primarily through the eyes of its principal with the words of various actors on the scene punctuating the chronicle also. At most, Hentoff raises a variety of questions with the strategy, but refuses to indulge in any breast-beating or tirades to tell the story. The result, for the reader at least, is a more honest, but less moving, chronicle.

Some ten years later, however, Hentoff appears to have changed his strategy and conclusions. In *Does Anybody Give A Damn?*⁴⁷ Hentoff lashes out at teachers and administrators especially and attributes the deplorable conditions of inner city schools primarily to lack of funding. He also sees the failure of public schools as a consequence of the incompetency of teachers and administrators: "... (e)ducation professions--unlike doctors--are isolated to the point of nearly absolute protection from the consequences of any harm they do."⁴⁸ Hentoff is among the few writers to list specific retribution for such inadequacy among teachers. "When grave evidence

⁴⁶Hentoff, pp. 92-93.

⁴⁷New York, Knopf, (1977).

⁴⁸Hentoff, *Does Anybody Give a Damn?* p. 232.

of probable teacher failure is found, the teacher in question should be brought up on charges, with all due process protections."⁴⁹ Furthermore, when a school fails in teaching students to read at grade level, Hentoff recommends "principals and other administrators being brought up on charges of incompetency."⁵⁰ The sharp change in voice sounds more like Kozol. However, with a more specific focus of attack, he appears to lay the blame squarely on those most intimately connected to the situation rather than that amorphous group of individuals known under various categories as "the school boards," "the general public," "politicians," or simply attributing such failures to social problems.

Authors as Teachers

If rage, outrage, and self-righteousness seem to characterize the prose of many of our writers, humorous and *outrageous* might be better ways with which to characterize the works of James Herndon. While a public school teacher much of his adult life, Herndon has written three books on his classroom experiences. Following *The Way It Spozed To Be* (originally self-published), Herndon wrote a second book, *How To Survive In Your Native Land*, an even more unusual text in that he leads the reader through what the book's jacket cover describes as a "situation so hilariously perverse and stunningly inappropriate in its every approach to productive enterprise, it makes the frenetic activity of a Mack Sennett comedy look sober and sane."⁵¹

Herndon notes the distinction between his first and second books.

In *The Way It Spozed To Be* I was able to write that the book was about my "teaching, learning to teach" in a public school in America. As a travelogue it was mercifully cut short--the end of the novice traveler's voyage brought about simply, perhaps by lack of funds or by losing his passport out the window of an Italian train. . . . This book is about what it is like to work from 1959 to 1969 in America. A decade, comrades. Of course it is about schools, too, since that is where I have worked. Along the way I got rather sarcastic with myself when I began to write this. What?

⁴⁹Hentoff, *Does Anybody Give a Damn?* p. 229.

⁵⁰Hentoff, *Does Anybody Give a Damn?* p. 230.

⁵¹Herndon, *How to Survive in Your Native Land*, back cover.

Another school book? I'll call it *Return of Way It Spozed To Be!* I told myself I'll call it *Son of Way It Spozed To Be!* Yet one purpose of writing, like the purpose of talking to other people, is to demonstrate to yourself that you aren't crazy. Once begun, good or bad, such a purpose becomes immune to sarcasm. So I end up with only this chapter entitled both.⁵²

In addition to a reflexive prose style, Herndon seems to be less critical of teachers than most of the other writers reviewed thus far. In a third book, published in 1985, he sets out to defend teachers in general, minus much of the rhetoric of rage and righteousness witnessed previously.

We talk some at lunch about the bad press we currently get. Our conclusion, in brief, is that if anyone thinks the trouble with public schools comes from incompetent teachers, they are crazy as hell. We figure that before you get around to the teachers, you'd better investigate the incompetent administrators, the crazy parents, society, dope, standardized testing, Sony Walkmans, the economy, ex-Governor Jerry Brown, TV, rock-and-roll, nuclear weapons, racism and sexism, and Vietnam, to name a few, not necessarily in that order. Incompetent teachers? I think. When haven't we been? Or, incompetent at what? There is no such thing as teaching school competently.⁵³

Herndon, foremost of all the authors, maintains that self-reflective style of writing throughout all three of his books, although only the first two are analyzed to any extent here. One of the more rewarding and humorous chapters came in his second book, *How To Survive In Your Native Land*. In a chapter describing a film-making episode in one of his classes, Herndon provides a brief vignette into motivating and involving his junior high students in pursuit of a 22-minute film.

When it rained, we all just sat around the classroom content and relaxed, doing nothing without anxiety about doing nothing or should we be doing Nothing or Something or how to tell our parents we weren't doing nothing? and was it educationally sound to do nothing? . . . for we weren't doing nothing, but instead we were sitting around waiting for the rain to stop. It is a big difference.⁵⁴

This has all the earmarks of a Tom Wolfe scene from the decade earlier. On and on for about half the book, Herndon provides short peeks into his experiences in the classroom. But then, he does something quite different from the other authors. He

⁵²Herndon, *How To Survive in Your Native Land*, pp. 19-20.

⁵³Herndon, (1985). *Notes From A Schoolteacher*, New York: Simon & Schuster, p. 34.

⁵⁴Herndon, *How To Survive in Your Native Land*, p. 49.

separates the book in Part Two and proceeds with a series of Explanatory Notes. It is in these pages that Herndon comments on the passing scene he witnesses daily and pours out his own insights and wisdom as to how the situation might be altered. He personalizes the narrative at this juncture, including references to the education of his own children in a school he obviously favors "because for a few years there was a district superintendent who tried to get intelligent, serious people to come to work in the district and, once they did, allowed them to work."

Herndon reserves this section for his own bromides, which, while less critical than Kozol's and Conroy's and considerably less angry, nonetheless amount to his suggestions toward solving many of the problems of the public schools. The matter of grades will serve as an example.

How does the school make certain that it will have winners and losers? Well, obviously by giving grades. If you give A's, you must also give F's. Without the rest of the grades, the A is meaningless. Even a B is less good than an A--in short, every kid who does not get an A is failing and losing to some extent.⁵⁵

He follows this with his own grim analysis of school in general.

The school's purpose is not teaching. The school's purpose is to separate sheep from goats. You can find a very good school with lots of grass where teachers don't yell at you. It separates. By all means send your kid there.⁵⁶

Six more Explanatory Notes follow this, all recounting a number of the author's "school" experiences, all delivered in far more serious, almost pompous tones, as though given some experience, an oracle has arisen who can point the way toward public school improvement.

The departure from the humor of the first half of the book plunges it into a rather cynical, tedious bit of pontification, which while exhibiting elements of literary journalism, falls well short of the more balanced approach of his earlier work. The book, however, received its share of praise, including praise from Nat Hentoff, who

⁵⁵Herndon, How To Survive in Your Native Land, p. 94.

⁵⁶Herndon, How To Survive in Your Native Land, p. 96.

opined on the book's jacket that it "will last, as Tolstoy's writings on education have lasted, because it is about the lives of children, the total lives of children."

What Hentoff appears to be saying is not that Tolstoy provides the universal "bon mots" concerning education. Rather, education is a subject of universal interest to writers in all cultures and ages. If, for children, education is destiny, then for writers, writing of education is recognition. Hentoff views from first hand experience prompted him to self-publish *Our Children Are Dying* in 1966.

Herbert Kohl

Herbert Kohl, a "third member of the influential triad of teacher-authors writing in the 1960s,"⁵⁷ was another author who made use of student essays. In *36 Children*⁵⁸ Kohl combines his own comments and observations with extensive samples of the written work and letters to him from 36 students. What makes his book even more unique, however, is that it resulted from observations he made while a teacher in 1962 at a public school in Harlem at 119th Street and Madison Avenue. The *Saturday Review* called it "Unique in the literature of education," while the *New Republic* labeled it "honest . . . illuminating . . . and devastating." Compared to Kozol, "Kohl's book is focused more extensively on the lives of the individual children in his class."⁵⁹

Crude in its overall format and rather disconnected in overall structure, Kohl's book nonetheless is damning in what it tells about racism. The book's jacket cover provides perhaps the most succinct description.

This is the ghetto world of 36 Negro children who faced their white, Harvard-graduate teacher for the first time on a September morning in Harlem in 1962. What Herbert Kohl did with these children, how he set them free to expand their own brilliant potentials, is the most moving and important episode in U.S. education today.

⁵⁷Farber, p. 12.

⁵⁸New York: Signet, (1967).

⁵⁹Farber, p. 12.

Kohl's description of his first hour of his first day is much more sanguine.

The weight of Harlem and my whiteness and strangeness hung in the air as I droned on, lost in my righteous monologue. The uproar turned into sullen silence. A slow nervous drumming began at several desks; the atmosphere closed as intelligent faces lost their animation. Yet I didn't understand my mistake, the children's rejection of me and my ideas. Nothing worked, I tried to joke, command, play--the children remained joyless until the bell, then quietly left for lunch.⁶⁰

After more than 200 pages of describing the individual stories of his 36 children, Kohl has learned much and is ready to admit that his efforts and any subsequent achievements were made against the grain.

There is no point in continuing to document each child's problems and pains. Enough has already been said. The 36 children are suffering from the diseases of our society. They are no special cases; there are too many hundreds of thousands like them, lost in indifferent, inferior schools, put on the streets or in prep schools with condescension or cynicism. . . . Without hope and without cynicism, I try to make myself available to my pupils. I believe neither that they will succeed nor that they will fail. I know they will fight, falter, and rise again and again, and that if I have the strength I will be there to rejoice and cry with them, and to add my little weight to easing the burden of being alive in the United States today.⁶¹

Kohl adopts an almost confessional, self-deprecating voice throughout his book. His own lack of teaching experience is regularly included in the narrative, especially his attempts at disciplining students.

I was afraid that if one child got out of my control the whole class would quickly follow, and I would be overwhelmed by the class. It is the fear of all beginning teachers, and many never lose it.⁶²

This reflective criticism of himself is extended to the profession as a whole, and provides the major critical flaw in Kohl's book (as well as Kozol's and others), namely "their singular attribution of blame . . . for a remarkably complex set of problems."⁶³

Kohl was able to follow his own instincts with regard to altering previously prepared lesson plans. For example, his "ten minute break" was a singular

⁶⁰Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 15.

⁶¹Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 224.

⁶²Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 31.

⁶³Farber, p. 14.

achievement as was his success in securing a record machine when he "learned to trust their (students') knowledge over official statements of what was available."⁶⁴

Readers should notice too how there is that hint of self-righteousness, that "I did all I could but failed" tone to the lament. With Kohl, for example, the epitaph reads:

I try to make myself available to my pupils. I believe neither that they will succeed nor that they will fail. I know they will fight, falter, and rise again and again, and that if I have the strength I will be there to rejoice and cry, and to add my little weight to easing the burden of being alive in the United States today.⁶⁵

One particular technique that Kohl uses more than other education writers is the interior monologue. Especially in the first part of the book when he discusses his own misgivings, Kohl makes repeated use of one-line phrases. "Where to look? What assignment? What lie now? . . . have I misunderstood again?" While brief, the overall tone of these monologues is confessional and appears to help the reader witness the learning process the teacher himself is going through.

Despite his own inexperience as a teacher, however, Kohl is able to move from his own confusion and anger to admiration and praise for many of his students. Rather than present lengthy descriptions of his students' actions, he lets their writing provide the evidence. As the book weaves on, student writing assumes a far larger proportion of the text. There is, for example, an almost complete replication in miniature of the class newspaper *AND* (its real title) between pages 142 and 153. While this appears as a form of documentation in the text itself, its abrupt presentation and the disruption of the narrative is evidence enough of the nature of the book and seems to lessen the overall impact on the reader.

As such, the book is often more anecdotal than narrative. The introduction of student writing, including letters and the newspaper, is but one such example. The

⁶⁴Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 43.

⁶⁵Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 224.

story of how he met his wife is another. This provides the book with a more "primitive" appearance, as though a rank amateur, teacher and writer, was at the controls. On the other hand, perhaps this is a form of innocence which helped make the book so well received at the time and provides a more uplifting, positive tone, even now. In addition, a series of sketches and illustrations by one of the more gifted students in Kohl's class also provides the reader with a first-hand "glimpse" inside the class, instead of a constant stream of descriptive narrative.

The "crude" nature of Kohl's text and, in parts, many of the others in this genre suggests it may qualify as a form of documentary presentation examined by William Stott in *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*.⁶⁶ Stott explains that

Documentary is the presentation or representation of actual fact in a way that makes it credible and vivid to people at the time. Since all emphasis is on the fact, its validity must be unquestionable as possible Since just the fact matters, it can be transmitted in any plausible medium The heart of documentary is not form or style or medium, but always content.⁶⁷

The "content" of much of Kohl's book, in particular, presents graphic representation of drawings and papers created by the students in his class.

Stott would term these "contents" social documents which "increase our knowledge of public facts, but sharpen it with feeling; put us in touch with the perennial human spirit, but show it struggling in a particular social context at a specific historical moment. They sensitize our intellect (or educate our emotions) about actual life."⁶⁸ Any reader cannot help but be touched by the poignant descriptions of home life ("life on my block") that Kohl reproduces within his book.

This "string of anti-teacher books in the 1960s and 1970s that contributed strongly to public images of teachers as racist, authoritarian, and anti-progressive,"⁶⁹

⁶⁶Stott, William. (1973). *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*. New York: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁷Stott, p. 14.

⁶⁸Stott, p. 18.

⁶⁹Farber, p. 3.

also provided a form of documentation of what was going on in public schools. Their contents could not help but resonate throughout society because

[D]ocumentary treats the actual unimagined experience of individuals belonging to a group generally of low economic and social standing in the society (lower than the audience for whom the report is made) and treats this experience in such a way as to try to render it vivid, 'human,' and--most often--poignant to the audience.⁷⁰

Besides such documentary evidence, Kohl's growth as a teacher is signified by the defiant stance he takes toward the administration at the school some two-thirds of the way through the book. The defiance is evidenced through his releasing to the students their IQ test scores.

I braced myself, and defying all precedent as well as my own misgivings, I performed the unforgivable act of showing the children what their reading and IQ scores were according to the record cards. I also taught a lesson on the definition of IQ and of achievement scores. The children were angry and shocked; no one had ever come right out and told them they were failing.⁷¹

That defiance seemed born of a deeper frustration at the system of administering New York schools in general, especially in Harlem. Kohl maintains his open, honest relationship with students throughout the text, and indeed shows its growth in inverse proportion to his own administrative and systemic contempt.

The system, I had to tell them, it was the system of which I was an insignificant and powerless part that had to be changed. My choice was to remain within the system and work with the children, or leave and try to change it from without. I stayed, though now I am convinced that that system, which masquerades as educational but in Harlem produces no education except in bitterness, rejection, and failure, can only be changed from without.⁷²

Kohl finishes his book with an "extension" of the two school years he worked in Harlem. He records numerous letters sent to him and his wife following his decision "to take a year's leave and go to Europe." From a literary standpoint, the letters serve little useful purpose and seem more personal indulgence to validate his two years' contribution in the classroom.

⁷⁰Stott, p. 62.

⁷¹Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 176.

⁷²Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 163.

But despite this somewhat different ending, Kohl can't resist the temptation to include his own bit of philosophizing, a trait he holds in common with almost the entire universe of teacher-writers in the classroom. His is no more, no less poignant, but does provide the rationale for his book.

Confronted by the human challenge of the classroom I reached into myself, uncovered a constant core which enabled me to live with my mistakes and hypocrisies, my weaknesses and pettiness And because of all this I had to ask: What about the children? Of what worth is all this to the children? At one point I thought I knew, but not any longer By June of the year with 6-7, I was tired and lacked perspective. The thought of 25 more children the next year . . . depressed me. I wanted to think and to write, to discover how I could best serve the children.⁷³

Like many others faced with a choice of continuing to teach elsewhere, he chose to write a book.

Samuel G. Freedman

One recognized investigative reporter who turned his literary talents on the public schools is Samuel G. Freedman, a *New York Times* reporter, who took a two-year sabbatical to research and write about his findings. While not a teacher himself, he tells the story of Seward Park High School through the eyes of an English and journalism teacher, Jessica Siegel.⁷⁴

Freedman ushers the reader into the narrative of Jessica Siegel, who, for nine years, labored intensely as an English/journalism teacher at Seward Park High School on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Freedman, true to the rigor of investigative reporting, packs volumes of factual data into the 430 pages of text. He also gives meticulous attention to the details of Siegel's life, as well as the lives of fellow teachers, some administrators, and her students.

In sympathetic tones but little of the outrage witnessed in some of the prior books analyzed here, Freedman provides a poignant yet elaborately documented

⁷³Kohl, *36 Children*, p. 192.

⁷⁴Freedman, Samuel G. (1990). *Small Victories: The Real World of a Teacher, Her Students, and Their High School*. New York: Harper & Row.

year in the life of this *actor*, Jessica Siegel. That she finally decides to resign her teaching post at the end of the one year of Freedman's research for the book seems fitting, timely, and sad. Freedman has, in word, fact, and narrative captured what the life of a dedicated public school teacher is all about and perhaps, more than any other author in this study, has written an accurate portrayal of a teacher's school and personal life as influenced by school. The portrayal, as Winterowd contends of literary journalism, presents the truth of an account which transcends factuality.⁷⁵

Freedman makes more use of a plot technique than any other author. He uses flashback and succeeds beyond the measure of all the other writers in this study. The technique helps direct the reader's attention to the salient factors in the lives of the characters in his book, and thereby documents undeniably the story of urban public education. It is through flashback that Freedman incorporates the myriad facts and information which he researched prior to writing the book.

Freedman is employing perhaps the simplest of narrative ploys, yet in this instance, it is very effective because it sets the life of the characters, especially Jessica Siegel, in a historical context. We learn about Ms. Siegel's own childhood, for example, her own struggles to get through school, as a sort of comparative study of the trials of two different generations. Whether that is owing to author Freedman's own sense of historical perspective or the craft of investigative reporting isn't clear, but it "works," in the same manner described by Phyllis McCord.

A narrative about a historical situation or occurrence, a piece of journalism, a chapter from a biography or an autobiographical essay works, therefore, in the same way as a short story or novel because the plot of any narrative is its composition in language; in the case of so-called "true-life" or nonfiction narratives, *the story we infer from the narrative is historical* [italics added], and we describe story events as "what must have occurred" according to the version given in the plot.⁷⁶

⁷⁵Winterowd, *The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature*, p. 48.

⁷⁶McCord, Phyllis. (1985). "Reading Nonfiction in Composition Courses: From Theory to Practice." *College English*, 47(7), p. 754.

Throughout *Small Victories*, Freedman "shows" as much as "tells" about the teacher, chief protagonist in this public school narrative. In a true sense, he is writing biography, providing vignettes, portions of Jessica Siegel's life. In his recent book describing how investigative reporters appear to be changing the writing of biography, Steve Weinberg addresses this point.

A biographer has an obligation to present more than facts, to make judgments about normality or the lack of it. Readers want to know the why as well as the who, what, when, and where. But, like a novelist, a biographer should show instead of tell, letting readers arrive at their own realizations about character, about causation and motive. Academics who write biographies tend to rely more heavily on the psychological approach than do journalists turned biographers, probably because academics receive more exposure to Freudianism as they pursue their doctorates.⁷⁷

In *Small Victories*, we read not only the lives of students as victims, but begin to get a sense of teacher as victim, all keyed through flashback.

Like many other authors in this study, Freedman provides the rationale for his writing.

My idea was simple: I would spend the entire 1987-88 school year in Seward Park--not masquerading as a student, not attempting to teach, but taking notes and conducting interviews as a sort of reporter in residence. I would follow Jessica Siegel, but with the intention of widening my aperture to include many teachers, students, and administrators, for I wanted to explore a community, not create a personality cult. I would observe classes, parent conferences, disciplinary hearings, faculty meetings, basketball games, and the entire pageant of school life. I would pursue Seward Park's people to their homes, their second jobs, their old neighborhoods, and perhaps to their birthplaces abroad.

After securing Siegel's cooperation in writing the book, Freedman moves up the bureaucratic ladder, eventually getting clearance from the Seward Park principal and city board of education president.

Responding to the refusal of a Midwestern school board to renew the contract of a close personal friend and mentor, Freedman returned to New York "and to my immersion into the real world of public education" taking his friend's worried

⁷⁷Weinberg, Steve. (1992). Telling the Untold Story: How Investigative Reporters Are Changing the Craft of Biography. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, p. 25.

expression at being released as an omen for his own writing. Freedman portrays through narrative the verity of that omen when, by the end of the text, we have followed the struggles of Jessica Siegel through the labyrinth that was Seward Park High School in that 1987-88 school year where she, too, finds the renewal of her own contract will not be an issue any more: she has resigned.

Jessica Siegel moves from teaching to writing free-lance articles for the *Village Voice* and *Columbia Journalism Review* as well as some other lesser paying positions. "From time to time, Jessica still teaches a lesson"⁷⁸ we are told. But not before a memorable final chapter of the book and her days at Seward Park, with the testimonials of her peers and students recorded through conversation or printing of the notes of well-wishers. Even after the final "good-byes," Jessica sees a student through his final days in preparation for the Regents Competency Tests. He succeeds, the final exclamation point to a teacher's dedication.

Freedman must have meant he engaged in the "close-to-the-skin" reporting Hollowell suggested some twenty years earlier. But unlike the other authors, Freedman absented himself by and large from the narrative. Occasionally he appears, but no more than a dozen times in the book, yet the reader *knows* he had to be very much a part of that one year at Seward to have been able to capture the intense and rich detail he presents.

Not only is Freedman missing as an obvious participant, but the book is free of the "editorial" commentary that so often dots all the other texts in this study. Freedman is content to let the story state the case. So well does he use flashback details of the dramatic scene, and dialogue, that he succeeds. For example, upon hearing favorable comments from a colleague about teaching compared to returning

⁷⁸Freedman, p. 422.

to graduate school, Freedman presents this ironic paraphrase and description (interior monologue) of Jessica's own thoughts:

Nodding agreeably for appearances, Jessica bridles within. What could be better than going back to school? Nothing to do but read and think and talk. If you want to stay up till three in the morning, you can. If you want to slide for a week, you can. You are responsible to nobody but yourself. Those summer seminars Jessica took on Shakespeare and Melville were like fine brandies whose aftertaste turns all else to tap water. Teaching is the thing she can't control. You come to work late or woozy, you coast for awhile, and you let down 170 people who depend on you every day. Winning the Robert F. Kennedy awards would have been easier had Jessica actually done what some cynics believed--written the articles herself. No, it's far harder, far more draining, to take an intellectually insecure child and educate and inform and push, push, push. And with forty-five *Seward World* submissions and thirty Lower East Side tests to read this weekend, and preliminary term grades due on Tuesday, Jessica needs no reminder that her job is her taskmaster.⁷⁹

This comes close to describing the daily routine of a public school teacher in the inner city, done in the language of the participant. It's typical of the manner in which Freedman lets the characters in this school drama deliver their own evaluations, adding his own substantial factual detail in an effort to "background" the picture. Freedman is using his own investigative reporting knowledge to write biography. The passage above demonstrates what sound journalism can include. As Weinberg suggests,

The best journalism has long been the ultimate scholarly activity, which I define as learning everything that can be learned about an individual (or institution or issue), then communicating that knowledge compellingly and clearly.⁸⁰

Thus, while many of the authors seen previously in this research have offered overt criticisms of teachers and the teaching profession as among the primary reasons for the sad state of the art, Freedman chooses detail to reveal the dizzying pace of a dedicated, hard-working teacher who gives her all for her students, unlike all too many of her colleagues. But he offers no comments in comparison.

She treks to the annex, as she has every spring, to woo next year's juniors for journalism and humanities, and she laughs when one boy asks, "Which class don't

⁷⁹Freedman, pp. 374-375.

⁸⁰Weinberg, p. 3.

have tests?" She nominates two of her current juniors, Yuet Lo and Alvin Aponte, for a summer journalism workshop at New York University. Concerned that she does not adequately prepare pupils for college term papers, she revises her English 7 curriculum to include a three-page research paper, drawn from a new two-week unit on literature of the Industrial Revolution. Having massaged a donation of seventy books from its publisher, Jessica adds *In Country* to the course. She arranges for Ottavio Johnson, her black nationalist in residence, to review both *School Daze*, Spike Lee's movie about an all-black college, and *Sarafina!* a South African musical on Broadway, for *Seward World*. She steers See Wai into a part-time job at the New York Chinatown History Project, a far more ideal employer than Arby's for someone of his cultural consciousness, and she begins his intensive tutoring for the Regents Competency Test in writing.

Freedman has described but a few minutes of Jessica's day, but the implied very subtle message is that "Teachers do much more than they're given credit for."

One of the most frenzied chapters in the book is Chapter 15, "Soupin' 'Em Up." Here Freedman's flashback technique is in evidence as he traces an excursion of Jessica and three of her students to New Paltz College for an interview. The hectic pace to get to the interview on time is interrupted as Freedman flashes back to Jessica's own entry into the University of Chicago in 1966.

Alone as only a first-day freshman could be, Jessica Siegel dragged her suitcases toward Woodward Court, her dormitory at the University of Chicago. It was early September 1966, and never before had she been farther from home than Camp Najewah, which was on the near side of the Delaware River. She watched with emptiness and anxiety as other students emerged from station wagons with parents and siblings, carrying footlockers and record players, and parting with kisses. Jessica had flown by herself to a college she had never seen. An admissions officer had interviewed her in New York the previous spring, and his initial question should have been her initial clue. 'We're next to a slum, and there's a lot of crime,' the officer had said. 'How do you feel about that?'⁸¹

The author successfully builds empathy for students and teacher in this episode, showing all too well how the system and authority-participants within it are essentially out of touch with students, corrupt with selfishness, the "I" apparent. Failing to achieve the purpose for which they came, Jessica and her charges do visit a former student enrolled at New Paltz, but the excursion has obviously been a failure.

⁸¹Freedman, p. 344.

Their testimony only deepens Jessica's disappointment. All she has to show for today's misadventure is a sore throat and two throbbing temples. Tomorrow she has this car to return, and Sunday she has articles to edit and papers to grade. And for what? Where is the reward? Knowledge for its own sake is a wonderful thing, as Jessica surely agrees, but in the workaday world of getting a job and buying a house and raising a family, it is no replacement for a college diploma. Nearly seven months of work, starting in September, pointed toward this one day. All the writing assignments, all the private confidences, all the nagging and nudging, what was it for if not to push three students like these off the margin and into the mainstream? She told herself hours ago that today's trip felt like triage, but maybe she was wrong. Triage is supposed to save the fortunate few, not pronounce them dead on arrival.⁸²

The trek and chapter conclude with a little known quote from Martin Luther King, one quite applicable to students in need who are unable to get deserved attention and assistance because of the lack of human compassion: "What good is it to be allowed to eat in a restaurant if you can't afford the hamburger?"

Interior monologue provides little of the narrative force in this book, in keeping with the others in this study. Upon hearing her students discussing their own personal lives on that trip to New Paltz, Freedman tells us, "Jessica says nothing. *The stuff they have to deal with*, she thinks. *These lives people in school have no idea about. Much as I know, I don't know the half of it.*"⁸³ This is as much "witness" to Jessica's interior discourse as we are privy to hear, Freedman preferring instead to show through facts and details of the "protagonist's" possible thoughts.

Freedman provides the "follow-up" in keeping with a good journalist's news instincts. In the Afterword to the text, we learn that two of the three students on that "ill-fated" trip to New Paltz are now sophomores at the state university there. He also follows up on other students who receive extensive descriptive portrayal earlier in the narrative. This, of course, follows an elaborate presentation of the actual moment when these New Paltz bound students were accepted.

⁸²Freedman, p. 354.

⁸³Freedman, p. 339.

Systemic failure is part of *Small Victories*, though its presentation is not as intrusive as in some of the other books. Where the author does portray systemic failure, he does it with dialogue as in this exchange between Seward Park teacher John McNamara and a principal of a previous school.

When in 1982 John heard of a colleague in mathematics being allowed to transfer to Brooklyn Technical High School, one of the most elite in the city, he ran directly to the principal to protest.

'How come you're letting that guy transfer,' he demanded, 'when he doesn't do one-tenth the job I do?'

'Exactly,' the principal responded.

'You're penalizing me for doing well,' John pressed. 'If I was lousy, you'd let me go.'

'Yes,' the principal said, smiling.⁸⁴

This entire chapter, devoted to McNamara's need to moonlight in order to survive as a teacher and carve out a personal life with his wife Linda, is testimony to the low pay and overworked schedules of the truly dedicated public school teacher. But nowhere is there any commentary of a personal nature by Freedman. Instead, as he does throughout the text, Freedman uses the indirect quote or paraphrase, along with myriad details.

John does not bother trying to describe the surge of electricity he feels when he enters Seward Park each morning, or the excitement of seeing a lesson plan succeed. The guy has John sized up as a Pollyanna, and nothing will shake his certainty. There is no point in John telling him that at the age of forty-one, he has read 150 pieces of homework a night 180 nights a year for 19 school years. There is no point in telling him that he taught in a junior high school where students too illiterate to read *The New York Times* used copies as kindling for hallway fires. Confronted by such conditions, such reasons to resign or surrender, John stayed and grew. He earned a master's degree in American history from Fordham University, compiled thirty-three graduate credits at Kean College in New Jersey in educational administration, and has completed all but his dissertation in the doctoral program at Columbia University. Last summer, he won a Fulbright scholarship to study in Korea. John is a survivor, blessed with a survivor's equanimity and an Irishman's tolerance for hard work. Little rattles his resolve, little except for the irony of his existence.⁸⁵

⁸⁴Freedman, p. 325.

⁸⁵Freedman, p. 320.

A certain sense of closure pervades the entire text and each chapter. Having begun the McNamara chapter ("The Opa-Opa Show") with the setting "On the day before Valentine's Day . . .," Freedman ends it with a poignant description:

On the morning of Valentine's Day, John will give Linda a dozen red roses. Then, at eleven, he will drive to the Chrystopoulos Citadel to work another wedding while his own wife waits alone. As a husband, he wishes he could have turned down the day's work. As a teacher, he could not afford to say no.⁸⁶

The text provides ample evidence of the journalistic training of its author. From the inclusion of volumes of facts and statistics to the occasional footnote, Freedman is a journalist first, a crafter of literature second.

He creates interest, involves the reader in the narrative, and makes meticulous use of the conventions of investigative reporting, a craft with which he is thoroughly familiar having served as an investigative reporter for seven years prior. But his writing style is sometimes insipid, certainly less memorable, than Kozol and others in this research. Why? Most probably because Freedman remains closer to traditional journalism in style, whereas Kozol moves beyond to incorporate their voice as an instrument of personal mission. As Sims notes regarding literary journalists, "understanding begins with emotional connection."⁸⁷ Freedman's prose carries little emotion, and that low-keyed approach appears dull by comparison to Kozol's livelier, angry style. Clearly, Freedman seeks to provide a journalistic rendering of inside the classroom, whereas Kozol prefers to write literature. Barbara Lounsberry in *The Art of Fact* notes the distinction which marks the difference in the two styles in question here.

If the subject of a nonfiction work is compelling, its research exhaustive and verifiably elaborated, and its form artful and narrative, it may still fail the standards of literary nonfiction if its language is dull or diffuse.⁸⁸

⁸⁶Freedman, p. 375.

⁸⁷Sims, Norman. (1984). *The Literary Journalists*, p. 10.

⁸⁸Lounsberry, Barbara. (1990). *The Art of Fact: Contemporary Artists of Nonfiction*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, p. xv.

In a chapter ("Liquid Paper") in which he details some of the union difficulties teachers face, Freedman uses indirect quotation to provide some insight into Jessica's ideas on the subject.

What was the matter with the system, she asked rhetorically, that it drove away such gifted people? What was this bureaucracy that cannibalized the creative minds in its midst? Jessica had to be honest. She could not really respond to Ilene's observations because she did not buy Ilene's premise. She spoke instead about Ben Dachs and Hannah Hess, excellent teachers who not only stayed in the system but rose through its ranks. If you worked for sensitive people, if you worked around them, you could spend your career in the trenches, and more or less gladly. The landscape was not nearly so inhospitable as outsiders were led to believe.⁸⁹

Prior to this insight, Freedman has described a teacher's meeting with the UFT (United Federation of Teachers) representative present. At issue were expenditures of discretionary monies. Jessica, a minority of one, wants to buy a second Xerox machine for the English department; the school's union president objects. Freedman offers a brief footnote perhaps suggesting the pitfalls of investigative reporting: "After I attended this meeting, I was barred from several subsequent English Department meetings. The action was taken, I was told, at the request of Judy Goldman" (union rep at the school). This is the only time the author uses the first person in the book to detail his own inclusion in the proceedings.

This same chapter provides some of the book's best characterization of what makes a good teacher, thereby linking Jessica to the standard.

Jessica hands out a test. It contains two essay questions, plenty of work for a forty-minute period. She looks across the room, sees two or three kids applying Liquid Paper to their prose as gingerly as debutantes painting their nails.

"Just cross out!" she shouts.

"But I want it to be neat," comes the answer.

"I don't care! I'm interested in your ideas."

How many times can you insist before you bore even yourself? A good teacher doesn't fall out of bed one morning as a burned-out case. A good teacher is ground

⁸⁹Freedman, p. 222.

down to mediocrity over weeks and months and years, and a good teacher who tries to resist learns that the millstone is an implacable adversary. But when the time comes to assign blame, Jessica cannot point the accusing finger. When a class turns churlish, as it did this morning, Bruce decries the system and the students. Jessica judges only herself.⁹⁰

But a page later, Freedman has tied Jessica into the concept of "good teacher" in a paragraph which also reveals the utter exhaustion she routinely feels and which, ultimately, led to her resignation.

She is tired, but everyone is tired. The long trek to Christmas is almost finished, and the nearer the caravan draws to the oasis, the more onerous seems each day's march. Jessica's colleagues will feast and toast and revel and return in January at least somewhat renewed. But her exhaustion exceeds the physical; it is a condition of the spirit. She gives so much; she gives too much; she gives as she has given since childhood, compulsively, relentlessly, and at her own expense, until her soul is windblown topsoil, a spent strip mine. Yet there is something more, something specific to this morning, something specific to herself and Bruce Baskind, who for many years had been the finest of friends at Seward Park.⁹¹

As a school, Seward Park probably qualifies up the list from some cited by Kozol in *Savage Inequalities*. There are few of the stark intrusions, such as backed-up toilets, missing toilet paper, and chemical plants in the neighborhood routines that Kozol includes so effectively in his narrative. But in a chapter entitled "Built To Fail," Freedman does provide an extensive glimpse into the school and its surrounding neighborhood, in nowhere as intense a voice as Kozol might, but still poignant and effective.

On Saturday morning October 17, the auditorium of Martin Luther King, Jr., High School on Manhattan's Upper West Side throbs with the frenzy of a flea market. Three dozen booths stretch across the stage, into the orchestra pit, and up the aisles, dispensing balloons, calendars, banners, and cupcakes to throngs of children and parents. This event is the Board of Education's annual High School Fair, ostensibly the occasion for junior high school students to peruse the wares of the various institutions they can attend, but more importantly the physical and material

⁹⁰Freedman, pp. 212-213.

⁹¹Freedman's reference to 'the long trek,' coming from a journalist/observer who was not himself a teacher as well, is a reminder how the trope of school as a journey is widely engrained in the culture. The school year is a journey, a long one. All who have passed through school make 'the long trek;' many recognize the symbolic nature of the journey, something of a pilgrimage to the mecca of learning; few, mostly teachers, see themselves as Capt. Ahab confronting/chasing the white whale of ignorance. The journey trope appears in all of these books as a common structure providing unity to the narratives; p. 214.

manifestation of a system in which certain schools are engineered for success and others, like Seward Park, for failure.⁹²

He then presents an extensive history of the immediate neighborhood of the school.

Why, indeed, would anyone believe it? The disdain for Seward Park and the Lower East Side was not some recent and lightly held belief, of which people could be readily disabused. It was decades, and in some respects almost two centuries, old. It derived as much from a national ambivalence toward immigrants and poor people as from the specific and troubled history of public education in New York. These forces, entrenched and immense, defined the battles that students like Daisy Severino and Sharrone Usher, counselors like Susan Chan, and teachers like Jessica Siegel fought every single day.⁹³

The extended history of the region follows; the Lower East Side provides a microcosm of multiculturalism . . . geography, population, ethnicity. The extensive, in-depth reporting of the socioeconomic conditions which comprise this part of southeastern Manhattan is interspersed with quotes from other writers--Bennett, Cubberly, Tyack, Simon--whose fiction and non-fiction accounts of the people of the region help flavor the author's own text. Freedman provides readers with nine pages of bibliography. Among the citations are ten articles written by teacher Jessica Siegel when she was a writer for the *Liberation News Service* in the years following college and prior to assuming her role as a para-professional at Seward Park, and thence becoming a teacher at the school.

Free of frills and editorial comment, Freedman directs the narrative to the effects of the region on education in general and Seward Park in particular. He then performs an extraordinary feat: he provides a global context in an effort to play *down* the myth of New York's extraordinary public schools

Beneath the venom lay not only the disillusion and recriminations of the former civil rights coalition, but the myth of which Diane Ravitch wrote, the myth of New York's extraordinary public schools. Because blacks believed that the schools had raised the European immigrants, they asked why the schools were failing them. Because Jews

⁹²Freedman, p. 100.

⁹³Freedman, p. 101.

believed that European immigrants had thrived in public schools, they asked why blacks faltered so badly. Neither side recognized an important truth. Jewish immigrants had arrived in America with urban backgrounds and industrial skills, as well as a tradition of community-supported religious scholarship. Blacks from the rural South shared more with the Irish and Italian tenant farmers, whose children dropped out of New York's schools in droves. Beyond all that, as former slaves, blacks faced discrimination more pernicious and more complete than that known by any ethnic white group. And blacks, like Puerto Ricans, flocked to New York just as the industrial economy that had elevated even unlettered immigrants from poverty was lurching into permanent decline. But the various antagonists in Ocean Hill chose to ignore such factors. It was simpler to bow to the myth, and to rail against its broken promise.⁹⁴

Freedman then addresses an issue common to all in this study: the matter of expenditure per pupil. He compares city and suburban schools. As he sums up one year's battle in the New York Assembly over school funding, Freedman indulges a rare moment of pique: "Indeed, the legislature's arithmetic provided a symbol of scorn: Financially or otherwise, New York City schoolchildren counted for less."⁹⁵ That's as close as the author comes to "rage" and personal involvement in the entire 420 pages.

Still, he echoes the findings and conclusions of Kozol when he points to the importance of geography as a (the) vital issue in determining quality education.

Geography condemns Seward Park two ways. Academically, it draws students from junior high and intermediate schools in which about 55 percent of the pupils read below grade level even before the best of them are siphoned off by selective schools. Culturally, it draws students from a neighborhood that continues to receive new immigrants in almost unparalleled numbers.⁹⁶

Continuing and concluding a chapter which comes as close as any to revealing the author's bias, Freedman focuses on the neighborhood school concept, an idea which has continually been revealed through the years to be of essential importance to the American public in terms of schooling its children.

The surpassing of Seward Park and institutions like it, then, is that the 'neighborhood school'--once the rallying cry of a white middle class that was

⁹⁴Freedman, pp. 109-110.

⁹⁵Freedman, pp. 114-115.

⁹⁶Freedman, p. 117.

indignant at integration--has become the catch basin for poor black, Hispanic, and Asian children in the late 1980s. These children are the waste products of the new improved sorting machine. The weight of history and the miracle of modern social engineering conspire for disaster, and yet when education critics, social scientists, and newspaper editors stumble upon it, they act as if they had discovered a startling scandal. But there is another way to conceive of Seward Park and its ilk. In a school built for failure, anything short of failure qualifies as a kind of success.⁹⁷

But foremost of all, *Small Victories* is the story of Jessica Siegel's typical year as a teacher, the triumphs, the disappointments, the recognition, the snubs. The book recounts the story of her struggle to empower her students, her insistence they perform up to and beyond their abilities, her determination to see them advance to college where they could, only then, hope to extricate themselves from the existences that almost all of them faced in the area around the school and, to a lesser degree, in school as well.

From the moment we read of Jessica's early years to the time of her farewell party given by colleagues and students, we are provided, in unusual detail, the picture of a teacher who cares. From the Prologue where we first meet Jessica at the Graduation Day exercises before her final year, to that last note from a former teacher thanking Jessica, we are witnesses to the abridged biography of an extraordinary human being who is willing to trade "small victories" in the lives of her students for her own life. From those early years in teaching when she was seen as "intellect in search of form and insecurity in search of reality"⁹⁸ to the Afterword when we learn that teachers like Jessica continue "to defy all expectations by sending 90 percent of each graduating class on to further education,"⁹⁹ the reader is witness to the remarkable spirit of real-life teachers whose motto may well be "greater love than this hath no man." This sympathetic and accurate portrayal, by an investigative reporter turned biographer/chronicler, of the life of a teacher comes near the end of

⁹⁷Freedman, p. 118.

⁹⁸Freedman, p. 184.

⁹⁹Freedman, p. 422.

the period under study here and presents a sharp contrast to some of the books 25 years earlier which portrayed the teacher more often as cogs in a plot to destroy schoolchildren. The earlier books in this study, those published in the 1960s especially, provided a

sanctimony of tone . . . that implied that only one way of teaching was right and that there could be no disagreements among reasonable people as to the cause of or solutions to the problems that were being described.¹⁰⁰

Tracy Kidder

Freedman's more traditional journalism, his investigative reporting, is 180 degrees removed from that "sanctimony." Freedman's book along with Kidder's, perhaps because they tell the "story" through a "third" person narrator, provide not the least "sanctimony of tone." If anything, these two books, and to a lesser degree Kozol's *Savage Inequalities*, published during the same three-year period (1989-1991), go to great length to document problems within the schools as caused, in part, by social conditions outside the classroom. Rather than indict teachers as a group, Kidder and Freedman (and Kozol in *Savage Inequalities*) especially, present "models" of how an "ideal" teacher addresses systemic and individual problems within the schools. No longer sanctimonious, the most recent books on public school education provide a far more sympathetic depiction of the teacher than the ones from the 1960s, for example. If the books some quarter century earlier "suggested that teachers' efforts were useless or even harmful,"¹⁰¹ those published in recent years document how useful and helpful some teachers can be even in the face of serious systemic problems.

Rather than belabor the analysis by word, this study now presents a tabular analysis of *Among Schoolchildren* by Tracy Kidder, using primarily portions of the

¹⁰⁰Farber, p. 14.

¹⁰¹Farber, p. 22.

first chapter, "Awakenings," to show the relationship to Burke's pentad. Both story itself and symbolic interaction (levels one and two) are combined in Table 6-2.

Kidder's approach is far less angry than Kozol's certainly. To a great extent, he is portraying a year in the life of an elementary teacher. His *purpose* in writing would appear to be a defense of teachers, women teachers in particular. Kidder's book can also provide the basis for an analysis of Burke's Pentadic Ratios. For that purpose, Chapter One ("September") of Kidder's book is analyzed in Appendix B.

Table 6-2: Dramatistic Analysis Using Text--Kidder's *Among Schoolchildren*

Level One
Actor - Chris Zajac - Teacher She was thirty-four. She wore a white skirt and yellow sweater and a thin gold necklace, which she held in her fingers, as if holding her own reins while waiting for children to answer. Her hair was black with a hint of Irish red. It was cut short to the tops of her ears, and swept back like a pair of folded wings. She had a delicately cleft chin, and she was short--the children's chairs would have fit her. Although her voice sounded conversational, it had projection. She had never acted. She had found this voice of classrooms.¹⁰² Actor - Clarence - Student Clarence was a small, lithe, brown-skinned boy with large eyes and deep dimples. Chris watched his journeys to the pencil sharpener. They were frequent. Clarence took the longest possible route around the room, walking heel-to-toe and brushing the back of one leg with the shin of the other at every step--a cheerful little dance across the blue carpet, around the perimeter of desks, and along the back wall, passing under the American flag, which didn't quite brush his head. Reaching the sharpener, Clarence would turn his pencil into a stunt plane, which did several loop-the-loops before plunging in the hole.¹⁰³ Act - Actor - Scene 1st Class Meeting Mrs. Zajac seemed to have a frightening amount of energy. She strode across the room, her arms swinging high and her hands in small fists. Taking her stand in front of the green chalkboard, discussing the rules with her new class, she repeated sentences, and her lips held the shapes of certain words, such as "homework," after she had said them. Her hands kept very busy. They sliced the air and made karate chop to mark off boundaries. They extended straight out like a traffic cop's, halting illegal maneuvers yet to be perpetrated. When they rested momentarily on her hips, her hands looked as if they were in holsters. She told the children, "One thing Mrs. Zajac expects from each of you is that you do <i>your</i> best." She said, "Mrs. Zajac gives homework. I'm sure you've all heard. The old meanie gives homework." <i>Mrs. Zajac</i>. It was in part a role. She worked her way into it every September.¹⁰⁴
Level Two
Actor/Agent - Author - Kidder Act - Writing Book in Defense of Teachers Scene - Author as Observer Immersion in Subject Agency - Appeal to Audience Expectation - Provide Information

¹⁰²Kidder, pp. 3-4.¹⁰³Kidder, p. 7.¹⁰⁴Kidder, p. 4.

Teaching is an anomalous profession. Unlike doctors or lawyers, teachers do not share rules and obligations that they set for themselves. They are hirelings of communities, which have frequently conceived of them as servants and have not always treated them well.

Take, for instance, the plight of the female teacher in not very distant times. As the number of public schools burgeoned in the late nineteenth century, teaching became overwhelmingly a female occupation. The dream of universal education required lots of teachers, and women could be hired much more cheaply than men. Nature, educationists reasoned, fitted women nicely to the role of surrogate mothers. If they became actual mothers, they weren't allowed to continue teaching in many districts. That fact alone guaranteed that many teachers would soon quit. Those who stayed on were apt to be subjected to extreme isolation.¹⁰⁵

But to be a teacher implies parts of most of those roles and of some others, too. Decades of research and reform have not altered the fundamental facts of teaching. The task of universal, public, elementary education is still usually being conducted by a woman alone in a little room, presiding over a youthful distillate of a town or city. If she is willing, she tries to cultivate the minds of children both in good and desperate shape. Some of them have problems that she hasn't been trained even to identify. She feels her way. She has no choice.¹⁰⁶

Purpose - Defend Teachers, Comment on Education

What a stirring faith in children and in the possibility and power of universal intellectual improvement. And what a burden of idealism for the little places where education is actually attempted.¹⁰⁷

The history of education in America is the history of attempts to reform it. The latest movement deplores high dropout rates and declines in the College Board scores of new teachers. Many tests and surveys show that large percentages of American youth come out of high school and even college incompetent in the three R's and ignorant of basic facts about history, geography, science, and literature. The bad news has inspired many commissions and from them many reports that make use of the word "crisis." As in the late 1950s, these reports often invoke an external threat--not Soviet competition now, but Japanese economic power. "Public education has put this country at a terrible competitive disadvantage," a corporate leader was quoted as saying in 1987. "They're the suppliers of our workforce, but they're suppliers with a fifty percent defect rate."

On the whole, the reform movement of the 1980s lacked the moral and emotional force of the movement of the late 1960s. The cries of alarm from that earlier campaign still echo, particularly from one group of books that comprise, collectively, a literature of rage.¹⁰⁸

But for children who are used to thinking of themselves as stupid or not worth talking to or deserving rape and beatings, a good teacher can provide an astonishing revelation. A good teacher can give a child at least a chance to feel, "She thinks I'm worth something. Maybe I am." Good teachers put snags in the river of children passing by, and over the years, they redirect hundreds of lives.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵Kidder, p. 49.

¹⁰⁶Kidder, p. 53.

¹⁰⁷Kidder, p. 301.

¹⁰⁸Kidder, p. 302.

¹⁰⁹Kidder, p. 313.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Throughout this research, the tensions between "objective" observation of public school education and an outraged "subjective" voice of author-observers have been explored. In attempting to tell their stories, these author-observers, many of them teachers, have been engaged in the process of investigating and documenting serious inequities in American public schools. These authors imply that the documented inequities are symbolic of something basically wrong with the schools themselves, or perhaps, society as a whole. A few have been far more explicit, not merely in the documentation, but in the voice of outrage--or moral vision--contained within the story. Jonathan Kozol and others have used their narratives to argue that something is unfair or inequitable in the distribution of resources to public school children, and to press vehemently for change. That story has thus become the appeal to public conscience, for as Glasser and Ettema point out

The story is always a call for the community to affirm by word or deed that an action is, indeed, a transgression of the moral order or else to affirm by indifference that once, perhaps, the act might have been a transgression, but it is no longer.¹

Kozol's two books, amplified by frequent essays, articles, and speeches since 1967, served as a prototype for a literary journalism of outrage aimed at public school education. From *Death At An Early Age*, the "stinging, convincing indictment of racism within the Boston Public School system in the

¹Glasser & Ettema, (1989). "Investigative Journalism and the Moral Order," p. 16.

early 1960s"² to *Savage Inequalities*, which "brings a voice to his analysis of the causes for this human degradation that is solid, resonant, and moving,"³ Kozol built a career on exposing unfair distribution of resources. His writing makes a "passionate plea for a more humane educational system, one in which the values and needs of minority children are understood and respected."⁴ Kozol is the primary advocate for correcting the public school's inequities and for empowering through his rhetoric the poor minority school children of the inner city especially.

According to Lawrence C. Stedman, while public schools may not be collapsing, "long-standing academic problems" remain. While his conclusion is based on a host of quantitative data, Stedman goes beyond it.

One cannot examine this information without a sense that our schools are not what they could be--or should be. But such quantitative data are not our only source of knowledge. Over the past decade, a series of thought-provoking ethnographies and school profiles has portrayed an education system in crisis.⁵

Stedman cites Kozol's *Savage Inequalities* as one of those "thought-provoking" texts.⁶ (In doing so, he raises the potential for future research: are these books about public education really disguised ethnographies? Michael Agar believes "... ethnographers emerge out of a relationship among the traditions of ethnographer, group, and intended audience."⁷ It ought not be too difficult

²Farber, p. 8.

³Rabow & Saunders, p. 344.

⁴Farber, p. 9.

⁵Stedman, Lawrence C. (1993). "The Condition of Education: Why School Reformers Are On the Right Track." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 75, November, p. 223.

⁶Stedman, FN #76, p. 225.

⁷Agar, Michael. (1986). *Speaking of Ethnography*. Newbury Park: Sage, p. 19.

to make the case of author as ethnographer, students in class as group, and the public as audience.)

Besides Kozol, since the early 1960s, radical and reform voices have called for a redress of grievances within the public schools. The authors' general theme had its nascence with the *Brown* decision in 1954. Then, as Kohl states, "With the appearance of Kozol's *Death At An Early Age*,⁸ my *36 Children*,⁹ and James Herndon's *The Way It Spozeed To Be*,¹⁰ ghetto schools and teachers began to be looked at critically."¹¹ Subsequent narratives produced by Nat Hentoff, Pat Conroy, Tracy Kidder, Samuel Freedman, and second books by Kozol and Herndon have followed the same theme. While the statement "We have bungled badly in education"¹² may suggest a macro approach to public education from the writers in this research, the micro view was much more readily associated with the use of resources in inner city (ghetto) public primary and secondary schools.

Rhetoric and A Journalism of Outrage

Fundamentally, rhetoric may be defined as the *art* of communication used in the conduct of human affairs. Rhetoric, with its roots in Plato and Aristotle, seeks to create knowledge, promote values, and produce action. All three inherent *arts* of classical rhetoric--create, promote, produce--are fundamental to the discourse surrounding public education in America, most especially since the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown* decision. Mass

⁸Houghton, (1967).

⁹Norton, (1968).

¹⁰Simon & Schuster, (1968).

¹¹Kohl, Herbert R. (1975). "Is It Enough To Change the Schools?" *American Libraries* 6(3), March, p.

160.

¹²Gross, p. 13.

communication, affecting all peoples and cultures across all media, uses the most basic of human symbols--words--to inform, instruct, entertain, enlighten, --ultimately to persuade--an audience.

Kenneth Burke's philosophic treatises of language are primarily contained in a trilogy: "A Grammar of Motives" (1945), "Rhetoric of Motives" (1950), and "Language as Symbolic Action" (1966). In the first of these, "dramatism" is detailed at length as a method which "invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action."¹³ Burke "sought to formulate the basic stratagems which people employ, in endless variations, and consciously or unconsciously, for the outwitting or cajoling of one another."¹⁴ Concerned with the basic ambiguity of human symbol systems, especially language, Burke sought *"terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise."*¹⁵ He found them in drama, developing a five term structure for analysis by which "any complete statement about motives will offer *some kind of* answers to these five questions: What was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)."¹⁶ Burke's pentad parallels quite closely the typical journalist's questions. "Dramatism," therefore, provides a promising method of analysis to examine nonfiction books dealing with public education.

¹³Burke, Kenneth. (1945). A Grammar of Motives. New York: George Brazillier, Inc., p. xxii.

¹⁴Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. xvii.

¹⁵Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. xviii.

¹⁶Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. xv.

Analyzing rhetorically, or interpreting, the primarily outraged "voices" of public school education involved a dual theoretical frame. First, the analysis has proceeded along a writer-reader "contract" using a form of ethical criticism suggested by Wayne Booth. Second, the study used Burke's dramatistic analysis because the story inside the classroom is "drama," but the reflexive implication--that the story about education is drama--often is not fully captured in conventional journalistic language. This is why narrative becomes vital. No attempt, however, has been made to circumscribe or narrowly interpret the proceedings within the narratives in this study. As in most interpretive studies, "The aim is to draw large conclusions from small; to support broad assertions about the role of culture in the construction of collective life by engaging them exactly with complex specifics."¹⁷ From "densely textured facts" such as conversations, anecdotes, statistics, even children's art and writing, "large conclusions" about inequities in the public schools result. From "complex specifics" of firings, dedicated/ineffectual teachers, and conditions on the "outside" (culture) emerge "broad assertions" about a society's view of ghetto schools. Yet throughout the interpretation, the goading, Jeremiahic voice of outrage questions the reader as to why and how such "conclusions" and "assertions" were made in the first place and have been allowed to continue.

The authors have treated the children within the classroom as victims of an inequitable distribution of systemic resources, and, as a consequence, have offered their outraged authorial voices as proxies. The level of outrage

¹⁷Geertz, Clifford. (1973). The Interpretation of Cultures, New York: Basic Books, p. 28.

witnessed among authors' "voices" has varied from Kozol's intense first person rage to the more distant, third-person presentation of Kidder. But whether seen through the eyes of a teacher-author like Kozol, or observer-author like Kidder, the inherent message has had the effect of "calling into question the relevance of the entire enterprise of formal education."¹⁸ The text itself provides its own influence for "the minds we use in judging stories have been constituted (at least in part) by the stories we judge."¹⁹

Effects of a Journalism of Outrage

Other than teacher burnout,²⁰ recent Gallup Poll Surveys²¹ and occasional best seller/book award lists, producing evidence of effects achieved by the books and authors in this study would be difficult. But since the research is predicated on a rhetorical analysis of a journalism of outrage, "how" that literature told the story of public education and thereby attempted to persuade is as important as "what," if anything, of lasting impact was achieved. As almost daily news and feature stories continue to document, the distribution of resources in American public education, especially in the inner city, has not improved. Only now, the earlier problems have been exacerbated by crime and violence, drugs and bureaucratic neglect. The "We have bungled badly" theme of two decades ago has yielded to an almost impossible irretrievably lost situation.

¹⁸Gross, p. 17.

¹⁹Booth, Wayne C. (1988). *The Company We Keep*, p. 40.

²⁰Farber, (1991). "Tracing a Phenomenon: Teacher Burnout and the Teacher Critics of the 1960s."

²¹Elam, Rose & Gallup. (1993). "The 25th Annual Phi Beta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools." *Phi Delta Kappan*, 75, 137-152.

The powerful force of the outraged voices telling the story of victims of public school education has, nonetheless, created an awareness in readers. Further, judging by the Gallup Polls' 25th Anniversary survey of American attitudes toward public education, it may also have had a profound influence on the public's value(s) in choices affecting education. Nor is this surprising.

Fairness in distribution of resources in a democracy resonates particularly loudly as a value throughout society when the issue is education.²² Since fairness is an essential value--implied or explicit--in all books in this study, it is understandable why that value should resonate with readers, for to a great extent, "we absorb the values of what we read," and in terms of the story, "have lived with [the] values for the duration"

We have been that kind of person for at least as long as we remained in the presence of the work, and any ethical criticism we engage in will thus be 'tainted' for those who would prefer some kind of objective view.²³

Moreover, the reader is not the only affected party. The authors whether teachers or "disinterested" reporters, whether through first- or third-person narration, were particularly engaged witnesses to what went on in the classroom. They, too, were impressed by what they observed, because "any story told with genuine engagement will affect its teller fully as much as it affects listeners."²⁴

²²In "Investigative Journalism and the Moral Order," Glasser and Ettema comment that "Investigative reporters . . . set aside explicit consideration of the normative 'ought' and concentrate instead on documentation of the empirical 'is' by limiting their investigative stories to violations of widely shared values" (p. 2). This study described consistently the techniques of education authors as using techniques of investigative reporters, among them the "objectification of moral claims," which Glasser and Ettema call "the special contribution of investigative journalists to the ongoing cultural process by which morality is not only reinforced but also defined and refined through application to new and ever-changing conditions" (p. 3).

²³Booth, *The Company We Keep*, p. 41.

²⁴Booth, *The Company We Keep*, p. 42.

Any criticism of the books in this research must tend to be subjective *and* comprehensive. The books provide a variety of subjective and objective observations about public elementary and secondary education. Any literary criticism of these books must take that into account. As Esslin puts it:

There is not, nor can there be, one all-embracing method of criticism, simply because there is no objective truth to be uncovered; there is instead a multiplicity of motivations and intentions in the discourse about art.²⁵

Perhaps, however, we ought not to expect significant alteration in the way we "do school" in American society as a result of published works on the subject. After all, we are dealing with reform minded individuals, teacher/authors by and large. Not radical, but gradual reforms, are what they suggest. Furthermore, deciding on an agenda for the public education in the nation is a difficult task as the Gallup Poll Survey indicates. The public, even those better educated and better off financially, can't agree over a prolonged period what the educational priorities should be. The first Gallup Poll of attitudes toward education in 1969 found the general public viewed favorably the job public schools were doing. At that time, lack of discipline was considered the main problem, this despite the feeling "radical attacks on the school were commonplace" from the mid-1960s until late 1970s.²⁶ During the interim 25 years, while lack of discipline remained relatively high (it "slipped" to third place), lack of proper financial support and drugs assumed the top concerns of those polled. But even here, scarcely better than one in five adults surveyed viewed lack of proper financial support the major problem in schools nationally.

²⁵Esslin, Martin. "A Search for Subjective Truth," in What Is Criticism?, Paul Hernadi (ed.), p. 204.

²⁶Ravitch, The Schools We Deserve, pp. 12-13.

The 1993 Phi Beta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the American public's attitudes toward the public schools starts this way: "Americans are well aware of the 'savage inequalities' that characterize the funding of U.S. public schools."²⁷ That statement, indeed a number of poll results, are testimony enough to the impact Jonathan Kozol and others have had in bringing to the forefront for public consideration the serious funding inequities in the nation's public schools. No argument is forthcoming that Kozol and others, singlehandedly, primarily are responsible for the public's far greater awareness and concern on the issue. But by painting the picture of the lack of fairness in distribution of resources, Kozol et al have helped make inadequate funding a major problem Americans perceive in public schools, evidence of "the possibly strange and unexpected results they (Elegant Jeremiahs) produce" as Landow says. As documented earlier in this study, 21 percent of poll respondents consider it number one, as citizens become increasingly aware of how the quality of education varies and are "almost unanimous in believing that more should be done to improve the quality of public schools in the poorer states and communities."²⁸ Furthermore, 61 percent favor paying higher taxes to improve conditions in poorer communities.²⁹ Once again, this is not an attempt to point out a *significant* influence of Kozol and others on public thinking, but surely some influence.

By raising the issue of (un)fairness in education through their narratives, the public school writers analyzed in this study have demonstrated

²⁷Elam, Rose & Gallup, p. 138.

²⁸Elam, Rose & Gallup, p. 142.

²⁹Elam, Rose & Gallup, p. 142.

that the combination of journalism and the literary are not separate, but joined, in the public's mind. These writers, using a variety of appropriated techniques from the fields of literary journalism, investigative reporting and the sage, have demonstrated such an approach--a moral vision--is an ethical one more widely understood and appreciated by readers than some critics achieve. A journalism of outrage has a long and viable history in the United States; its application to public school education is simply another example of how "socially committed nonfiction" works.

States Address Funding

Even as inadequate school funding topped the 20 percent mark in 1991 and 1992 in polls, some states were already well along in revamping how public schools are funded. In 1993, "For better or worse, Michigan voters altered history's course on March 15 (1994), approving by an almost 70% majority 'Proposal A,' which would reduce property taxes, and hike sales and cigarette taxes."³⁰ Almost a year later (amid dire predictions one might add), the public voted, a year in which local school districts were without funding as a result of the legislature's elimination of the property tax. What the legislature and voters in Michigan did in 1994 other states have done (including Kansas, the most recent) or are considering when courts throw out local funding as the prime means of financing education.

The point is, in Michigan and 29 other states as of early 1994, the principle of fairness in public school funding has made major headway and it was this principle primarily which caused many of the public school literary

³⁰Horowitz, (1994). "Property Tax In Full Retreat," p. 1.

journalists to raise their narrative voices to tell how vastly unfair public education had become from the 1960s to the 1990s. That principle of fairness--that all children deserve an equal opportunity, through education, to reach their full potential--has been the touchstone especially of Kozol who has made it a point to paint the children as the clear victims of unfair use of resources.

One of the saddest things on earth is the sight of a young person, already become adolescent, who has lost about five years in the chaos and oblivion of a school system and who still not only wants but pleads to learn, as this boy was doing.³¹

Couple this picture of the student as victim with another from Kozol's 1991 book.

Like grain in a time of famine, the immense resources which the nation does in fact possess go not to the child in the greatest need, but to the child of the highest bidder--the child of parents who, more frequently than not, have also enjoyed the same abundance when they were schoolchildren.³²

The biblical "sophisticated allusion" at the beginning of this last passage is a literary device reminiscent of the Victorian sages who "could salt their works with complex, often witty, allusions to the Bible."³³ However, in an age where biblical allusions are becoming rarer, the passage may indeed "fall on deaf ears" and only corroborate prior criticisms of Kozol and other public education authors as "eloquent and super verbalizers . . . able to deceive their readers."³⁴

Still, "It is unfair!" the reader replies to Kozol's heartfelt portrayal of children/students as victims. By so doing, Kozol provides considerable

³¹Kozol, *Death at an Early Age*, p. 46.

³²Kozol, *Savage Inequalities*, pp. 79-80.

³³Landow, p. 34.

³⁴Ornstein, p. 29.

evidence of an investigative vent combined with the Jeremiadic literary ability of a sage. We can agree then, with Protess et al., that "all investigative stories reveal some form of victimization with which readers or viewers can empathize."³⁵ In the case of Kozol and the other writers, children are always the primary victims, teachers less so, administrators rarely, school board members never.

Kozol also had that ability to show racial overtones in the way whites dominate blacks. In the following excerpt from *Death at an Early Age*, Kozol refers to the hypocrisy he encountered among teachers.

All white people, I think, are implicated in these things so long as we participate in America in a normal way and attempt to go on leading normal lives while any one race is being cheated and tormented.³⁶

Whether it be children or an entire race, Kozol particularly seems adept at picturing victims, perhaps "to *trigger* agenda-building processes"³⁷ and thereby to demonstrate how "investigative reporters are reformers, not revolutionaries. They seek to improve the American system by pointing out its shortcomings rather than advocating its overthrow."³⁸

³⁵Protess, David L., et al. (1991). *The Journalism of Outrage*, p. 8.

³⁶Kozol, *Death At An Early Age*, p. 12.

³⁷Protess, et al. p. 6. An agenda-building motivation may well have helped spur the efforts of some of the education writers in this research. The theory of agenda-building is already well researched, established and discussed among communication scholars. Its application to education is much less researched, established, and discussed. While this study makes only a tentative reference to the agenda-building impact of education writers, a more rigorous study using quantitative measures could be the subject of future research. This would help demonstrate empirically, perhaps, the process by which public education issues, particularly unfair distribution of resources, became salient to policy makers.

³⁸Protess, et al, p. 11.

A Journalism of Outrage: Story and Fact

This study argued that since the 1960s, a select group of writers has presented to the American reading public the stories and facts of public education, especially in the inner-city where the children of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the racial minorities are victims of inequitable distribution of resources. This story and fact presentation has been dramatized through a dynamic moral voice, identified here as a journalism of outrage, which relies almost exclusively on the *ethos* of the individual writer.

The authors attempt to summon readers to enter a moral universe where inequity and unfairness need not exist. And while some of the authors used their own teaching experience to enhance their own credibility and the reliability of the facts presented, all the authors analyzed here found "Narrative is an instrument for the assertion of moral authority."³⁹ Thus, fact, narrative, and value(s) all combine in the "task of defining victims . . . because the 'simple fact' that innocent people have been victimized turns out to be not so simple after all. Innocence must be painstakingly *made real* through narrative."⁴⁰

Nonetheless, the words "made real" cause critics of a journalism of outrage to see it as failing to measure up to traditional journalistic criteria. Journalism with a moral vision strikes purists as inferior methodology when presenting facts, as though facts ought to "speak for themselves." Except for mere chronicle, however, such is hardly the stuff of reality for "Facts are

³⁹Ettema & Glasser. (1988). "Narrative Form and Moral Force," p. 10.

⁴⁰Ettema & Glasser. (1988). "Narrative Form and Moral Force," p. 13.

selected to fit the story but, more than that, fact and story are mutually constituted, though not necessarily consciously."⁴¹

A journalism of outrage--a narrative of public education since the mid-1960s--is one which seeks to reform public primary and secondary education as practiced in the inner cities especially. The author-teachers become reporters who seek "the evocation of righteous indignation" among readers as Ettema and Glasser contend

indignation at the plight of victims who are . . . at least innocent enough to make what happened to them an outrageous injustice, and also indignation at the demeanor of officials who are . . . at least guilty of indifference and hypocrisy.⁴²

Education authors thus establish a contract with the reader whereby the chronicle of public education since the mid-1960s is transformed, that is, "the events, agents and agencies represented in the chronicle must be encoded as 'story-elements.'" The readers of the books about public education thereby become witnesses to the drama inside the classroom. Readers may respond with, at least, surprise at the existing conditions, if not indignation at the total unfairness of the situation.

When the reader recognizes the story being told . . . as a specific kind of story . . . he can be said to have 'comprehended' the 'meaning' produced by the discourse. The 'comprehension' is nothing other than the recognition of the 'form' of the narrative.⁴³

The nine books analyzed thus achieve a rhetorical significance beyond their education reform impact because they document the conditions of public education through a narrative that tries to raise fundamental societal

⁴¹Ettema & Glasser. (1988). "Narrative Form and Moral Force," p. 10.

⁴²Ettema & Glasser. (1988). "Narrative Form and Moral Force," p. 24.

⁴³White, H. (1984). "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," History and Theory, 23, p. 20.

value questions in readers' minds. Ultimately, this is their impact or effect, not whether reform followed their publication. As James Boyd White contends,

The true center of value of a text, its most important meaning, is to be found in the community that it establishes with its reader. It is here that the author offers his reader a place to stand, a place from which he can observe and judge the characters and events of the world he creates. . . . This means that all literature, fictional and nonfictional, necessarily has an ethical and political dimension, for it always entails the definition of at least two roles (writer and reader) and the establishment of a relationship between them that can be seen to have both political and ethical content.⁴⁴

⁴⁴White, James Boyd. (1984). When Words Lose Their Meaning: Constitutions and Reconstitution of Language, Character, and Community. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 17.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX "A"
GALLUP POLL TABLES

Table A-1: Gallup Poll - 1993 Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools (In Percent)

Question: What do you think are the biggest problems with which the public schools of this community must deal?

	National Totals	No Children in School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
Lack of proper financial support	21	19	24	13
Drug abuse	16	17	14	9
Lack of Discipline	15	15	15	19
Fighting/violence/gangs	13	12	14	17
Standards/quality of education	9	9	8	18
Overcrowded schools	8	6	11	10
Difficulty in getting good teachers	5	4	4	3
Parents' lack of support/interest	4	5	4	3
Integration/segregation, racial discrimination	4	4	4	4
Pupils' lack of interest, poor attitudes, truancy	4	3	4	4
Low pay for teachers	3	4	3	2
Moral standards, dress code, sex/pregnancy	3	3	3	9
There are no problems	1	1	3	2
Miscellaneous**	3	3	2	*
Don't know	14	17	10	16

*Less than one-half of one percent

**A total of 36 different kinds of problems were mentioned by two percent or fewer respondents. (Figures add to more than 100 percent because of multiple answers.)

Table A-2: Fluctuations of public perceptions of the three public school problems most often mentioned over the past decade. (In Percent)

	Percentages Mentioning Each Major Problem											
	1993	1992	1991	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986	1985	1984		
Lack of proper financial support	21	22	18	13	13	12	14	11	9*	14**		
Drug abuse	16	22	22	38	34	32	30	28	18	18		
Lack of discipline	15	17	20	19	19	19	22	24	25	27		

*Ranked fifth among problems

**Ranked fourth among problems

Table A-3: Question #1. Just your impression, how much would you say the quality of the education provided by the public schools in your state differs from school district to school district--a great deal, quite a lot, not too much, or not at all? (In Percent)

	National Totals	No Children in School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
A great deal	33	31	35	44
Quite a lot	29	30	27	28
Not too much	30	30	33	22
Not at all	1	1	1	1
Don't know	7	8	4	5

Table A-4: Question #2. Again, just your impression, how much would you say the amount of money spent on the public schools in your state differs from school district to school district--a great deal, quite a lot, not too much, or not at all? (In Percent)

	National Totals	No Children in School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
A great deal	28	28	26	31
Quite a lot	26	24	32	32
Not too much	33	34	32	29
Not at all	3	3	3	5
Don't know	10	11	7	3

Table A-5: Question #3. In your opinion, how much does the amount of money spent on a public school student's education affect the quality of his or her education--a great deal, quite a lot, not too much, or not at all? (In Percent)

	National Totals	No Children in School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
A great deal	38	37	40	33
Quite a lot	30	30	30	31
Not too much	25	25	25	30
Not at all	5	6	2	5
Don't know	2	2	3	1

Table A-6: Inner-City School Questions

How important do you think it is to improve the nation's inner-city schools--very important, fairly important, not very important, or not important at all? (In Percent)

	National Totals	No Children in School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
Very important	81	80	81	79
Fairly important	15	15	16	13
Not very important	2	2	2	3
Not important at all	1	1	*	4
Don't know	1	2	1	1
*Less than one-half of one percent.				
	National Totals			
	1993	1989		
Very Important	81	74		
Fairly important	15	19		
Not very important	2	2		
Not important at all	1	*		
Don't know	1	5		

***Less than one-half of one percent.**

***Less than one-half of one percent.**

Table A-6 (continued)

Would you be willing or not willing to pay more federal taxes to improve the quality of the nation's inner-city schools? (In Percent)				
	National Totals	No Children in School	Public School Parents	Nonpublic School Parents
Yes, willing	60	59	62	52
No, not willing	38	38	37	47
Don't know	2	3	1	1

APPENDIX "B"

BURKE'S PENTADIC RATIOS: *AMONG SCHOOLCHILDREN*

Burke's Pentadic Ratios: *Among Schoolchildren*

Chapter One: "September"

Scene/Act: First day of class, whole year of school; school as journey, status details; writer documents, organizes.

Scene/Agent: Chris Zajac meeting first classes; Clarence introduced as primary antagonist, status details, extensive description of each; third person perspective, interior monologue as writer "enters" agent's mind.

Scene/Agency: Opening "address" to students, "talk" with Clarence, "comments" to student teacher; writer describes how agents will interact, relates sympathetically to teacher's challenges; writer uses mild tone, no explicit criticism of teachers.

Scene/Purpose: Agent (teacher) wants to establish discipline, yet remain sensitive to individual student; writer portrays teacher as challenged, effective, in-control, friendly; writer introduces all agents, scene, to provide background (status) details for better reader understanding of city school where minorities dominate.

Scene - Holyoke, Mass.: "For moments then, the room was still. From the bilingual class next door to the south came the baritone of the teacher Victor Guevara, singing to his students in Spanish. Through the small casement windows behind Chris came sounds of the city--Holyoke, Massachusetts--trailer truck brakes releasing giant sighs now and then, occasional screeches of freight trains, and, always in the background, the mechanical hum of ventilators from the school and from Dinn Bros. Trophies and Autron, from Leduc Corp. Metal Fabricators and Laminated Papers. It was so quiet inside the room

during those moments that little sounds were loud: the rustle of a book's pages being turned and the tiny clanks of metal-legged chairs being shifted slightly. Bending over forms and the children's records, Chris watched the class form the corner of her eye. The first day she kept an especially close eye on the boy called Clarence."¹

Agency - Actors - Fairness: "Children get dealt grossly unequal hands, but that is all the more reason to treat them equally in school," Chris thought. "I think the cruelest form of prejudice is . . . if I ever said, 'Clarence is poor, so I'll expect less of him than Alice. Maybe he won't do what Alice does. But I want his best.'" She knew that precept wasn't as simple as it sounded. Treating children equally often means treating them very differently. But it also means bringing the same moral force to bear on all of them, saying, in effect, to Clarence that you matter as much as Alice and won't get away with not working, and to Alice that you won't be allowed to stay where you are either. She wanted Clarence to realize that he would pay a price for not doing his best and for misbehaving. If she was consistent, Clarence might begin to reason that he could make school a lot easier by trying to do his work. If she got him to try, she could help him succeed, and maybe even help him to like school and schoolwork someday."²

Agency - School as Journey: "At home on late summery days like these . . ."³

"The first day . . ." "The afternoon of that second day . . ." "On a winter morning . . ." "January went well . . ." It was the season of muddy footprints in

¹p. 7.

²pp. 18-19.

³p. 4.

Purpose - Actor: "Even the most troubled children had attractive qualities for Chris.

Even the most toughened, she always felt, wanted to please her and wanted her to like them, no matter how perversely they expressed it. She belonged among schoolchildren. They made her confront sorrow and injustice. They made her feel useful. Again this year, some had needed more help than she could provide. There were many problems that she hadn't solved. But it wasn't for lack of trying. She hadn't given up. She had run out of time."⁵

⁵p. 331.

VITA

VITA

Bob Tobia has travelled many roads since his birth over fifty years ago. His formative years were spent moving between Buffalo, New York, his birthplace, and Northern New Jersey. He received his undergraduate degree from Seton Hall University (NJ) in 1960. After trying his hand at six different careers, including one as owner-editor of a weekly newspaper, he returned to school, receiving an M.A. in English from Appalachian State University (NC) in 1987. He then focused on an academic career in higher education before starting on the Ph.D. path in 1990.

Still travelling after all these years, Mr. Tobia considers himself a novice teacher and an aspiring writer who knows no permanent abode.