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## NCTE Presidential Address: Dreams and Realities

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THE National Council of Teachers of English was founded in Chicago in 1911. It began as a dream, and as dreams usually do, it had a very solid base of reality in that long-ago time. A committee appointed by the English Section of the National Education Association to protest against the narrowness of the system of examinations given by the National Board for Uniform Entrance Examinations for College offered a motion which passed at the San Francisco meeting of the NEA. The purpose of the new group was to consider the initiating of a more diversified program fitted to the needs of all students in secondary schools. As a reality NCTE began in the high school section of NEA. In the minds of its founders there was the dream—the hope and aspirations of a handful of visionary men—to democratize and make more realistic our subject, English.

Let me digress for a moment. What is a dream? The psychologists tell us a dream is the conscious series of images that occur during sleep. They are consistent in style, complexity, and content with the educational and cultural attributes of our waking life. They reflect our age and general maturity. Dreams are usually concerned less with present realities than projections of the future based on the past. This conception is not greatly at odds with the supernaturalistic notion that dreams read the future.

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The psychologists also tell us that dreaming serves a twofold function: biological and psychological. The contradiction between these functions is more apparent than real. Biologically, people dream in order to remain asleep. Psychologically, as is becoming increasingly understood, people dream in order to become more fully awake.

Much of what we know about dreams comes from Freud, but it was Jung who suggested that dreams have a psychological function. "Conscious mind," he said, "in its one-sided attention to the practicalities of everyday life, tends to become insulated from the unconscious mind and its preoccupation with the deeper issues of human meaning. The unconscious tends, therefore, to exert a corrective or compensating influence on consciousness whenever the two are brought into direct contact. The psychological function of dreaming is to bring about such contact." We have, then, biological and psychological needs to dream while asleep.

We also have need to dream while awake. The conscious, intelligent mind has hope and aspirations which give meaning to life. The human organism is goal directed, a vital aspect of its being.

Just as individuals have dreams, so, too, do organizations. The National Council of Teachers of English has long had the dream of being a democratic fellowship of those who teach the English language arts. It was one of the first national associations to insist that its offices and its convention facilities be open to all members, regardless of race or religion. Although its first official action to insure democracy for all of its members was not taken until 1941, the antecedent of that action goes back much earlier. By today's social standards and interpretation of law the early meetings of the Council in southern cities—Chattanooga in 1922, Memphis in 1932, and Atlanta in 1941—were outrageous indeed. But at the 1941 convention the Council adopted a resolution against undemocratic convention sites, supporting its long standing custom of free, democratic activities within its ranks. This policy was reaffirmed at conventions in 1945, 1949, and 1957. The final loophole for undemocratic behavior was plugged in 1964 when the Board of Directors mandated that membership in all associations affiliated with the Council be completely open. Within two years all affiliates had satisfied the new requirement. NCTE, which began as a dream, realized its aspiration of becoming one of the first national associations to achieve democracy in its activities. But like the temporal thing that it is, this dream must continually be examined, safeguarded, cherished. This we owe ourselves.

### *The School and the Cities*

Today our great cities and the schools in these cities are in trouble. Only lately have we as a nation and NCTE as an organization recognized the malady. The Council's first systematic and penetrating look at the problems of our cities and debilitations of poverty occurred in 1965 with the Task Force Report on *Language Programs for the Disadvantaged*. As pioneering as that study was, it must now represent only the first in a long series of major efforts which the Council must make if the dream of its founders fifty-nine years ago to provide English programs for all of the children is to be realized.

Through the work of the newly formed Inter-Commission Committee on the Social and Cultural Problems of the Schools and the Profession, the Council hopes to marshal its forces to work on these problems. The committee, which

held its second meeting during this convention, will attempt to do several things: it will attempt to initiate its own projects in this area; it will attempt to coordinate the current efforts of Council committees and commissions and spur each of these groups on to further and more productive efforts; it will attempt to communicate to the Council membership all that is being done and whatever ideas there are about what might be done; it will prepare, coordinate, and publish materials for the profession; and it hopes to influence grant-making agencies and the public at large for greater support in attacking this largest and most critical of all problems facing the total profession at this time—not just English teachers, but all teachers.

The Inter-Commission Committee will focus on three areas. It hopes that the Council members individually, and as formally organized groups will also accept these as their own challenges: teacher preparation, in order that teaching may improve and become more relevant to today's world; educational strategies, the means and methods by which we teach; curriculum, which it has defined as the functional, viable, relevant, flexible educational procedures used in teaching, including all educational structures, models, supporting personnel, and objects and subjects of study. The charge to this committee indeed is a large one, but the dream it will pursue is not a new one.

#### *A Relevant Curriculum*

One of the first major tasks which the Council took on after its inception was the preparation of an English curriculum, in cooperation with the secondary school section of the NEA, the National Board for Uniform Entrance Requirements in English, the National Speech Association, and the Conference on Public Speaking of New England and the North Atlantic States. Under the chairmanship of James F. Hosis, the committee produced the famous curriculum bulletin called *The Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools*, an attempt to relate English teaching in the high school to the lives of all people. Subsequent reports of this sort include *The Place of English in American Life* (1925), *An Experience Curriculum in English* (1935), *A Correlated Curriculum* (1935), *Conducting Experiences in English* (1939), and the five volumes sponsored by the Commission on the Curriculum, beginning with *The English Language Arts* in 1952 and ending with *The Teaching of College English* in 1965. The dream of a relevant curriculum is not a new one, but a continuing one.

#### *A New Focus on Reading*

During the nearly sixty years of its existence the Council has been less concerned with the teaching of the skill of reading than with other dimensions of the total English language arts program. It has really published only two volumes on the subject: *Teaching High School Students To Read*, in 1937, and *Reading in an Age of Mass Communication*, in 1949. But the Council has long held that reading is not a skill to be taught in isolation from the oral and written language of children. The experts in our ranks now say that reading should be related to *all* the language arts. Over the years the Council has concerned itself with what children read, with independent reading, with programs in literature, and with providing the best available reading matter. It has fended off fetters of censorship. It has given continued attention to the relationship of reading instruction to total language development in children.

Now the dream has been augmented: the proposal for the creation of a

permanent Commission on Reading in the Schools, presented to the Executive Committee on Tuesday, and approved by the Board of Directors this morning heralds the Council's entrance in the entire reading instruction arena. We will share our dream of raising in the next several years the reading level of all of the children with other professional organizations and with the U. S. Office of Education.

### *Teacher Education Needs*

While the Council has spent fifty years attempting to improve the teaching of English, it did not publish any monographs devoted exclusively to teacher education until the appearance of an annotated bibliography in 1957 and *The Education of American Teachers for American Schools and Colleges* in 1963. There was a normal school section of the Council from 1911 to 1928 and a teachers college section from 1929 to 1941. But a determined, consistent effort in teacher education was long in coming. Among the first efforts were those directed at weak state certification requirements which permitted teachers with little or no preparation in English to teach the subject in the schools. The Committee on the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of English alerted national and state groups to this problem. The task is only beginning. Much remains to be done.

The 1961 report on *National Interest and the Teaching of English* directed national attention to the fact that half of the English classes in the secondary school were taught by individuals lacking undergraduate majors in the subject. A subsequent *National Interest* report showed that most teachers of English-as-a-second-language were also inadequately prepared.

NCTE's role in the first College Entrance Examination Board Institutes and in federally supported institutes were major developments directed toward teacher education. In 1963 an exploratory conference was held which led a year later to the creation of the Conference on English Education, now a major division of the Council.

The English Teacher Preparation Study of 1965, resulting in the publication in October 1967 of *Guidelines for the Preparation and Certification of Elementary and Secondary Teachers of English* was the realization of another dream.

There were realities along the way which had to be considered. Much of the Council's efforts have had to be devoted to conditions influencing the teaching of English. The excessive load of the English teacher; the continuing battle against censorship and the treatment of controversial issues in the classroom; and the problem of teaching English during periods of social upheaval, such as the several wars and eras of repression of thought, are examples. The dream is still aborning as we bring our talents to bear on the plight of our cities and great groups of our people debilitated by poverty and social unconcern.

### *Some Enemies of the Dream*

For a moment or two I'd like for you to look with me at some enemies of this dream.

One of the teacher's primary jobs is to provide students with tools and skills for learning, for problem solving. Now he is faced with problems for which he has no tools or skills. He is used to rational powers. Now he deals with people who have no commitment to or belief in rational processes. He is supposed to determine cause and effect. Now the relationship eludes the educator because students' effects come from causes with which he is not familiar.

Many teachers are aware of the inadequacy of human institutions. The lack of faith, the questioning attitude, the disregard for tradition give evidence that we live in a supremely irrational time. What is rational is local and specific. What is partially rational is proximate. What is totally irrational is pervasive. If education is to be relevant, it must address itself to the basic question of rationality. We can begin with the dream that any problem made by man is soluble by man. Nothing is now being done that did not come out of human desire and intelligence. For the time being we have to view irrationality as an enemy of the dream.

I've said this before: we teachers of English don't have a corner on the market of irrationality, nor do we have an unlimited stockpile of solutions to the problems. Because so much of the world's work and because the possibility for individual advancement in this world depend on linguistic ability, the value of education and the type of education which should be offered to children is undergoing a rigorous search. Whereas education once served as a means for ascending the cultural, social, and economic ladders in our society, it is now frequently viewed as a bar to upward mobility. The insistence today on maximum education as a prerequisite for the most unskilled of jobs represents an insurmountable barrier to the less privileged among us. We have become a credential society. Our credential myopia has led us to believe that one's educational attainment is more important than what he can do, is more important than the person himself.

I think we need a new dream: of an educational program in the English language arts, not with the emphasis of the past decade, but with an emphasis for today's and tomorrow's world. A crucial element in this program will be the building of bridges to reach those members of our society who now are not in the social and cultural mainstream and who do not view education as a sure and swift elevator. The locus of this program, I hazard, will be a new approach to language. Through the study of language psychologists hope to discover the psychology of man. Through a focus on language, I think we educators will discover how to educate man.

I hope that our commitment to such a new program will not be Augustinian. As you probably know, as a young man in one of his prayers, St. Augustine asked, "Oh, Lord, make me chaste. But not yet." I am asking—now!

#### *Publishers: Enemies or Allies?*

Let's look at another enemy of the dream, but potentially a powerful ally. I refer to publishers and textbooks.

Elementary and high school students annually use some 250 million textbooks. During his school period a child will either commit to memory or attempt to absorb 32,000 textbook pages. By the time he is graduated from high school he will have intensively studied sixty-five or more books. Up to 75 per cent of the child's classroom time and 90 per cent of his homework time will be centered around textbooks. More than any other factor the textbook determines what our children study and to a large extent how well they learn. Texts available are both astonishingly good and unspeakably bad. Some few are as exciting as murder mysteries, others as dull as municipal sewer bond announcements. Some reflect the role and concerns of all groups in our society. Others—too many—are so WASPish and racist that they strain our credibility.

My object, however, is not to point a finger. I should like to ask that we

go on record wishing to make allies of the publishers, to invite them to make an ally of the National Council of Teachers of English to do battle in getting the best of all possible textbooks to all of the children. Here are some representative problems on which we might help. Our efforts, primarily, must be directed toward preventing censorship, either externally applied or self-imposed by the publisher. But we also must be more effective and adamant in informing publishers what we must have in the texts we use.

If a publisher decides to put out a new elementary reading series for Grades 1-6, he may spend as much as three million dollars developing these texts. His investment is considerable and hence he will do many things a trade publisher would not do in order to make sure he gets his money back. This means he will censor his own books if he thinks some passages may hurt sales. He will submit to censorship from outside sources, if the potential market is big enough. He will fail to insert the latest teaching methods if he feels that the majority of teachers, his customers, are not ready to accept them. Publishers say frankly that when they try to do innovative things they often suffer a blood bath, frequently drawn by teachers themselves.

You will find no mention of the word *evolution* in most elementary school science series, because of the objections of religious fundamentalists. You will not find Shakespeare's *Othello* in most hard-bound high school English anthologies because of the fear they could not sell in the South. You frequently will not find the *Merchant of Venice* because of the fear of Jewish protest. You will find two editions of many textbooks which have identical texts but different illustrations: one a multi-ethnic edition with pictures of white and Negro children playing together; the other, disparagingly called the "mint-julep" edition, shows only white children.<sup>1</sup> But let us be fair on this point: in this country we have lived in a caste society for three and a half centuries. Textbook publishers, like teachers, for most of this time, behaved like the rest of the population. In fact, they may have even been ahead of many other mass media. It has been only one or two years since Negroes have appeared in advertisements on our network television, and we might well ask how long has it been that black faces have appeared in magazines of general circulation?

While publishers have, on occasion, withstood outside pressure, their courage very often is measured by the size of the market involved—and some markets can exert tremendous pressure. Texas and California are the great state censors of American textbooks. Texas employs a state screening committee and has one of the biggest state adoption systems in the country. The sales to Texas can mean hundreds of thousands of dollars to a textbook publisher. Because the state controls the textbooks the schools can buy, the state can also demand that publishers make changes. Every publisher who submits a textbook for adoption must agree to make whatever changes the State Board of Education demands, or forfeit the sale of the text. In addition, the authors of texts sold in Texas must sign loyalty oaths. In all fairness to California and Texas, nineteen other states, with variations on state adoption plans, determine what, to a large extent, is published.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> An editor-in-chief for a major textbook publisher cautions that such behavior on the part of publishers, while commonplace a few years ago, is rare today. However, he did agree that in some instances school purchasing units might still buy an older segregated text in preference to new integrated editions.

<sup>2</sup> Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New

Publishers find advantages and disadvantages to state-adoption plans. A major adoption may mean that a publisher has invested wisely in a new text. But one book per grade regulations, as well as restricting a child's education, may prevent the sale of supplementary learning materials. They certainly prevent multiple text adoptions, the adoption of learning systems, and the acceptance of coordinated text plans. What publishers really need help with is a liberalizing of state adoption systems, with wider parameters to accommodate today's broader view of what are adequate learning materials.<sup>3</sup>

But publishers also censor and emasculate pieces of literature for their own reasons. In their study of English textbooks—no longer new, but the best we have—Evans and Lynch found that otherwise excellent selections were often compromised either by drastic cutting or by revision and adaptation. These treatments, amounting in some cases to mayhem, were found by their study: *Julius Caesar* appeared in a tenth-grade anthology with some five hundred lines, about a fifth of the play, silently removed. Whittier's poem, "Snowbound," appeared in eleven of the anthologies they examined, but nowhere was it intact. In one of the volumes, all of the persons who people the world of this poem, and whose experiences and character in fact make the poem, are deleted. There was no one to be "snowbound." They found in a special school edition of Shakespeare's plays that Macbeth's famous "She should have died hereafter" appeared as "She should have died later on." Anthony's famous "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears" appeared as "Friends, Romans, countrymen, listen to me"; Romeo's farewell to Juliet, "Dry sorrow drinks our blood" is transformed into "thus sorrow drains our blood." Shirley Jackson's short story, "The Lottery," was included in a unit called "America Is Neighborly"—though the characters in this story surely must be among the least neighborly neighbors in all fiction.

Another publisher brought out an American literature anthology for eleventh-grade students. At one point the editor dared to include the successful Broadway play, "Raisin in the Sun," portraying the anguish and bigotry a Negro family faces when it attempts to move into an all white suburb. The editor began to think about the sales resistance his firm would meet when it tried to sell the anthology in certain communities. He solved the problem by substituting a TV drama for "Raisin in the Sun." It didn't matter that the play had been made into a popular movie and subsequently appeared on television.<sup>4</sup>

So much for a sampling of problems in publishing textbooks. My dream here simply is that in the very near future we more closely align the publishers' sincere but profit-making purposes with our best not-for-profit efforts in devising a better-than-before educational program for our society.

### *Teachers and Textbooks*

Let me make an additional point: you know, and I know, that depending on

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Mexico, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Indiana, West Virginia, Oregon, Utah, Idaho, Arizona, and Alabama.

<sup>3</sup>It should be pointed out that city-wide adoption by one of our larger cities might result in larger purchases than some state adoptions. For this reason city-wide adoptions represent a powerful influence, for both good and evil.

<sup>4</sup>These examples were taken from a "Report of the Textbook Seminar," co-sponsored by the American Educational Publishers Institute and The National Council for the Advancement of Education Writing held in Dallas, Texas, June 30, 1963.

the teacher's point of view—his biases and his prejudices—the most democratic statements can become a call for bigotry; and an outlandishly slanted viewpoint can become an object lesson in the democratic process. It bears underlining that as we ask other groups to refurbish their institutions, we subject ourselves, as a profession, to the most rigorous housecleaning possible.

The report of the Task Force on Racism and Bias in the Teaching of English, approved today by the Board of Directors, should be eminently helpful in working with the public, with publishers, and with teachers alike.

### *Teachers and Their Students*

One final dream-reality: teachers and their students.

Dr. William Glasser, a psychiatrist in Los Angeles who works with the Los Angeles and Palo Alto public schools, last year described to the Department of Elementary School Principals the unintentional inhumanity of teachers. He said then:

I was working with a group of about thirty teachers a couple of years ago in the Los Angeles city schools. I was talking about the idea that maybe we shouldn't fail anyone and the teachers were listening kind of haphazardly. The idea struck them as funny. One teacher finally couldn't contain herself any longer, and she said, "Dr. Glasser, you've *got* to fail a few kids." I said, "What grade do you teach?" She said, "First grade." Those little beady-eyed kids, about two feet off the ground—she's teaching them, and she said you've *got* to fail them!

I said, "Well, does it help the children to fail them?"

"No, no, no. It makes them feel miserable."

So then I said, "You've got a principal, a real tough principal who says, 'Look, you've got to fail some kids to keep up the school's standards.'"

"No, my principal is not that way at all. It would be fine with him if I passed everyone."

"So you are doing it for their parents. Do they have the kind of parents who really want to know if they have a failure early in life, so they can prepare for it? Six years old!"

"No," she said, "the parents aren't like that."

By this time I had run out of reasons, so I said, "Well, you're doing it for America; you think it's good for your country." She didn't understand this and there wasn't anything more I could do then. She is convinced that if you have thirty kids in a class, you fail three or four of them every semester. It's hard, it's very hard on those who fail. Yet, this is the kind of philosophy that seems to prevail in our schools: that somehow or other we can teach children how to succeed by failing them.<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Glasser also bears repeating on children's success:

<sup>5</sup>"The Effect of School Failure on the Life of a Child," Part I. *The National Elementary Principal*, 49 (September 1969) 8-18. Copyright 1969, Department of Elementary School Principals, National Education Association. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission.



If you were to examine yourself and conclude that you were a success, you would find that you followed two basic pathways—success-need pathways—that led you to be able to make that identification of yourself. The pathway leading to identity is the pathway of love. Practically everyone whose identity is success has someone who cares for him, someone who loves him. Equally important, he has an ability himself to care for someone else. If we are on the success pathway, we believe that what we are doing in the world is worthwhile. We have some confidence that others in the world also believe that what we are doing is worthwhile—not everybody and not all the time, but *generally*.

The other pathway Dr. Glasser defines as the pathway of withdrawal, where children have no identity, and where their behavior becomes either seriously or mildly antisocial. He points out that children in the Watts School where he works, though viewed as coming from inadequate home backgrounds, really have as their major problem a lack of identity. To sum up his point:

Identity is the basic human need. All of us, no matter who we are, have this basic need to identify ourselves as somebody, as separate, unique, distinct human beings—our self image, our self-concept, whatever you want to call it. There is nothing complicated about this. It's *me* in distinction to *you*, and *you* in distinction to *me*. From the time we are born until the time we die, we struggle to gain and to maintain for ourselves this feeling as an identified person; we are somebody.

The dream, as I see it, is that we as a profession give to children, not take from them, their identity.

#### *A Final Look at One Night's Dreams*

Psychologists say that most of us dream perhaps four times during the night, usually about fifteen minutes each time. I have not quite used the allotted time, but I have offered you four dreams, quite enough for one evening. Let me restate them:

- (1) The dream that the National Council of Teachers of English become all that its founders hoped that it would become, and all that those leaders who have followed them have attempted, for bestowing and preserving our legacy of language and letters; for influencing the direction of teacher education and the curriculum. I have asked that in Goethe's words we "dream no small dreams, for they have no power to move the hearts of men"; in our convention theme I have asked that we

Hold fast to dreams  
 For if dreams die  
 Life is a broken-winged bird  
 That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams  
 For when dreams go  
 Life is a barren field  
 Frozen with snow.<sup>6</sup>

—Langston Hughes

<sup>6</sup>From Langston Hughes, "Dreams" in *The Dream Keeper*. Copyright, by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1932, 1966. Reprinted by permission.

- (2) I have asked that in spite of the worst of times we close the distance between our dreams for the schools and the children in them, and the results of our efforts.
- (3) My dream includes making an ally of the publishers who forge our basic tool, the textbook.
- (4) And finally, I have asked that we close the gap between the means and the methods by which we teach, and the ends for which we teach; to make the best human beings possible of the children and youth in our classes, to give them their identity—an improved means to an improved end.

In the Middle East there is a legend about a spindly little sparrow who is lying on his back in the middle of the road. A horseman comes by, dismounts, and asks the sparrow what on earth he is doing lying there upside down like that. "I heard the heavens were going to fall today," said the sparrow. "Oh?" said the horseman, "And I suppose your puny little legs can hold up the heavens?" "One does what one can," said the sparrow, "one does what one can."

Dream as we will, try as we will, our efforts may only be bird-like in their effect. But one must—NCTE must!—do what one can!

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*A Resolution Passed by the National Council of Teachers  
of English at the Fifty-ninth Annual Meeting, 1969*

## ON THE NEED FOR COURSES REFLECTING THE CULTURAL AND ETHNIC PLURALITY OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

**BACKGROUND:** Preparation of teachers of English is still, in many instances, predicated on the assumption that the English program in the schools should be designed to introduce students to only one cultural heritage and to only one society. The National Council of Teachers of English should vigorously question that assumption whenever and wherever it appears. Specifically, the National Council should advocate that programs for teacher preparation should include courses in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural approaches to the teaching of English. Be it therefore

*Resolved,* That the National Council of Teachers of English, acting through all of its appropriate commissions and committees and related professional organizations, contribute to the design and implementation of courses which will reflect the cultural and ethnic plurality which exists in American society today and that the National Council of Teachers of English should work actively to educate its members and the total American community to an understanding that social dialect is not an index of intelligence, capability, or learning ability.

*And be it further Resolved,* That the National Council of Teachers of English affirm that the Urban Teacher Corps is a constructive force that is already contributing to the design and implementation of courses which reflect cultural and ethnic plurality and that the National Council of Teachers of English use its resources and personnel to effect continued funding of the Urban Teacher Corps programs and to win additional funding to make the Corps available in more urban areas of the United States.