NEW proposals and patterns continue to emerge in the English language arts curriculum. It is necessary, therefore, to renew our efforts to communicate with the public concerning both the magnitude and meaning of these new patterns.

Major spokesman for the new curriculum patterns continues to be the National Council of Teachers of English. Two of the most recent publications of the Council, an organization of over seventy thousand teachers of English, are directly concerned with informing the public about new developments and needs in the English language arts. Both publications stress that the most effective means of winning public support for language arts programs comes through the development of effective English programs at the local level. If local citizens can see evidence of the positive impact of school programs in language on students in their communities, the best kind of public relations program will be in effect.

The trend of the times is one of specialization and technology in the development of new instructional materials in an attempt to accommodate a revolution in curriculum content. The works of the Physical Science Study Committee and the School Mathematics Study Group are representative of efforts in curriculum areas other than English to accommodate the explosions of knowledge which characterize our age.

Linguistic Science

For the humanities, similar explosions of knowledge receive little publicity but are no less significant. Particularly noteworthy for the curriculum workers in the language arts and for the teacher of English is the explosion of knowledge in the study of language known as linguistic science. Although space here does not permit a detailed summary of the content of this explosion, such a summary is available in the literature. There is need for effective communication with the public concerning the meaning and significance of this revolution.


tion for the English language arts curriculum. Particularly at points where new knowledge contradicts popularly held myths concerning the English language, is there need for interpretation.

Linguistic scientists have developed, largely within this century, methods and techniques for studying, analyzing and describing the various languages which are used or have been used by speech communities throughout the world. With some exceptions the linguists have given primary attention to the internal workings of language systems, and not to “what is being talked about.” The linguist does not attempt to evaluate how things should be said, what grammatical constructions should be used, or how words should be pronounced. Also, by an emphasis on the study of sequences of speech sounds, linguists have limited themselves in investigations of the relations of printed or written symbols to speech. There is some recent evidence that this may be developing into a promising line of investigation for some linguists. 

Interest by linguists in the relations of speech to writing should materially assist research in reading.

As the linguist, James Sledd, has indicated in a recent article, there are many problems in accommodating the explosion of knowledge that is linguistic science to such matters as the teaching of composition. Linguistic scholarship has revealed new knowledge about language and language learning. Much of this knowledge suggests a differing set of propositions for the organization of instruction in the English language arts than prevails in current practice in most of our schools.

1. There are no permanent, absolute rules governing correctness in the English language. Correctness in a given speech community depends upon conventions agreed upon by the members of that community. In a speech community there are infinite variations in usage among the users of a given language.
2. The English language changes constantly. Change should be considered as normal.
3. Language behavior is habitual and can best be changed or modified through supervised practice in the language or dialect one is attempting to learn. Hearing the desired form is essential.
4. Systematic study of traditional English grammar (there is little evidence concerning linguistic grammar) has little transfer value for the development of skill in reading, writing, or speaking. Direct and purposive instruction in essential aspects of these skills does result in improvement. 

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either during school time or at convenient out-of-school hours to allow the study to proceed with due haste. Additional accommodations such as meeting place, class supplies and any other auxiliary costs may well have to come from district budgets.

5. There must be some guarantee of implementation of proposed solutions. Only if the administration of the district is willing to follow through in the utilization of suggested outcomes can any enthusiasm for cooperative effort be maintained.

Such cooperative effort will, of course, not be easy to establish, particularly for the first time. Public school personnel may well feel suspicious. College instructors will find the arrangements somewhat upsetting to their established personal routines and particularly to their book of college rules. One course per semester may seem hopelessly little but, as leaven within the loaf, it can have far-reaching effects.

—Delmar T. Oviatt, Dean of the College, San Fernando Valley State College, Northridge, California.

Interpreting

(Continued from page 301)

The fact that the old myths about language and communication are still held by a large segment of the public is demonstrated whenever one of the above points is made public through the popular press. Any suggestion that the English language is a flexible instrument of communication not bound by irrevocable laws brings forth a plethora of letters to the editors that the schools are lowering standards. Teachers and curriculum workers need to help the public distinguish between standards of instruction in the language arts and obeisance to mythical standards concerning language usage and linguistic change which have never existed in the history of our language. What exists is a popular attitude of mind about language matters which linguist Donald J. Lloyd has described:

The demon which possesses us is our mania for correctness. It dominates our minds from the first grade to the graduate school; it is the first and often the only thing we think of when we think of our language. Our spelling must be "correct"—even if the words are ill chosen; our usage must be "correct"—even though any possible substitute expression, however crude, would be perfectly clear; our punctuation must be "correct"—even though practices surge and change with the passing years, and differ from book to book, periodical to periodical. Correct! That's what we've got to be, and the idea that we've got to be correct rests like a soggy blanket on our brains and our hands whenever we try to write.7

There is a great need for interpreting the new knowledge about language to the general public if we wish the public to understand our developing curriculum in the English language arts. Informed teachers and curriculum workers must find ways to inform the public at the same time they are planning new instructional materials and curriculum patterns. The goal continues to be the planning of learning experiences for young people which will assist them in the development of language power and thereby help make the English language a more flexible and sensitive medium for all.
