“IQ and Standard English” Revisited

Thomas J. Farrell
Professor Emeritus in Writing Studies
University of Minnesota Duluth
tfarrell@d.umn.edu

In his deeply polemical new book *Political Literacy in Composition and Rhetoric: Defending Academic Discourse against Postmodern Pluralism* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), Donald Lazere surveys a wide range of publications and issues. In his chapter “Orality, Literacy, and Political Consciousness” (pages 195-215), he revisits my article “IQ and Standard English” and the controversy that followed its publication in 1983 – more than thirty years after its publication.

My controversial article “IQ and Standard English” was published in the professional journal *College Composition and Communication*, volume 34 (1983): pages 470-484.

That professional journal whose name is abbreviated as the acronym CCC is the official publication of the professional organization known as the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC – or 4C’s). The CCCC is a subset of the much larger professional organization known as the National Council of Teachers of English.

The first draft of what eventually became my article “IQ and Standard English” was named “IQ, Orality, and Literacy,” and it was probably about ten pages double-spaced pages in length. Over the ten years or so that I worked on that essay, all subsequent drafts of my essay the title was “IQ, Orality, and Standard English” – until the final draft that was published as “IQ and Standard English.”

Recently I have published my 10,000-word essay “Donald Lazere’s New Book and Walter J. Ong’s Thought” at the UMD d-Commons.

In it, I refer repeatedly to the earlier drafts of my essay that was eventually published in 1983 as “IQ and Standard English.”

For the record, I have decided to published the earlier unexpurgated version of “IQ, Orality, and Literacy” (approximately 18,460 words in length) separately. But I am not able to supply an exact date for the unexpurgated version. However, it contains certain terminology that I use in my article “Scribes and True Authors” in the professional journal *ADE Bulletin*, Serial number 61 (May 1979): pages 9-16. (ADE = Association of Departments of English, a professional association that is a subset of the Modern Language Association of America.)

I presented a version of that paper at the session planned by the Association of Departments of English at the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Denver, Colorado, on March 30, 1978. (For understandable reasons, Lazere does not discuss my article “Scribes and True Authors.”)
So I probably wrote the unexpurgated version in 1978 or 1979.

At my UMD homepage, I have posted information about my education, my employment history, and my professional publications.


Walter J. Ong, S.J. (1912-2003), published the article “Orality, Literacy, Medieval Textualization” in New Literary History, volume 16.1 (Autumn 1984): pages 1-12. However, unlike Ong and Lazere, I have never published anything in NLH. But like Lazere, I did publish an article in JBW, which he is familiar with.

For the record, perhaps I should also report here that I met Lazere at a national professional conference in 1986 (I think) in New Orleans. However, I do not know him well. But I knew Mina P. Shaughnessy, Elizabeth McPherson, and Greg Cowan comparatively well on a professional basis.

I want to say something further here about Cowan and McPherson and others at the community college campus in the City of St. Louis, including me. Based at least in part on Joseph P. Cosand’s pep talks to the faculty, we saw ourselves as educational radicals – but not necessarily political radicals along the lines that Lazere envisions for English teachers who might engage in teaching political literacy as he envisions it. I have stated this point as felicitously as I can.

Between 1969 and 1979 when I was teaching at that community college campus in the City of St. Louis, I had not ever even heard of Lazere. I did not hear of him until the 1980s. In addition, I am not arguing here for political literacy as Lazere envisions it. In the final analysis, I do not find his vision of political literacy compelling.

Now, in part, the controversy over my controversial 1983 article involved my targeting the 1974 CCC official position paper known as The Students’ Right to Their Own Language, which had been published as a special issue of CCC. To make a long story short, I had read a draft of that position paper before it was finally approved by the leadership group and published. Greg Cowan told me that it was in the works, and he suggested that I should ask Elizabeth McPherson to allow me to read the draft, which I did.

Next, I want to turn to something I said in my controversial 1983 article that rang a bell with Lazere.
In his new book Lazere says, “One of Farell’s most thought-provoking hypotheses about basic writers is their tendency, as in oral cultures and nonliterate speech, to use paratactic language and thinking – that is, placement of phrases or clauses one after the other without logical connectives or [logical] sequence. In contrast literate cultures and written language make more use of hypotactic (subordinate) and syntactic (coordinate or sequential) structures and ideas. (Bernstein makes the same distinction in restricted and elaborated codes, as we will see.) In other words, oral cultures tend to be appositional and formulaic, while literate culture tends to be propositional in reasoning, so that writing facilitates a greater degree of abstract and analytic thinking . . . “ (page 197-198).

The terms restricted code and elaborated code were introduced by the British linguist Basil Bernstein (1924-2000; Ph.D. in linguistics, University College London, in the 1960s) in 1971, which Lazere lists in his Works Cited.

In the book Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (Methuen, 1982), Ong says, “Bernstein’s ‘restricted’ and ‘elaborated’ linguistic codes could be relabeled ‘oral-based’ and text-based’ codes respectively” (page 106).

I have long been familiar with Bernstein’s terms, but I do not remember using his terms in any of my own publications, except in my above-mentioned 10,000-word essay.

But Lazere prefers to use Bernstein’s terms.

I appreciate the care with which Lazere expresses himself in the above quote, which is centered on something I said in my controversial 1983 article.

But I published an earlier article titled “Literacy, the Basics, and All That Jazz” in the professional journal College English, volume 38 (1976-1977): pages 448-449. Lazere list that article in his Works Cited. However, he does not explicitly set up his discussion in his new book as a polemic against what I claimed in the article. Instead, he just asserts his own view in preference to my own published view. But does this make any difference.

I had claimed that the Basic Writing students at City College/CUNY and elsewhere under open admissions came from a residual form of a primary oral culture (Ong’s term) and that supposedly remedial students at Berkeley came from a secondary oral culture (Ong’s terms).

As I say, I myself have not used Bernstein’s terminology to discuss the operationally defined students from a residually oral background and the students from a secondary oral background.

In publication after publication, Ong claimed that secondary oral culture is not the same as primary oral culture. Of course Lazere is free to disagree with Ong and with me. But he does not explicitly state either Ong’s position or my position, and then proceed to disagree with one or both of us.
Instead, he conflates what I say about a residual form of primary orality and what he himself has experienced in teaching students from a secondary oral culture. As far as I am concerned, Lazere is conflating apples and oranges. But that’s not how he sees it.

Please don’t misunderstand me here. I am not suggesting that the analogies that Lazere spotted between certain things I say about open-admissions students and the students he taught are inaccurate or mistaken or wrong. As analogies go, the analogies that he spotted are plausible enough. When I talk, I need to use words, eh? (I return to this point below.)

Now, the IQ scores of the students that Lazere has taught, and the IQ scores of the students at Berkeley who were assigned to remedial writing, are of no particular concern to anybody, because their IQ scores are not low.

But the primary focus of my controversial 1983 article was the low scores of groups of African American students on IQ measures – as compared with the scores of white students in the same age range on the same IQ measures. I emphasize that we are discussing groups of students and mean scores.

Yes, to be sure, one target in my controversial 1983 article is the 1974 position paper The Students’ Right to Their Own Language, a late draft of which I had read before it was finally approved and published.

Now, for all practical purposes, my article “Literacy, the Basics, and All That Jazz” is not inconsistent with that 1974 position paper, even though I did not happen to advert explicitly to it.

But my controversial 1983 articles is explicitly against that 1974 position paper. So what had happened to prompt me to change my own position between “Literacy, the Basics, and All That Jazz” and “IQ and Standard English”?


Lazere sums up my position about the standard forms of the verb “to be” in English versus the non-standard forms in American black English (page 199).

Before I proceed further, a disclaimer is in order. As much as I have admired Mortimer J. Adler’s accessible books in philosophy, I have never thought of myself as capable of writing equally accessible books in philosophy. But in what follows I am undertaking to write something as accessibly as I am capable of writing in philosophical thought.

I have never found it easy to articulate anything in philosophical thought. However, when I was in the Jesuits (1979-1987), I did very well on my hour-long oral exam in philosophy with three different examiners – two of whom were from other universities. Oddly enough, my first
examiner, an older Jesuit professor of philosophy at another university, asked me about a theoretical line of thought. My answer was swift and sharp. It was immediately obvious that I understood exactly what he had said and had a cogent come-back. My answer is now what I will unpack here – the difference between becoming and being. In plain English, I am going to discuss metaphysics.

Now, Adler also makes a distinction between being a philologist and being a philosopher. I am writing here as a philosopher. But I am drawing on philologists and philological historical accounts of the emergence of the verb “to be” in ancient Greek thought and expression.


Next, I want to move beyond philology and philological history and discuss becoming and being. No doubt the ability to articulate a sense of being and to differentiate being from becoming involved a number of factors.

In Ong’s 1958 book, he draws on Louis Lavelle’s thought and works with the aural-visual opposition (or contrast). In Ong’s 1969 article in the American Anthropologist, he expands that basic terminology and refers to the world-as-event sense of life and the world-as-view sense of life.

In terms of becoming and being, the world-as-event sense of life fosters a sense of the world as becoming. But the world-as-view sense of life fosters a sense of the world as being – and as static.

But based on Havelock’s and Kahn’s philological studies of the ancient Greek verb “to be,” I claim that the verb “to be” played a central role in the emergence of ancient Greek philosophical thought not only in Plato but also in Aristotle – and in subsequent philosophical thought.

In my estimate, the non-standard forms of the verb “to be” in American black English express what Ong refers to as the world-as-event sense of life.

Is my claim debatable? Sure. Could I be wrong about this? Sure. But what if I’m right about this? If I am right about this, does anything follow? For example, does the use of the standard forms of the verb “to be,” as distinct from the non-standard forms, help actuate certain cognitive potentiality as measured by standardized IQ tests? That is my hypothesis. It is a testable hypothesis. But it would not be easy to test. If my hypothesis were properly tested and shown to be correct, then the 1974 position paper The Students’ Right to Their Own Language should be repealed.

But I should not stop here. I should broaden the scope of my discussion beyond the verb “to be.”

Can we have a show of hands of those who are against social justice?

“Down with social justice! Social justice is no good!”

Few people claim to be against social justice.

But many people claim to be for social justice.

But what is social justice? What do people who are for social justice mean by social justice?

I would say that it would be hard to discuss social justice without articulating operational definitions of key terms.

However, when we move to undertake articulating operational definitions of key terms, we are moving toward Aristotelian essentialism. In the philosophical position of critical realism, you would claim that your essentialist operational definitions represent something real in the order of knowledge.

Moreover, the verb “to be” usually comes into play whenever we try to articulate operational definitions.

By definition, operational definitions involve establish a univocal way to use certain conceptual constructs.

When certain words are not used in a univocal way, then they are used in a polysemous way, as words are used in poetry.

But of course it is fashionable in certain academic circles to decry essentialism and supposed essentialists. Basically, this fashionable trend is fundamentally anti-intellectual, except for discussing poetry and other forms of imaginative literature.

In most academic fields of study that claim to be scientific, operational definitions of key terms are commonplace – and fundamentally essentialist in spirit. Introductory level survey courses in fields of study that claim to be scientific in spirit usually involve learning the meaning of technical conceptual constructs in the respective fields of study.

But if you want to ban essentialism from discourse, then you are in effect advocating that we should use the thought and expression of the world-as-event sense of life (Ong’s term). (I return to the world-as-event sense of life and the world-as-view sense of life below.)

In any event, am I willing to switch to using Bernstein’s terminology – instead of making the claims I made in my controversial 1983 article? No, I am not. However, I have no objection to
Lazere using Bernstein’s terms if he wants to. But enough polemic with Lazere. Let me now turn to my story.

I was part of the then-expanding community college in the United States. Around 1970, a new community college opened at the average rate of one a week across the U.S. In addition, I was also, in 1975-1976, part of the experiment with open admission across the campuses of the City University of New York. Because New York City is to this day the center of the news media in the U.S., and because the four-year colleges in the CUNY system was prestigious four-year colleges, the new media publicized the CUNY experiment with open admissions. By comparison, the opening of new community colleges across the country received little attention from the national media.

For nine years, I taught in an open-admissions community college in the City of St. Louis. Elizabeth McPherson also taught there, but she taught exclusively in the Department of English. When I started in the fall of 1969, she was already in there. Over the years, I also taught various courses in the Department of English. But my primary teaching responsibility was in a special program in which almost all of the students were inner-city black youth.

In that special program, we had the second highest per student cost on the campus – only the nursing program had a higher per student cost. The classes were small. And it was a counselor-intensive program. The elected Board of Trustees and the administrators were committed to the program. It was a national showcase program. There was no program comparable to it at the City College/CUNY.

That program was by far the most widely publicized program on the campus. Joseph P. Cosand, William Moore, Jr., and other administrators publicized it conferences – and, in Moore’s case, also through his books. As a result, we had a steady stream of visitors from new community colleges around the country coming to see the program and interview the faculty about it. So there I was from the age of twenty-five in 1969 to the age of thirty-five in 1979, with a leave of absence in 1975-1976 when I taught at the City College/CUNY.

As I briefly indicated in my 10,000-word essay, it was in many ways a heady experience for me.

The program in St. Louis included a required developmental reading course. On standardized reading tests, the students in the program regularly received scores showing reading levels below the ninth-grade level – some were considerably below the ninth-grade level.

Now, at the City College/CUNY, when I taught there in 1975-1976, there were three Basic Writing courses. The students were placed in the three different levels based on a written placement test read by faculty readers, which was a labor-intensive process for the faculty.

From my admittedly limited experience teaching Basic Writing 1, I would say that many of those students in New York City resembled the students I had taught in St. Louis who had reading scores below the ninth-grade level – at times, considerably below the ninth-grade level.
In plain English, many of the open-admissions students I taught in St. Louis and in New York City were not functionally literate, as reading teachers define functional literacy.

But the community college in St. Louis used other standardized test scores to place students in the program as well as academic records. Unfortunately, many of the students had been socially promoted and had been graduated from inner-city schools.

I know, I know, standardized admissions tests, standardized reading tests, and standardized IQ tests have been criticized. Nevertheless, those standardized tests can serve as ways in which we can measure literacy. (As I say, I return to this point below.)

Cal Poly at San Luis Obispo and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, where Lazere has taught, do not have open admissions. No doubt Lazere’s heart is in the right place. But he has never taught the lower-end open-admissions students. Put differently, the standardized tests scores of the students he has taught over the years would clearly set them apart from the lower-end open-admissions students’ test scores on standardized tests. (As I say, I return to this point below.)

Now, I am sorry to say that not all the students who started the year-long (two-semester) program at our community college campus in the City of St. Louis were able to stay enrolled for the full year. Some dropped out mid-year. Of those students who completed the year-long program, not many of them were able to continue their postsecondary education. Very few ever completed an associate-degree program, and fewer still ever completed an undergraduate degree program.

Now, with funds from a Danforth Foundation grant, I arranged to have a follow-up study done on students who had completed a semester or two semesters in the program. The follow-up study showed that employers interpreted the former students’ regular attendance of the classes in the program as showing responsibility, so many of the former students had found employment and credit the program with helping them become employable.

So what’s that famous oath about do no harm? We did no harm. But what we did entailed having the second highest per student cost on the campus – second only to the nursing program.

The stars need to come together just right to produce the constellation that enabled us to have the second highest per student cost year after year for a comparatively small number of high-risk open-admissions students – mostly black inner-city youth. Thank you, Joseph P. Cosand.

But all good things come to an end. The stars changed. Our campus experienced a sharp decline in enrollment. In a spectacular example of reverse racism, the elected Board of Trustees voted to lay off a number of white men in English, including me, to “protect” blacks and women who had less seniority. But a number of white women and one black woman who had been hired before I was hired had left our campus to take positions elsewhere, because the job market at the time favored women.
Concerning that program in St. Louis, see William Moore’s book Against the Odds (Jossey-Bass, 1970) and Alice M. Thelen’s unpublished doctoral dissertation The Effectiveness of Required Individual and Group Guidance in Promoting Change in Selected Characteristics of High-Risk Junior College Freshmen (University of Wisconsin, 1968). Thelen prepared numerous in-house reports about that program, some of which may be available through the ERIC database.

Because Lazere evidently considers his mission in life to discuss what he interprets as the political implications of certain events, I want to turn now to certain events at the community college in the City of St. Louis where McPherson and I taught. I have not checked the newspaper records of either the St. Louis Post-Dispatch or the now-defunct St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

However, I am well aware that Robert Crawford used the online records of the now-defunct St. Louis Globe-Democrat effectively to flesh out circumstantial detail about St. Louis historically in his book Young Eliot: From St. Louis to The Waste Land (2015).


Perhaps I should also say that Patrick J. Buchanan worked for the Globe-Democrat from 1962 to 1965, as he himself recounts in his autobiography Right from the Beginning (Regnery, 1990, pages 267-293).

Now, there was a flag-burning incident on our campus – by the flagpole. It involved an African American young man who was protesting against the Vietnam War.

I was not on campus when it occurred. I do not remember ever talking with anyone who was on campus and witnessed the incident. I learned about it from the local news media – as did most people in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County.

The then-new community-college district was supported by the taxpayers in both the City and the County. (Perhaps I should explain that Ferguson, Missouri, is in St. Louis County.)

Editorials (plural) in the Globe-Democrat denounced the flag-burning incident in the strongest language.

Cosand requested a meeting with the editorial board of the Globe-Democrat. His request for a meeting was granted. Subsequently, he told the faculty on our campus about that meeting. He was well aware of the fragility of our campus as a public institution.

I was selected to be the faculty representative from my program to the College Council, the campus advisory group to the campus president that included student representatives. In a three-way election, I was elected to chair the College Council. I received all but three votes in the election – I didn’t vote for myself.
One of my opponents in that election was a white man. The other was a black man. They were loquacious, to say the least.

In my year as chair of the College Council, I worked closely with the elected student government, which at the time included few white students, even though approximately half the students on our campus were white. At the end of the academic year, I received a plaque from the student government honoring me for my service. A white woman in English also received a plaque from the student government honoring her for her work with the student government.

After Cosand left St. Louis in 1971, we had a new district president. On my campus, we also had administrative turnover, some of which generated certain tensions on campus, to say the least.

But on our campus we also had certain faculty in English who allowed the students in their transfer-level writing courses to determine their own final grades for the course. No, Elizabeth McPherson was NOT one of them. But as division chair, he did nothing that I know of to intervene and halt the practice of allowing students to determine their final grades.

In addition, the white dean of instruction on our campus, who was well aware of what certain white English teachers were allowing the students to determine their final grades, did nothing to stop them. But he eventually lost his job for failing to do anything, and the new campus president, an African American man, did intervene to penalize the English faculty who had been allowing students to award their own final grades. He penalized them by freezing the salaries for the remainder of their time there.

The English faculty who did that were among the supporters in English on our campus of the 1974 position paper known as The Students’ Right to Their Own Language that Lazere writes about. At that time, over a period of years, the English faculty on our campus were over-represented on panels at the annual conference sponsored by the CCCC, the professional organization that eventually approved the position paper known as The Students’ Right to Their Own Language in 1974.

Elizabeth McPherson served as president of the CCCC one year. Ong served as president of the Modern Language Association in 1978. So I personally knew one person who served as president of the CCCC and another person who served as president of MLA. When Joseph P. Cosand left St. Louis in 1971, he took a position as a high-ranking official at the U.S. Department of Education.

In addition to presenting papers at professional conferences, the English faculty on our campus published textbooks in writing. For example, Elizabeth McPherson and Greg Cowan published a widely used writing textbook that went through multiple editions, and Dick Friedrich and David Kuester also published a textbook. Both books were published by Random House.

In the program that I was in on our campus, Alan Kraus also published two textbooks (readers) that he himself used in the humanities course in our program.
Now, when I taught at City College/CUNY in 1975-1976, Greg Cowan and his second wife, Elizabeth Cowan, were also living in Manhattan. They were quite gracious toward me. At the time, Elizabeth Cowan was serving as the director of the Association of Departments of English at the Modern Language Association, and therefore ex officio as the editor of the *ADE Bulletin*. Subsequently, Greg Cowan and Elizabeth Cowan took positions in English at Texas A&M University.

Now, the white English faculty who allowed the students to determine their own final grades in their transfer-level writing courses had been among the early hires in English on our campus, and so they were not among the white English teachers laid off in 1979.

Now, I heard about what happened to one black student when he transferred from our campus to another campus (the campus in the area of St. Louis County where Ferguson, Missouri, is). He had received a self-awarded final grade of A in his transfer-level writing course on our campus. But he still needed to take the second transfer-level writing course at the other campus, because both were required courses in the degree program. The English faculty at the other campus understandably confronted him and told him that his writing showed that he was not ready to take the second transfer-level writing course. But he was distraught when he was told this, because he innocently believed that his self-awarded final grade of A meant that he had received a final grade of A in the course. Indeed, his transcript showed that he had received a final grade of A in the course. Quite a scene unfolded. I do not know what eventually happened to the student. But I did hear about how distraught the student had been.

I did not hear about any faculty at City College/CUNY who allowed students to determine their final grades in the Basic Writing courses there. Nor did I hear about any students there becoming distraught about anything they were told about their writing.

Let me construct an analogy. Let’s say that we are going to play basketball. But I say to you, “Whenever you throw the ball up at the goal and it hits the rim or the backboard, you score two points.” For the sake of discussion, let’s say that you play along with this way of scoring points.

In effect, *The Students’ Right to Their Own Language* does just this.

Now, the black president of the student government on our campus when I served as the chair of the College Council was instrumental in giving me the award I received that year from the student government for my service. He had also been involved in arguing with the English faculty that they should be teaching black students how to write so-called standard English. (He was an older student – what would be called a non-traditional student. He had experience at work as a union organizer.)

Surprise, surprise, the English faculty on our campus who allowed the students in the transfer writing courses to determine their own final grades considered themselves to be radicals – and so did the two faculty members in history who were my opponents in the election for chair of the College Council.
So in the spirit of guilt by association, I want to mention that Lazere also considers himself to be a radical. However, I seriously doubt if he ever allowed students in his writing courses to determine their final grades.

When I look back on my life today, I recognize that I was an impressionable teenager and an impressionable undergraduate. Typically, college undergraduates are impressionable. For this reason, I think that postsecondary faculty should be extremely careful about what they say to impressionable undergraduates.

Camille Paglia (born in 1947), the author of the book *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Neferti to Emily Dickinson* (Yale University Press, 1990), has made this point about undergraduates recently in an op-ed piece in *Time* magazine, in which she was urging fervent feminists to temper their statements to undergraduates.

No doubt this point could also be made to anti-abortion zealots who oppose legalized abortion in the first trimester. Disclosure: I do not oppose legalized abortion in the first trimester. For an intelligent discussion of abortion based on deontological moral theory, see my former colleague (we’re both retired now) James H. Fetzer’s book *Render unto Darwin: Philosophical Aspects of the Christian Right’s Crusade against Science* (Open Court, 2007, pages 95-120).

In addition to being an impressionable undergraduate, I also happened to live in heady times, as I’ve said. That was simply my fate – and my destiny, through which I discovered my vocation in life.

Recently I have been reading the book *The Dilemma of Narcissus*, translated with an introduction and notes by W. T. Gairdner (1973; n.d. for the orig. French ed.) by the prolific French Catholic philosopher Louis Lavelle (1883-1951), in which he devotes a chapter to discussing “Vocation and Destiny” (pages 107-132).

In his Works Cited in his new book, Lazere lists eight works by Albert Camus (1913-1960), who received the Nobel Prize in Literature at the age of 44.

But Camus and Lavelle both claimed not to be existentialists.

Incidentally, among other things, Lavelle says, “My relationship with others is the same as my relationship with myself” (page 137).

Now, if that claim is true, I have to apply it to myself first. But then I have to wonder about the intensity of certain critics of my controversial 1983 article. Then again, perhaps Lavelle’s claim is not the case.

But Lavelle’s claim is consistent with what C. G. Jung says about “shadow” projections that we make unconsciously. As a remedy, Jung recommends that we integrate our “shadow” contents into our ego-consciousness. When we do this, according to him, we will stop making unconscious projections from our “shadow.”
Now, among other things, certain critics of my controversial 1983 article claimed that the linguist Noam Chomsky had supposedly said something that somehow supposedly ruled out even the possibility of something or other I had said might be the case.

Not being an expert on Chomsky’s thought, I sent him a copy of my article and in a cover letter told him the line of criticism that had been against it based supposedly on his thought. To my surprise, he wrote back and stated that nothing in his thought contradicted anything I had said in my article. I should also state here for the record that he took no position one way or the other about the hypothesis that I had advanced in my controversial article. Nor did he offer me any encouragement to pursue my line of thought.

Next, it remains for me to suggest how a scale of values might be established for the purposes of differentiating students from a residually oral cultural background from students from a secondary oral cultural background (Ong’s terminology).

In the book *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (Methuen, 1982), mentioned above, Ong devotes a subsection to delineating “Further characteristics of orally based thought and expression (pages 36-57). He delineates nine so-called characteristics. He uses a short subheading to identify each one.

First, I propose to incorporate each of his nine subheadings into nine complete sentences here, using the stock wording “Oral-based . . . .” Next, I propose to reverse each of those nine sentences using the stock wording “Text-based . . . .” I will use the same numbers to number each of the nine sentences, but I will differentiate each set of number with the capitalized letter of the alphabet A and B.

(1A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be additive rather than subordinative.

(2A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be aggregative rather than analytic.

(3A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be redundant or “copious.”

(4A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be conservative or traditionalist.

(5A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be close to the human lifeworld.

(6A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be agonistically toned [not irenic].

(7A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced.

(8A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be homeostatic [as Ong operationally defines and explains that term].

(9A) Oral-based thought and expression tends to be situational and abstract.
As an operational definition, I hereby stipulate that “oral-based” here means based on the thought and expression of people in a primary oral culture as Ong uses this term, or in a residual form of primary oral culture. By contrast, I hereby operationally define “text-based” here to mean the thought and expression of functionally literate people as reading teachers define functional literacy. And now the reversed sentences:

(1B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be additive rather than subordinative.

(2B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be aggregative rather than analytic.

(3B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be redundant or “copious.”

(4B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be conservative or traditionalist.

(5B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be close to the human lifeworld.

(6B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be agonistically toned [but irenic].

(7B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be empathetic and participatory.

(8B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be homeostatic [as Ong operationally defines and explains that term].

(9B) Text-based thought and expression tends not to be situational and abstract.

In theory, if it were possible to use these eighteen sentences as a conceptual matrix for constructing ways to measure each, then the results of those measures would enable us to differentiate students who come from a secondarily oral culture, such as the students Lazere has taught, from students who come from a residual form of a primary oral culture, such as some open-admissions students.

Your guess is as good as mine as to whether or not a talented team of psychological test makers could construct suitable self-report statements regarding these oral-based and text-based characteristics to make a test that might be worth using.

But the results of that hypothetical test would not address how writing teachers might best proceed to teach students in writing courses. I consider my own suggestions about reading and writing instruction in the unexpurgated version of “IQ, Orality, and Literacy” to be tentative. As far as I am concerned, the floor is open for other people to make whatever suggestions they may want to make about reading and writing instruction.

Now, to sidestep the line of object to standardized IQ tests, Howard Gardner of the Harvard Graduate School of Education suggested that we should think instead of multiple intelligences. No doubt there is some merit to his suggestion.
However, his suggestion just sidesteps the differences on measures of IQ using standardized IQ tests.

In other words, thinking in terms of multiple intelligences does not close the gap on those measures.

Have inner-city schools set new graduation records since Gardner suggested that we should think in terms of multiple intelligences? No, they have not.

Basically, the problem that I forthrightly address in my controversial 1983 article remains as much a problem today as it was in 1983.

So perhaps the time has come for me to publish the unexpurgated version of “IQ, Orality, and Literacy” for the English-speaking world to see.

On May 5, 1978, I was one keynote speaker at “The Highlands Conference on Literacy ’78” at Virginia Polytechnic and State University in Blacksburg. I know that I read the paper I delivered at that conference. It was a version of “IQ, Orality, and Literacy” that I plan to make available as a separate essay in the near future.

Elizabeth McPherson was another keynote speaker at that conference.

No doubt that conference was a regional conference. Nevertheless, it was kind of remarkable that two persons from one community college in the City of St. Louis were invited to deliver keynote addresses in Blacksburg, Virginia.

As I stated in my 10,000-word essay mentioned above, I regret that I did not know about Gary Simpkins’ work in the 1970s when I was working on the unexpurgated version of “IQ, Orality, and Literacy.” I thank my former colleague Michael D. Linn (we’re both retired now) for calling my attention to John Rickford’s work.

Now, Rickford directed John McWhorter’s doctoral dissertation in linguistics at Stanford. In the book Doing Our Own Thing: The Degradation of Language and Music and Why We Should Like, Care (Gotham Books, 2003), McWhorter (pages 20, 38, and 39) discusses Ong’s book Orality and Literacy (1982), mentioned above, which he characterizes as “a truly consciousness-altering book I highly recommend” (page 20).

Whew! McWhorter is one card-carrying African American linguist who grasps certain parts of Ong’s thought. Good for him.

However, with all due respect for Connors, McWhorter is the better writer of the two.

But in Lazere’s way of thinking about people, he would probably categorize McWhorter as a conservative. But just how useful is it to categorize McWhorter as a conservative – even if he is a conservative compared to Lazere?

After all, Lazere is to the left of so many Americans that he himself says that he is to the right of Richard Ohmann, a past editor of the NCTE journal *College English* in which I published my article “Literacy, the Basics, and All That Jazz,” mentioned above. Ohmann was the editor of *CE* when I published that article and other articles in it.

Apart from categorizing persons as leftists, liberals, libertarians, and conservatives, is there perhaps a problem in this country that we are not yet addressing – a problem that I address in my controversial 1983 article and in the unexpurgated version of “IQ, Orality, and Literacy”?

Of course if there is no problem, then we can all return to categorizing one another as leftists, liberals, libertarians, and conservatives.

But do I have the power to single-handedly turn the country’s attention to reading and reflecting on and debating the unexpurgated version of “IQ, Orality, and Literacy”? No, I do not think that I have such power. I can only make it available by published it at the UMD library’s digital commons.

But does Lazere have the power to single-handedly turn the tide in composition and rhetoric against the various people in composition and rhetoric that he includes under his umbrella term “postmodern pluralism”? I seriously doubt that he has the power to turn that tide. However, in the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, I will give him credit for trying to turn that tide by writing his new book.

But what is powering the tide – indeed, the tsunami – that the cultural pluralists are riding? Often, on a conscious level, they invoke their sense of social justice. It’s hard to argue against social justice. How many politicians have you heard say, “I’m opposed to social justice”? Most people do not explicitly say that they are opposed to social justice. That claim is too big a claim to make. But people do claim to be for social justice.

But I claim that the tsunami that the cultural pluralists are riding arises from movements in their psyches that are far deeper than conscious calls for social justice.

Perhaps those deeper movements in their psyches involve the kinds of deep calls within their psyches that Lavelle discusses in his chapter on “Vocation and Destiny,” mentioned above. (The English translation of Lavelle’s book was published in London; it follows British conventions of spelling, which I plan to alter silently.)

Some of what Lavelle says in that chapter calls to mind Robert Browning’s lines in his poem “Andrea del Sarto”: “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, Or what’s a heaven for?” Perhaps this is also true for a woman.
No doubt my reach in my controversial 1983 article exceeded my grasp, eh?

Perhaps Lazere’s reach in his new book exceeds his grasp, eh?

Lavelle says, “There is a flood-tide within us on which we are borne; nevertheless, we are never quite certain of having abandoned ourselves to it unless it is we ourselves who set it flowing. And my vocation is my response to the voice of my most intimate and secret being, when this response remains totally unaffected either by my will, or by the impressions made upon me by things without” (pages 110-111).

Lavelle imagery of “a flood-tide within us” may be connected to my imagery of the tsunami rising up in the cultural pluralists.

Lavelle says, “One may miss one’s vocation [calling] for lack of diligence in the search, or of courage in the realization” (page 111).

Lavelle says, “True courage consists in recognizing our vocation [calling] and its uniqueness, and remaining faithful to it, never yielding, whatever the obstacles. Obstacles are to be resisted, not submitted to; but they have their purpose, for through them a vocation [calling] is brought to birth; they promote its realization” (page 112).

Lavelle says, “Vocation [calling] presupposes acceptance by a free will, putting to use the gifts we have received, and the situation in which our life is placed” (page 113).

Lavelle’s overall philosophy of participation is related to Plato’s philosophy of participation.
