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English in the high school curriculum.

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ENGLISH IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

by

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I. The Development and Aim of English in the Curriculum.
   1. History
   2. Scope
   3. Aims

II. The Problem: How secure a taste for good literature?
   A. General
      1. Value of English
      2. The Freshman
   B. Specific
      1. The Reading Curve.
      2. Criticisms
         a. Approaches
         b. Reactions

III. Aiding and Suppressing the Spirit for Reading
   1. Criticism--general
   2. Aids and Reactions.
      a. Reaction through Composition Writing
      b. Reaction through Oral discussion
      c. Reaction through Art
      d. Reaction through Other agencies
      e. Method
      f. Assignments
      g. Teacher's hour.
      h. Outside Reading

IV. Summary
ENGLISH IN THE HIGH SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The Development and Aim of English in The Curriculum

History
The idea that there is need for definite instruction in the vernacular is comparatively new. For centuries Latin, the language of the "learned" was the basis of all education. College training was based on Latin; college entrance required a mastery of the Latin language; Latin was the medium through which all else was taught. Only when we consider that Latin was the language of Church and State alike do we consider its vast importance.

Latin
Along with the Latin language was another in ordinary use. The vernacular, the language of the uneducated, was the name given to the native tongue. No instruction was given in the vernacular, and few felt the need for such instruction. The scarcity of literature in the native tongue during the middle centuries shows with what regard such languages were held by men of letters.

Vernacular
The first to react against the Latin tradition were the Jansenists. These represent a body of men who, in opposition to the Jesuits, set up a school at Port Royal where they used the vernacular as a medium of teaching children in the elementary schools. Only twenty-four years after their establishment, however, they were suppressed by Louis XIV at the instigation of the Jesuits. Their work was continued and spread by Ratich and such supporters as Pascal, Racine, Rollins, and LaFontaine. Among the ideas which the Port Royalists introduced into their schools were (1) instruction by means of the vernacular, (2) survey of classical literature by means of translation, (3) grammar sufficient alone for the understanding of this.

Jansenists

Others
Other leaders, as Montaigne and Locke, saw the advisability of studying "modern foreign languages to enable [pupils] to travel and secure a wide experience".
In England there were some who opposed the Latin tradition, though few dreamed that English would ever supplant Latin as the language of the State. Milton and Bacon both wrote extensively in Latin, and it was not until the last years of his life that the former was convinced of the advisability of writing his great epic in English.

In the United States, though the colonists based their education on the systems of England, there has always been an English tradition.

To be sure, there was no provision for the teaching of English in the curriculum of the Latin grammar school, nor in the college, but the ability to read and write English (and Latin) "sufficiently to read and write his own lessons" was one of the requirements of entrance to the Latin grammar school. The schools of the "Three R's", the early New England elementary school, devoted most of their time to the teaching of English, in order that citizens might understand the statute law and the law of God.

Not until the founding of the academy, however, did English come into the curriculum of the secondary schools. Benjamin Franklin's is one of the outstanding names here. In 1743 he sketched his plan for the establishment of the academy, and in 1749 he published his "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania". The aims of the academy were:

1. to fit native youths for public office
2. to provide youth with an education at home
3. to prepare teachers
4. to attract students from other parts of the country.

Those studies were to be pursued which would be "most useful and most ornamental". Among the subjects emphasised were penmanship, drawing, arithmetic, and English.

Hitherto men had learned their own language through translating the classic authors. From now on, the demand for the teaching of English increased.
The rise of the factory system, with the consequent breaking down of the domestic system, the trend of population toward the cities, the demands of the laboring class for a free education with English as a basis, have all tended toward the firm establishment of English in the curriculum.

**Scope**

When once English found its place, the next question was one of method. Those who taught English had definite aims, but they had little idea as to the proper way to attain these aims. Latin most naturally served as a model, so formal grammar was emphasized. By degrees, literature, history of literature, composition, and rhetoric have taken their place beside grammar, until English has gained such importance that it is universally agreed that English shall be the one course required of all pupils in all their education up to the college.

**Psychology**

After all the long struggle for its establishment, the psychologist steps in and asks, "Why?" "Why must so much time be consumed in the study of a single language?" "Why doesn't the ordinary high school graduate show that he has spent twelve years in the pursuit of English?" "Why must so much time be spent in writing useless compositions?" The why's are unending. The answer must be found in the aims of English.

**Aims**

The aims of the teaching of English are as broad as the aims of education itself. English is the basis and medium of education. The aim of free universal education in the United States is to prepare citizens to enjoy and support the democratic institutions of this country. The more immediate aims of the subject are (1) to enable the pupil to express himself intelligently, (2) to train him to interpret the speech and writing of others, (3) to give him power to appreciate the body of English literature.

**Present tendencies**

The present tendency is toward more scientific methods of teaching the subject matter of English. The psychologist has put the teacher of English on the defensive. While the psychologist demands that the English course be condensed, the English teacher argues that the course should be extended until every course be an English course and every teacher a teacher of English.
The Problem: How Secure A Taste for Good Literature?

If we consider the true worth of English in the curriculum, we shall measure it from its absolute effect in the child's life, that is, in his taste for literature. The taste for good books must be cultivated during the school years, and this privilege and responsibility rests with the teacher of English.

Each class is composed of pupils of widely varying capacities, needs, and interests. The entering class in high school offers even more difficulty for the teacher than do the classes in the grades. The pupils enter high school from a number of schools. Their preparation differs accordingly. Maladjustment, change of interest, difference in emphasis and aims, all contribute toward complicating the matter. The children come to high school with little or no knowledge of literature. The emphasis shifts immediately from extensive drill in formal grammar to intensive study in the masterpieces. The work in composition which has hitherto been regarded from the point of view of grammar, spelling, punctuation, suddenly stresses ideas, thought, structure of plot. The emphasis of reading, too, has suddenly shifted from mechanics to appreciation. The problem for the teacher, then, is "How provide for the individual needs of the pupils?"

A study of the reading curve shows us that the child's interest in books begins at about the age of ten. For the next five or six years the interest increases rapidly, so long as some external force does not crush it. Unless the child finds incentive or support his interest will gradually decrease until it reaches very nearly the starting point.
Causes of disinterest

Inaccessibility to books may cause interest to decrease, though the public libraries now obviate this difficulty for the most part. Often it is lack of interest at home, or lack of incentive that kills the spirit of reading, but, whatever may be the external agent acting against it, the schools must provide incentives, where such are lacking, and keep alive the interest where it exists.

The Teacher

It will require all the talent, sympathy, and skill that the teacher possesses to keep the reading interest vital. She must have clear insight into the needs and desires of her pupils; she must judge their interests and capacities; she must have skill to direct and further these interests; she must have tact in pressing her own ideals, and she must have the grace to withdraw her own pet schemes when her pupils fail to respond.

Intensive study not suited to first year pupils

To begin an intensive study of literature in the freshman class is theoretically wrong. The pupils have neither the interest nor the preparation for it. Their primary interest is in the story, while the previous training in reading has been merely for mastery of the mechanics. The course would be far more effective if many more books could be read during the freshman year, and the detailed or analytic study be postponed until the next year. There is, however, a place for real study, even in the first year of high school. The pupils expect it, and they appreciate the need for it. Only let it be much less microscopic.

Ennui

It is the detailed study that bores pupils. They want to get over the ground quickly, and discuss the story rather than the details of plot and structure. The teacher should encourage quick silent reading. After the pupil has mastered the mechanics of reading, there is no place in any class room for oral reading, except for the talented reader who reads for the entertainment of the whole class. Place a premium on quick silent reading and the pupil will strive to reach the standard set.

Approach through history

To approach the study of literature through the history of literature is poor pedagogy. The history of literature is as far removed from the
interests of the pupils as is the study on the art of writing. This does not mean, however, that there is no place for biography or biographical sketches in the freshman class. Quite the contrary is true, for pupils are keenly enthusiastic over the stories of human beings, and the closer the incidents parallel incidents in their own lives, the more eagerly do they seek them. Who, for instance, could not appreciate the anecdote of Scott and the button? Biography offers one of the best means of approach to the study of a masterpiece, and affords, in addition, a background of knowledge for a systematic study of the history of literature.

In dealing with any work the teacher should approach the story so as to arouse curiosity and interest. This may be done, as already suggested, by giving a brief sketch of the author's life, or merely an incident in it; it may be done by telling what incident caused the author to write it, or by reading for the class the opening chapters. The book itself must determine the method of approach.

In all assignments the teacher should be specific. The pupil must be taught to seek that which is worth while in his reading. His work should be directed. He expects to work, but unless he knows how, his effort will be fruitless. The pupil should have definite aims in his reading, and he should be held strictly accountable for the accomplishment of these aims.

In dealing with the literature in class, the main points to remember, are to reduce formal criticism to a minimum, and to seek native reactions. The pupils have not enough experience to criticize a masterpiece intelligently. Any criticism they can offer must necessarily be second-hand, and meaningless, hence, worthless. A question here and there put by the pupils is far better than numerous responses to the teacher's question by the pupil who quotes the notes of the author. No matter how slight the reaction of the pupils, the teacher should receive it gratefully and be content with little, so long as that little means actual effort on the part of the pupil.
Value of Critical Study

As the pupil matures, more may be expected of him. If the difficulty increases only in proportion to the experience of the pupils, the interest may be kept alive during all four years. Systematic, intensive study of the masterpieces may be demanded of advanced pupils in the high school without killing their interest in the work itself. Such study is the only means of providing for the pupils, definite standards of judgement and appreciation.

Summary

To summarize, then, general principles which should guide the teacher of English:

(1) Increase the number of books for class and outside reading
(2) In the freshman class strive for mastery of the story matter rather than for details of plot, structure, etc.
(3) Furnish incentives for wider reading
(4) Seek native reactions
(5) Reduce formal criticism to the minimum.
(6) Approach the story so as to arouse curiosity and interest.
(7) Define aims
(8) Discard history as an approach to literature
(9) Be content with a little where that little means actual effort.
(10) Postpone intensive study until the pupil is ready for it.
Aiding and Suppressing the Spirit for Reading

Approach to Literature

It has already been pointed out that in approaching any work of literature the pupil is to be filled with curiosity. The teacher must introduce the work so impressively that the pupil will want to know the work for himself. There is grave danger of regarding any work from a purely analytical and critical standpoint. The primary interest is and must remain in the story itself, and only as analysis leads to the appreciation and understanding of the story as a whole can it have any lasting effect on the pupil's conduct. It is often necessary to treat a book solely for the story matter. It might be best, for instance, to leave the reading of "Henry Esmond" in the freshman class with the question, "Did you like the way the story ended?" Many pupils would prefer that Harry should marry Beatrix. The pupils may then be led to see why the story ends as it does. This is also a fitting point to suggest that Beatrix may be seen again in "The Virginians".

The Story

In dealing with any work analytically, then, the teacher must constantly keep before the class the idea of the story as a unit. Minute critical study is deadening if it is treated as an end in itself. Before undertaking intensive study at all, the pupil should read the book through entirely once or twice. At all points along the line the pupils should see the relation of the part to the whole, and when the study is completed the work should be re-read, either in class by the teacher, or at home by the pupils. In the case of short stories, poems, or drama, the former method would be the better.

Analytical Study

From the Known to the Unknown

It might be mentioned in connection with this technical study that it is often well to study a book which has already been read in some other class. For instance, if "Henry Esmond" has been read in the freshman class, why would it not be wise to study it in the junior class? Such method, if carried too far, would be unintelligent, but it could occasionally be pursued with profit. It is just this sort of thing which we are always
Stressing the good doing in connection with the masterpieces. None of us is content with a single reading of Shakespeare, for example. Pupils come to a familiar work, with a real background of knowledge, and an initial interest which increases as the power of judgement and discernment increase.

It is well to note that, even with the upper classes, the teacher must let some things pass unnoticed. Some matters are beyond the comprehension of the class as a whole, and some matters are irrelevant. As an instance of the latter, it is not necessary to remind the pupils that Shakespeare has placed certain characters in the wrong century or that Scott has the sun rising on the west coast of Scotland. Leave with the pupils the best that the author has given and pass over the faults unnoticed. If, however, the pupils themselves notice such errors, show them why the work has survived in spite of its faults. Here again it may be shown that the whole is greater than any of its parts.

Aids

In connection with the study of any selection there are many supplementary aids which keep the interest alive while the study is being pursued and which serve as definite points of departure in future reading. Any scheme which furnishes incentive or external interest keeps the work vital until the pupil on his own initiative broadens his study along the lines in which his school work has carried him. Supplementary aids may be found in composition writing, cooperation with other departments, outside and vacation reading, the school paper, literary and book clubs, the school and public libraries; wise use of the "teacher's hour" and numerous other ways.
Advantages in using Composition

Teachers who use composition writing as a means of supplementing the study of definite literary selections gain more than this single end. In the first place they satisfy the composition requirements with a minimum of drudgery on the part of the pupil, for the subject selected must necessarily be one which is vitally related to the child's experiences. The child has some definite ideas which he can express as simply or as elaborately as he will. Such compositions furnish the teacher with definite data on the pupil's power to comprehend subject matter and his power of appreciation. It also furnishes the teacher with some idea of his own teaching ability. The most valuable aid from compositions comes, however, because through them the teacher obtains definite native reactions from the pupil.

Theme subjects

Every piece of literature suggests theme subjects for pupils. Theme work of a constructive sort is far more interesting for the pupils than criticism of the work from the point of view of workmanship style, technique. The teacher may suggest the theme subject or the pupil may select one for himself. Such topics as "Steps in the Miserliness of Silas Warner" or "The Ambition of Macbeth" readily suggest themselves. I recall such titles as "A Dream of Brave Men" and "My Childhood Superstitions," titles chosen by sophomores for themes. The former was written in connection with a study of Tennyson; the latter in connection with Sir Roger. To have the pupils select their own titles usually insures greater originality and deeper interest.

Drama

In connection with the study of drama, pupils often enjoy dramatizing some short story which they have read, while occasionally gifted pupils actually attempt to write original plays. If the play which is being studied is being treated very thoroughly, rather than have the pupils attempt criticism of it, it would be well to let them apply their tests to some play which they have read or seen. They should be sent to the newspapers to...
find criticisms of current plays in order that they may see how these criticisms differ from the criticisms of editors of Shakespeare.

Reaction

If the teacher does not wish to treat drama from anything but a literary point of view there are other class exercises that suggest themselves. The following is the reaction of a junior who was told to write on "What Antony Thought of Cassius", in connection with the study of "Julius Caesar". There had been no drill in blank verse, nor any suggestion that the class use it.

Antony's Opinion of Cassius

And as to Cassius, friends, you all do know
His life was one of jealousy, deceit.
And artfulness. His proper character
He hid in smiles and flatteries. He was
A friend to no man--save it were himself--
And yet to that same self he was untrue.
A deeper thinker hardly could be found;
Nor yet a better judge of character.
He knew exactly when and how to speak:
He knew precisely when his point was won;
His speech was fluent and his language frank
Did seem, yet 'neath this seeming frankness did
He hide a deep abyss of artifice.
'Twas not for love of country that he killed
Great Caesar, but for envy of that man.
He tried to make you think that Caesar would
Be king--and that you Romans did not want
A king 'tis true. Had I but offered him
A kingly crown, a kingly robe, a throne,
Would he like Caesar have refused them all?
Would Cassius then have said, "No king for Rome"?
I doubt it friends and countrymen! A life
Like Caesar's, honest, true, sincere, and just,
Has ended sadly for us all, but oh,
Good Romans, friends, is not the end that came
To Cassius sadder far? Did not the life
Lived in dishonor, hatred, strife, and crime
Come to its own just end? And there is none
To weep for, pity him. No, he has won
His lawful prize--A coward's, traitor's grave.

Quoted from "The Distaff" G.H.S. Feb. '13
Oral discussion

I should be pointed out that reactions should not all be written. Often the most beneficial reactions come in the form of class discussions. In a senior class, the teacher asked what kind of a woman Lady Macbeth was. One girl responded that she was no woman, whereupon another responded that she was a woman but not a lady. This naturally led to the discussion of the characteristics of a true woman. A vital lesson in ethics was effected without any attempt on the part of the teacher to moralize.

Other Aids

Cooperation with other departments

Another means of creating interest is by tying up the work of the English department with the work of other departments and seeking the cooperation of these departments in turn. Thus the study of historical poems, stories, and plays should be related to history and recognition of such work should be made by the history teacher. The English teacher, in turn, should give credit for work done in history which bears on her subject. For instance, if pupils in her class are studying history which serves as background for "A Tale of Two Cities", they might use such material for oral themes, thus saving the rest of the class from the necessity of looking up the matter for themselves.

Art

Use may be made of the art department in connection with English. Teachers do this often but it seems as if they might make even wider use of it. Numerous examples suggest themselves as plans for abbeys, the lists in Ivanhoe, book covers for themes, etc. I visited one class where the pupils were sketching scenes from Milton's "L'Allegro" for possible stage production. The descriptive passages lend themselves well to such treatment. The results varied. Some were simply crude drawings of a stage, while others were artistically painted scenes with a plan of the stage accompanying them.

Outside interests

In this connection also, interest may be created through collections of pictures; trips to public libraries and art museums, and to places of historical interest; as well as by lectures, plays and other educative gatherings not connected with the school.
within the school itself the literary and book clubs, the school library and the school paper all serve the English department. From my observation, these institutions are not used as extensively as they should be. Mr. Thomas, formerly of the Newton High School has given many valuable suggestions relative to this in his book, "The Teaching of English in the Secondary School". His discussion of the English Club of the Newton High School is particularly valuable in that it explains the way in which the club was founded, and how it is conducted.

Another means of making or marring the course in literature is the method of conducting the course. Mention has already been made of the error of dealing with literature too microscopically. It rests with the teacher whether intensive study of plot structure, form, style, characters, etc., kills or aids interest in the story itself. Occasionally the teacher may call back the pupils' interest by spending a period in reading to the class. Here much depends on the teacher's power of interpretative reading.

Another way in which interest is often lost is in poor assignment of lessons or in deadening lessons. Vagueness of aim often causes the pupil excessive labor or misdirected effort. If the teacher wants a thorough mastery of words, let him say so; if certain notes are to be mastered he should specify them. If the pupils fail then to prepare their lessons, at least they cannot blame the teacher. In assigning memory passages the teacher should spend a few minutes in supervising the study of the passage. So many pupils attempt to learn their lessons without understanding what the ideas are, or what their relationship is. Consider such a passage as Grimke's "Our Country". Many pupils find great difficulty in memorizing this, because they fail to distinguish between ideas. If the teacher would point out that this selection divides itself into two parts, the first half of which deals with our duty to our country, and the second half of which answers the question, "What is our country?" The following is a brief
analysis

honor} Our country--a family composed of East
love} North
serve} West
South

Of course, the teacher will insist that the pupils use only the most economical methods of memorizing.

Another mistake teachers make is the assignment of lessons which they know the majority of the class cannot prepare. Some of these pupils are so conscientious that they will work for hours only to fail utterly in the end. I know one high school pupil who spent three evenings in the attempt to write a Spenserian stanza, and then cut class because he had no lesson to pass in. I recall another case of a girl who was told to write a sonnet. She had studied Milton's sonnets and she knew all the rules and principles governing the process. She hunted eagerly for an "exalted" theme. and after long patient labor she began, "Thou shalt not steal, 'tis thus the laws command---"

The girl succeeded in following the rules to the letter. and she bore her prize triumphantly to school; but, after all her labor, her teacher failed to call for the sonnets which she had assigned for homework. Such assignments tend to kill interest and reduce the study of literature to drudgery. Pupils should be encouraged to attempt anything, but the incentive should be extra credit, honor, or some such reward---not fear.

In one of our large girls' schools it has been the custom to permit the teachers to use one hour each week for any matters which they might wish to discuss with their class. This hour is called the "teacher's hour". It is interesting to note that almost all the teachers use this hour in furthering the reading interest or in teaching morals. Some teachers prefer to have the pupils use the hour for study. I shall mention two extreme cases in which the teachers
have taken opposite courses. One teacher who was in charge of a freshman class spent the entire hour preaching to the pupils. She selected such articles as "Behind Time" to read to her pupils, and, lest the pupils should not get the moral, she pointed out the significant ideas. The children were always bored.

The other teacher had charge of a sophomore class. She turned the hour over to the pupils. They did as they pleased. The teacher wished only to encourage initiative. During the year which I have in mind the pupils never betrayed the confidence of their teacher. The teacher, moreover, was seldom in the room during that hour. The committee which was elected by the pupils provided a program each week. Members of the class were appointed each week to read to the class, or to sing, or take part in some simple play. Special programs were provided for weeks in which holidays came. While this hour was in no way spent for the interests of English, it happened that much of the entertainment furnished was directly traceable to the influence of the English courses in the school--probably because those in charge had sought suggestions from their English teacher. It should be mentioned, however, that the pupils sometimes sang French and German songs or spent their hour discussing possible improvements for their room.

While this discussion has not been entirely to the point, it offers some suggestions as to the advisability of allowing a period to be used each week for the advancement of literature.

The last way of furthering the reading interest is through outside reading. Outside reading, (as well as vacation reading), if wisely directed may be made one of the most effective means of promoting the reading habit. All depends upon selection of books, but to select wisely means that the teacher must know her pupils thoroughly. There are two guiding rules that the teacher may well bear in mind. The first is that the work shall not be difficult; the second that it shall be in line with the pupil's interest. It is necessary then for the teacher to observe her pupils' tendencies, and improve or satisfy them.
The teacher should avoid betraying her own tastes. She should build always from what the pupil is capable of. Suppose, for instance, the teacher finds that John Jones has a library of Alger's books and is looking for more. Let the teacher suggest that the pupil come prepared to tell five reasons why he likes an Alger book better than "Captains Courageous". Now one may be fairly certain that he has never found Kipling or he would not still be enjoying Alger. He will not be able to do as the teacher requested, but he will have read something worth while. The teacher may have to begin with something still more elemental, the Sunday comic section perhaps. Even from these the teacher may build. The pupil may be led to see that these are merely stories in the form of pictures. Moreover most papers run a picture based on some book, as, for example, "The Katzenjammer Kids" which appears in most Sunday papers. Most children would jump at the prospect of reading about "pieces of eight" and the pirates in a real story. Or perhaps some pupil is interested in dogs. He writes about his own pet possibly, or is in danger of losing him unless he has a high conduct mark, as was the case with one of my freshmen. Interest him in "A Dog of Flanders", (and incidentally the rest of the stories in that volume). There is always some vital point of departure. It is for the teacher to find it, and to build from it to higher aims and ideals.

**Summary**

In discussing the subject of English in the curriculum, I have treated it mainly from the point of view of literature. This has seemed important because it is mainly with literature that the pupils will be concerned, if they are concerned with English at all after they have left school. The problem has been mainly one of interest, getting, keeping, increasing, interest in books, with the theory in mind that if the interest is kept alive during the high school period it will not be lost thereafter.
The teacher is mainly concerned with method of approach and method of treatment, though the question of selection of subject matter enters in also to some degree. The teacher must find the happy medium between extreme formalism on the one hand and aimless wandering on the other. The child's capacities, needs, and tendencies must be the guide for the teacher in all study. It must be constantly borne in mind that there shall be no impression without expression.
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