The Changing Methods in the Teaching of English Composition Since 1850

Eva H. Lycan

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THE CHANGING METHODS IN THE TEACHING OF
ENGLISH COMPOSITION SINCE 1850

BY
EVA HANKS LYCAN

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of the Requirements for the Degree
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THE CHANGING METHODS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION SINCE 1850

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the depression public education has been subjected to severe criticism by the taxpayers who are demanding retrenchment in the schools. Some critics have asserted that the methods of teaching and the subject matter of such basic courses as English have undergone few changes since those days of the little red school house when a teacher could be hired for a "song". These statements have raised in the minds of those most interested such questions as — What have been the changes in the methods of the teaching of English composition since 1850? Eighteen hundred fifty was chosen because it is the date of publication of the first English textbook¹ found that devotes any considerable space to the teaching of composition

or includes the word "composition in the title.

To answer the question, "What have been the changes in the methods of teaching composition since 1850?" a definite plan has been followed: (1) A survey of the early methods of teaching composition, as revealed by the following textbooks, has been made:

- Progressive Lessons in Composition, R. G. Parker (1850)
- Advanced Course in Rhetoric, G. P. Quackenbos (1854)
- First Lessons in Composition, G. P. Quackenbos (1865)
- Elementary Composition and Rhetoric, Simon Kerl (1869)
- Rhetoric, E. O. Haven (1869)
- Lessons in Language, C. E. Hadley (1871)
- A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric, John S. Hart (1872)
- Higher Lessons in English, Reed and Kellogg (1877)
- English Grammar and Composition, Wm. Swinton (1881)
- How to Write, W. B. Powell (1882)
- The Elements of Rhetoric and Composition, D. J. Hall (1884)
- Practical Rhetoric, J. D. Quackenbos (1886)
- English Composition, Wendell Barrett (1897)

(2) Five retired English teachers, Mrs. J. E. Whitehead, Indianapolis, Indiana; Mrs. Mary L. Stewart, New York City; Miss Mary B. Crowley, Fillmore, New York; Mrs. Ruthem Browne, Hume, New York; Miss Laura B. Arbuckle, Marshall, Illinois; and two teachers still in service who have had years of ex-
perience (Miss Esther Fay Shover and Miss Anna Brochhausen of the Arsenal Technical Schools of Indianapolis) have been consulted about the early methods in the teaching of English composition and have recommended the examination of many of the early books here used. (3) The following professional aids have also been carefully examined with a view to ascertaining what influence they have exerted on the teaching of English composition: The National Educational Association, the National Association of Teachers of English, and the English Journal. (4) Helpful changes in the English curriculum have been traced. (5) A survey of outstanding textbooks\(^2\) from 1900-1934 has been made and a comparison has been drawn between the methods used in these books and those methods employed in the English texts between 1850-1900.

\(^2\)See Bibliography, pp. 54-60
CHAPTER II

A SURVEY OF THE EARLY METHODS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH COMPOSITION

The prominent place given to the courses in English composition in the modern high school curriculum makes it difficult for the majority of people to realize that this subject is a comparatively new one. The "three R's", it is true, for more than two centuries have held their place in song and in story; but the writing there referred to was largely a matter of penmanship.

"Instruction in English, from about 1870 on, changed rapidly."¹ At first it was the large city schools, or those in favored communities, that were recognized; but the new idea spread quickly, and in a large part of the country, instruction in English became organized and was carried on in an intelligent way.

"Until 1870 the possibilities of the subject were not realized. English lagged somewhat behind the other subjects. The trouble lay not so much in the lack of desire

for instruction as in the general feeling that there was no great body of instruction to give. After the pupils had mastered grammar, they wrote formal themes; they gave orations and declamations; they studied treatises on rhetoric and aesthetics like those of Blair, Kames, and Campbell or their imitators.\(^2\) The general plan was to find the material for composition work in some book the students were reading, as in the ordinary reproduction of a story; and to imitate the general style of the model. This, of course, gave no chance for the development of originality, or for the correlation of the composition work with that wealth of material which goes to make up the experiences of people in general.

Up to the nineteenth century the colleges had done practically nothing in establishing a good system of instruction in English composition, and hence did not demand thorough preparation in the high school. The students of those early days relied on translations, or on means outside the curriculum, to gain mastery of their mother tongue. "The first sign of a coming change was when Thomas Jefferson gave a prominent place to the study of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Virginia.\(^3\)

\(^2\)Ibid, p. 45.

In 1873-1874, Harvard instituted an entrance examination in English, committing itself to a stand in favour of grammatical and rhetorical accuracy in the use of English on the part of students entering college.\(^4\) This, of course, led to definite attention being paid to the teaching of English in the secondary schools.

A study of old composition texts furnishes much enlightening material. In *Progressive Lessons in English Composition* (1850) by R. G. Parker, A. M., Principal of the Franklin Grammar School of Boston, but fifty out of the 143 pages are devoted to teaching the pupil to write; the major part of the book consists of grammar exercises. On page 83, much emphasis is given to such hints as

Avoid low expressions, such as "topsy turvey, hurly burly, pellmell, dancing attendance on the great, etc."

Pages 134-138 are filled with three hundred and two suggested titles for compositions, of which the following are typical of the abstractions used:

1. On Attendance
2. On Adversity
12. On Benevolence
18. On Chastity
36. On Disease
39. On Dissipation
44. On Envy
80. On Ingratitude
172. Government of the Tongue
301. Prayer ardent opens Heaven.

\(^4\)Harvard University, "History of the Requirements in English for Admission to Harvard College," appendix to Twenty Years of School and College English.

There is no attempt to limit the subject. Imagine a child's trying to treat, in a single essay, the subject, "On Disease". These titles give the child no opportunity "to look into his heart and write". He is not urged to express what is within himself and closely connected with his life. Such subjects as those suggested carry no appeal to the mind of an adolescent. "What do pupils like to write about?" was asked by Professor H. G. Paul, of the University of Illinois, in a questionnaire to the members of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. They replied by sending him lists of topics submitted by the pupils themselves. The following are typical of those chosen:

This Hero Stuff
Are Teachers Human?
Why I Should Like to Get Rid of My Name
Camping with Mosquitoes
All at Sea in a Latin Class
The Boy Who Got My Goat
An Unsuccessful Date

Such topics encourage the pupil to develop his powers by independent ventures of his own plotting and to give him a feeling of liberty to create something of his own designing in his individual way. Professor Paul adds to this list the following comment:

Every boy has a store of memories and observations, vague conjectures, and surmises, which can be developed into respectable ideas; and it is better to encourage and evolve these than to graft upon his youthful energies an unwelcome alien stock.

This modern, progressive attitude toward composition work as expressed by Professor Paul stands in sharp contrast to the old cut and dried mechanical method which placed emphasis on a store of ponderous wisdom gleaned from encyclopedias, dictionaries, and sermons and copied by the writer of the composition as his own.

The general plan of the *Advanced Course of Composition and Rhetoric* (1854) by G. P. Quackenbos, A. M., follows:

Lesson I  ..... "Media of Communication"
Lesson II  ..... "Origin of Spoken Language"
Lesson III  ..... "Written Language"
Lesson IV  ..... "Alphabetic Writing"
Lesson V  ..... "Formation of Language"
Lesson VI-VIII  ..... "Origin of English Language"
Lesson IX  ..... "Analysis of the English Language"

It is interesting to note that throughout these nine lessons no opportunity is given for practice in the actual writing of compositions. The educational adage, "We learn to do by doing," is ignored. Not until page 325, Part IV, does the author pay any attention to the actual practice of writing. When he does so, he merely asks pupils to reproduce some plan he has given, as -

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*Ibid*
Draw up careful and exhaustive analyses on the plan here described, of the subjects "Education" and "Death". 8

What could be a greater death blow to originality than such an assignment? No opportunity is given for the substitution of a more interesting topic. The assignment is dictatorial in tone and calculated to arouse anything but a pleasureable response in the mind of the pupil.

The book, First Lessons in Composition, (1865) by G. P. Quackenbos, A. M., uses the question and answer method. For instance, on page 109, Lesson LIV begins as follows:

What is the essential property of good style?

PROPRIVITY.

In what does propriety consist?

PROPRIVITY CONSISTS IN THE SELECTION OF SUCH WORDS AS THE BEST USAGE HAS APPROPRIATED TO THE IDEAS TO BE EXPRESSED. 9

Throughout the book, this method prevails -- all theory but no practice; and strange as it may seem, these are first lessons in composition. Such a method is in direct opposition to the great educational slogan "learn by doing" --


that is, face real situations which engross one's attention and engage one's activities, and as the doing proceeds, the learning takes place as a phase of it. What the child needs is an inspiration that will draw him out and make him seek to express himself, not long rules which to him will mean only so many words to be committed to memory.

It is hard to believe that in the enlightened year of 1869 such an assignment as occurs on page 91 of *Elements of Composition and Rhetoric* by Simon Kell, A. M., would ever have been allowed in any school text:

Let the following poem be changed into three different prose narratives: one in which the child is the principal figure, one in which the mother is the principal figure, and one in which the father is the principal figure:

The Dead Mother

FATHER: Touch not thy mother, Boy; thou canst not wake her.

CHILD: Why, Father? She still wakens at this hour.

FATHER: Your mother's dead! my child.

CHILD: And what is dead?

If she be dead, why, then, 'tis only sleeping;
For I am sure she sleeps. -- Come, Mother, rise.--
Her hand is very cold.

FATHER: Her heart is cold.

Her limbs are bloodless; would that mine were so!

CHILD: If she would waken, she would soon be warm.

Why is she wrapped in this thin sheet? If I,
This wintry morning were not covered better,
I should be cold like her.
FATHER: No, not like her; The fire might warm you, or thick clothes; but her — Nothing can warm again!

CHILD: If I could wake her, She would smile on me, as she always does, And kiss me. — Mother! you have slept too long. — But that I know she loves me.

FATHER: Come, my child.

CHILD: Once, when I sat upon her lap, I felt A beating at her side, and then she said It was her heart that beat, and bade me feel For my own heart, and they both beat alike, Only mine was the quickest; and I feel My own heart yet; but hers — I can not feel.

FATHER: Child! child! you drive me mad; come hence, I say.

CHILD: Nay, Father, be not angry! let me stay Here till my mother wakens.

FATHER: I have told you Your mother can not wake; not in this world; But in another, she will waken for us. When we have slept like her, then we shall see her.

CHILD: Would it were night, then!

FATHER: No, unhappy child! Full many a night shall pass, ere thou canst sleep That last, long sleep. Thy father soon shall sleep it. Then wilt thou be deserted upon earth; None will regard thee; thou wilt soon forget That thou hadst natural ties,—an orphan lone, Abandoned to the wiles of wicked men.

CHILD: Father! father! Why do you look so terribly upon me? You will not hurt me?

FATHER: Hurt thee, darling? no! Has sorrow's violence so much of anger, That it should fright my boy? Come, dearest, come.
CHILD: You are not angry, then?

FATHER: Too well I love you.

CHILD: All you have said I can not now remember,
Nor what is meant; you terrified me so.
But this I know you told me, -- I must sleep
Before my mother wakens; so to-morrow!
Oh, father! that to-morrow were but come!

(—Porter)

In the light of modern psychology, what a shadow
to cast over the soul of a child: Adolescence is a time
of immortal longings, of fine appreciations for color and
music, of shrinkings from the ugly and sordid, of dreams
and ambitions. Children naturally shrink from death. Life
is before them filled with adventure and achievement. They
have thoughts which they will enjoy expressing if stimu­
lated by the right type of assignments. Such a lesson as
Mr. Kerl has suggested would cause the pupils to shrink
further within themselves and to develop a dislike for com­
position. Furthermore, too many assignments are based on
the same poem. The child likes change and is interested
in the new and the unknown.

This book contains no illustrative material and
no pictures. The introduction is addressed "To the Teacher",
as are the exercises. The following is illustrative of the

10 Simon Kerl, Elements of Composition and Rhetoric,
Lesson XIII --

1. Occasionally the teacher may write a ridiculously awkward and erroneous composition or letter on the blackboard, and then call in the assistance of his class to correct and improve it.

2. Sometimes the teacher may write on the blackboard a subject for a composition; he may then call upon the pupils of the class to help him find suitable thoughts and language for the composition, and the sentences thus formed should be first written underneath in detail, and then combined into a composition. 11

In both of the above assignments the main responsibility rests entirely with the teacher; there is little need for initiative on the part of the pupils. The first exercise violates the psychological Law of Primacy. Modern textbooks avoid this. The second exercise will be done almost entirely by the brightest pupils of the class while the slower ones will be quite content to take their ease throughout the lesson.

Thomas W. Harvey's Elementary Grammar and Composition (1869) is filled with cautions about what not to do, examples of which follow:

Caution I. - Never use will for shall nor would for should.

Caution IV. - Do not use the perfect participle to express past time, nor the past tense form instead of the perfect participle.

Caution V. - Avoid the inelegant use of participles in place of other forms. Ex. Going to Congress is no evidence of greatness.12

So great is the stress on the negative side that it puts the wrong idea uppermost in the child's mind. The composition work is based entirely on reproduction and imitation. A typical assignment follows:

Read the following description a number of times; then reproduce it from memory.13

Then follows a composition entitled "Sugar". There is no training in observation, no suggested titles, nor illustrations.

Another early book, E. O. Haven's Rhetoric, 1869, begins with definitions to be memorized. One whole chapter14 is devoted to "Hyperboles or Extravagant Expressions"; another to "Modern Idioms". Chapter VIII15 deals at length with faults to be avoided. The book is divided into four parts, and not until part four is the pupil introduced to composition, which masquerades under the caption "Invention".

13 Thomas W. Harvey, Ibid. p. 121.
Even here the ability to do the "inventing" is apparently to result from such rules as follow:

First Rule. The writer or speaker should in all cases, before proceeding to do his work, form a definite idea of what he intends to accomplish.

Second Rule. Having determined in what general form the subject shall be discussed -- whether to describe something or to prove something, or to rebut some falsehood, or simply to please -- the writer should collect information, and thoughts, and facts, and illustrations bearing on the subject.

Self expression, however, does not consist primarily in learning rules, cultivating formalized habits, and imitating accepted forms; it calls for the cultivation of naturally aroused interests, the tendency to observe, to analyze, to think clearly, and to react. This textbook does not take into consideration these things. After several such rules as have been given, this assignment follows on pages 321-322:

Themes in Description. For practical exercise we subjoin a list of subjects upon which students may exercise their ingenuity, and would recommend that each person collect information and classify in an outline or sketch, and complete an essay on at least two of the following themes. It would be well to write on all of them.

1. Description of My Native State.
2. The Great American Desert.
3. The Mississippi Valley.
4. The Fall of Niagara.
5. The White Mountains.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid. pp. 312-313.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. pp. 321-322.
6. The Gulf of Mexico.
7. Relics of Prehistoric Man in America.
8. Oak Trees.
10. The Supreme Court of the United States.
11. The Largest Railway in the Country.
12. The Bible.
15. Ancient Babylon.
17. The Steam Engine.
18. The Pyramids.
19. The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Certainly the above topics are fact-producing ones, and it is difficult to understand why they should be listed under "Inventions". Here again the pupil is given no chance to make use of his own experience; he must read and reproduce the thoughts of others. The assignment is in the third person. At no time in these early textbooks are any of the assignments addressed to the pupils who are the most concerned. Occasionally the author does take the teacher into his confidence as has already been illustrated on page 12.

In 1872 there came from the press a "forward-looking" book entitled A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric\(^\text{18}\) by John S. Hart, L. L. D., of the State Normal School of Trenton, New Jersey. Its suggested composition titles on page 310, of which the following are typical, would do credit

to any modern textbook on composition, for they take into consideration the interests and observations of the pupils:

1. A Letter from Old Mother Hubbard Concerning Her Dog.
2. When My Ship Comes In.
4. A Sojourn on a Desert Isle.
5. What I Heard and Saw When I Used My Invisible Ring.

On page 313, attention is given to the personal narrative; and student specimen themes are quoted in illustration. This is the first textbook in which the writer has been able to find any attempt to bring the subjects for composition work within the range of the students, or to make them of interest to young people.

The Sudlow and Crosby Language Lessons,10 published in 1875, seek to develop proficiency in the art of written composition by requiring pupils to change poetry into prose. Such lesson plans presuppose no belief in the native powers of the child, nor lend encouragement to his self-confidence, nor recognize the learning process as a continuing life-experience.

A School Manual of English Composition (1879) by William Swinton, places emphasis on the proper organization of material before writing. While Mr. Swinton makes no at-

tempt to encourage the child to be creative, he does much for the definite plan of composition material in general.

A practical exercise in composing, from page 14, follows:

Write a short composition from the following outline.
Subject, "The Camel". Underline the simple sentences.

Outline
Where found — Dry countries of Asia and Africa.
Description — Size, hump, color, coat, hoof.
Habits — Its food, drink, docility, etc.
Uses — For travelling — caravans — milk

In 1881, Mr. William Swinton published what he called a "working class book" under the caption English Grammar and Composition. On page 55, he asks the pupils to write newspaper paragraphs and gives such suggestions as follow:

A Fire. — Late last night our quiet town was startled by an alarm of fire.

A New School-House. — Today the laying of the cornerstone of the Washington School in this city will take place.

These are practical assignments well within the comprehension of the ordinary high school pupil. He likewise devotes considerable space to letter writing, a subject that previous

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composition textbooks have generally seen fit to omit.

In 1890, the popular book, *Higher Lessons in English* by Reed and Kellog, came from the press. Two hundred forty-seven pages of this book are devoted to grammar regardless of whether such exercises further the work in composition or not, and but thirty-five pages contain assignments in composition. The composition subjects are, however, well within the experiences of the child. The authors also give considerable space to the writing of friendly letters. Evidently, however, they did not consider the writing of business letters important, for no discussion of them appears; nor are any examples of business letters given.

In these early textbooks little if any attention was paid to oral composition. Educators evidently did not consider that every time the pupil talked he was composing; that the written composition was only the same thing in another form. Composition in those early days meant but one thing—written expression. To develop skill in oral expression, the pupil was left to work out his own haphazard methods.

The most popular method in use for the teaching of written composition, as demonstrated again and again in

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the early textbooks, is perhaps best set forth by Professor Laurie in his book, Language and Linguistic Method, thus:

To make boys and girls sit down and write out, with due attention to legible writing and punctuation, prose paragraphs and poems from celebrated authors, is an admirable exercise. It gives linguistic material. At all ages, but especially in the early years of language teaching, this exercise should be almost a daily one. There is no strain in this exercise, and it is all the better for that.

Most of the early textbooks lay stress upon the word and the sentence. The importance of the paragraph as a basis of composition did not then seem fully to be established. This point was particularly emphasized by Miss Esther Fay Shover of the Arsenal Technical Schools of Indianapolis, a teacher of long experience.

The preceding survey of the early methods in the teaching of English composition has disclosed that the old method exalted conformity and correctness above originality and energy. The assumption was that pupils could learn to write by reading an article and reproducing that thought, or by committing to memory the rules for writing. Very little appeal was made to the pupils' tastes, interests, or needs, and no realization was shown of the varying background of ability, experience, or interest among pupils. No provision was made for training in oral composition. The rules of

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learning were ignored, and the textbooks contained few pictures and were written in the third person. The emphasis was placed upon the word and sentence rather than upon the paragraph. Letter writing, although the most used form of composition in adult life, was given scant emphasis. On the whole, composition was a difficult and uninspiring task to be mastered.
CHAPTER III

PROFESSIONAL AIDS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Certain professional organizations and their publications have done much to promote better methods in the teaching of English. The groups which have been the most active in this movement are the National Educational Association and the National Council of Teachers of English with its organ, the English Journal.

The National Educational Association had long showed a marked interest in the teaching of English, and the publication in 1894, of the Report of the National Committee of Ten on Secondary Schools gave a new basis to the teaching. This report was the first attempt in England, or in America, to systemize secondary instruction in English. The Committee of Ten recommended that English should be pursued in the high school for five hours a week during the entire course of four years. It also suggested the assignment of three hours a week for four years to the study of literature, and the assignment of two hours a week for the first two years, and one hour a week for the last two years to training in composition. Rhetoric, during the earlier
part of the high school course was to connect itself directly, on the one hand, with the study of literature, furnishing the student with the apparatus for analysis and criticism, and on the other hand, with practice in composition, acquainting the student with principles and maxims relating to effective discourse.¹

This report unified the teaching of English. It tended to do away with the overemphasis of any particular phase of English, and thus helped to bring about a broader and more general training in all its aspects.

The National Council of Teachers of English was formed during the year 1912. This council dedicated itself to help solve the problems of English teaching. Up to this time, local associations of English teachers existed, such as the New England Association of Teachers of English; and similar societies in New York, Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois had been organized. These organizations were necessarily limited in scope and were unable to unite the English teachers of the country as a whole. There were other groups which drew from larger territories, but they were not truly representative. Such was the case with the National Conference on Uniform Entrance Requirements in English. The

Modern Language Association of America included English in its subjects of discussion; but the point of view was that of the scholar engaged in research rather than that of the teacher, and the members came almost entirely from the institutions of higher learning. The English Round Table of the National Educational Association was a shifting and an uncertain body and was unable to make its influence felt.

Without duplicating the work of any other society, the English National Council came to fill a definite need. It had its beginnings in the midst of the storm and the stress of the controversy over college entrance requirements and the freedom of the high school. Its members consisted of English teachers from the elementary schools, the high schools, the normal schools, the colleges, and the universities. One of the first steps to be taken by the English National Council was to come to the support of the Composition Committee of the Modern Language Association by assisting it in determining what changes should be made in the teaching of English. As a result of the investigation the committee recommended smaller composition classes and the use of methods less wearing though equally effective.

Another problem to be considered by the Council was suggested by Mr. Edwin Hopkins of the University of Kansas:

I believe we can also put an end to what is perhaps the gravest waste of time in any school sub-
ject by teaching grammar, not separately with independent textbooks, but incidentally in connection with all English training; in composition as a part of the mechanism of expression. Grammar by itself is lifeless, and the study of it bears pitifully small fruit; grammar with composition is vital. No "special text" is needed to make this sort of training effective.

The Council's approval of Mr. Hopkins's suggestion did much to put an end to the controversy over the value of teaching grammar in the high school and the amount to be taught. Thus functional grammar, rather than isolated grammar, came to take its place in the English course.

The English Journal made its appearance in January, 1912. This organ was to be the official voice speaking for English teachers throughout the United States. It was to provide a clearing house of experience and opinion for the English teachers of the country. An editorial of the June, 1912 issue of the Journal sums up its policy thus:

First of all, the Journal would be representative. It would give voice to teachers in all sorts of schools in all sections of the country. We believe each has some portion of the truth and that wholeness is to be attained only by putting together the contributions which all can make. We believe, too, that English teachers are greatly in need of coming to a good understanding, more in need of this probably than any other group. The English Journal has a very great opportunity in this connection in as much as it is the organ of the National Council, which is rapidly becoming a sort of federation of

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local associations.........

In the second place, the Journal is progressive. We do not wish to root out, tear up, and overthow, but we are eager to move steadily forward. The Journal does not worship at the shrine of tradition; it does not prize school practices merely because they are old. Social conditions change, and schools must change with them. Nevertheless, we believe in sound methods of investigation and of testing.

In the third place, the Journal aims at a high standard of excellence in style and typography. There is no good reason why educational articles should not be clear, easy, forceful, and suggestive.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to show the influence of certain professional groups upon the teaching of English. The following achievements may be credited to their efforts: (1) The National Educational Association in 1894, through its Committee of Ten, gave a new basis to the teaching of English by unifying the subject and prorating the time to be spent on composition and on literature. (2) The National Council of Teachers of English has interested itself in helping to solve the problems of English teaching which are constantly presenting themselves. (3) The English Journal has provided a clearing house of experience and opinion for the teachers of English throughout the country, thus enriching the methods of those teachers who are its readers.

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CHAPTER IV

HELPFUL CHANGES IN THE ENGLISH COURSE

What a change has come over the content of the English composition courses since the good old days! The high school English curriculum has expanded with rapidity; and the course of study in many modern high schools boasts such names as Business English, Journalism, Social English, and Public Speaking, all excellent courses and definitely related to the life and interests of the pupil.

Composition twenty years ago meant but one thing, a long, written, formal theme -- subject and length prescribed. To-day Oral English is definitely taking its place in schools side by side with written English. It does not concern itself with the imitation of lofty masterpieces or with elocutionary style; it aims at direct, effective speaking without unnecessary adornment. Good oral habit is now recognized as the most desirable of all language instruction. Here the teacher corrects in order to teach self-correction; she criticizes in order to show a better way.

The movement in favor of oral composition in the high schools did not definitely begin until 1912. Mr. H. H. (27)
Munroe of Bryant High School, New York City, in the June, 1912, number of the *English Journal* has this to say:

The authorities of the New York city high schools have felt that, of late, written composition has been emphasized at the expense of oral composition. Therefore in a new syllabus for the general guidance of English teachers, much stress has been laid upon oral composition, and provision has been made for an oral examination in English previous to graduation.\(^1\)

The movement for oral composition, once begun, gained great momentum. Not only because of its paramount use in business, but because old fashioned oratory, debate, declamation, and their kindred forms have yielded their places to a saner, more direct and more thoughtful presentation of speech, oral composition receives equal emphasis with written composition and usually precedes it.

An interesting article in the February, 1933 issue of the *English Journal*, entitles "Organizing Units Around Functional Centers" by Edward Alvey, Jr., Supervisor of Practice teaching in English in the University of Virginia, reveals that much is still being done to improve and to further oral composition:

A very definite unit of composition work should represent an organization of learning activities around the center of "conversing".

General Objective: To acquire increased facility in the art of conversation.

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The Material of Conversation:
1. What we do
2. What we are
3. What we hear
4. What we read
5. What we think

Kinds of Telephone Calls:
1. The social call
2. The business call
3. The emergency call

all demand accuracy, courtesy, and brevity.²

English courses are now very carefully outlined from the standpoint of outcome and activity. The new course of study for the Junior High School Division of the Indianapolis Public Schools illustrates this plan:

OUTCOMES
To gain in skill and maturity in the outcomes of previous grades.

To converse about subjects of mutual interest.
To discuss the use of leisure time.
1. Mental, physical, and moral values of common leisure activities.
2. The relative merits of indoor and outdoor recreations.

Spelling is now regarded very largely as remedial work and the instruction in it is individualized to a great extent.

²Alvey, Jr., Edward, "Organizing Units Around Functional Centers", p. 18, English Journal, February, 1933, Vol. XXII.
extent. The rules of capitalization and punctuation are taught incidentally as the need arises in connection with written work. These points were emphasized by Miss Anna Brochhausen of the Arsenal Technical Schools of Indianapolis, a teacher of long experience.

Because of the discouraging lack of agreement among teachers as to the merit of their pupils' writing when scored by personal, subjective methods and expressed in percentile forms, such devices as the Hillegas Composition Scale, the Hudelson English Composition Scales, the Van Wagenen Minnesota Scales, the Indiana Willing Composition Scales, and other similar scales have been used in many English departments throughout the country. The chief value of these methods of measuring are: (1) to test impartially the various methods of teaching composition by measuring the results; (2) to measure the results in accurate, objective, stable, and understandable terms; (3) to furnish a common basis for comparing the writing proficiency of different pupils within the same class or school or that of pupils in different classes or schools; (4) to classify fairly pupils in composition; (5) to grade them justly within the group; (6) to enable teachers to discover their reliability in judging the merit of English composition, and (7) to furnish pupils an incentive to self-competition.

By 1916 school authorities were gradually brought
to see that the best results could not be realized if pupils possessing varying degrees of mentality were enrolled in the same classes. Professor Lewis M. Terman of Leland Stanford Junior University stated the problem as follows:

Among those classed as normal, vast individual differences have been found to exist in original mental endowment, differences which affect profoundly the capacity to profit from school instruction.

We are beginning to realize that the school must take into account, more seriously than it has yet done, the existence and significance of these differences in endowment. Instead of wasting energy in this vain attempt to hold mentally slow and defective children up to a level of progress which is normal to the average child, it will be wiser to take account of the inequalities of children in original endowment and to differentiate the course of study in such a way that each child will be allowed to progress at the rate which is normal to him, whether that rate be rapid or slow.\(^3\)

Mr. Terman charged the schools with having relied too long on the "trial and error" method. As a remedy for these evils, he suggested a mental examination to determine whether a child is unsuccessful in school because of poor native ability, or because of poor instruction, lack of interest, or some other removable cause.

As a result of such agitation school officials allowed the English departments in the larger high schools to classify their pupils, according to their I. Q.'s, into accelerated, accelerated.

medium, and slow classes. This experiment greatly reduced the number of failures in the English departments, particularly in the field of composition.

An interesting fact revealed by the English Journals of the years 1913, 1914, and 1915, was that prior to 1912, little attention was paid to the qualifications of the English teacher. Professors George A. Carpenter and Franklin T. Baker of Columbia University, and Professor Fred N. Scott of the University of Michigan express the situation thus:

The assumption often seems to be that anybody who can read and write the English language with a fair degree of proficiency may be entrusted with the correction of compositions.

The school authorities seemed to think that anyone with a license to teach was capable of instructing in English. Gradually, however, these same authorities were brought to realize that special preparation was necessary.

As Mr. Charles Swain Thomas of Harvard University says in his Teaching of English regarding this subject: "The school authorities in selecting and retaining a teacher should carefully consider each individual teacher's power in the use of oral and written English." This is now the procedure followed in the best high schools.

This chapter has attempted to give the results of a careful investigation of the helpful changes which have taken place in the English course in the last twenty years. Among these, the following may be considered as most impor-
tant: (1) the enrichment of the course by the addition of such new subjects as Business English, Journalism, Social English, and Public Speaking; (2) a decided emphasis upon practical oral English; (3) the organization of English courses from the standpoint of outcome and activity; (4) the spelling and punctuation regarded largely as remedial work, and the instruction individualized; (4) the use of composition scales; (5) the classification of pupils according to their I. Q.'s and (6) the stricter requirements for teachers of English.
CHAPTER V

A STUDY OF THE PRESENT-DAY METHODS OF
TEACHING ENGLISH COMPOSITION

In the previous chapters a survey of early composition textbooks has been conducted to determine the methods used between 1850 and 1900; a study of professional aids affecting the teaching of English has been made, and the changes in the English course in the last twenty years have been cited. This chapter will be devoted to a study of the present-day or modern methods in the teaching of English composition so that a comparison may be drawn between these methods and the earlier methods used.

The new methods in the teaching of composition cannot be adequately discussed unless some mention is made of the new English teacher, for it is she who is largely responsible for the new methods. Professor Charles S. Pendleton of the University of Wisconsin, in a paper entitled, "The New Teacher of English"¹, read before the National

Council of Teachers of English in Kansas City, March 1, 1917, has said some interesting and worthwhile things concerning this new type instructor. The following is a synopsis of much that he has said:

The old-time teacher was an oracle of knowledge; the new teacher is an expert in the development of personal power through knowledge. The old was interested mainly in subject-matter; the new is primarily interested in the pupil, and she looks upon the subject as merely a means to effect the child's development. The old teacher considered knowledge as an end in itself; the new as a means to civic betterment. The old kind of teacher was constantly haunted by the fear that her pupils might not pass the college-entrance examination; the modern teacher is concerned over the child who perhaps will be sent from school into the world to be a failure.

In the classroom of the new English teacher there is a decidedly different atmosphere than that which pervaded the classrooms of long ago. Not only is the teacher's personal attitude different toward the pupils and the pupil-group, but the pupils' attitude is different toward her. The new teacher is companionable. Throughout the class there is co-operation, a common purpose. The new English teacher is not always found in the front of her class; she is perhaps seated within the group, or walking from desk to
desk, working unobtrusively. How quiet and poised she is, and how little she talks! Everyone in class is at work; there is no idling. The old-time teacher, who was constantly busy imparting her knowledge, never kept everyone busy. She taught entirely by means of the lecture, the textbook, and the question and answer system. The new teacher subscribes to the adage, "We learn to do by doing;" she, therefore, fills her class period with individual activity. Her pupils are actually under her supervision, writing short themes, or planning and beginning compositions to be finished at home. The class is working together, and yet each individual is going forward in his own way at his own best rate of speed. The best pupils will probably bring in several themes or book reports while the slower ones are completing one. The new English teacher never fixes the length of a theme, as did the old teacher; and she merely suggests theme subjects, permitting the pupils to select topics of their choice, should they so desire.

The new English teacher has an entirely new method of getting the greatest possible achievement from each pupil. She does not threaten punishment for failure; she does not hold over the poor victim's head that dire thing known as a "mark" which is put down in a book after each recitation. She does not drive the pupil to do hard work in spite
of himself. Instead, she deals in that praise so sweet to the pupil's ear. She leads him to have confidence in himself. She understands that nothing succeeds like success, and she recognizes real effort and gives credit for it.2

A good example of this particular method was recently demonstrated in the Horace Mann High School of New York City. A slow class in composition was reciting. The teacher in charge of the group chose a perfectly hopeless composition to discuss with the class. Instead of picking out the defects in this written work, she selected the one good sentence which the composition contained. This she placed upon the board. She discussed with the class why this was such a good sentence. Due praise was given to the modifiers selected, to the correct placing of clauses, etc. She then concluded, "Wouldn't it be fine if J------ could make all of his composition as good as this?" The teacher then passed the paper back to the pupil, who with eager, hopeful eyes went to work on it again. The results obtained through this method were most gratifying.

These new conditions are well summarized by Professor Edward H. Webster of the State Teachers' College of Mount Pleasant, Michigan, and Miss Dora V. Smith of the College of Education, University of Minnesota in their book, Teaching

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English in the Junior High School, published in 1927:

One of the basic principles of true democracy—the purposeful co-operation of individuals to effect a worthy end—is daily illustrated in the best modern schools. No longer can the teacher play the role of benevolent autocrat, dispensing assorted and useful gifts of information to her sometimes eager, oftentimes rebellious, most times passive pupils. Nor are young people any longer expected blindly and alone to perform tasks of occult meaning. In the new school, the democratic school, pupils and teachers co-operate in activities which they feel have social value. The cooperation, however, never ignores the significance of the contribution of the individual.5

The present-day method of teaching composition shuns imitation or mere repetition of another's thought and puts its emphasis on creative writing. Once the student has learned to know and to use his tools—word, sentence, paragraph, and verse—he may hope to achieve something worth while. By means of these he can capture for all time the beauty of a single hour, the mood of an inspired moment, and the fancy of an instant.

In recent years student writing has become more purposeful. Today the pupil no longer writes exclusively for his own or for his teacher's waste basket. Class magazines and books make interesting projects; the school paper, and occasionally even the daily press, want student-written material. Many worth-while and varied prize contests also invite the student to express himself.

Given a workable knowledge of the mechanics of writing, much fascinating subject matter begging for attention, and a satisfying purpose for expression, the student no longer finds writing a task but a privilege and an opportunity.

It is of interest to examine a few specific instances of the present-day methods of teaching composition and to note how these methods have changed up through the years since 1850:

In the *English Journal* for September, 1932, Miss Mildred Wright, of the Evanston High School, sets forth in an article entitled "Suggestions for Creative Writing" one interesting present-day method of promoting creative writing.

To arouse interest in creative writing, Miss Wright has found the pupil-chairman project valuable. Its purpose is to bring before the class all the material related to the English work to encourage creative writing. The pupils are more interested when they find the material themselves and voluntarily offer original contributions. Through a student chairman, a correlation of material with civics, history, and Latin is effected. Keeping classbooks of the best creative writing, Miss Wright said, increased interest. Pupils were urged to be on the alert for poems and prose paragraphs which would make good models.\(^4\) What a departure this proced-

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ure is from the old method of assigning a subject of prescribed length, or requiring the pupil to reread an article a number of times and reproduce it from memory.

Miss Bertha Evans Ward, chairman of the English department of the Hughes High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, in her article, "A Writing Group and the School Magazine" reveals other devices for teaching composition. She says that the present-day method requires that much time and thought be given to assignments. Every school, Miss Ward believes, boasts of some exceptional pupils. These should be given optional assignments. She says, "Let the pupil express himself through the medium which will best fit his mood, whether it be prose or poetry." Such freedom is typical of the present-day method of teaching composition. Here individual differences and preferences, factors never recognized in the early days, are taken into account.

The old method was "Thou must!" James Fitzgerald in his article, "Situations in which Children Write Letters Outside of School" considers it poor psychology to force a child to write. The crucial problem is, consequently, to

6 Fitzgerald, James, "Situations in which Children Write Letters Outside of School", Education Method, January, 1933.
motivate him in such a manner that he will write spontaneously letters and selections for which there is need. He illustrates copiously how letter writing may become vitalized in the modern school.

The present-day method of teaching brings composition down to earth. In her article, "Writing for Later Generations", Miss Ellen Due, English teacher in the Smith High School, Akron, Ohio, says that when on September 12, 1931, the world's largest dirigible rose over Akron, the public schools of the city were dismissed for the launching of the ship. The children were so filled with pride, enthusiasm, and more than a smattering of scientific knowledge that, on the following day, they were bursting to tell all about it. She sketches her plan thus:

The journals of colonial settlers gave us our idea. Half in fun we tried recording our impressions of the maiden flight of the Akron. We agreed that newspaper accounts and neighbors' accounts were to be ignored; every student was to record only his own impression. The revised version was to be done in ink on sturdy paper and labeled as a precaution against house-cleaning, "Source Material for Future Readers"."7

Professor H. G. Paul and Hasley S. Jones of the University of Illinois make the following statement concerning the subject matter of the present-day school compositions:

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The most interesting person for the student to put into the story for dramatic purposes is the person the student knows most about—himself. One should write about one's self in a straightforward manner, without modesty or conceit in entire sincerity. 8

The early method of teaching composition totally ignored the student; he was considered an undeveloped and uninteresting individual whose thought and acts were of little consequence.

Professors Paul and Jones continue:

Other people are worth studying too. One should capture them at an interesting moment and make them act and talk and appear alive. Or, better, one should for the moment be these people, and understand them inside and out. 9

Then follows a list of suggested topics:

1. The Borrower  
2. Mother's Pay Day  
6. Tattle-Tale  
11. The Small Town Sport  
14. A Small Boy Working His Teacher  
21. Listening to the Village Quartet  
29. Looking Over Old Kodak Prints  
33. Johnny on Good Behavior

What human topics these are, and how different they are from the abstractions in the earlier books, as cited in the first chapter of this dissertation! The old method of assigning topics was admirably portrayed not long ago in a cartoon by

9 Ibid, p. 4.
Webster under the caption, "Life's Darkest Moments". The teacher is saying to an unhappy-looking, short-trousered boy, "Remember that a good argument can be made on both sides of any question. Now I want you to write an argument in favor of having school on Saturday. Bring it in tomorrow."

It is not difficult for anyone to imagine the zest with which the young writer set to work.

Teachers no longer assign subjects for themes, but they suggest many. The teacher plays the part of editor by determining the general policy, considering everything that comes in, selecting, suggesting, encouraging what is best.

Emphasizing the importance of self analysis, Professors Paul and Jones advise:

The best of all assignments is autobiography (an assignment that would have been frowned down in the early days). It may well come near the end of the course, because it combines the virtues of all the forms of writing. It may properly include description and exposition. One should not only narrate; he should pass judgment on his earlier years, discriminate and assign values.

Early methods of teaching composition completely disregarded the interest in the personal element and sought to have pupils write on abstractions or reproduce the thoughts of others. The ideas of the child were held to be of no interest and his opinions of no value. Until a few years ago

nearly all English teachers were intolerant of newspaper
English, advertising English, Business English, and almost
any English or near-English that was serving a definite
need in the everyday life of the people. Lately, however,
there has been a pronounced turn toward the hitherto unrecog-
nized forms of useful English composition—the news story,
the feature article, the editorial, the advertisement, the
business talk, and there has sprung up a new interest in
the study of truly modern and constructive English. Repre-
sentative texts are: Fasset and Eaton, Practical Writing11,
Helen Davis, Practical English Projects12; Leo Borah, News
Writing for High Schools13; Rose Buhlig, Business English14;
and George Burton Hotchkiss, An Outline of Advertising15.

The new English composition books are decidedly in
contrast to those of the long ago. The covers are bright

11 Fasset and Eaton, Practical Writing. Boston:
12 Helen Davis, Practical English Projects. New York:
Isaac Pitman & Sons, 1931.
13 Leo Borah, News Writing for High Schools. Boston:
Allyn & Bacon, 1925.
14 Rose Buhlig, Business English. Boston: D. C. Heath
& Co., 1914.
and attractive; the print large and readable, and pleasing pictures, carefully chosen for their appropriateness and their direct appeal to high school pupils, help to decorate many of the pages. These books likewise contain a minimum of theory and rules. The greatest emphasis is laid on stimulating and helping pupils to speak and to write correct, vigorous, and colorful English. These texts take into consideration the plastic mind of the child, filled with experiences and likings peculiar to him. Likewise they provide for training in precis writing, that clear, concise, orderly summary of the contents of a passage, as in English Fundamentals.16

Typical of these new composition texts are English Composition17 by McKitrick and West, in which the lessons are grouped according to the unit plan, and in which extra-credit exercises are included for the accelerated pupils; Junior High School English18 by C. E. Crumpton which provides projects and experiments calling for individual and group initiative as well as co-operation; Experiments in Writing19

by Luella B. Cook which supplies for high-school composition classes a more extended project than the daily assignment, thus allowing individual students to break the lockstep of daily recitation.

Today the pupil is also trained to get real fun out of the writing of verses. Through this exercise he gains skill in reading and in appreciating good poetry, and will be able to write real poetry if he has beautiful ideas, pictures, or emotions to express.

The new textbooks are rich in specimens of compositions, both the selections from standard authors and those from student writers. The numerous composition assignments are based largely on the major interests of boys and girls and on actual situations that arise frequently in their home, school, and community life.

The directions in the new books are clear and simple and addressed to the child.

The oral composition is also made attractive. The following assignments from a modern textbook illustrate this. Here the child is led to do the work because it is more or less of an adventure.

C. Nothing is more interesting than to put yourself in the place of someone else. What strange adventures can be yours for the choosing! Impersonate one of the following, or any other character of interest, and tell to a body of reporters (the class) the most interesting incident in your life:
A hunter of big game
An old sea captain
A circus clown
A tight-rope walker
A Red Cross Nurse
A deep-sea diver, etc.

This type of an assignment serves to allay the pupils' self-consciousness, for he is now somebody else. He can give his imagination free reign and reveal dreamed-of exploits that otherwise he would forever lock safely in his own breast.

In the following assignment a social value is given to the oral recitation:

Let the members of the class imagine that ten years have passed, and that they have assembled at a reunion banquet. Choose a toastmaster or toastmistress to have charge of the after-dinner speeches. The toastmaster will give each speaker a good standing with his hearers by a complimentary introduction. Some good-natured bantering on the part of the toastmaster is considered quite in order. The speaker, however, may "turn tables" on the toastmaster if he wishes. The person giving the toast should always first acknowledge the toastmaster by saying, "Mr. Toastmaster and Classmates," (or "friends" depending upon the nature of the occasion). He should be quite at his ease, self-confident, and speak in a conversational tone. His toast should be clear and brief, and whenever possible, humorous. For example, one speaker at a camp-banquet referred to camp-life as "just one canned thing after another." Choose the topic you wish to discuss, and notify your toastmaster. The following suggestions may prove helpful:

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20 Camp, Lycan, Bair, Creative Composition. p. 231.
Chicago: J. B. Lippincott, 1932.
Such interesting assignments might be cited indefinitely. Suffice it to say that the new method takes into account the interests of the pupil, and at the same time attempts to train him to take his place in the social and business world; it also takes into account the fact that the work a pupil gives to his composition will be in exact proportion to his interest.

This study of the present-day methods in the teaching of composition has revealed the following facts: (1) A new type of English teacher is largely responsible for the new methods. (2) The present-day method of teaching composition shuns repetition and places its emphasis on creative writing. (3) The new method takes into account the interests and the ability of the pupil. (4) The modern teacher no longer assigns subjects for themes and prescribes the length, but suggests topics. (5) A pronounced turn toward the forms of useful composition, such as the news story, the editorial, the advertisement, etc., is evident. (6) The new English Composition books are more attractive and more helpful in every way. (7) Oral composition is emphasized. In fact, the new method makes composition attractive and purposeful instead of dry and uninteresting.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

After a careful survey of the early methods of teaching of English, a study of the professional groups and their influence on English, an observation of the changes in the English curriculum, and a comparison between the old methods and the new, certain conclusions may be drawn and definite recommendations may be made:

Definite changes in the methods of teaching composition have taken place. These have been in accordance with the changes in educational theory. Individual differences in the capacities and aptitudes among secondary-school pupils have been recognized. Teaching methods have been tested in terms of the laws of learning and the application of knowledge to the activities of life. Both written and oral expression have come to be recognized as among the needed tools in the affairs of life.

In the English composition classes the greatest opportunity exists for dovetailing education with life. To base composition exclusively upon English classical writing as was done between 1850-1870, is actually to misfit the
pupil for proper adjustment to those interests in the world to which he will be called upon leaving school. To have pupils speak and write upon subjects related to life is to prepare them for their life work.

Since the real source of composition material comes from the experiences and thoughts of the child, the right kind of composition should, therefore, be a part of the writer and reflect his personality. To do this, the student should be able to choose his own subjects and to treat them in the manner which is best adapted to his talents. This the present-day method attempts to do.

Oral and written composition, then, that centers in human experience makes expression purposive. Pupils choosing composition subjects that are intimate to their experiences develop the natural qualities of imagination, wonder, and curiosity—all so necessary to happiness in life.

Between 1850-1870, the easy method of reproduction used made unnecessary any inventiveness on the part of the teacher. The choice of material so remote from the life and experiences of the child could not help but be uninteresting and unintelligible. As a result composition work was viewed as a disagreeable task, not as an opportunity for self-expression.

In the modern composition text, the paragraph, instead of the word and sentence, has come to be the unit of
thought in all that continuous thinking towards which school is working. "Whether the pupil attempts to grasp the thought of a story or of an explanation given by someone else, or to order his own thoughts into fit form for expression, his mind must proceed from paragraph to paragraph. When he wishes to make a single point clear, in any degree of fulness, he must write a paragraph. The appreciation of the paragraph, therefore, implies at once some power of discrimination and some sense of unity."¹

The student no longer studies long and complex definitions on how to write; instead, he "learns to do by doing."

The stress placed upon oral English is a great aid in preparing the student for social and business life. In the class room he is called upon to meet life situations, and to learn from the comments of his classmates how he can best improve himself. This type of criticism is taken much more kindly than the teacher's. As Mr. C. S. Thomas says in his book, *Teaching of English*:

Drill in oral composition has become more insistent with the growth of the conception that skill in oral expression is not likely to develop by any haphazard process. ²


He also says:

The most marked growth in language power comes, doubtless through the opportunities offered constantly by informal speech.3

This alone marks a great step in the forward-march of composition work. In the early days, oral work was completely ignored.

The correlation of English with the subject matter of other departments is another step toward broadening and enriching the English course under the present-day method. The work is based upon the pupil needs, and remedial work is provided for those who need it, thus doing away with the retarding of the work of a class because a few pupils have failed to grasp the import of some lesson.

English textbooks have undergone a change for the better. The modern textbook has, to a large extent, relieved the teacher of the burden of organization of material, assignment making, explanation, and guidance. The lessons are grouped according to the unit, or block form. Each unit aims to offer scope for whatever power a pupil may possess. Extensive training in team-work is offered in such projects as clubs, committees, class books, school paper, co-operative letter writing, and co-operative criticism.

3Ibid. p. 5.
Creative writing, in which the student is encouraged to react emotionally, imaginatively, and reflectively toward his present experiences, has provided the child with the true medium of self-expression. He has thus been liberated from the old mechanical methods.

Perhaps the teaching of no subject has undergone so great a change for the better as has English composition. The experience of the least successful teacher is ample proof that composition can be taught, and that under the present-day method, composition work, now so closely related to the pupil's life interests, is constantly improving. When one stops to realize that every type of pupil must include three years of English work in his high school course, this is indeed an educational achievement.

The greatest change of all, however, has been made in the attitude of the English teacher who knows that

"To see beyond crude themes piled on a shelf
To the sweet unfolding of an humble self,
Is a true task."4

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