

*A committee works  
to improve preparation and  
certification of English teachers.*

Eugene E. Slaughter

## Improving English Teaching

A GOOD English teacher for every girl and boy in school is the aim of the committee on preparation and certification of the National Council of Teachers of English. Means of attaining the aim is stated in the committee's assigned function: To assemble and make available for the use of interested persons information relevant to the improvement of standards for preparation and certification of teachers of English. Points of principal interest are the role of the English teacher and the enforcement of certification requirements which ensure that the teacher who is assigned is well qualified for the role.<sup>1</sup>

For the past five years the committee has considered these points against a background of other matters. As for all teachers, so for teachers of English, there

are general professional roles. There are procedures such as selection of teacher candidates, development of an institution's program of teacher education, approval of the program and accreditation of the institution by responsible agencies, an institution's recommendation of its graduates who seek teacher certificates, issuance of certificates, employment and assignment of teachers by administrative officers, and enforcement measures.

### Mutual Responsibility

The committee agrees with a consensus of the profession that in formulation of policy regarding these matters everyone having an interest should be represented equitably. Interested persons and groups are school boards, elementary, high

<sup>1</sup> Members of the NCTE committee on preparation and certification of teachers of English are Agnes V. Boner, Montana State University; Richard Braddock, State University of Iowa; Howard O. Brogan, Bowling Green State University, Ohio; Marie D. Bryan, University of Maryland; John Cowley, Iowa State Teachers College, Cedar Falls; John H. Fisher, Duke University; John McKiernan, on leave in Ireland; Karl W. Dykema, Youngstown University, Ohio, associate chairman; Eugene E. Slaughter, Southeastern Oklahoma State College, chairman, 1958-60; A. K. Stevens, University of Michigan;

Margaret Ann Thomas, Hackensack, New Jersey; Donald R. Tuttle, Fenn College, Cleveland, chairman 1955-57, consultant 1958-60; Vern Wagner, Wayne State University, Detroit; Audrey Nell Wiley, Texas Woman's University. Former members are Peter Donchian, Wayne State University; William J. Dusel, San Jose State College, California; Foster B. Gresham, Longwood College, Virginia; Robert W. Rogers, University of Illinois; Eugene E. Seubert, Washington University, Missouri; Emerson Shuck, Bowling Green State University, Ohio.

school, and college teachers, their professional societies, academic and professional education departments, state education authorities, professional accrediting agencies, and administrative officers of schools and colleges.<sup>2</sup> Since the trend is from legislative prescription and administrative order toward cooperative process, it is urgent that all persons and groups assume their responsibility.

With the support of the NCTE, the committee has insisted that English teachers participate in selection, preparation, certification and accreditation whenever English teacher candidates or teachers are concerned. This would apply within the preparing institutions, on both the state and national commissions and councils, in their committees on standards and teacher education programs, and on their evaluating teams. In order to share in the over-all professional effort to improve standards, members of the committee have represented the NCTE at meetings of the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards and of the Council on Cooperation in Teacher Education. They have also engaged in discussions intended to provide a balanced participation in the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education by representatives of professional education and the academic disciplines.

English as a discipline and a profession with a unique responsibility has been tending to fall apart. There is a widespread opinion that anyone who uses English can teach it. The opinion is true in the sense that teachers of the natural sciences, the social sciences, the practical arts, and the fine arts are obliged to teach

their students to use the language and writings that belong to their art or science. It is also true that all teachers should work for a common literacy. But in another sense language and literature constitute a discipline for which a specialist is needed. Besides a practical understanding of the form and use of English which, under expert supervision, may develop into the fine arts of speaking and writing, students need an organized knowledge of the language and an understanding of the relation between life, or reality, and imaginative literature, together with a notion of literary form and structure. The general and humanistic knowledge and uses of the English language, including literature in English, require professional attention.

The professional role of English teacher is hard to define. It is real, nevertheless, and it requires, in the committee's opinion, an intense and broad interest in life, literature and language; considerable understanding and expertness in these matters; appreciation of the values in life, which literature reveals and clarifies; proficiency in the arts of thinking, speaking, reading and writing; affection for boys and girls, a knowledge of how they learn, and a desire to teach them the values and the arts which can be learned through the study of the English language and its literature.

### Requirements

Preparation for the role of English teacher, the committee believes, is a liberal and professional education with a concentration on language, literature, and related fields. The NCTE has not

<sup>2</sup> "Report of Sixteenth CCTE Annual Meeting, 1957." Council on Cooperation in Teacher Education. Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1958.

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endorsed a specific program of courses for preparing teachers of English. It has, however, produced a series of related studies<sup>3</sup> and has defined a minimum college preparation in English for the high school English teacher. Upon recommendation of the committee, the NCTE board of directors in 1957 declared that every teacher of English in an accredited high school should have, as a part of his college preparation, *not less than 24* semester hours in English, in addition to freshman composition and a course in methods of teaching English, and including courses in the scientific study of the English language, advanced composition, and English and American literature.

This resolution specifically provided that teachers in core curriculum programs which combine English with another subject should meet the minimum requirement for preparation in English. It stated further that even the smallest secondary school should have at least one teacher of English with a collegiate major in English to provide leadership in curriculum planning, text selection, teaching methods, and in-service training, and to set an example of competent teaching for those with minimal preparation.

The committee's opinion is not that college credit necessarily makes a good English teacher, but that at present the best (in fact, almost the only) available indicator of minimum proficiency in English is a major concentration as part of the degree program of an accredited college or university. When taken as a planned major, the English preparation

<sup>3</sup> See especially three volumes of NCTE curriculum series: (I) *The English Language Arts*, (II) *Language Arts for Today's Children*, and (III) *English Language Arts in the Secondary School*, all New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc.

will ordinarily include a significant and appropriate choice of courses designed to give the student the essential knowledge and uses of the English language and literature. Besides having too little college English, the teacher of English who has less than 24 semester hours in the subject usually accumulated his few hours without faculty counsel or a personal plan.

State requirements for teacher certification are quantitative and qualitative. Generally, state agencies declare the need of all teachers to receive a liberal education with one or more concentrations in subjects to be taught, together with a professional education that includes the psychological and sociological foundations of the teaching-learning process, teaching methods, and student teaching. Of the 50 states, 39 require a bachelor's degree for an elementary certificate; 49 require the bachelor's degree, and two the master's besides, for the initial secondary certificate.<sup>4</sup> More than half the states have specifications concerning health, age, United States citizenship, and loyalty oath.

Ordinarily, states consider quality by requiring portions of the total preparation to be in courses designed to develop special competencies. Some states use proficiency examinations as a substitute for a prescribed course or as a means of qualifying in an area that the teacher candidate has not included in his college preparation. A very few states require the candidate to make a designated score on a standardized national teacher examination in order to receive a certifi-

<sup>4</sup> Here and later, data on certification and teacher education programs have been drawn largely from *Working Papers for Participants in the Kansas Conference*, Washington, D. C.: National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, National Education Association, 1959. p. 3-30.

cate; other states encourage him to include such a score in his personnel file; still others require for renewal of a certificate that he pass a locally prepared examination or submit a minimum of additional college credit.

Quantitative requirements in semester hours, as set by the states for an elementary certificate that is based on a bachelor's degree, range from 16 to 36, with the median 21, in professional education (*excluding* professionalized subject matter); range from 16 to 104, median 45, in general education. Similar requirements for a secondary certificate range from 12 to 27, median 18, in professional education; range from 25 to 104, median 40, in general education. The undergraduate teacher-education programs of colleges and universities accredited by the NCATE point to slightly higher requirements in semester hours: For elementary teachers, a range from 18 to 69, median 34, in professional education (*including* professionalized subject matter); for secondary teachers, a range from 10 to 51, median 23, in professional education; for elementary and secondary teachers, a range from 11 to 97, median 46, in general education. The NCTE committee on preparation and certification believes that the median requirements of the states and the institutions are reasonable guides for a four-year college preparation of the elementary or secondary school teacher of English insofar as professional education and general education are concerned.

For the high school teacher of English, state certification requirements in the area of English, journalism, speech, and library science combined as the language arts, measured in semester hours range from 0 to 40, median 24, for teaching English full time; range from 0 to 40, median 18, for teaching English part time. In the colleges and universities ac-

credited by the NCATE, the semester-hour requirement in English for the teaching major ranges from 18 to 64, median 30. Sixty-eight percent of these institutions require 30 to 39 semester hours of English for the teaching major, 17 percent 20 to 24 hours, 6 percent 25 to 29 hours, and 9 percent 40 to 64 hours. The median requirement of the institutions for an English major exactly meets the minimum of the NCTE resolution adopted in 1957; the median state requirement for certification in English is too low.

Still lower is the minimum college preparation to teach high school English in the majority of the states. Assume that school administrators will observe a recommended standard in states having a blanket certificate—which is a shaky assumption. Even then the minimum requirement for English is less than 24 semester hours in 29 states out of the 50, less than 18 semester hours in 22 states, less than 15 semester hours in 10 states, and less than 10 semester hours in six states. Two states require only six semester hours; two states require none. If the certification requirements in the lowest states are taken as an indicator, it seems that the teacher of English in high school must be a healthy United States citizen, of a proper age, sworn to be loyal, schooled and experienced in educational theory and method, but he may be an ignoramus in English.

### Enforcement

If all school administrators were qualified and responsible, and all school boards enlightened and public-spirited, the employment and assignment of teachers would be done properly without enforcement procedures. But under the present circumstances, it is necessary to

enforce certification with such measures as these: (a) making it illegal for a board of education to grant a contract to a teacher who does not hold a valid certificate for English if he is permitted to teach English; (b) making it illegal to pay a teacher who is teaching English without a certificate in English; (c) withholding state financial aid from a school which is guilty of (a) or (b); (d) depriving the administrator of his administrative certificate if he assigns anyone to teach English without a certificate in English; (e) withholding accreditation from a school which permits anyone to teach English without a certificate in English. Granted these are stern measures; but think of the boy or girl who is subjected to the poorly prepared teacher of English.

Standards for accreditation of the high school must support certificate requirements. In some states where the major preparation for a certificate to teach English is respectable, a poorly prepared teacher may be employed and assigned because low accreditation standards permit it. This is true of both state and regional accrediting. For example, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools accepts the minimum standards of the states where its member schools are located, but not less than 15 semester hours of English, except that, in the case of unified courses which draw their subject matter from two or more teaching fields, the minimum preparation is 20 semester hours appropriately distributed among the teaching fields concerned. Ten of the NCA states which have a major teaching field in English of 24 to 30 semester hours permit accreditation of a high school where the English teacher has only 15 semester hours of English. In this way the standards of accreditation, state and regional,

nullify the higher standards of certification.

The extent to which this nullification reaches—and the extent to which the teacher of English has only a minor preparation in English—is not known precisely, but there are some indications. In 1953-54 about one fifth of the Oklahoma high school English teachers had less than the standard-certificate minimum in English. In 1956 nearly one third of 710 English teachers questioned in Michigan had less than 24 semester hours of college English, and nearly one eighth had less than 15 semester hours of English, which was the state minimum requirement to teach the subject. In 1957 many of the 260 public high schools in South Dakota had no English teacher with more than 15 semester hours of English. In 1958 about one third of 440 English teachers in Wisconsin reported only a college minor in English, and 9 percent less than a minor. Conditions in these respects in some other states have been estimated to be worse than in Oklahoma, Michigan, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.<sup>5</sup>

The results of the committee's efforts are hard to evaluate. The chief products of its study and collection are (a) a file of 177 articles and reports on the preparation and certification of teachers, which are lent upon request; (b) an annotated bibliography on preparation and certification, published as a pamphlet covering 1950-1956, and in *College English* a supplement of items that belong to 1957; (c) the resolution adopted by the NCTE in 1957 defining minimum standards of college preparation to teach high school English; (d) a biennial survey of state certification requirements to teach English in high school; (e) a sur-

<sup>5</sup> From committee studies. See also "English Taught Here," *Time* 72:63, 8 September 1958.

vey of the use of examinations as a basis for teacher certification and membership in professional organizations; (f) a rough draft of a booklet on the preparation and certification of high school English teachers.

All the regional and some state accrediting agencies have been requested to accept as a minimum preparation for English teachers the standards of the NCTE resolution of 1957. The agencies have not responded. Seven of nine states where the committee has provided information, resolutions, letters or speakers have raised the certification requirement for college preparation in English for the high school English teacher. A majority of states have low standards for English teachers. Much needs to be done to improve this situation.

#### Studies by the Committee

1. John H. Fisher. "Certification of High

School Teachers." *College English* 19:344-48, May 1958.

2. *Preparation and Certification of Teachers of English, a Bibliography, 1950-1956*. Donald R. Tuttle, chairman; Autrey Nell Wiley, editor. Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1957. 58 p.

3. "Preparation and Certification of Teachers of English: 1957 Supplement to *A Bibliography, 1950-1956*," edited by Autrey Nell Wiley. *College English* 20:227-40, February 1959.

4. Donald R. Tuttle. "A Professional Teacher of English for Every American Student." *College English* 20:87-91, November 1958.

5. Donald R. Tuttle, "Improving Certification Requirements." *College English* 17: 353-55, March 1956.

6. Donald R. Tuttle and others. "Preparation and Certification of Teachers of English: A Symposium." *College English* 18: 295-309, March 1957.

7. Vern Wagner. "Theocracy in Education." *College English* 17:349-53, March 1956.

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