Implementing the Guidelines of the English Teacher Preparation Study

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The Guidelines of the English Teacher Preparation Study\textsuperscript{1} read like the counsels of perfection. Would that I had had a teacher in high school who fulfilled these qualifications. Would that I were such a person.

But we must, of course, have an ideal toward which to aim. As Samuel Johnson has told us:

Some deficiency must be forgiven all, because all are men; and more must be allowed to pass uncensured in the greater part of the world, because none can confer upon himself abilities, and few have the choice of situations proper for the improvement of those abilities which nature has bestowed: it is, however, reasonable to have perfection in our eye; that we may always advance towards it, though we know it never can be reached.\textsuperscript{2}

The Guidelines, we all realize, can be used for a variety of purposes. Importantly, they can provide ferment within the profession—the kind of ferment, it is hoped, that results in thought, and the kind of thought that results in intelligent change and improvement. Again, the Guidelines should be helpful to agencies like state departments of education, which can find here a basis for evaluation of both institutional programs and individual applications for certification. Also, the Guidelines should aid those institutions preparing college teachers of English to formulate programs that will help these college teachers become better preparers of English teachers for all levels. My focus in this paper, however, will be on how the Guidelines can help English and education departments of colleges and universities prepare better teachers of English for our elementary and secondary schools.

I shall discuss the need for developing in our students and ourselves a concern for the future of the profession, the importance of our heeding the Dartmouth conference (the 1966 Anglo-American Seminar on the Teaching of English), and ways of implementing the Guidelines in our teaching of literature, methods, writing, and language. Too many teachers arrive at their teaching job—or, if they are lucky, at their student teaching—only to discover what teaching English really means. Too many of our high school English teachers, for example, arrive in their classrooms only to realize that one-third of their time will be spent teaching composition. They have not had any formal training in composition since their freshman year in college, when they were taught by first-year teaching assistants who had not had any formal

\textsuperscript{1}“English Teacher Preparation Study: Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English,” \textit{English Journal}, 56 (September 1967), 884-895.

\textsuperscript{2}\textit{The Adventurer}, No. 85 (Tuesday, August 28, 1753).

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training in composition since they were freshmen in college when they were taught by first-year teaching assistants who—

One effective instrument for communicating to our students what the profession is and for encouraging interest in the teaching of English is an active junior affiliate of the NCTE. Every institution that trains English teachers should have an affiliate. It serves to bring together those students considering a career in English. They subscribe to NCTE journals (at a reduced rate); they find out about the profession they are training themselves for before they begin student teaching; they grow in their sense of what the profession is, what it has stood for, what it is striving for. The faculty member who advises or moderates this group should be chosen wisely. It is difficult to imagine a more important appointment for a chairman than the moderatorship of such an affiliate. The moderator must be convinced of the value of such work and be willing to spend time with the students. (Such a responsibility should be taken into account in the measurement of a teacher's load of work.)

It may well be that this moderator will be the best person to apply the first guideline: "The teacher of English at any level should have personal qualities which will contribute to his success as a classroom teacher and should have a broad background in the liberal arts and sciences."

Each college, then, should have an NCTE junior affiliate. From their association with the affiliate our students will grow in their commitment to the profession.

This commitment to the profession includes the teacher's commitment to his students. We read and hear that one should start his teaching with a respect for the student as he is—with an effort, for example, to accept his dialect as part of his identity and to proceed from there, not with an attempt to stamp out his dialect. But won't the fledgling school teacher have trouble developing and communicating this attitude unless he has experienced it in his college training? Our college teachers should examine their behavior here, should ask themselves how they respond to their students' efforts. We have all learned, I suppose, that the first grader needs praise before and after our suggestions for improvement if improvement is to come. We need reminding that the fourteenth grader probably needs more praise if we expect him to respond to our proposals for improving his writing or speaking.

Another commonplace—but one that must not be omitted here lest the prominence it deserves be lessened—is the need for continued and improved cooperation between English and education departments. I gather that we have made real progress here, but at most institutions much improvement can still be made. Three important steps occur to me: getting some of our regular English department members to take over certain classes in the methods course from time to time; having some of these members observe and then confer with our student teachers; and appointing people from education to appropriate committees—working, not paper, committees—in the English department. Wouldn't these steps be forward steps at many institutions?

If, as we consider the Guidelines, we are going to respond to and accept in any way the Dartmouth conference, we will have to bear in mind its findings as
we form our programs and—importantly—as we implement them. As I read Herbert Muller’s report on the conference (The Uses of English), the most important single idea of that month-long seminar was the need for a proper balance between concentration on the subject matter of English and on the students whose minds have been entrusted to us. English is not literature, language, and composition. English is not a laboratory in which a student experiences life. English is a difficult-to-arrive-at balance between subject matter and student. English is not merely an analysis of how Polonius’ advice to Laertes (“This above all: to thine own self be true,/And it must follow, as the night the day,/Thou canst not then be false to any man”) functions in terms of plot, character, and theme in Hamlet. English is not merely a discussion, written or oral, about what I as a sixteen-year-old think about truth and self and my relationships to other sixteen-year-olds. English must combine these two: how does the play mean, and what does it mean to me. We must not lose sight of the play (small danger in our college English departments); we must make room for the me.

I mentioned earlier that we must bear in mind the importance of the Dartmouth conference as we form our programs and as we implement them. Formulating the program is one thing; implementing it is another. If we are convinced that student involvement is important, we must be prepared to listen to students talk—not without guiding them, certainly, but not with such rigid command of the situation that they will soon give up. Telling them on the first day of class that we want them to talk about the course readings won’t work; they won’t believe us. John M. Kean recently asserted (Educational Leadership, April 1967) that 70 percent of the talk going on in schools is teacher talk. Mathematically, each student ends up with 1 percent. No, we have to show our students that we want them to participate; we have to coax them along. Another example: If we are convinced that using class time to discuss student writing—both during the process of composing and after the fact—is important, we must demonstrate this conviction by using class time to discuss student writing. I have never known an English teacher who spent enough class time discussing student writing—and I have known a lot of English teachers. Finally, if we believe that there is room in our literature classes, e.g., the senior class in modern poetry, for a glance at the student’s future labors, we should include as one assignment (optional if not required) a paper on how to teach a selected Frost poem to eighth graders. Such an assignment, properly constructed, does not debase the modern poetry course; and no one wants the whole course to be concerned with how to teach modern poetry.

When we think about implementing guidelines, it is inevitable that we are very soon talking about courses. By and large we need not worry about courses in literature. College professors are anxious to teach them; students are anxious to take them; and prospective teachers are looking forward to teaching literature in America’s schools. Three important areas remain: language, writing, and methods.

What should be done in the methods course is always a problem. In a sense the best answer is “Everything.” But perhaps even more important than the syllabus of the methods course is the dissemination of that syllabus. In all too
many colleges and universities across the land the teachers of English courses do
not know what takes place in the methods course—and some of them, sad to
relate, do not care. Each English department should take the steps necessary to
communicate to all who teach prospective English teachers what the methods
course does; all English teachers will then know what topics their students will
be attending to in the methods course.

One effort that all of us can engage in is enriching the methods course by
the use of consultants. We cannot do everything that the Guidelines recommend,
but we must do everything we can to make our prospective teachers aware of all
the disciplines involved in the teaching of English. Why not, then, make the
methods course a staff effort and ask for help from our authorities in the
psychology of learning, the teaching of reading, and the sociology of the city? I
am assuming here that we are always striving to involve members of the English
department in the methods course—not so much because the education depart-
ment methods teacher couldn't do as good a job on ways of approaching short
fiction, but because English department members should be involving them-
theselves in this aspect of the profession. Again, a planned team effort is superior to
an approach to all of these problems from the viewpoint of one person.

But what of writing? There are three methods of implementing those guide-
lines that deal with writing. The first one—not the best one, certainly, but one
worthy of consideration—applies in those colleges that have a one-year sequence
in composition, what is usually called freshman composition. Isn't it axiomatic
that the future teacher would be helped by not taking the second course (under
the semester plan) until his junior year, when he is closer to the classroom where
he will teach? His sense of the profession has improved, as has his knowledge of
language and literature. The reports that I have from schools following such a
program indicate that it works well.

A second way of improving student writing as it relates to teaching is to
weave appropriate writing assignments into standard literature courses. Although
one would not want to build all his assignments in a Victorian literature course
around the possibility—even the probability—that the student will be teaching
high school English some day, there is no reason why one essay assignment out of
four could not focus on how a Browning monologue should be taught to tenth
graders.

But I really don't believe that this second proposal will work very ef-
effectively. In the first place the teacher of the advanced literature courses has
other important things to do as he teaches literature to twenty-one-year-olds
without getting involved with how the work affects fifteen-year-olds. And if he
does a good job with the twenty-one-year-olds, they acquire a solid base on which
to build. In the second place the teacher of advanced literature courses is often
not temperamentally inclined to concern himself with younger people, or even
with writing in the sense that we mean it here.

The third way of improving a student's writing—by far the best way, in
my opinion—is a year-long course in composition at the junior or senior level.
To those who object to this project, who wish the major to be in literature, who
say that the English major should study literature in the classroom and write on
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the side, I can only cite all of the modern writers who tell us what hard work writing is, what great discipline is needed. (Parenthetically, although I like Edward Albee's story that he writes every day until he gets a headache, my favorite is Flannery O'Connor's. She used to put her feet in a pan of water and make sure that there was no towel near by. Then when the temptation to stop writing came upon her, the difficulty of getting the towel without marring the rug was so great that she stayed at her task.) The chief premise of this year's course would be a conclusion of the Dartmouth conference: that the most important thing about a student's essay is not its need of mechanical improvement but its worthiness of being replied to—by fellow students as well as by teachers. To this end there would be a good deal of "publishing" done, the basic readership being the members of the class. The development of the concept of audience is an important by-product here. The course would have four sections, the most desirable length of each to be determined by experience. Three of these sections would deal with drama, fiction, and poetry; the focus would be on practical criticism with a view to improving the student's ability to discuss the works in oral as well as written form. In writing about literature we enrich the involvement that begins with our reading it. The fourth would deal with writing expository and argumentative prose. Here the student would come to a better understanding of the principles of rhetoric and how they are taught.

We must also squeeze in some place, perhaps in this writing course, the opportunity for the student to write a story or a poem. For, as John Dixon's Growth through English reminds us, "Teachers without this experience—who would never think of writing a poem, flinch at the idea of 'acting;' and rarely enter into discussion of the profounder human issues in everyday experience—are themselves deprived and are likely in turn to limit the experience of their pupils."3

We should not, I must note, be discouraged by how much remains to be done, for we are making significant progress. The forthcoming Wilcox study of undergraduate English programs indicates that, whereas in 1960 41 percent of the teacher preparation programs required a course in advanced composition, in 1967 55 percent had this requirement. An even more dramatic increase has occurred in linguistics, where the percentage of institutions requiring such course work has jumped from 36 to 60 percent.4

Let us turn briefly to the need for improved training in the English language. This is a particularly crucial area for elementary school teachers, it seems to me, because someone is crushing the young child's joy in the language, his delight in puns, his wonder over words—and I'm afraid it's probably the teachers. The teachers who do not respect the identity of the child's dialect because they have had little or no education in the nature of dialects. The teachers who even after Webster III and the Random House Dictionary insist that root has only one pronunciation, /ruf/ (u as in goose), that /rut/ (u as in put) is substandard. The teachers who still labor to distinguish between shall and will and who still

4 Council-Grams, 40 (January 1968), 11.
inveigh against ending a sentence with a preposition. And why shouldn't they? Until recently we have done little or nothing in college English departments to train prospective teachers in the language.

Here we also need a year-long course, one with perhaps five parts: the nature of language, the history of English, structural grammar, generative-transformational grammar, and matters related to dialects, dictionaries, and usage. And here we can also implement the concept that learning is a process of inquiry and discovery and its corollary that courses or lessons must be constructed to further this process (Guideline VI). Although other subject matters can be approached in a manner that encourages inquiry and discovery, language—because it has been so widely disregarded—is a very good subject for promoting inductive learning. Let me illustrate with three examples: (1) After the student has read material on how our speech is influenced by such forces as family, geography, schooling, and economic status, he can be asked to review his own experience and to write on the way these causes influenced his speech. (2) He can be asked to check in several dictionaries a list of terms and to write a report on the ways in which status labels are used and the impact of his findings on his view of the function of a dictionary. (3) He can be asked to write an essay on, say, Addison's style. In all likelihood he has had little experience in the analysis of prose—beyond perhaps the acquisition of a few presumably useful terms like 
*sparse, sublime, impassioned,* and *dyspeptic.* Now he can be directed to consider such matters as these: (1) sentence length and the ways in which sentences of various lengths are distributed; (2) the extent to which Addison adheres to normal sentence patterns, what patterns are most common, and what transformations are called into play; (3) the kinds of sentence modifiers used and their location; (4) the brevity or expansiveness of nominal elements; (5) the kinds of connectives used. Such an assignment, useful in itself, becomes more interesting when a similar analysis is made of a more contemporary writer and the results of the two analyses are compared. The student can also be invited to analyze his own style. In such a language course he can experience inductive learning.

We have proved that an important message plus the determination to deliver it can result in the message getting through. At the first meeting of the CEE, which took place in 1963 at Indiana University, there were relatively few people from English departments present. In 1968, a great many more English departments were there—speaking, listening, getting ready to bring back the word to their departments.

The program for training teachers of English can be what the members of the profession want it to be—if the members of the profession are willing to work to have their convictions prevail. Peter Schrag's *Voices in the Classroom: Public Schools and Public Attitudes* reminds us that the schools of a community are what the power structure of that community wants them to be. Should not the nation's programs for training English teachers reflect the ETPS Guidelines? Should not these programs reflect our wishes?