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NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
OF THE UNITED STATES

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Report of the Committee on the High-School Course in English

July, 1913

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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE HIGH-SCHOOL COURSE IN ENGLISH

A PLAN FOR A NATIONAL SYLLABUS

The National Education Association, thru its Secondary Department, has organized a committee to prepare a syllabus, or handbook. The object is to improve the work of the secondary schools by bringing about more effective adaptation of the course of instruction to the ideals, needs, and conditions of the time. The subcommittee to which the task of reporting on the English studies has been assigned is that appointed by the English Round Table in 1910 and formerly known as the Committee on College Entrance Requirements in English. The membership has been increased and now includes the following: Emma J. Breck, Oakland High School, Oakland, Cal.; Randolph T. Congdon, State Education Department, Albany, N.Y.; Mary E. Courtenay, Englewood High School, Chicago, Ill.; Charles W. Evans, Supervisor of English, East Orange, N.J.; Benjamin A. Heydrick, High School of Commerce, New York City; Henry W. Holmes, Department of Education, Harvard University; Walter J. Hunting, Superintendent of Schools, Carson City, Nev.; James F. Hosic, Chicago Teachers College, Chicago, Ill.; Mrs. Henry Hulst, Central High School, Grand Rapids, Mich.; William D. Lewis, Principal, Penn High School, Philadelphia, Pa.; Edwin L. Miller, Assistant Principal, Central High School, Detroit, Mich.; May McKittrick, Assistant Principal, East Technical High School, Cleveland, Ohio; Edwin T. Shurter, Department of Public Speaking, University of Texas; Elmer W. Smith, Department of Rhetoric and Public Speaking, Colgate University; Charles S. Thomas, Newton High School, Newtonville, Mass.

In order that the report of the Committee might represent as fully as possible the results of study and experiment in every quarter, the co-operation of all existing organizations interested in the problem has been sought. The National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English, on May 30, 1911, instructed its executive committee to assist, and to this committee the matter formulated by the National Education Association committee will be submitted for criticism. In like manner the National Speech Arts Association and the Conference on Public Speaking of the New England and the North Atlantic States have directed appropriate committees to render aid. The National Council of Teachers of English is yet more closely associated with the work. The members of its Committee on the High-School Course, which recently collected information for a report on types of organization of high-school English, are participating

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intimately in the compiling of the syllabus. The Council is broadly representative in the character of its membership, both individual and collective, and is thus well fitted to join in the enterprise. The members of the Committee of the Council are: Franklin T. Baker, Teachers College, Columbia University; Elizabeth G. Barbour, Girls' High School, Louisville, Ky.; C. C. Certain, High School, Birmingham, Ala.; Allison Gaw, Department of English, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, Cal.; E. H. Kemper McComb, Manual Training High School, Indianapolis, Ind.; Edwin T. Reed, Agricultural College, Corvallis, Ore.; Elizabeth Richardson, Girls' High School, Boston, Mass.; together with Mrs. Hulst, Mr. Lewis, and Mr. Hosic mentioned above. The latter is chairman of each of the two constituent committees and of the joint committee.

THE POINT OF VIEW

The Committee will endeavor to make a fresh study of the problem. Previous efforts in this field have had reference primarily to college entrance; the time has come for an English course based upon the life of the school. The secondary schools have developed so remarkably in the last two decades that their function of preparation for advanced academic study is completely overshadowed by other functions. For most students the high school is now a finishing school. Moreover, these schools serve such various constituencies that the widest possible freedom is necessary in adapting the materials of education to particular capabilities. Hence the committee will consider the experience of those who have sought to meet the needs of particular communities. A course which fits the life of the school and which prepares young people for the life of the home and of the social and industrial community will best equip for attendance on higher academic or professional institutions.

With this ideal before them the various subdivisions of the Committee will undertake to select material and outline activities for the successive years of the course. The groundwork of composition will consist of those projects for speaking and writing which young people can be made to feel are worth while. Rhetorical theory will thus be made to serve as the handmaid of expression, not the occasion of it. Books for reading, likewise, will be selected because they are capable of producing a genuine reaction, not because they are illustrative of literary history. In both composition and literature, there will doubtless be a shift of emphasis toward those subjects and activities which are of greatest value in active life—toward oral expression, for example—and toward modern books and periodicals. It is not to be inferred, however, that the supreme values inherent in the world's literary masterpieces will be overlooked.

THE PLAN

A general plan for the syllabus has been agreed upon. A section will be devoted to each of the following: (1) an account of the origin and labors

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of the Committee; (2) a summary of the work in English which is ordinarily undertaken in the first six years of the elementary school; (3) the aims which should guide the English work of the following years, including the high-school period; (4) a general course of study in English for six years, beginning with the seventh grade of the elementary school and providing abundant material for choice; (5) several examples of more limited courses as worked out to meet particular conditions; (6) a suggestive outline of activities in composition (speaking, writing, spelling, grammar, and rhetoric); (7) a suggestive outline of activities in literature (interpretation of poetry, fiction, and drama, reading aloud, dramatization, lives of authors, literary history); (8) a list of books for pupils' general reading with suggestions as to guidance; (9) general suggestions as to plans of faculty cooperation in English instruction, size of classes, equipment, etc.; (10) a bibliography of the professional aspects of the subject. Such a handbook will be useful to administrators in arranging courses of study and providing equipment, and it will aid the teacher at work, particularly the teacher of limited experience.

AIMS

The Committee believes that a single statement of aims will prove serviceable as a guide to the English work of all schools. Stated broadly, it should be the purpose of every English teacher, first, to quicken the spirit and kindle the mind and imagination of his pupils and to develop habits of weighing and judging human conduct, with the hope of leading them to higher living; second, to supply the pupils with an effective tool for use in their future private and public life, i.e., the best command of language which, under the circumstances, can be given them.

The particular results to be sought may be somewhat specifically indicated as follows:[1]

I. In general, the immediate aim of secondary English is twofold:

a) To give the students command of the art of expression in speech and in writing.

b) To teach them to read thoughtfully and with appreciation, to form in them a taste for good reading, and to teach them how to find books that are worth while.

These two aims are fundamental; they must be kept in mind in planning the whole course and applied in the teaching of every term.

II. Expression in speech includes:

a) Ability to answer clearly, briefly, and exactly a question on which one has the necessary information.

b) Ability to collect and organize material for oral discourse on subjects of common interest.

[1] This outline, here considerably modified, was originally prepared by Allan Abbott, of the Horace Mann School, Columbia University, and appeared in the *English Journal* for October, 1912.

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c) Ability to present with dignity and effectiveness to a class, club, or other group material already organized.

d) Ability to join in an informal discussion, contributing one's share of information or opinion, without wandering from the point and without discourtesy to others.

e) For those who have or hope to develop qualities of leadership, ability, after suitable preparation and practice, to address an audience or conduct a public meeting, with proper dignity and formality, but without stiffness or embarrassment.

f) Ability to read aloud in such a way as to convey to the hearers the writer's thought and spirit and to interest them in the matter presented.

NOTE.—*All expression in speech demands distinct and natural articulation; correct pronunciation; the exercise of a sense for correct and idiomatic speech; and the use of an agreeable and well-managed voice. The speaker should be animated by a sincere desire to stir up some interest, idea, or feeling in his hearers.*

III. Expression in writing includes:

a) Ability to write a courteous letter according to the forms in general use, and of the degree of formality or informality appropriate to the occasion.

b) Ability to compose on the first draft a clear and readable paragraph, or series of paragraphs, on familiar subject-matter, with due observance of unity and order and with some specific detail.

c) Ability to analyze and present in outline form the gist of a lecture or piece of literature, and to write an expansion of such an outline.

d) Ability, with due time for study and preparation, to plan and work out a clear, well-ordered, and interesting report of some length upon one's special interests—literary, scientific, commercial, or what not.

e) For those who have literary tastes or ambitions, ability to write a short story, or other bit of imaginative composition, with some vigor and personality of style and in proper form to be submitted for publication, and to arrange suitable stories in form for dramatic presentation.

NOTE.—*All expression in writing demands correctness as to formal details, namely, a legible and firm handwriting, correct spelling, correctness in grammar and idiom, and observance of the ordinary rules for capitals and marks of punctuation; the writer should make an effort to gain an enlarged vocabulary, a concise and vigorous style, and firmness and flexibility in constructing sentences and paragraphs.*

IV. Knowledge of books and power to read them thoughtfully and with appreciation includes:

a) Ability to find pleasure in reading books by the better authors, both standard and contemporary; with an increasing knowledge of such books and increasing ability to distinguish what is really good from what is trivial and weak.

b) Knowledge of a few of the greatest authors, their lives, their chief works, and the reasons for their importance in their own age and in ours.

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c) Understanding of the leading features in structure and style of the main literary types, such as novels, dramas, essays, lyric poems.

d) Skill in the following three kinds of reading and knowledge of when to use each:

(1) Cursory reading, to cover a great deal of ground, getting quickly at essentials.

(2) Careful reading, to master the book, with exact understanding of its meaning and implications.

(3) Consultation, to trace quickly and accurately a particular fact by means of indexes, guides, and reference books.

e) The habit of weighing, line by line, passages of especial significance, while other parts of the book may be read but once.

f) The power to enter imaginatively into the thought of an author, interpreting his meaning in the light of one's own experience, and to show, perhaps by selecting passages and reading them aloud, that the book is a source of intellectual enjoyment.

NOTE.—*All bookwork should be done with a clear understanding, on the student's part, as to what method of reading he is to use and which of the purposes mentioned above is the immediate one. To form a taste for good reading it is desirable that a considerable part of the pupil's outside reading be under direction. To this end, lists of recommended books should be provided for each grade or term. These lists should be of considerable length and variety to suit individual tastes and degrees of maturity.*

V. The kinds of skill enumerated above are taught for three fundamental reasons:

a) Cultural. To open to the student new and higher forms of pleasure.

b) Vocational. To fit the student for the highest success in his chosen calling.

c) Social and ethical. To present to the student noble ideals, aid in the formation of his character, and make him more efficient and actively interested in his relations with and service to others in the community and in the nation.

NOTE.—*These fundamental aims should be implicit in the teacher's attitude and in the spirit of the class work, but should not be explicitly set forth as should the immediate aim of each class exercise.*

PROBLEMS

The committee has formulated a series of problems which must be worked out. These may be briefly indicated as follows:

I. In general:

a) What is the most effective division of the school course? Is it, for example, that which provides for an Intermediate School to include grades seven, eight, and nine?

b) Should the course be planned by years or by half years (semesters)?

c) What minimum of time for class recitations per week should be demanded?

d) Should a choice of academic or vocational courses be offered in the twelfth or any grade?

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e) How shall due emphasis be secured for speaking, reading, and writing of the more practical matter-of-fact sort without at the same time neglecting the literary or æsthetic?

II. As to composition:

a) How shall progress from year to year be indicated and measured?
b) How shall the principles of grammar and rhetoric be sufficiently enforced without over-formalizing the instruction and preventing spontaneity and the operation of specific purposes?
c) How much of the time should be devoted to oral composition and what are the proper relationships between speaking and writing?
d) To what extent may pupils be taught to criticise their own work and that of their classmates?
e) What is the value of the various methods of criticism employed by teachers?
f) What reading is essential to the work in composition?
g) What co-operation of all departments in the work of establishing right habits of collecting and ordering of ideas and of clear and correct expression of them is possible and desirable?
h) What legitimate opportunities for practice in expression does the social life of the school afford and how can these be most effectively utilized?
i) What equipment does the work require?

III. As to literature:

a) How shall progress from year to year be indicated and measured?
b) How shall sufficient knowledge of the backgrounds of literature be insured without defeating the ends of appreciation and a habit of reading books of lasting value?
c) How much of the time should be devoted to oral reading and how shall this be made at once a social accomplishment and a gateway to understanding?
d) What are the proper limits of the study of literary art in the various years? How shall pupils attain to standards of æsthetic judgment?
e) What part should oral and written composition have in the study of literature? What provision should be made for dramatization?
f) What principles should determine the selection of books to be read? For example, should American authors have preference?
g) How shall pupils be trained in the use of current books and periodicals and in the choice and enjoyment of current plays?
h) What responsibility shall the English teacher assume for the general reading of the pupils and for their library training?
i) What equipment does the work require?

The members of the Committee will welcome information and suggestions from all who are interested. They wish particularly to learn about the work of schools in agricultural and industrial communities which have developed English courses to meet their peculiar needs.

JAMES FLEMING HOSIC, *Chairman*

CHICAGO TEACHERS COLLEGE
June 24, 1913

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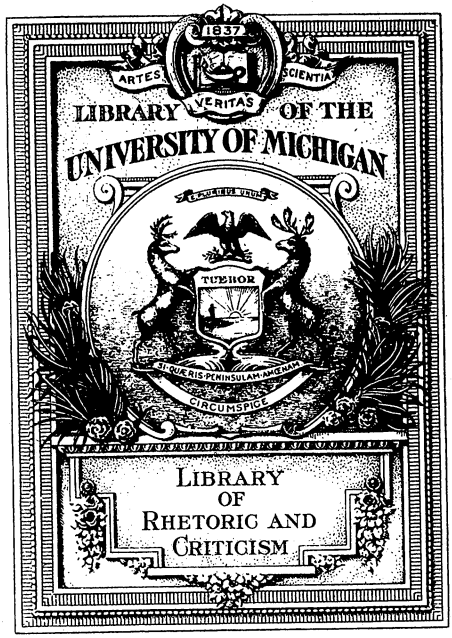

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