"A String of Textbooks": Artifacts of Composition Pedagogy in Indian Boarding Schools

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> A string of textbooks piled up in the storehouses high enough to surround a reservation if laid side by side will never educate a being with centuries of laziness instilled in his race.—Indian school superintendent, 1886[1]

The term "artifact" is particularly apropos when discussing the teaching of writing to Indian children in government boarding schools at the turn of the century. Due to the emphasis on manual labor and industrial/domestic training in the curriculum, information about academic subjects taught in these institutions is scarce, and buried in far-flung geographic and scholarly territories. In this paper, I "excavate" material from two sources: *A Uniform Course of Studies for the Indian Schools of the United States* and selections from *McGuffey's Reader*, a text used in many of the schools. Very little scholarship addressing the details of curriculum used in boarding school classrooms has been done to date, although several publications have focused on the cultural and economic consequences of that education.[2] However, an examination of the material that *is* available indicates that, without fail, coursework in Indian boarding schools situated "writing" either embedded in, or at the end of, a long list of vocational objectives. Such obscure placement was far from arbitrary, and has significant historical and pedagogical implications rooted in both

the ideology of colonization that dominated all government-Indian relations and nationalistic theories of education.

In order to analyze the *UCS* and *McGuffey's Reader*, it is important to carefully contextualize the ways education for Indians was envisioned and defined by the government. Specifically, it is necessary to recognize that boarding schools had, at the center of their curriculum, no intention of educating American Indians for anything but vocational and subservient positions in the lowest strata of society. An analysis of the materials and methods used to teach composition, then, must include lessons in racism and nationalism.

On March 3, 1819, the U.S. Congress passed what was commonly (and tellingly) called "The Civilization Fund"—legislation designed to finance education "for the purpose of providing against further decline and final extinction of the Indian tribes . . . to instruct them in the mode of agriculture suited to their situation, and for teaching their children in reading, writing, and arithmetic" (Tyler 45). This act laid the groundwork for a complex government-run educational system, the final "cure" for savagery: Indian Boarding School. The first such efforts were day schools, or reservation schools, which allowed the children to remain in close contact with their families. However, this arrangement proved unsatisfactory when, during home visits or long vacations, the children went "back to the blanket"—refused to speak or write English, dress in European styles, or practice the Protestant brand of Christianity that was a large part of their education in the school. Off-reservation schools attempted to change this; modeled after military academies (and frequently supervised by former Army officers), boarding schools were located at great distances from the students' home reservations or territory. Ideally, Indian children were now isolated in these boarding schools for an uninterrupted period of five years before being allowed to return home for the first time. This arrangement, supporters reasoned, allowed the students time to become educated and civilized without the opportunity to backslide.

But just how were the words "education" and "civilization" defined for late nineteenth and early twentieth century educators, particularly those working with Indian children? David Wallace Adams, in his article "Fundamental Considerations: The Deep Meaning of Native American Schooling 1880–1900," argues that the curriculum was not, as commonly thought, "the 3 R's" but, more correctly, "Christianity, Capitalism and Republicanism" (23). These three driving forces were, indeed, reflections of a general American educational agenda increasingly concerned with industrialization and the perceived role of immigrants. But a close look at the "artifacts" will also reveal the extremes to which such a pedagogy was taken in Indian boarding schools when magnified by colonization and a racist rationale.

The Uniform Course of Studies

Carlisle, the first off-reservation boarding school, became operational in 1879, but it was not until 1890 that then-Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas J. Morgan issued what may have been the first course of study for Indian schools. Morgan's course of study was ambitious, calling for a complete system of primary schools, grammar schools, and high schools which were never realized or (given the many complex issues involved) ever truly possible. The "high education" Morgan hoped for was quickly out-dated by changes in administration, student populations, and political pressure. In 1901, Estelle Reel, Superintendent of Indian Schools from 1898–1910, published a much-revised course of study for government boarding schools. Reel's work eliminated many of Morgan's plans for "higher (academic) education" and became the standard for all future course-of-study outlines.

In *A Uniform Course of Studies for the Indian Schools of the United States*, Reel's introductory remarks make her intentions clear: "This course is designed to give teachers a definite idea of the work that should be done in the schools to advance the pupils as speedily as possible to *usefulness and citizenship*" (emphasis added, 5). Reel's pedagogical structure, examined here, clearly prepares the way for

the institution of a purely vocational curricula. There is a noticeable absence of words or concepts such as *literacy, writing,* or, indeed, *education*. The audience for the *UCS* was ostensibly teachers and district superintendents of Indian schools, which were operating on a supposedly half-day academic/half-day industrial model (in truth, the students not only trained in certain trades, but also maintained the school's kitchens, laundries, grounds, buildings, gardens, livestock and so on, on a daily basis; punishments usually included adding more work hours to a student's day). The book was meant to achieve uniformity in the overall curriculum and to provide a basic reference for teachers to look to for guidelines and authority. K. Tsianina Lomawaima, in her study of Reel's life, writes, "According to news reports, three thousand copies were first printed for the Indian Schools, then another six thousand for distribution in the Philippines and 'Porto Rica'" (Lomawaima "Domesticity" 5). These were impressive publication figures for 1901, and lend an air of importance and urgency to the government project of "civilizing" Indian children. The *UCS* was also scrutinized (and applauded) by the news media—and thus the general public—as proof that the "Indian problem" was being addressed professionally.

Reel's introduction is also full of phrases such as "self-supporting," "willing worker," "cooperate," "trained in habits of industry," "practical," and "the dignity and nobility of labor" (5–6). These phrases emphatically draw attention to the industrial/domestic "half" of the program, while absenting academic matters of consequence. Not surprisingly, Reel closes with, "As far as possible teach the children that cultivation of good habits, self-control, application, and responsiveness are recognized as being *on a higher educational plane than a knowledge of definitions and unimportant dates*" (emphasis added, 6). Composition is presumably held in even lower esteem than "definitions and unimportant dates," as Reel doesn't mention such a program at all. Twenty–nine student-related content areas are presented next, in alphabetical order: Agriculture, Arithmetic, Baking, Basketry, Blacksmithing, Carpentry, Cooking, Dairying, Engineering,

Evening Hour, Gardening, Geography, Harness-making, History, Housekeeping, Laundry, Music, Nature study, Outing system, Painting, Reading, Language and Sub-primary work, Sewing, Shoemaking, Spelling, Tailoring, Upholstering, and Writing. Although the subject "Writing" might seem to be about instruction in the arts of composition, the actual curriculum under that heading was excruciatingly basic: an introduction to, and practice of, the physical acts of sitting at a desk, holding a writing utensil, making marks on chalkboard or paper, and so on. Reel's curriculum makes the leap to copying words, taking dictation and constructing short compositions within the "Read, Language and Sub-primary work" topics which I examine next.

"Reading, Language and Sub-primary Work" holds some promise of revealing clues to the methods by which composition was taught. This section is presented in the style for the entire book: first, a general laying-out of philosophy, materials and advice; next, a year-by-year description of how to proceed. The title reveals what was one of the most pressing issues at boarding schools: the teaching of English as the first "academic" priority of teachers. Most of the incoming Indian students spoke little or no English; and by 1890, when the Federal Government took on full responsibility for the education of Indians, English-only instruction became a strictly enforced requirement. Both Adams and Gould report that the "objective method" of teaching English was generally employed by staff—introducing an object, naming it in English, and requiring the student to replicate that name (initially, only oral replication was required, with great attention paid to pronunciation and audibility).[3] This type of instruction coincides with the basic method outlined in the 1894 publication *Object Teaching: or Words and Things* by T. G. Rooper, which also has sections entitled "all good Object Lessons are also good Language Lessons" and "the Importance of Formal Grammar in Elementary Education has been Overestimated" (14)—objectives that fit into the course of study of composition in boarding schools quite well.

"Object Teaching" is, indeed, the pattern set out in *UCS*, though it is never labeled as such. Reel writes, "The mother in the

home has shown us that the natural method begins with objects; that it is not more necessary for the child to catch hold of a chair or his mother's dress in order to lift himself from the floor than it is that he have objects for his mental climbing" (212). Reel's "objects" for this mental trek up from savagery were intensely domestic and/or industrial. The image of student as miniature worker-in-training is one that is carried out extensively in the *UCS* (which initially utilizes families of dolls engaged in household/agricultural tasks) to teach language and prepare the Indian child for academics.

Reel's idea of language training is rooted in the practical—housekeeping, farming, sewing, child-care—and she attends to the smallest details of lesson plans almost to the point of absurdity. For example, she instructs,

> The teacher must plan ahead for the meals that are to be prepared for the dolls. Cereals and beverages must be prepared in the correct way. Tiny potatoes or vegetables of other kinds may be selected and pared and prepared for the doll's table, cooking them in different ways, as one does in a well-regulated family. (213)[4]

The general idea, then, is to encourage the children to learn English in what Reel considers playful, pleasant, and, above all, *useful* ways. By the end of the first year, Reel writes, "The sentences expressed by the little child should be written on the board from time to time, and, if the child wishes he may endeavor to write the words himself" (220). This is the first mention of using written language, but Reel does not acknowledge that it often took much longer than one year for an Indian child to advance to this level.

In the second year, reading is addressed directly, again via objects: drill and practice of viewing and verbally describing objects; tracing, copying and writing the names of objects on practice paper; moving on to "fill in the blank" sentences on the chalkboard; and eventually writing short compositions. The

compositions at this stage are still based on objects: the example given is of a caged squirrel placed on the table, and the words *squirrel, tail, nose, fur,* and *feet* written on the board. The students are then instructed to "write a story about the squirrel, using the words on the board, and any others that may be necessary to tell a good story" (222). The creative limitations of those stories seem obvious; but it is also unpleasant to note that the children, being from outside civilization, are supposed to be better able to make contact with a wild animal than with anything else. The fact that this wild animal is caged, and undoubtedly frightened, sends unwritten messages about the curriculum and what education requires of students.

Additional vocabulary was added through the use of "sight reading," basic memorization of word formations. Later, Reel suggests that the students practice writing correspondence, either to their parents or to the teacher. In this description, Reel specifies,

> Teach the use of comma and period. Teach the child to distinguish between proper names and common names and to give the plural forms of words; to use *this* and *that*, *these* and *those*; *is, are; was, were; have, has*. Teach the use of capitals at the beginning of sentences and proper names and in writing the pronoun *I*. (226)

These vocabulary and grammar exercises are expanded and repeated throughout each year's instructional notes in what seems a haphazard and random manner; probably, despite the addition of the *UCS* to their resources, teachers were still on their own in creating language and grammar lessons. On what criteria was Reel basing her grammatical objectives? If she was following a particular grammar textbook, or guidelines from a certain school of writing, she does not cite such a work. Reel also indicates during this second year's plan that students begin taking dictation and creating books of drawings with written descriptions of the processes involved in cooking, gardening, laundry, agriculture, dairying,

woodwork, sewing, and so on. Here we have the basic components of composition as it was taught in boarding schools: rote drill and practice, with attention to mechanics and utilitarian value.

By the sixth year of "reading," apparently as far as students were expected to actively learn the subjects of reading and writing, students progress to compound and complex sentences, and vocabulary in more abstract terms—"study ... *wish* and *want*, or *look* and *observe*" (230). The subject of compositions has completed the transition from "pleasant" objects such as dolls and squirrels to utilitarian subjects "showing the important industries of the locality ... with the allotment in view, plan what shall be done on every foot of ground there ..." but with an even more industrially-minded bent: critique of those compositions attends to mechanics only superficially. Instead, Reel instructs, all comments should be designed to "stimulate the pupil to effort to make his particular farm the most productive one in the locality."[5] This constant reiteration of the economic value of productivity is echoed throughout every subject in the *Unified Course of Study*.

McGuffey's Reader

Determining which textbooks were used in Indian boarding schools, and how they fit into the industrially-oriented course of study, is problematic: neither their titles or uses are well-documented. Initially, teachers addressed the task of teaching the students to speak and understand English. Once instruction in reading and writing English began, some texts were used at some boarding schools, but it is not known if all schools used textbooks. The choice of texts was influenced by many factors which deserve a much deeper exploration than can be given here. For example, the *Webb's First Model Reader* was written for "deaf and dumb" children, but used in some Indian classrooms. Why? Were Indian children thought to be more easily taught by signs, or was the text considered substantially simpler for pre-literate populations to grasp? In a different instance, it is interesting to note that one of the three authors of the *Appleton's Reader* series, William T. Harris,

was U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1883 when educational reformers met at Lake Mohonk to discuss and make concrete policy recommendations regarding Indian schools. Harris' firm conviction that Indians were pagan savages in need of Christianizing, and the clear Protestant-oriented morality of his textbooks, were no doubt considered assets when choosing or acquiring readers for the Indian classrooms. In all, four textbooks have been noted in records of Indian school instruction: *Webb's First Model Reader*, *Appleton's Second*, *Keep's Stories with Questions*, and *McGuffey's Readers*.[6] I will discuss only the *McGuffey's* here.

McGuffey's Eclectic Readers were extremely popular from their first publication release in 1836 to the present day re-prints, and based on numbers alone, it is not surprising that they were one of the selections for Indian boarding schools.[7] The use of the word *eclectic* in the title format was meant to denote the *choice* or *selective* reading samples within. Unfortunately, *choice* also meant that the vocabulary was often much too high for the reading level of the intended students. Nietz, in his study of textbooks, writes that an early edition of the *McGuffey's Second Reader* revealed a vocabulary of about the eighth grade reading level—"ill-adapted to the age level of the children using the books" (77). If this text was difficult for English-speaking children, it would likely have been nearly impossible for Indian children still in the process of learning English. Neitz notes that the vocabulary level was gradually adjusted in revisions, but adds that mixed levels of reading remained in each reader.

One advantage of *McGuffey's*, however, was the use of sight-reading, a technique which encourages students to memorize and recognize a word based on visual shape, position, and context rather than letter-by-letter decoding. Most textbooks began with spelling and letter-sounds, and progressed slowly to phonetic reading; but *McGuffey's Readers* used whole, short sentences that were related to accompanying pictures. The lessons were brief and contained in short paragraphs that were suited to the boarding school methodology of object and language lessons. In addition, a typical *McGuffey's Reader* lesson included the moral qualities that fit

the "Christianity, Capitalism and Republicanism" of Adams' description: stories and poems taught "honesty, truth and truthfulness, obedience, temperance, kindness to humans and animals, thrift, work, and patriotism" (Nietz, 78). Such qualities are echoed in Estelle Reel's introductory remarks in *UCS*, "[I am] hoping that better morals, a more patriotic and Christian citizenship and ability for self-support will result from what this course of study may inspire . . . ." (6). In short, the *Readers* accommodated what educators and administrators saw as the academic needs of boarding school students as well as moral issues such as religion and citizenship.

The process of composition, while not always directly discussed in *McGuffey's*, is a subject worth noting in one story in particular. *McGuffey's Fourth Eclectic Reader* contains "Susie's Composition," a tale of 24 short paragraphs. This text most likely would have been used with the older, if not oldest, students at boarding schools, as Indian schools typically graduated students at about the eighth grade level, although at a much later age than the general American population (sometimes students finishing Indian school would be as old as twenty or twenty-two). The necessity of learning English as well as a vastly different culture; time lost to running away, punishment, illness; and the intensive focus on industrial training played into this age differential.

"Susie's Composition" relates the dilemma of "Susie Smith," assigned to write a composition of "twelve lines at least" (104). "I never, never can write one," sobs Susie to her mother—going on nobly (and in typical *McGuffey's* morality) to reject the possibility of cheating, but still bereft at the thought of failure. The story progresses under a steady and guiding hand: Susie's mother convinces her to go play in the garden for half an hour, then calls her inside.

> "Now, Susie," said her mother, "I want you to sit by the window with this nice sheet of paper and a pencil, and write something about what you can see ... Never mind your

composition, my dear; do this to please me, and we will talk about that shortly by and by." (105)

Predictably enough, Susie is shortly gentled into writing her composition under the guise of having "a nice time" (her essay, included in the story, is a description of what she saw while in the garden) (106). When Susie expresses surprise that she has so easily written a composition, her mother replies with the moral of the story: " . . . it is easy enough to write if you have anything *interesting* to write about" (emphasis added 108). According to this vignette, Susie simply needed to relax, listen to her all-knowing mother, and let her surroundings inform the composition, rather than looking within herself for the words.

What seems to have been presumed in boarding school curricula for Indian students was that "interesting" meant their industrial training and the hope of one day having their own allotment of land to cultivate. Instructors at the school were encouraged by Reel to position themselves as the "mother-teacher" who, like Susie Smith's mother, would guide these children toward that goal (Reel 220). The reality of boarding school was not, however, the reality of *McGuffey's* readers. In the *UCS* for the second year, Indian students were asked to produce one essay a week "on the work accomplished" (227), and by the fifth year, "an essay each week setting forth the work of each department" (230). By requiring the students to write e*xclusively* about what they "knew" (or at least what teachers thought students *should* know), and by presuming for the students that industrial training was the most interesting subject possible, boarding schools did, indeed, teach some basic aspects of composition. In fact, in her research of Indian student compositions and letters, Janice Gould concludes that "the children's struggle to write, to articulate ideas, describe a life, and narrate events, no matter how faulty or incomplete the attempt, constitutes what I believe may legitimately be called boarding school literature" (2). In examining student writing, especially non-academic work such as confiscated notes passed in class and letters, Gould finds examples of student resistance,

spirit, and voice. But at the time those compositions were written, what kind of Indian student was constructed by the *UCS* and the *McGuffey's Readers*? What was the intent behind the curriculum?

" . . . the very structure of his bones . . . "

In theory, these pedagogical artifacts combined to construct a subservient, obedient, domesticated, unquestioning, patriotic, loyal worker for the U.S.A., one who could read and write enough to run a small allotment of land and take his/her place in the American economy as a good consumer. In reality, this work constructed adult Indians who had been forcibly separated from their language, homelands, culture, blood families, religion and self-esteem; people who had varying degrees of industrial, domestic and/or academic training and who were, more often than not, generally unemployable at the jobs they had been trained for due to the one bad habit that could not be broken: they were still, despite years of painful training to become otherwise, Indians. The racial ideology in the United States prevented all but a few students from succeeding in any profession above menial laborer (or, in a self-perpetuating cycle, an instructor or worker at an Indian school). The irony of producing a student who could write a passing essay examination about how to clean, thread and run a sewing machine, but who could not find a job that paid enough to purchase that machine or cloth to sew on it, was lost on the federal government. Why, then, this obsession with industrial education?

There are historical rationales for the overriding emphasis on vocational training in the *UCS*. Clues to reading the pedagogical obsessions in Indian Boarding Schools are found partly in the mish-mash of ethnography, anthropology and history that characterizes colonization and partly in the general attitudes about education in the United States being changed by the forces of industry and immigration.

From first contact, Europeans assumed Indian peoples to be genetically inferior to people of European descent; this inferiority began with physical limitations and extended to actual mental

handicaps; and the influence of such beliefs did not end after first contact. Estelle Reel detailed in a newspaper interview how this affected pedagogical concerns:

> Allowing for exceptional cases, the Indian child is of lower physical organization than the white child of corresponding age. His forearms are smaller and his fingers and hands less flexible; the very structure of his bones and muscles will not permit so wide a variety of manual movements as are customary among Caucasian children . . . " (qtd. in "Domesticity" 14).

Here, Reel seems only moments away from suggesting that Indians lack opposable thumbs. Her words imply that academic tasks requiring small-motor skills (such as holding a pencil, writing or drawing), and even the ability to utilize or fit furniture comfortably or correctly (shorter forearms couldn't reach desks, for example) were basic genetic impossibilities for Indians. Conveniently forgotten, of course, were the fine-motor skills required for basketry or beading as well as the wide variety of "manual movements" required by Indians to hunt, travel on foot, or defend themselves before boarding school taught them these lessons! Reel's belief—by far the most common of her time—was that a direct connection existed between the perceived physical deficits of non-literate people and their mental performance.

The second basis of support for the vocational track played on the first: while no real intellectual progress or evolution could be hoped for, it was possible that the Indian population, particularly the younger generations, could be made useful members of society—trained to perform the mindless, boring, and strenuous tasks they were most ably suited for. This ideology seems to me to be rooted in what David R. Russell terms "The Cooperative Movement" of the Progressive Era of American education, circa 1895–1920 (101). This theory stressed the idea of utility in writing—writing that was useful to industry, to technical writers, and to clients.

Although many of the Cooperative School's practices were not fully carried over in the Indian boarding schools, there is, I believe, a direct link. One of the Progressive Era's top architects, Robert G. Valentine, developed the highly influential technical writing program at M.I.T.; his next job was a long stint with the Bureau of Indian Affairs from 1904-1912—during the very time the *UCS* was being implemented. Valentine's influence seems likely to have been at the highest level of the course of study. As Russell points out, remediation and Americanization of immigrants were a key focus during the Progressive Era, when "the remedial model of writing instruction was at bottom a response to fears that the influx of immigrants would corrupt the purity of American language and culture" (149). Similar fears marked the boarding school curriculum's extreme separation of students from tribal life in order to "civilize" them. Russell notes that in (non-Indian) American schools of this time period, " . . . the English work focused on surface features: spelling, usage, letter format, and so forth" (152). The study of English, and of composition, became necessary only as it pertained to a student's "chosen" line of work—and industrial pursuits were clearly the purpose of cooperative language instruction.

In addition, other major characteristics of boarding school pedagogy appear to be directly related to the Cooperative Movement. Russell writes,

> Urban reformers often made English instruction part of a broad program of Americanization, teaching American history and civics, to be sure, but also such values as personal cleanliness, factor-like discipline, and, its critics charged, disdain for ethnic customs and beliefs. (153)

This sounds suspiciously like rules which, much magnified, governed Indian students from the moment they stepped over the threshold of a government boarding school and were subjected to radical haircutting, delousing, outfitting in European-style boarding school uniforms, and strict monitoring of personal

hygiene and conduct with military-like discipline and routine (including forced marching and drills). It seems that efforts to control non-English speakers were being made on several fronts of American education at once.

In a slightly different but tantalizing twist on this idea, Susan Miller proposes in *Textual Carnivals* that behind the immigrant-industrial educational emphasis with its focus on vernacular literary ideals lurked the "Anglo-Saxon upper class," attempting to form "a distinct institutional appropriation of written language" (54). Miller argues that, on the surface, the teaching of composition as an industrial tool only seemed to politely and helpfully encourage correct written vernacular language in immigrants. She writes,

> . . . [composition] actually stripped from new students and a nation of unschooled potential writers their needs and desires to create significant pieces of writing . . . *the purposes and practices for the composition course . . . indicate that it was set up to be a national course in silence*" (55-emphasis added).

It seems to me that Miller has an excellent point: if students are taught that utilitarian writing is the purpose of writing, and if those students are directed solely toward vocations in which the uses of writing are, again, purely utilitarian, then the "higher" uses of language have been carefully obscured from those students. Writing as literature, consequential discourse, a conversational process, or a process of discovery is denied.

In this light, it is rather chilling to compare "Susie's Composition" in *McGuffey's Reader* with Miller's analysis of the Progressive Era's "new criteria for making assignments" (59). Susie's original topics were "Time," "Temperance," and "Industry," but she became distraught by the effort to express the intangible aspects of such titles in writing. Classical curricula, Miller asserts, asked students to do just this task: compare, contrast, classify—acts of rhetorical invention—using subjects they might or *might not* be familiar with, in order to "test students'

ability to call up common wisdom and to demonstrate grammatical and syntactic fluency" (59). Thus, during the Cooperative Era, topics such as "Time" were exchanged for new, more practical assignments which asked for, and required, much less creativity and/or risk. Miller explains,

> These criteria said that topics for writing should be of "interest" to the students and should be about subjects that the students "knew something" about. These criteria were strenuously promoted in the latter nineteenth century, when courses in daily themes began and invention was no longer included in textbooks . . . (59)

Or, as Susie's mother concludes, "You have been trying to write upon subjects you know nothing about" (*McGuffey's* 105) and "it is easy enough to write if you have anything interesting to write about" (108). "Interesting" is further defined by reading the series of questions provided at the end of "Susie's Composition," specifically, "Why could she not write about 'Time,' 'Temperance,' or 'Industry'?" Such post-reading questions were designed to guide students away from topics that required speculation or original, independent thought. The story of Susie and her playtime in the garden, followed by her lengthy description (not analysis) of that garden immediately afterwards (a subject she "knew something about"), is connected to and part of the mechanical kind of composition that Miller is outlining in her study of immigrant education—and related, as well, to the passive, limited and limiting writing that was allowed to Indian students within the boarding school curriculum and ideology.

Conclusion

In the historical context of the complex social and educational issues intersecting in the United States during the mid-nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, the teaching of composition in Indian boarding schools takes on the connotations of a battlefield. Efforts to save souls, promote capitalism and self-

sufficiency, and maintain the social/racial status quo were being faced in the industrial centers of the country with immigrants, and in the Midwest and far west where Indian tribes had been driven or confined to reservations. It is not surprising that similar solutions were attempted for both struggles; what is distinctly different for the students of Indian schools, as opposed to their immigrant counterparts, is mostly defined by what is called "race." Easily identifiable, economically destitute, involuntarily isolated from family and homeland, and not legally citizens of the United States until 1924, Indian students were subjected to an education that worked to silence their voices even as it professed to entitle them. I return to the quote at the head of this paper: "A string of textbooks piled up in the storehouses high enough to surround a reservation if laid side by side will never educate a being with centuries of laziness instilled in his race." The visual image of surrounding Indian land and families with a "string of textbooks," as if choking the enemy with a textual noose or ring of educational soldiers, is a threatening, ominous message. The textbooks of this superintendent's vision are not there to enable Indians to speak—they are there to divert, obscure, and silence Indian voices in the name of pedagogical victory.

In this paper I have argued that the teaching of composition in Indian boarding schools, through the combination of textbooks, *UCS* philosophy, and historically-generated pedagogical emphasis on industrial/domestic training, created a situation in which the writing was intended not to assist Indians in becoming "civilized" but to aid in the erasure of Indian presence and voice in a literate, consequential dialogue. However, it should be noted that even if, as Susan Miller suggests, such an intent was indeed an Anglo-Saxon effort to deny writing to Indians as a culturally-empowering device, the results, while devastating, were not entirely successful. There were Indian students who not only survived the curriculum of the boarding school, but became skilled writers with limited acceptance in mainstream society: Ella Deloria, Luther Standing Bear, Zitkala-Sa, to name a few.[8] Clearly, some Indians were able to assert themselves as authors in ways that challenged

the expectations of educators—and of their own cultures. It remains to be examined at what cost these writing skills were gained, and how the difficult methods of acquiring such writing skills continue to influence contemporary Indian writing and literature. Muscogee Creek Joy Harjo, one of the finest contemporary Indian poets, acknowledges,

> To write is often still suspect in our tribal communities, and understandably so. It is through writing in the colonizers' language that our lands have been stolen, children taken away. We have often been betrayed by those who first learned to write and to speak the language of the occupier of our lands . . . [but] we've transformed these enemy languages. (20–22)

New research by Adams, Child, Gould, Lomawaima and others documents resistance to and subversion of that encircling string of textbooks by the Indian students educated in government boarding schools. This kind of information and excavation is crucial to viewing the ways in which Indian writing has evolved, survived, and, as Harjo asserts, "transformed" to flourish today.

NOTES

[1] Quoted in D.W. Adams, "Fundamental Considerations" (5).

[2] Two scholarly works that include historical and ideological analyses of government boarding schools are Adams' *Education and Extinction* and Lomawaima's *They Called it Prairie Light*.

[3] I am indebted to Janice Gould's unpublished manuscript "Boarding School Literature: English Usage by Children Who Attended Indian Boarding Schools, 1879–1927" for historical and pedagogical insights regarding boarding school writing.

[4] At this point, it becomes necessary to ask exactly what pedagogical fantasy allowed Reel to dictate the many tools, articles of clothing, dolls, foods, staff members and compliant Indian children she seems to feel are at the disposal of the teachers and superintendents reading this course of study. The reality of actual boarding school situations was well-documented by Adams, Lomawaima, and others: children were subjected to corporal punishment for speaking "Indian," were punished for running

away by having their heads shaved (a sign of grief or shame in many Indian communities), were under-fed and ill-clothed, suffered from tuberculosis and trachoma, and were involuntarily held at an institution far away from their parents and homes. Neither the materials nor the compassion cited in this course of study actually existed in reliable quantities.

[5] Reel's use of "the allotment" and "farm" refers to a complicated system of land management described in the Dawes Act, whereby land was held in trust for Indians (initially, for 25 years) until the Indians were judged to have become civilized and competent to manage their land and the use of that land. Typically, boarding school students were told that upon graduation, each student was to receive a land allotment, and should therefore work toward using his Government-provided vocational skills to successfully farm this land (Indian women, of course, would want to be able to support their husbands in these domestic efforts). Unfortunately, more Indian students ran away from boarding schools than ever graduated; and in any event the allotments, as Francis Paul Prucha explains, were badly mismanaged by the U. S. government and scarcely existed as truly arable land (see Prucha 297–299).

[6] The first three textbooks were found by Gould in the ARCIA, 1880 (179); the last, *McGuffey's*, is noted by David Wallace Adams in "Fundamental Considerations" (7).

[7] Nietz asserts that over 122,000,000 copies were sold for actual classroom use (73); this should not be confused with the more recent sales figures of the new reprints of *McGuffey's* which have, interestingly, found a contemporary market among collectors, homeschoolers, private schools, and other populations.

[8] Pointed out by Gould, personal communication with the author.

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