types of assessment approaches (e.g., criterion-, norm-, and self-referenced) that best match the use of certain assessment methods (e.g., portfolios, journals, performance assessment). This information would help educators to identify the most appropriate assessment tools to employ given their instructional goals, the characteristics of the learners, and the nature of the learning environment.❖

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Northrop Frye, a figure of enormous continuing significance on the world intellectual stage, was arguably one of the five or six most important minds working in the humanities in the twentieth century, and certainly the greatest Canadian humanist ever. Although his immense contribution to the business of understanding the substance and expression of human meaning was obscured somewhat in the last decades of that century by the postmodern turn in university humanities departments, the significance of his writings on literature, the theory of literary criticism, and religion have never been seriously disputed. Moreover, for many years, Frye was for active in university administration as Principal of Victoria College in the University of Toronto and later as Chancellor of Victoria University. His writings on the nature and possibilities of education at all levels, and especially on the role of the university in public

affairs, are independently of enduring interest, although the interpenetration of the intellectual and the practical is a notable theme in his work.

Northrop Frye is now justly honoured with a splendid edition of his collected writings. Published by the University of Toronto Press, seven large, beautifully printed and bound volumes have already appeared, bringing together his works on religion and his inquiries into the mythopoeic structure of spirituality. Volumes of correspondence and early student essays have also appeared, but it is the recently released seventh volume of Frye's educational writings that is the occasion of this review article.

The appearance of this large volume of educational writings is indeed very timely because education at all levels — and particularly university education, caught as it is in the transforming cross-currents of social, cultural and economic change — requires the application of precisely that form of creative and imaginative intelligence that not only was the subject of Frye's scholarly inquiries, but also the active means by which he achieved his results. The volume is also welcome in that Frye's impact on literary and cultural studies is due for a fundamental reassessment. The culture wars in university humanities departments in the final years of the last century between traditional and postmodern scholars have now begun to resolve themselves into a less fervid and more productive *entente* in which the intellectually disciplined continuity of the best traditional approaches and the rich contextualism of the postmodern perspective are beginning to negotiate new common ground (e.g., Schiralli, 1999; Toulmin, 2001). In this more temperate climate, the unique place occupied by Frye's thought, which is truly at home on neither side of the postmodern divide, might more accurately be assessed. As such, it is somewhat ironic that Frye's approach would have been dismissed by some activist humanists as excessively "modern," in the disapproving sense of being overly reductive and essentialist, when in fact so much of Frye's intellectual framework represents a rebellion against the tedious — if not for Frye, stultifying — positivism of many aspects of the modern, rationalist point of view. If Frye is neither modern or postmodern, he is most certainly intellectually closest to the great writers in the English romantic tradition and the philosophical orientations within which they worked so urgently.

Frye's Debt to Blake

Frye observed many times that the core components of his own philosophical and critical perspective had been learned from the visionary romantic poet William Blake, and it will be productive to discuss some of those lessons carefully so as to get a sense of the foundation on which Frye's mature thought is based. Before Frye's generative studies of Blake, the predominant view was that of a brilliantly demented poet whose difficult and symbolically inverted long poems such as *Jerusalem* and *Milton*, although suffused with elements of real poetic energy and aphoristic force, foundered symbolically on the shoals of a private and confounded mysticism. Stylistically, the long poems were likewise viewed as structurally untoward, sometimes metaphorically likened to untended vines left to grow wild, with occasional patches of flower and fruit to be discerned amidst much tangled and intractable foliage (Frye, 1962, p. 5).

Blake himself, however, frequently asserted the formal unity of his work and the fundamental integrity and coherence of his vision:

> Those who have been told that my works are but an unscientific and irregular eccentricity, a madman's scrawls, I demand of them to do me the justice to examine before they decide. (see Erdman, 1965, p. 518)

Frye's bold approach in making sense of this highly unconventional writer was to take Blake precisely at his word and to seek out systematically the underlying conceptual and symbolic patterns that Blake held to be operative in his work. In so doing, Frye rightly came to comprehend the poems and Blake's vision in ways they had never previously been understood. Frye came to see that Blake's purpose was as much philosophical and epistemological as it was poetic. In penetrating the unity of Blake's work and pursuing his purpose, Frye read not only what the poet had himself read sympathetically, but equally importantly, Frye studied those books with which Blake had vehemently disagreed. Chief among the latter category was the work of John Locke, whose 1690 Essay *Concerning Human Understanding* had delimited core foundational presuppositions of British empiricism and had become a cornerstone of eighteenth-century rationalism. In explicating Blake's disagreements

with Locke, Frye penetrated to the essence of Blake's powerful conceptions of poetic language and imagery, of symbolism and allegory, and of the epistemological force of the imagination. These lessons were to form the basis of virtually all of Frye's mature thought.

The Imagination

Frye saw that Blake's view of the imagination is grounded in a fundamental philosophical rejection of empiricism as the source of genuine knowledge. In Locke's Essay, the source of our ideas is the world as experienced through the senses: sensory impressions are experientially inscribed on the mind. The mind is receptive to these impressions, in that it can reflectively sort them and discern their underlying patterns and relationships giving rise to knowledge. But, before the impressions of the external world perceptually assert themselves, the mind itself is but a blank slate.

For Blake this is a wholly misguided account of human knowledge. He astutely recognized that the memories of impressions on which the rationalist mind was to operate in its reflective pursuit of general patterns or abstract ideas (Blake quite wonderfully refers to these impressionistic elements as "spectres" in his writings). were too vague and idiosyncratic to provide an adequate account of human knowledge. What is needed, Blake saw so vividly, is a recognition of the limitations of so mundane a view of understanding. While the "corporeal" understanding was concerned with vagueness, imprecision, and spectral generalizations, genuine knowledge was to be found in the individual's active perceptual investigation of the particular through imagination: As Frye (1965) notes:

> "imagination" is the regular term used by Blake to denote man as an acting and perceiving being. That is, a man's imagination is his life... to be perceived, therefore, is to be imagined, to be related to an individual's pattern of experience, to become a part of his character. (p. 19)

If the imagination is the locus of our genuine intellectual powers, there is for Blake and Frye a very special place for poetry. In Blake's own definition:

> allegory addressed to the intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the corporeal understanding, is my definition of the most sublime poetry. (see Frye, 1965, p. 9)

The imagination is what enables individual human beings to construct, to assemble, meaningful visions of possibility. Even for the careful empiricist there had to be an essential role for the imagination. How else might the connective tissue among impressions and ideas be worked out without this generative faculty of mind? So in identifying a central epistemological role for the imagination, Blake may be placed in very good philosophical company. David Hume, perhaps the greatest of British philosophers, himself presents a very special brief in favour of imagination in his *Treatise of Human Nature.* It is the principle of imagination:

> which makes us reason from causes and effects; and 'tis the same principle that convinces us of the continued existence of external objects when absent from the senses. (see Mossner, 1969, p. 313)

For Hume, however, this is a necessary and unavoidable consequence, even a weakness, of empiricist accounts of human understanding in that the imagination is "so trivial and so little founded on reason." But Blake's approach is to seize the creative potential of imagination, actively projecting it onto the more mundane world of the empiricist, and thereby recognizing it as a necessary constitutive principle without which no real knowledge is possible. Providing an adequate philosophical discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of the present essay, but it should suffice to say that Blake's thinking on these matters was not only philosophically sophisticated for his time, but in some important ways illustrative of the keenest philosophical intuition. Although there is a world of difference between Blake's approach to the problem of knowledge, and Hume's, and that of other philosophers, it is not too rash to suggest that at least in terms of the ways in which his "intellectual powers" come to structure the possibilities of knowledge, other responses to this problem, most notably those of Kant and Wittgenstein, may be seen to follow the same general form.

Poetry, therefore, in its privileged position as the language of the imagination, becomes for Blake a vehicle for consolidating and

communicating a form of knowledge deeper than the superficial manipulation of memory traces in Locke. It also becomes the means by which the necessarily weak principle in Hume is transformed into a vital epistemological engine. Imagination in the works of Blake as explained by Frye becomes nothing less than an innate framework of associative or allegorical possibility within which the deepest and most human meanings may be explored.

In demonstrating the underlying unity and coherence of Blake's writings, Frye refuted the contention that Blake's work was the aberrant product of a poetic genius disrupted and distended by mysticism and madness. Equally important, in demonstrating that unity and coherence in *Fearful Symmetry,* Frye initiated his own career-long application of Blake's vision of the poetic imagination. That application developed as a continuous spiral of successively revisiting, refining, and elaborating these core ideas throughout his vast scholarly output. In Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism,* the structure and dynamics of this associative framework are delimited and applied to the full range of literary images and genres, while in his late, major work *The Great Code,* the essential role played by the Bible in defining and elaborating that framework within the Judeo-Christian tradition is powerfully demonstrated.

Imagining Education

Literature, especially poetry, as the area in which the imagination is so thoroughly exercised, is therefore the entry point for Frye's explorations of the possibilities of education. Yet the scope of his educational interests is not confined to matters literary or indeed to the more general subject matter of the humanities. Frye writes with equal energy and insight about the general mission of the university in Canada and elsewhere, the problems of creating meaningful and substantive curricula for elementary and secondary school students in all subjects, and the special ways the university scholar's teaching may positively influence his research productivity and effectiveness.

There is much discussion today in universities about the tension between professors' commitment to research and their obligations in the classroom. Teaching is often viewed as a distraction from the more

central (and certainly more richly rewarded in terms of career-advancement benefits) responsibilities to advance knowledge. In view of this emphasis on research productivity, often perceived necessarily to be achieved at the expense of teaching, it is sobering and instructive to recognize that the prodigious scholarly output of Northrop Frye was viewed by him as largely the product of his "teaching interests." As he says in the introduction to *The Great Code:*

> the present book has grown directly out of my teaching interests... but then all my books have really been teachers' manuals... [the] conception of teaching as secondhand scholarship is common among academics, but I regard it as inadequate. (Frye, 1990, p. xiv)

And in the very nexus of teaching and learning the imagination asserts itself:

> The teacher, as has been recognized at least since Plato's *Meno,* is not primarily someone who knows instructing someone who does not know. He is rather someone who attempts to re-create the subject in the student's mind, and his strategy in doing this is first of all to get the student to recognize what he already potentially knows, which includes breaking up the powers of repression in his mind that keep him from knowing what he knows. This is why it is the teacher, rather than the student, who asks most of the questions. (Frye, 1990, p. xv)

It is this imaginative process of creation and re-creation that is common to both teaching and to scholarship. In another Blakean echo, teachers and students (and scholars and readers):

> all start with a personality that is afflicted by ignorance and prejudice... [and each] one emerges on the other side of this realizing once again that all knowledge is personal knowledge, but with some hope that the person may have been, to whatever degree, transformed in the mean time. (Frye, 1990, p. xv)

Design for Learning

These sentiments respecting the interpenetration of scholarship and teaching and the importance of the transforming influence of genuine

intellectual content in educational curricula are expressed repeatedly throughout the ninety-five essays, articles, and addresses collected in *Northrop Frye's Writings on Education.* But in none of them is their theoretical and practical educational application more vividly to be found than in Frye's substantial introduction to *Design for Learning,* a 1962 collection of papers. Happily this important piece, long out of print and difficult to obtain, is reprinted here in its entirety. The papers edited by Frye for inclusion in *Design for Learning* were actually a series of reports prepared for a joint committee of the Toronto Board of Education and the University of Toronto. In 1959, Roy Sharp, a trustee of the Toronto Board, and Robin Harris, acting principal of University College, jointly sought to establish a forum within which school teachers and university professors might together evaluate and suggest improvements to school curricula in English, science, and social science. Frye was quick to answer the call and actively participated in the business of the joint committee. The first order of business was to focus the underlying question to be pursued in this activity as an examination of the extent to which school curricula adequately reflected "contemporary conceptions of the subjects being taught" (p. 129). Once the work of the committee began in earnest and the pertinent curricula evaluated, the answer to this question was a resounding "no."

By the time that the committee was formed the eminent cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner's conception of the "spiral" curriculum had begun to take hold among curriculum theorists interested in substantive, high content approaches to school subjects at all educational levels; indeed the august Modern Language Association had, in 1959, endorsed approach taken by Bruner as a sound foundation for curriculum planning. Bruner's conception was in turn influenced strongly by John Dewey's work on the progressive organization of subject matter, work that Dewey himself, distressed at the misinterpretations of his own theories in many progressive education classrooms, had done to clarify the ways in which disciplined continuity had to infuse the interactive approach he stressed. Bruner's spiral curriculum urged the progressive revisiting of core concepts, those ideas constitutive of the basic structure of the subject being taught, throughout the educational process. Needless

to say for Frye these ideas had much resonance. We have already seen how his own study of the structure of literature progressively revisited those core structural concepts of imagination, symbol, and myth that he had learned from Blake, and Bruner's sympathetic conception provided a sound theoretical framework on which to elaborate the consequences of this insight for the school curriculum. Hence it is not surprising that the report of the English committee in *Design for Learning* recommended that careful attention be paid to "the forms and the recurrent themes which are... the basic principles of structure in literature" (p. xli).

The conception of curriculum theory underlying *Design for Learning* is lucidly elaborated by Frye his extended introduction to the volume. Later, Frye's general editorship of a series of books for school use based on this approach (*Literature: Uses of the Imagination*) provided a perfect practical complement to the theoretical orientation instigated in his *Design for Learning* piece.

The University

One recognizes therefore in *Design for Learning* and *Literature: Uses of the Imagination* that the interpenetration of Frye's scholarly and pedagogical interests is paralleled in his activities in curriculum theory and practice. Another pair of comparably synergistic roles is abundantly documented in *Northrop Frye's Writings on Education:* that of the scholar and the university administrator. Frye pursued the same structure, clarity, and coherence in developing his thinking about the idea of the contemporary university that he applied in his literary scholarship, teaching, and curriculum theory. As such he frequently accepted invitations to speak at universities about the nature of universities and university education, particularly enjoying the role of commencement speaker. A different kind of commencement, however, that of the opening of the Ontario Institute for the Study of Education's current home on Bloor Street in Toronto in 1970, on the occasion of the Institute's fifth anniversary, provided the venue for one of Frye's most eloquent and summative statements on the role of the university in contemporary society. Reprinted in *Northrop Frye's Writings on Education* as "The Definition of the University," it stands as a continuing point of reference in a time

of renewed challenges to the mission and vitality of universities. A brief passage from it will provide an eloquent conclusion to this essay. Caught in the eddies of social and economic concern and the pressures of public accountability, Frye acknowledges that the university is of course responsible to society and to government, but:

> the university has a difficult and delicate job to do: it is responsible to society for what it does, very deeply responsible, yet its function is a critical function, and it can fulfil that function only by asserting an authority that no other institution in society can command. It is not there to reflect society, but to reflect the real form of society, the reality that lies behind the mirage of social trends. (p. 421)

But in attending carefully to the way it deals with social pressures:

> it becomes clear that the intellectual virtues of the university are also moral ones, that experiment and reason and imagination cannot be maintained without wisdom, without charity, without prudence, without courage; without infinite sympathy for genuine idealism and infinite patience with stupidity, ignorance, and malice. Academic freedom is the only form of freedom, in the long run, of which humanity is capable, and it cannot be obtained unless the university itself is free. (p. 421) ❖

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