I. INTRODUCTION
For several years we have been studying the literacy practices of people labeled "remedial," "developmental," "underprepared," "vocational," or "slow learners" in American schools and colleges. We have examined the ways in which the abilities of such students have historically been assessed and understood, the kind of instruction they typically receive, and the effect that instruction has had on their reading and writing. In a nutshell, our research suggests that the ways that people who don't do well in our nation's schools have been perceived, depicted, and taught have hindered more than helped their move toward literacy. The goal of our research is to critically examine both this history and current practice, and to offer a social-cognitive model of problematic reading and writing that will reorient educational theory, policy, and practice toward what, we hope, is a more fruitful, generative direction. It is our belief that before educators and researchers can develop increasingly effective approaches and techniques to help the huge numbers of kids and adults receiving remedial instruction, we will have to fundamentally change the faulty and counterproductive ways we have been conceiving of the problem. This paper, then, is our attempt to find new ways of seeing the writing and reading and talking of students who are "underprepared."[1]

Our argument throughout will be that, if we are going to develop new ways of understanding students' literacy performances — new ways of seeing students' reading and writing that go beyond traditional, limiting notions of learners as merely deficient — we have to critically examine our assumptions about our students' abilities. However great the distance we have come in recent years in understanding the complex cognitive processes involved in writing and reading, we have not yet come far enough, we believe, in examining our assumptions about remediation. These are assumptions that are deeply held and so ingrained as to be tacit, and that can, without much conscious choice on our part, drive the way we structure a course and circumscribe the learning that students will do in it. We would argue that such assumptions are part of what we might call our national habit of mind for sorting and labelling individuals who perform poorly in school.

II. AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
At the present moment students who are at risk of failure are particularly salient, given many factors: recent immigration patterns; increased political pressure to address the needs of all students; public attention to school reform; the connection of schooling to economic demise as put forth in A Nation at Risk and other reports. But even though poorly performing students are particularly visible to us now, they have been with us for a long time, and we have traditionally thought about these students in certain ways.

In fact, there is a long, troubling history in American education of perceiving and treating low-achieving children as if they were lesser in character and fundamental abilities. Stanley Zehm (1973) traced this history partly by examining the labels that have been attached to students who perform poorly in school, and more recently Larry Cuban and David Tyack (1989) have expanded Zehm's study. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the poor performer was labelled a "duke," "shirker," "loafer," "reprobate," or "wrong-doer" who was "stupid," "vicious," "depraved," "wayward," or "incorrigible." Some of these labels imply that students lacked intelligence, but the majority suggest a flawed character.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, the labels shifted somewhat toward intelligence rather than character, though with a developmental or organic cast: students were "born late," "sleepy-minded," "overgrown," "immature," "slow," or "dull." The condemnation, religious language used earlier was diminishing, but the notion that academic failure came from defects of character or disposition continued. As we move into the twentieth century, notions of developmental and intellectual normalcy — evident in the abnormality of labels like "born late" and "sleepy minded" — continued to evolve and were applied, in a negative way, to
poor performers. This shift toward blaming inferior intellect was reified with the advent of IQ testing in the early part of this century; the assumption was that schooling just wasn’t for low-scoring children.

...it is easy for older, deficit-oriented explanations for failure to ...narrow the way newer theories are represented and applied ...reducing the rich variability of human thought, language, and motive.

These ways of thinking about thinking — by locating the blame for educational failure in students’ character or intellect — are still very much with us. Granted, we have changed perspectives somewhat. The social reform movements of the 50s and 60s, for example, shifted the discussion of school failure from the character and ability of the individual toward the society; during this period, new labels began to target the educational system more than the student: “educationally handicapped,” “educationally deprived,” “culturally different,” “pushouts,” “the rejected.” But the old terms and connotations co-existed with the newer formulations, and educators still tended to rest blame, as had been customary, on the students themselves. In the 70s and 80s, research on the effects of cultural differences on communication and learning, and the effects of class-based resistance to socialization into the mainstream, have also given us more enlightened ways to look at school failure.

What we want to argue, though, is that it is easy — and common — for older, deficit-oriented explanations for failure to exist side-by-side with these newer, more progressive theories, and, that in fact, the old notions can and do narrow the way newer theories are represented and applied, turning differences into deficits, reducing the rich variability of human thought, language, and motive. The historical and institutional studies we have conducted suggest to us that in fact there is a language of remediation that still has powerful influence over the way reading and writing programs are constructed and curriculum developed. By virtue of our backgrounds and educations, most of us are primed to speak of students who are underprepared as deficient even as, in the same breath, we attempt to devise curricula that we call liberatory. It is this set of received notions, we think, that dull the perception of teachers and researchers to the richness of the cognitive processes involved — even when students’ reading and writing run counter to our expectations — and the way that elements in the context of the reader and writer shape those processes.

So we think that we have to develop new ways of seeing. What we hope to do in our work is to develop a theory and a method that would help us and others to see reading and writing in ways that honor the richness of cognition — even when it appears to us to blunder — and honor the importance of social/cognitive context and try to trace the influence of context on cognition. We hope to bring the cognitive and social domains together, to develop a theory and methods that will allow us to understand problematic reading and writing performances in the context of students’ history of literacy activities and school experiences. In our work we assume that cognitive behavior is sensible and logical, that it emerges from information-processing, decision-making beings. And we assume as well that it’s rich — even when it diverges from our expectations — and that it can be examined closely and traced and represented. We are also trying to grant and make explicit what seems implicit in cognitive models of reading, writing, and teaching: that things like schemata (a repertoire of classroom recognition cues, rules and strategies) do not appear deus ex machina into disembodied information-processing systems, but rather have been developed in prior literacy and schooling and community experiences. This history is also something we want to look at systematically and carefully, linking it tightly to the cognitive analyses.

What we hope is that this interconnection between the cognitive and the social will provide a set of checks and balances that will generate a kind of awareness of the ease with which we define problematic reading and writing in reductive ways. This is also how we conceive of teacher education, as the practice of developing ways to see the connection between the cognitive and the social — by engaging in the kind of inquiry that leads one to trace the connections between the mind of the student, the classroom, and the community beyond.

III. INTERPRETING AN UNCONVENTIONAL INTERPRETATION OF A POEM

We have conducted studies at three sites: a community college, a state college, and a university. In each of these settings, we asked to work with those students designated by that particular institution as most at risk, most remedial. We spent four months in each setting, observing and videotaping writing and reading classes, audiotaping individual reading and writing tutorials, collecting reading and writing samples as well as reading and writing protocols, and interviewing students about previous literacy experiences and their memories of schooling. Our analysis and interpretation have consisted primarily of constructing vignettes that illustrate phenomena that have recurred in our larger data set and also that illustrate cognitive and social processes that we think bear in an important way on literacy
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instruction. It is to one of these vignettes that we turn now.

As part of studying literacy in remedial classrooms, we have looked at a kind of reading that students are often called on to do in school — to interpret literature. In remedial classrooms, it’s not uncommon for students’ interpretations of literature to strike teachers as unusual, or off the mark. When teachers enter classrooms with particular poems or stories in hand, they also come in with expectations about the kind of student responses that would be most fruitful, and these expectations have been shaped, for the most part, in literature departments in American universities. We value some readings more than others — even, in our experience, those of us who advocate a reader’s free play. One inevitable result of this situation is that there will be moments of mismatch between what a teacher expects and what students do. What interests us about this mismatch is the possibility that our particular orientations and readings might blind us to the possible logic of a student’s interpretation and the ways that interpretation might be sensibly influenced by the student’s history.

With composition professionals calling for the integration of reading and writing, and affirming the place of literature in remedial instruction, composition teachers will need to explore questions of interpretation, expectations, and background knowledge — particularly given the rich mix of class and culture found in most remedial programs. In the following vignette, we would like to consider these issues by examining a discussion of a poem that was part of a writing assignment. Specifically, we will analyze a brief stretch of talk, one in which a student’s personal history and cultural background shape a somewhat unconventional reading of a poem. We’ll note the way that mismatch plays itself out in conversation, the logic of the student’s reading and the coherent things it reveals about his history, and the pedagogical implications of conducting a conversation that encourages that logic to unfold.

The stretch of talk we will analyze comes from a conference following a classroom discussion in Mike Rose’s remedial writing class at UCLA. Mike kept a teacher’s log for us, and, with the students’ permission, he taped the writing conferences he held with them. The subject of the class discussion and later conference was the following poem by the contemporary Japanese-American writer Garrett Kaoru Hongo:

And Your Soul Shall Dance

Walking to school beside fields of tomatoes and summer squash, alone and humming a Japanese love song, you’ve concealed a copy of Photoplay between your algebra and English texts.

Your knee socks, saddle shoes, plain dress, and blouse, long-sleeved and white with ruffles down the front, come from a Sears catalogue and neatly complement your new Toni curls.

All of this sets you apart from the landscape: flat valley grooved with irrigation ditches, a tractor grinding through alkaline earth, the short stands of windbreak eucalyptus shuttering the desert wind from a small cluster of wooden shacks where your mother hangs the wash.

You want to go somewhere. Somewhere far away from all the dust and sorting machines and acres of lettuce.

Someplace where you might be kissed by someone with smooth, artistic hands. When you turn into the schoolyard, the flagpole gleams like a knife blade in the sun, and classmates scatter like chickens, shoed by the storm brooding on your horizon.

—Garrett Kaoru Hongo (from Yellow Light, 1982, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, p. 69)

Rose’s class followed the narrative line, pictured the girl, and understood the tension between her desires and the setting she was in. The ending, with its compressed set of similes and metaphors, understandably gave students some trouble — many at first took it literally; most pictured it cinematically. But, collaboratively, the class came to the understanding that the storm meant something powerful and disquieting was brewing, and that the girl — the way she looks, her yearning for a different life — was somehow central to the meaning of the storm. The students, however, weren’t immediately able to fit all the pieces together into one or more unified readings. And as members of the class focused on particular lines, offering observations or responding to classmates, Mike got the impression that some of them weren’t reading the lines carefully. He wondered if these “misreadings” were keeping the students from a fuller understanding of the way the storm could be integrated into the preceding events of the poem. One of these students was Robert.

Robert could be described as engaging, polite, style-conscious, and intellectually curious. His father is from
Trinidad, his mother from Jamaica, though he was born in Los Angeles and bears no easily discernible signs of island culture. His parents are divorced, and while he spends time with both, he currently lives with his mother in a well-kept, apartment-dense area on the western edge of Central Los Angeles. Robert’s family, and many of their neighbors, fall in the lower-middle class socio-economic bracket. In class, Robert is outgoing and well-spoken — if with a tinge of shyness — and though his demeanor suggests he’s a bit unsure of himself, he volunteers answers and responds thoughtfully to his classmates.

During the last half hour of class, the students began rough drafts of an interpretive essay on the poem, and in his paper, Robert wrote, “this girl seems to want to be different from society.” And later, in his conference, he would tell Mike that the poem “talked about change.” So Robert clearly had a sense of the poem, he was formulating an interpretation, but like the others, he did not unify the poem’s elements in his draft, and Mike assumed Robert’s performance was caused by his “misreading” of sections of the poem. Here is Mike’s entry in his teacher’s log:

Robert was okay on the 1st third of the poem, but seemed to miss the point of the central section. Talk with the tutor — does he need help with close reading?

Mike decided to get a better look himself, so he moved his regularly-scheduled conference with Robert up a week and tape-recorded it. In the three-minute excerpt from that conference which follows, Robert is discussing the storm at the poem’s conclusion — the foreboding he senses — but he is having some trouble figuring out exactly what source of this impending disruption is. Mike asks Robert if — given the contrast between the farming community and the girl’s dreams and appearance — he could imagine a possible disruption in her not-too-distant future. We pick up the conversation at this point.

1a Mike: What do you think, what, you know, on the one hand what might the reaction of her parents be, if she comes in one day and says, “I, I don’t like it here, I want to leave here, I want to be different from this, I want to go to the city and …”

1b Robert: Um, that would basically depend on the wealth of her family. You’d wanna know if her parents are poor … (mumbling) … they might not have enough money, whereas they can’t go out and improve, you know ...

When a student talks this way, especially in a remedial classroom, we often assume he’s not reading carefully, or worse yet, that he’s being difficult, or even worse yet, that there’s something wrong with his thinking. To be fair to Robert, though, not all of his exchanges were so packed with qualification and interruption. Still, it is representative of the characteristics that make his talk about texts interesting to us. Let us take a closer look at the reasoning Robert exhibits as he discusses the poem. To do this, we will intersect socio-economic, cognitive, and textual information, bringing these disparate sources together to help us understand Robert’s interpretation of certain sections. In doing this, we won’t be explicating the poem, but rather a particular reading of it in a particular social-textual setting.

Robert claims that the reaction of the girl’s parents to “I want to leave [here] and go to the city” would “depend on the wealth of her family.” This qualification is legitimate, although the reasoning behind it isn’t obvious. In a follow-up session, Robert elaborates: “[If she goes to the city], she’s gonna need support … and if they’re on a low budget they won’t have that much money to be giving to her all the time to support her.” The social context of Robert’s reasoning becomes clearer here. He comes from a large family (eleven siblings and half-siblings), some of whom have moved (and continue to move) across cultures and, to a degree, across class lines. It is the parents’ obligation to help children as they make these moves, and Robert is aware of the financial strains such movement brings — he’s in the middle of the same kind of tension himself. Mike continues:

2a Mike: Ok. Ok. From what we see about the background here and the times and the look, can, can we surmise, can we imagine — do you think her parents are wealthy or poor?

2b Robert: I wouldn’t say that they’re wealthy but, again, I wouldn’t say that they are poor either.

Surprised at Robert’s hesitance to make a judgment about the economic status of the girl’s parents, Mike probes Robert’s thinking, then focuses his attention on the text of the poem. We return to the transcript as Mike finishes reading an excerpt containing reference to the wooden shacks:

3a Mike: Now if she lives with her mother in a wooden shack, a shack …

3b Robert: Ok. Uh, right here — is it saying that she lives with her mother, or that she just goes to this wooden shack place to hang her clothes?

3c Mike: Oh, I see. So you think that it’s possible then that her mother —

3d Robert: — she probably hangs her clothes probably at home somewhere and then walks down to this place where the wind, the wind — the eucalyptus trees block this wind, you know, from —
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3e Mike: — so that the clothes can dry.
3f Robert: Right.
4a Mike: Well, that’s certainly possible. That’s certainly possible. Um, the only thing I would say if I wanted to argue with you on that would be, that that’s possible, but it’s also the only time that this writer lets us know anything about where she might live....

To get a sense of what we have come to call the “conventional” reading of this poem, we asked several people to interpret it for us. Though our readers represented a mix of ages and cultural backgrounds, they had all been socialized in American literature departments: two were senior English majors, two were graduate students, and two were English professors. All of them offered the same interpretation. Readers of this poem who have been educated in a traditional literature curriculum, and especially those trained in an English graduate program, have been schooled to understand the significance of the shacks in a particular way. They understand, even if they can’t readily articulate, the principles of compression that allow a single image to convey a lot of information, in this case, about economic and historical background.

Robert, however, is not socialized to these conventions, or is only partly socialized, and so he relies on a style of interpretation Mike had seen him rely on in class and in the stimulated-recall session. It could be characterized as almost legalistic, a careful, qualifying reasoning that defers quick judgment, and demands many sources of verification. In 3b for instance, Robert challenges the teacher with the assertion that the mother does not have to live in the shacks to hang the wash there. And yes, the mother could walk down to this place to hang her clothes; the poem does not specifically say that they live there. The kind of reasoning we see here, then, is not inadequate. In fact, it’s rather sophisticated — though it’s not the type normally invoked in a poetic world.

We will return to this point later, but first, we would like to raise the possibility that Robert’s background makes it unlikely that he’s going to respond to “a small cluster of wooden shacks” in quite the same way as would a conventional (and most likely middle-class) reader, for whom the shacks probably function as a quickly discernible literary device. Some of Robert’s relatives in Trinidad still live in houses like those described in the poem, and his early housing in Los Angeles — further into Central Los Angeles than where he now lives — was pretty modest. We would suggest that Robert’s “social distance” from the economic reality of poor landscapes isn’t as marked as that of the conventional/middle-class reader, and this might make certain images less foreign to him, and, therefore, less emotionally striking. We don’t mean to suggest that Robert is naive about his current position in American society, but simply that the wooden shacks might not spark the same response in him as in a conventional/middle-class reader.

In line with the above assertion, let us consider another indicator of the girl’s economic status — the mention of the Sears catalogue. It suggests, in our “conventional reading,” lower-income-level shopping (“thrifty” as one of our readers put it). But the catalogue could also carry with it an ironic twist. It is not likely that conventional readers would consider a Sears catalogue to be a source of high fashion, so there’s a touch of irony — perhaps pity mixed with humor — in this girl fulfilling her romantic dreams via Sears and Roebuck. We would like to suggest that Robert’s position in society makes it difficult for him to see things this way, to comply with this conventional reading. He knows merchandise from Sears is “economical” and “affordable,” and to him, there’s nothing pitiful or humorous about that. In the follow-up session, Mike asked him if he saw anything ironic or strange about the girl buying there, and he responded, “Oh no, no,” pointing out that “some of the items they sell in Sears, they sell in other stores, too.”

The desire for efficiency and coverage can cut short numerous possibilities for students to explore issues, articulate concerns, formulate and revise problems ...

And in this other session, Robert then goes on to uncover an interesting problem in the poem. He uses the Sears catalogue to support his own assertion that the family isn’t all that poor (and therefore doesn’t necessarily live in those shacks): He says, “She couldn’t be really poor because she has clothes from the Sears catalogue.” Robert knows what real poverty is, and he knows that if you have enough money to buy at Sears, you’re doing okay. So Robert shows us that using the Sears catalogue as an indicator of economic status doesn’t guarantee that all readers will come to the same conclusion about it.

Now, to Mike, all of this seemed like a jurisprudential rather than a poetic reading. In the follow-up session, however, Robert elaborated on it in a way that made
Mike realize that Robert might have had a better imagistic case than he at first thought — because Mike himself had missed the full visual particulars of the scene. As Robert elaborated on "this place where ... the eucalyptus trees block this wind," he describes, "this little shack area where the clothes can dry without being bothered by the wind and dust — with ... the tractor grinding through the earth. That brings up dust." Robert had pictured the surrounding landscape — machines stirring up grit and dust — and he saw the necessity of trees to break the dust-laden wind so that the wash could dry clean in the sun. The conventional reader could point out that such a windbreak would be necessary to protect residents as well, but given Robert’s other interpretations, it makes sense, and is coherent, to see the shacks — sheds of some kind perhaps or abandoned housing — as part of this eucalyptus-protected place where women hang the wash. What’s important to note here is that Robert was able to visualize the scene — to animate it, actually — in a way that Mike couldn’t, because Mike was focusing on the dramatic significance of the shacks. Robert’s reading may be unconventional and a bit jurisprudential, but it is coherent, and it allows us to animate the full landscape in a way that enhances our reading of the poem.

We hope we have demonstrated the logic and coherence of this student’s unconventional reading. What we have not addressed — and it should certainly be addressed now — is the pedagogical wisdom of encouraging in a writing classroom the playing out of such unconventional readings. Reviewing the brief stretch of Mike and Robert’s talk, we see how often Robert qualifies, challenges, and interrupts the teacher, and how rarely Mike’s expectations are fulfilled. If the teacher’s goals are to run an efficient classroom, cover a set body of material, and convey certain conventional reading and writing strategies to students who are on the margin of the academic community, then all these conversational disjunctions are troubling.

What we would like to suggest, though, is that the laudable goal of facilitating underprepared students’ entry into the academic community is actually compromised by a conversational pattern that channels students like Robert into a more "efficient" discourse. The desire for efficiency and coverage can cut short numerous possibilities for students to explore issues, articulate concerns, formulate and revise problems — all of which are necessary for good writing to emerge — and it can lead to conversational patterns that socialize students into a mode of interaction that will limit rather than enhance their participation in intellectual work. We would further suggest that these kinds of streamlined conversational patterns are often reinforced by a set of deficit-oriented assumptions about the linguistic and cognitive abilities of remedial students, assumptions that are much in need of examination. We would pose instead a pedagogical model that places knowledge-making at its center. The assumption here is that belonging to an academic community means dynamic involvement in generating and questioning knowledge, that students desperately need immersion in, and encouragement to involve themselves in this, and that underprepared students are capable of engaging in it, too.

Robert’s reading performance teaches us that expectations about remediation and remedial students ... can keep us from seeing the logic or sensibleness of a performance or the fruitfulness of error.

Finally, we would suggest that engaging in a kind of "social-textual" reading of Robert’s reading moves us toward a deeper understanding of the social base of literary interpretation. Mike operates with a conventional reading in mind, and begins moving toward it in 4a — out loud so as to reveal the line of such reasoning. Robert’s interpretations, though, gave Mike a new way of seeing the poem. In the same way, Mike’s presentation of his interpretation may help Robert acquire an additional approach to the poem. In fact, the very tension between academic convention and student experience could then become the focus of discussion. This, we think, is the way talk and thought should go when a student seems to falter, or when readings seem a little off the mark.

Robert’s reading performance teaches us that expectations about remediation and remedial students, a received set of assumptions, can keep us from seeing the logic or sensibleness of a performance or the fruitfulness of error. Given what we are learning about the logic and history of students’ reading and writing, given what we know about how such students are traditionally viewed, we asked ourselves how we might best use this work to influence practice and foster new, more generative views of student performance.

IV. FOSTERING NEW WAYS OF SEEING REMEDIAL STUDENTS

When basic writing was just emerging as a course worth a teacher’s serious attention and commitment, Mina Shaughnessy pointed out that most work was focusing on what was wrong with students rather than with teacher development. The effect of this tendency was the erroneous notion "that students, not teachers, are the people in education who must do the chang-
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Shaughnessy reminded us that students aren’t the only people in a classroom who develop and grow, and she proposed a kind of impressionistic developmental scale for teachers of basic writing, each stage of which she named with a common metaphor: “Guarding the Tower,” “Converting the Natives,” “Sounding the Depths,” and “Diving In.”

The significant thing to us about these metaphors is that they focus on teachers’ attitudes about students’ abilities. A teacher who guards the tower is so stunned by fractured writing that she believes the students who produced it have no place in the academy, for they will never be able to live up to the ideals of academic prose. Once this shock abates, and a teacher begins to believe that his students are educable, he proceeds with conversion by offering them a steady flow of “truth” without thinking too much about the skills and habits students bring with them, often unconsciously, to their interactions with texts. The third stage involves the recognition that the writing behavior these students display has a logic that merits careful observation. At this point, then, a teacher is moving away from deficit notions and towards an appreciation of students’ abilities. The last stage takes place when a teacher is willing to “remediate herself, to become a student of new disciplines and of her students themselves in order to perceive both their difficulties and their incipient excellence.” It is not at all easy, cautioned Shaughnessy, for a college teacher to assume that the students in his class, already labelled remedial, possess this incipient excellence.

We want to argue that the situation Shaughnessy described is still with us. Robert’s reading of the Hongo poem may merit our serious consideration, yet, as Steven Lynn (1990) reminds us, “most readings in violation of shared interpretive strategies will usually be seen as inferior, if not wrong,” and “finding insight in such violations often seems an act of kindness, a salvage operation.” The implication is that the best we can do for students like Robert is to extend them our charity, to salvage whatever insight we can from the wreckage of their otherwise flawed performances. We are troubled that this leaves us quite far from perceiving what Shaughnessy describes as the “incipient excellence” of our students.

And how we view students’ abilities can have profound effects. A great deal of research has shown that students whose teachers expect them to do well, tend to do well, while students whose teachers expect them to do poorly, do poorly. These findings hold firm, even in cases of mistaken placement or misinformation, as Brophy’s research shows us (e.g. Brophy, 1983). Students labelled “bright” who are mistakenly expected to perform poorly in the classroom will actually do poorly, while students labelled “average” will excel if their teacher believes that this is what they are supposed to do. Perhaps more troubling is the strong correlation between the instructional contexts in which teachers find themselves and their beliefs about the students they encounter there. In an extensive survey of American high schools, Purkey and Rutter (1987) found particular patterns of belief characteristic of teachers who taught minority or low socio-economic status students, foremost among them the belief that their students would not be able to master the curriculum. Jeannie Oakes (1985) reminds us how pervasive the effect of instructional tracking can be, determining both the images teachers form of low-tracked students and the subsequent kinds of teaching these students receive. Research on expectancy theory and the correlation of expectancy with instructional context thus supports Shaughnessy’s claims about teacher development: the beliefs we construct of our students’ abilities can influence their lives in our classrooms and beyond in profound ways.

We believe, then, that it would be unwise simply to rely on process pedagogy and experience in the classroom to foster the development of non-deficit attitudes. We need to think about teacher and tutor development—not only what knowledge to impart about writing and reading, but how to develop the ability to question received assumptions about abilities and performance, how to examine the thinking behind the curricula we develop and the assessments we make. That is, we need to question and get others to question the received ways we have of judging mental ability from performances that are somehow problematic.

In constructing our view of Robert, we observed his contributions to class discussions, we conferred with him about the poem and listened carefully to his reading of it, we considered how his previous experiences influenced his interpretations, we explored the knowledge and skills Robert brought to his interactions with texts. Conducting this type of inquiry has helped us to reorient our thinking about remediation and the cognition of remedial students, helped us to rethink how we represent the difficulties our students have. We believe that one way to influence practice, to encourage this change of perspective, is to engage others in this kind of inquiry that leads one to trace connections between the mind of the student, the classroom, and the community beyond, to engage, that is, in the same kind of work that we have been up to.
loose some richness and depth and set limitations on the kind of inquiry that is possible. So we have imagined and built a prototype of a multi-media data base that we think gets around some of the limitations of print and that we hope will better allow others to construct the stories that we think data such as ours can tell (Reilly, 1990). By "multi-media data base" we mean those recent technological innovations which have made it possible to link diverse modes of media — sound, pictures, text, film — and to order and access these media through computers. The data base we have built might be thought of as an electronic library of research data. We are able, for example, to digitize hand-written student papers, source texts, and tape-recorded interviews and conferences. (See the illustration in Figure 1.) With this multi-media library teachers can examine (and add their own examples of) reading and writing samples, as well as interviews and protocols, and they can create and examine hypotheses about particular reading and writing performances. These hypotheses can be played off those of other teachers working in the same data base.

It has been our experience in conducting inservice workshops that data like the vignette of Robert are enormously rich and can evoke many productive responses. By providing access to abundant data which represent student performances in multiple contexts, we hope to encourage teachers and tutors to construct their own readings, their own interpretation of problematic literacy performances. We have also imagined how these materials might fare in the hands of students, as invitations to explore reading and writing processes and the social contexts of learning. Our best hope is that such materials can help foster new ways of seeing remedial students — ways that are generative, that build from their abilities which too often are hidden from sight by current remedial models. This frame of mind, we think, is an essential step toward reconceiving remediation.

V. CONCLUSION
In our research we have been guided by these questions:

- What strategies, habits, rules, and assumptions tend to characterize the writing and reading skills of underprepared students?
- What personal, social, and historical forces might have influenced strategies, rules and assumptions?
- What tends to happen to these strategies, rules, and assumptions during instruction?
- What mismatches or points of convergence tend to occur between typical literacy curric-

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ula and students' background knowledge, experiences, and goals?

- What are the social and institutional processes whereby students are defined as remedial or deficient?
- What are the social and cultural processes by which we continually misperceive the ability behind the errors students make?

These are questions that we want to continue to address in our project and that we would encourage teachers of remedial writing and reading to ask. By engaging in this process, we hope we can all develop new ways of seeing and developing the promise of those students called underprepared.

Note

1. This article is based on talks given at the 1990 Conference on College Composition and Communication by Mike Rose, Glynda Hull, Marisa Castellano, and Cynthia Greenleaf, and on research to which Kay Losey Fraser and Susan Thompson also contributed. Parts of the paper have also been adapted from articles by Glynda Hull and Mike Rose appearing in College Composition and Communication and Written Communication and complementary technical reports published through the National Center for the Study of Writing and Literacy. This work has been supported by grants from the James S. McDonnell Foundation’s Program for Cognitive Studies in Educational Practice and the Research Foundation of the National Council of Teachers of English.

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