

English Courses Said Poorly Presented in Many Schools of Nation

Full Dimensions Of Growing Crisis Now Documented

By LOUIS CASSELS
UPI Correspondent

Take an inadequate number of teachers, most of whom are ill-trained for the task. Ask them to teach the most basic subject in the school curriculum, under conditions ranging from bad to impossible. If you think that is a formula for educational disaster, you need wonder no longer why Johnny can't read, write, spell, phrase or punctuate.

The reason is that he is being taught English under precisely those circumstances. Colleges, employers, parents and others closely associated with America's high school graduates have long been aware that something was horrendously wrong with their preparation in English.

But the full dimensions of this growing crisis in literacy have only now been documented.

The documentation is a 140-page report issued by the National Council of Teachers of English.

No False Alarms
The council is an old and prestigious organization, not given to raising false alarms. Its report is soberly worded, backed up by extensive surveys, heavily laden with statistics.

Its conclusions should be terrifying to any citizen who knows that American students spend more time on English than any other subject; that two of the "3 R's" are included in the subject; and that a mastery of his native language is the one indispensable skill that any person should be expected to bring away from a process called education.

Just how poorly English is presently being taught in many U.S. elementary and high schools is dramatized by two statistics in the report.

1. Last year, of 600,000 high school graduates who took college entrance examinations, 150,000 flunked English.

2. More than two-thirds of America's college and universities now find it necessary to offer remedial courses in English to incoming freshmen.

Several Reasons
The council pinpointed several reasons for the poor quality of English instruction. First, there is a chronic shortage of teachers who meet state certification requirements for teaching English in high school. A survey indicated the demand for such teachers outran the supply by 27 per cent.

Second, many of the teachers who do meet state certification requirements are actually ill-prepared in English. The average state requires only 18 semester hours of college credit in English (three courses) to qualify as a high school English teacher. Sixteen states will settle for one college course beyond freshman English.

A survey by the council indicated that about half of the men and women now teaching English in U.S. high schools do not themselves have a college major in English. (The percentage ranged from 40 in some states to 60 in others.)

Colleges engaged in preparing teachers could help the situation by requiring more

of their graduates than bare compliance with state certification standards. But the council's studies clearly indicate that few teacher-training institutes are going a good job of preparing English teachers. To cite just one hair-raising statistic, only 17 per cent of the colleges require a course in modern grammar of graduates who are preparing to teach high school English.

Preparation Inadequate
Summarizing the situation, the council says that the preparation of English teachers is "seriously inadequate" and "the great body of teachers now in English classrooms"

are "simply not equipped" to deal with the subject properly. That would be bad enough. But there is more. Even the most highly qualified English teachers are not able to teach effectively under the overcrowded conditions which exist in many U.S. schools. The average English teacher carries a "teaching load" of 150 to 200 students daily, whereas the council says 100 is a maximum for good teaching.

Perhaps the greatest single weakness, however, is the chaotic condition of the English curriculum. Thousands of separate school districts plan

their own English courses, with little coordination between elementary and high schools, between high schools and colleges, or even between one grade and the next.

A hodge-podge of assorted courses bear the name English (California has 217 such courses in its public schools) and the really important studies—language, literature and composition—tend to get lost in a profusion of peripheral studies.

The council concluded that the outlook is desperate, and can be relieved only by a massive national program such as Congress adopted, in the National Defense Education act, to improve the teaching of science and mathematics.

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COLD WEATHER EXERCISE—Sp/5 Daniel Sowers of Alameda, Calif., leads a camouflage patrol through woods 150 miles inland from Anchorage, Alaska, during the United States Army's cold weather training exercise "Willow Freeze". Behind Sowers are M/Sgt. Melvin Keoppel of Fresno, Calif., and Pfc. James Corneau, San Francisco. Some 7,000 men are taking part in the exercise. (UPI Telephoto)

Small Worlds Around Us

By Lynn W. Watkins
(Register & Tribune Syndicate, 1961)

Wasps Anesthetize Victims. Use Them Later

Induced anesthesia to render a patient unconscious, was practiced by some insects millions of years before man discovered it. Chief among these lower creatures are the wasps and the spiders, and their motives, of course, are different from ours.

Certain species of wasp have perfected the technique to a really high degree, even injecting enough of the material to render the victim incapable of the slightest motion, and leaving the victim in a state of helplessness for indefinite periods.

The common mud-dauber wasp uses this technique in her daily life. On her ability to inject the proper amount and in the right place, depends the welfare and future of her offspring.

Deposited in Crypt
The female wasp seeks small spiders to anesthetize and deposit in a small earthen crypt of her own making, so that her offspring will have fresh food when they emerge from the egg. She has to possess a certain, instinctive knowledge of the anatomy of her intended victim. She must know just where to make the injection, as her victim must not be killed, but merely rendered incapable of the slightest movement.

The insect victim of course, resists, and no two victims are exactly the same size. But with unerring instinct she plunges her hypodermic needle into the victim just back of the head. When the victim stops its struggles the wasp delivers other stings or injections. The prey now becomes limp and helpless, but is still alive.

Into the farthest corner of the mud-capsule she has made, she stuffs the helpless victims. They are the living dead. There in silence and abject helplessness they await the hatching of the wasp's egg, carefully placed and neatly sealed in the capsule.

Task Complete
With this final gesture she flies away, instinctively knowing that her task is complete, that she has built a nursery and has stocked it with the proper food. Also, she must be confident that she has administered just the proper amount of anesthesia to hold the captive spiders in a state of unconsciousness until the proper time.

Spiders that might come out from under the influence of the drug before the wasp babies hatch would, in their frantic struggles to escape, probably kill the tiny wasp larvae.

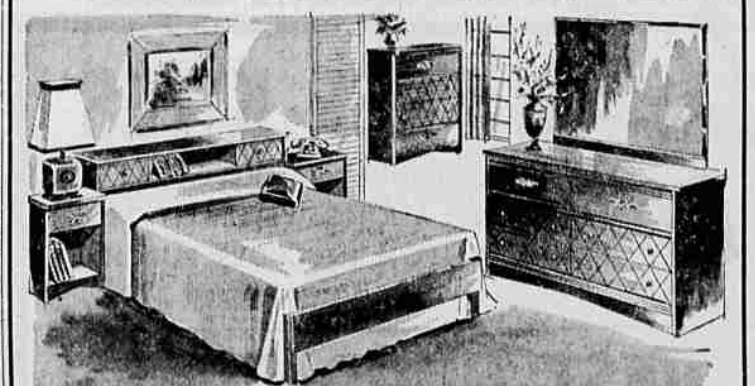
Strangely, the "dose" is always right; the insensible insects, regardless of how long they must wait for the egg's hatching, are incapable of the slightest motion, yet they live. They are the food that will give the wasp babies the strength to break out of the earthen crypt and fly away as adult wasps.

Unlike the human patient undergoing surgery, and insensible to pain because of the injection of an anesthetic, the wasp's victims have no future. They are forever suspended in a great void of insensibility until the final end and then there is nothing.

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