

Supervision and Continuing Education for Teachers of English

NO JOB is less likely to be done than the one which is "everybody's job." Any nation operating on the assumption that "peace is everybody's business" would do well to arm itself. Prior to Social Security legislation and organized social welfare agencies, care for the aged, which was then everybody's responsibility, was deplorable. Similarly, in no period of American education did instruction in English and the language arts suffer more than in the 1940's and early 1950's when every teacher, presumably, was a teacher of English. Unless a job is divided into components, assigned to and accepted by *someone*, no one does it.

During those "every teacher" decades, English in some schools lost virtually all identity as a discipline. School personnel officers, furthermore, interpreted the slogan to mean that anyone could teach English. As a consequence, despite subsequent efforts to raise certification standards, statewide studies such as those in Pennsylvania (1) and California (2) and two nationwide surveys by the National Council of Teachers of English (3, 4) reveal that half the teachers now teaching English in secondary schools across the nation still lack a major in this subject.

In fact, nearly a third have neither a major nor a minor in English.

In elementary schools the time devoted to direct instruction in English and the language arts, apart from incidental instruction in the teaching of other subjects, ranges from 40 to 50 percent of the total instructional time (5). Yet after full certification and nine years of in-service requirements, the typical elementary teacher has given eight percent of his total academic and professional education, preservice and in-service, to the content and the teaching of the language arts (4). Elementary teachers devoted eight percent of their preparation to approximately 50 percent of their task.

The argument with the slogan, "Every teacher is a teacher of English," is not with the principle, but with the result. To be sure, marking any piece of student prose is an occasion for teaching English, or reinforcing it, or ignoring it. Except for foreign language teachers who may rely completely on the direct method, any teacher who speaks before a class sets a

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standard of English expression, good or bad, for his students to emulate. Yet to someone must fall the principal responsibility for initial and sequential instruction in the skills and the arts of language, for teaching the principles of composition, for organizing access to our literary heritage. At least half of those to whom it falls in secondary schools and many of those to whom it falls in elementary schools are not even minimally prepared to meet this responsibility (4, 5). If the "specialists" themselves have not been adequately trained, on how firm a footing is the program if it simply rests with "everyone"?

Improvement in the long run depends on teachers who insist on better preparation, school systems which both demand it and reward it, colleges which offer it, and a national program of institutes to make additional training available to those now in service. Large-scale improvement in English instruction cannot be realized unless all these individuals and agencies meet their responsibilities. Yet each must meet his own responsibilities; this cannot all be "everybody's job."

Essential Needs in Teaching of English

In May 1964 the National Council of Teachers of English published *The National Interest and the Continuing Education of Teachers of English*, a national survey of the responses of 3,000 elementary teachers and nearly 7,500 secondary teachers of English, dealing with in-service education, both with graduate and professional courses available in colleges and universities and with programs sponsored by school systems. This study pinpoints certain essential needs which will go unmet unless those responsible for supervision and curriculum develop-

ment take appropriate action. (In the following pages all data not otherwise credited come from this report.)

Refine patterns of requirements for in-service growth. Recommendations of the profession and common sense notwithstanding, fully half those now teaching English in secondary schools have not majored in English. Moreover, only 55 percent of secondary school teachers of English and 45 percent of elementary teachers are employed in schools which have formal requirements for continuing education. That is to say, approximately half of the teachers work in schools which do not have such requirements. These are likely to be the schools accepting substandard preparation in the first place.

Where they exist, blanket requirements for a given number of credits in a specified period of time do virtually nothing to close the gap between preparation and professional responsibility. If a high school English teacher has not taken a course in composition or rhetoric during preservice education, even when it is available, this is the last course he will take to satisfy general requirements for in-service growth. Similarly, the elementary teacher, in a program calling for instruction in grammar and usage from the third grade on, will usually avoid courses in modern English grammar.

The Education of Teachers of English for American Schools and Colleges (7), as well as the earlier report entitled *The National Interest and the Teaching of English* (3), specify indispensable areas of preparation. Those in charge of in-service education should be familiar with such recommendations and make certain that teachers who offer additional credits in satisfaction of requirements make an effort to compensate for gaps in their preservice education.

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Encourage experimentation and the study of research. It is one thing to accept change cautiously. It is another to go on in utter innocence of new developments. Despite all the current discussion about team teaching, ungraded curricula, interage grouping, and lay readers, fewer than 10 percent of secondary teachers of English are in schools that have even begun to experiment with such programs. Their counterparts in the elementary schools have not done much better. Curriculum consultants can do much for in-service growth by encouraging experimentation and study. Local research projects make teachers more intelligent consumers of other research reports. Moreover, they place teachers in the clear position of needing additional information. With the strategic use of invited consultants and additions to the professional library, teachers participating in the study would on their own initiative not only seek to help to shed light on a real problem, but also to fill in gaps in their academic and professional preparation.

Develop professional libraries. In no other profession is the gap as great between what is known and what is practiced as it is in the teaching profession. And in few academic subjects is this gap greater than it is in English. Time and again research has demonstrated, for example, that under certain conditions the teaching of formal grammar not only fails to produce improvement in writing but actually inhibits it (8). No doubt the lag between professional awareness and professional practice explains to a considerable degree why leaders like Ruth Strickland can assert that no major recent change in the language arts curriculum has resulted from research (9).

One reason for the negligible impact of research is that reports of research are so inaccessible. Approximately 50 percent of teachers work in schools or systems without access to a professional library. The other half do not always find accessibility easy. The supervisor or curriculum director who wants to establish and maintain an up-to-date professional library will find help in the minimum professional libraries for elementary and secondary schools in English and language arts listed in the appendix to *The National Interest and the Continuing Education of Teachers of English*.

Reevaluate the function of the teachers institute. Despite occasional moves to substitute other activities for it, the teachers institute remains strongly entrenched. Over 70 percent of secondary school teachers of English and over 80 percent of elementary teachers are employed in schools or districts which hold such institutes regularly, usually once each year. For the overwhelming majority of teachers, attendance is "expected" or mandatory.

To what extent are such programs aimed at closing one or more of the gaps between preservice education and professional responsibilities? With the scope of their task, the institute for elementary teachers cannot give a preponderate amount of time exclusively to the English language arts. But 56 percent of elementary teachers regularly attend institutes that give less than 25 percent of the time to it. In fact, nearly 50 percent of the secondary school teachers of English attend institutes with equally little concern for their subject.

All teachers should have interests and knowledge outside a particular academic specialty. Yet an elementary teacher with no work in literature for children or a

secondary teacher of English whose last composition course was in his senior year in high school has specific and urgent needs that will never be satisfied by the kind of speaker engaged more often than any other for the annual institutes, a speaker from the field of general curriculum.

Few districts can afford to engage annually an outstanding speaker in every subject field. Yet a succession of such speakers over a few years' time would be better than an "all-purpose" speaker each year. Most schools, moreover, have on their teaching and supervisory staff more subject matter strength than they ever utilize sufficiently. The curriculum director responsible for institute planning can use district as well as outside specialists to insure that teachers have the chance to improve their understanding and teaching of the English language arts.

Encourage participation in the activities of subject matter organizations. The National Council of Teachers of English holds its annual meeting each fall, bringing to one city for a series of programs several hundred of the national leaders in English and the teaching of English. It sponsors many other conferences, institutes and workshops each year. The International Reading Association, the other national organization entirely devoted to issues of special interest to teachers of the language arts, holds an annual meeting in the spring. Both organizations have hundreds of local, regional and state affiliates with their own programs and activities. Both, too, have comprehensive publications programs, including regular periodicals, occasional bulletins, and a variety of books.

Here is an inexhaustible reservoir of in-service growth. To what extent do schools encourage teachers to tap this

reservoir? Approximately one third of the teachers of English in secondary schools hold membership in the Secondary Section of NCTE. But for elementary teachers, total memberships in NCTE and IRA constitute less than six percent of the total number of teachers. Despite the fact that for the past several years NCTE has followed a policy of placing its convention within 1000 miles of every teacher at least every fourth year, 82 percent of the secondary teachers of English and 92 percent of the elementary teachers have never attended. NCTE affiliates sponsor each year at least 200 local or regional programs, but 68 percent of the elementary teachers across the country have never attended one.

Many of these meetings are held on weekends or on holidays. With how little effort and at how little expense could schools put teachers into contact with outstanding scholars in English and the teaching of English! Some schools have found that all that is needed is an announcement, some encouragement, an occasional token reimbursement of expenses. By joining such associations, staying informed of their programs, and making it possible for teachers to attend, an alert supervisor or curriculum consultant, for little more than the cost of mileage, can do at least as much for the local English program as he could with several hundred dollars spent to bring speakers into his community.

Know and capitalize on the strengths of present staff members. If half the secondary school teachers of English across the country lack a major in English, an approximately equal number have such a major. Seven percent began their teaching with a master's degree; another 27 percent have earned this degree since beginning teaching. Sixteen percent of elementary teachers have an undergradu-

ate major in English or language arts. An additional one fifth have group or field majors which included English with one or more other subjects.

Although the general picture of teacher preparation in English is grim, across the country are outstanding teachers with academic and professional preparation unparalleled in the history of the profession. Of seven different in-service activities, elementary teachers ranked meeting with other teachers first; secondary teachers ranked meeting with other teachers second only to additional college courses. Yet barely one third of the secondary teachers and one fourth of elementary teachers have frequent opportunities for such meetings. In fact, more than ten percent of both groups *never* have such an opportunity.

Working with department chairmen, grade level chairmen, or steering committees, the supervisor can set up a sequence of meetings on topics selected by the teachers. In one secondary school, for example, at the invitation of the English teachers, the county consultant in elementary reading led a series of seminars on the teaching of reading. Particularly needed is leadership to bring together elementary teachers and junior and senior high school teachers of English. Again and again teachers identify this need to break down the "professional isolation" of the individual teacher. Yet to whom does the initiative belong?

By studying personnel records and by observing classes, the curriculum specialist can identify teachers with special training and competencies, teachers who might otherwise escape his notice. By similar study and observation, he can identify needed strengths that are nowhere represented on the teaching staff. If no one in a high school English department, for example, has taken advanced

work in rhetoric or studied modern English grammar, then the next vacancy reported to the personnel office should so stipulate. By keeping abreast of needs as well as present strengths, supervisors who have responsibilities for interviewing candidates will be in a unique position to make strategic recommendations.

Reevaluate the need for strengthened supervisory resources. In recent years the whole concept of supervision has changed. Dropping a policing function and adopting new procedures and often a new title, the supervisor in recent years has done much to enhance rapport with teachers and to create a climate more conducive to improving instruction. Yet as the supervisor has relied less on classroom observation and more on group process, as his assignment has been based more on geography or on school level, he has had to become a generalist. This is particularly true at the elementary level. There 80 percent of the teachers have at least some opportunity to meet with a general supervisor, but over 40 percent have never had an opportunity to meet with a supervisor trained in English or the language arts. This unavailability of direct supervision, as well as the remoteness of generalized consultant help, no doubt accounts for the low evaluation which teachers in many districts place on supervision. Secondary teachers, for example, rate conferences with supervisors of less help than any other in-service activity except reading research reports. The NCTE report indicates that new approaches to supervision are hardly more effective than the old in promoting curriculum change. Approaches are needed to relate supervision to active classroom instruction.

More recently the trend has been to include subject matter specialization

within the larger framework of supervision. Yet in English, as contrasted with other academic subjects, the swing has been slight. In 1963, for example, 15 states provided full or part time supervision in English while 33 states provided 221 supervisors in science, mathematics and foreign languages. While one cannot reasonably expect every district, large or small, to engage a full time supervisor in English, half the school districts in cities of more than 200,000 did not offer specialized supervision in English, although the supervisory staffs have been substantial.

One indication of the growing importance of specialized supervision in English was a national conference of some 50 English supervisors called in February 1964 by the U.S. Office of Education to develop guidelines for supervision in English. Leaders of NCTE, ASCD, NASSP and The Modern Language Association participated in this conference.¹ Similarly, in October and November 1964, the National Study of High School English Programs is calling two conferences on the supervisory responsibilities of high school English chairmen.²

The issue here is not entirely fiscal. To be sure, federal funds supported supervision in science, mathematics, and foreign languages. Yet awareness of advances in these subjects has led to specialized supervision even without outside help. In English, much of the problem grows from a failure to recognize that here, too, are new scholarship and new techniques. The profession has

given up the idea that anyone can *teach* English; in many areas, however, any supervisor can *supervise* the teaching of English.

The demands for strengthened supervision are clearly implied in ASCD's "The Role of the Curriculum Supervisor" (10). This working paper underscores the rapid expansion of knowledge and the need to recognize that "teacher education is a lifelong process. . . . In-service education by local school districts is essential if the teaching corps is to keep abreast with advances in knowledge. . . ." The paper, furthermore, highlights the central responsibility of curriculum specialists in this process. They "must play major roles in a school district's in-service education program. Both the generalist and the subject-area specialist have important parts to play. . . ."

The need for subject specialization implied in the discussion of changes in the educational scene is reiterated in subsequent discussions of basic assumptions. "It is essential that the supervisor be regarded . . . as a helping teacher, a consultant or a co-teacher. . . ." Finally, it is spelled out in the section dealing with staff organization, which distinguishes between the contributions of general supervisors, who "are primarily concerned with looking at any curriculum proposal or instructional problem in its relation to the students' total educational experience," and the subject matter supervisors, who "are the specialists in the content, methods, and materials of a particular discipline. . . ."

Competing with traditional school grammar are three distinct grammars of English, any one of which improves on the traditional in describing accurately the structure of English. With respect to language learning, Charles Ferguson, Director of the Center for Applied Lin-

¹ A report of this conference, edited by Sue Brett, Specialist in Secondary English, will be published by the U.S. Office of Education.

² Director of this project is James R. Squire, Professor of English, University of Illinois and Executive Secretary of NCTE. NCTE, cosponsoring The National Study, plans to publish a conference report.

guistics, has said that more information has become available in the past five years than in the previous one hundred. Joint efforts of linguists, psychologists, and reading specialists promise to reorganize if not to revolutionize fundamental principles of reading instruction. These are but a few of the changes. Keeping up with the new scholarship and discriminating among suggested changes in procedure and techniques demand full time commitment.

Apart from any steps taken to improve the in-service and continuing education of teachers of English, the implications for the supervisory staff are clear. In the absence of a supervisor trained in the English language arts, schools can and probably should rely more on their best prepared teachers for instructional leadership.

Generalists in supervision can do much to create a climate that releases the energy these teachers can bring to the problem. Yet in the long run if supervisors are to be leaders, as they must be, the continuing education of supervisors themselves and the selection of replacements or additions to the supervisory staff should command at least as much attention as the continuing education and recruitment of teachers of English.

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Candidate—Roberts

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maintaining aloof from politics. It is they who will have to dispel the image by feeling free to participate in politics as any other good citizen should. How much a teacher involves himself in politics and the form of his participation will be determined by his own convictions and his own abilities and interests. Yet the citizen who is a teacher should be no less a citizen because of his profession.

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