

University of California: In Memoriam, 1992

Walter D. Loban, Education: Berkeley

1912-1992

Professor

Walter Loban, beloved and highly respected teacher and researcher, died of a heart attack at his Piedmont home on March 12, 1992. At the time of his death he was busy with plans to rebuild the home on the Claremont Knolls that he lost during the Berkeley-Oakland fire. He was born on March 29, 1912 and grew up in Brookings, South Dakota, where he graduated from high school. He attended South Dakota State College and received a B.A. in English from the University of Minnesota in 1933. He attended summer school at the University of Chicago, receiving an M.A. in English in 1937. His U.S. Navy service extended from 1942 through 1946; he served as gunnery officer, achieving the rank of Lieutenant Commander. Following his service experience, he completed the Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota in 1949, specializing in education in English language and literature.

His first teaching position was as a secondary English teacher in the Litchfield Public Schools, Minnesota, from 1933-1936. He then served as chairman of the English Department at University High School at the University of Minnesota (1936-1939). He assumed the position of Professor of English at Northwestern University (1939-1942) and, following his U.S. Navy service, became an Instructor in Humanities at the University of Minnesota (1947-1949). His Berkeley professorial appointment extended from 1950 through his retirement in 1979, in the Graduate School of Education.

Loban devoted himself to lifelong scholarly study of the stages of linguistic development in children from kindergarten through secondary and post-secondary years. His research sought to determine predictable stages of growth in language, to identify definite sequences in the development of language, and to discover how children

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vary in language ability and gain proficiency in using it. His internationally recognized longitudinal research was based on data gathered over a 14-year period as he interviewed, recorded, and analyzed the language of students. In 1967, his study, *The Language of Elementary School Children*, received the prestigious David H. Russell Award for Distinguished Research from the National Council of Teachers of English. In 1970 he was recognized by the University of Minnesota, receiving the University Regent's Outstanding Achievement Award. He won further national recognition in 1976 with the publication of his pioneering longitudinal work, *Language Development: Kindergarten through Grade Twelve*.

He was equally concerned with the role of the study of literature in the social and cultural life of a democracy and how its study might contribute to fostering respect for human dignity. His monograph, *Literature and Social Sensitivity* (1954), investigated how adolescent readers develop sympathy or insight into human relations through the reading of literature. He and his two co-authors, Margaret Ryan and James Squire, wrote a methods text, *Teaching Language and Literature: Grades Seven-Twelve* (1970), which had wide impact on secondary English education across the nation. He also authored many texts that were used extensively in secondary schools throughout the United States, including *Adventures in Literature* (1968), and *Adventures in Appreciation* (1970).

Throughout his career Loban maintained a deep interest and intense involvement in English-teacher education and its professional associations. He was a founding member of the Curriculum Study Commission of the Central California Council of Teachers of English. He was constantly involved in work with school districts throughout the nation through keynote addresses and advising educators in the creation and evaluation of English curricula at various levels. He was viewed by his colleagues as a “weaver at the border” tying together research, professional thinking and theory, and the actual practice of education.

Walter will be remembered by his colleagues and former students for his understanding and insight into the nature of language development and for his moving readings of literature. The breadth of his personal vistas is revealed in the following brief personal note to a friend regarding his last sabbatical.

One of the advantages of a sabbatical leave is the increased opportunity to read, attend dramatic presentations, and listen to music. I do these things all the time, but during a sabbatical I immerse myself much

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more frequently in the landscapes of the mind and emotions we can realize through the arts. Most of my sabbatical reading is literature rather than professional education, but I always set up some plan for my reading of literature. This time I chose writings from foreign cultures: Russian, both old and modern; African, mostly the works of Achebe, a Nigerian writer of great power; Scandinavian, especially Ibsen and Strindberg; and Japanese, mostly modern but also *The Romance of Prince Genji*. I also purchased and played a great many musical recordings, all the symphonies of Sibelius and more of Mozart and Beethoven than I had previously owned.

Walter will be remembered for his ability to stir the imagination with his memorable stories, his good sense of humor, and his passionate words on literature, teachers, and children. He will be remembered fondly for his ever-present grace and wisdom.

Lily Wong Fillmore Robert B. Ruddell Leo P. Ruth

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