

A STUDY OF THE STATUS OF COMPOSITION  
IN KANSAS HIGH SCHOOLS

by

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## INTRODUCTION

## A Contrast

You look out into the traffic-congested street where may be seen numberless automobiles of varying makes and models. Your eye catches sight of the latest model of an expensive make, dashing down the street. A stop is made at a traffic signal, the driver has the car effectively under control to do his will. He may wish to move at a snail's pace through a beautifully landscaped part, or he may need, as in the case of a physician, lightning speed. Either is his to command, even though he may know nothing of the delicate adjustments and the intricate devices composing its mechanism.

To the average individual English composition is a thing to be used rather than understood. Composition, just as the car takes a person where he desires to go, affords an utilitarian device for achieving those things sought by the driver. To some a knowledge of technical grammar is essentially necessary, but for the large majority such is not the case. From this larger group demands are less exacting. Those demands that are made are with the idea of fitting an actual situation, and hence the grammar usage of the majority must be practical as opposed to the theoretical.

The truth of this contention is expressed by the National Joint Committee on English (1917) in its bulletin, "The Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools", which says, "A sane attitude toward the teaching of grammar would seem to be to find out what parts and aspects of the subject have actual value to children in enabling them to improve their speaking, writing and reading to teach these parts according to modern, scientific methods, and to ignore any and all portions of the conventional grammar that fall outside these categories. In general, the grammar worth teaching is the grammar of use...Language, it is well known, is learned mainly by imitation, largely unconscious, and children constantly use in their speech hundreds of expressions, many of them highly idiomatic, which only the linguistic scholar, familiar with the history of the language, can explain.

Children should be set to the examination only of those grammatical forms and constructions whose use they can plainly see, and they should pursue such examination with the conscious purpose of learning to make better sentences. Any other aim is mere pedantry....."

### Criticisms of Teaching of English

An ever-greatening stigma is being fastened upon the high schools of the country by those in the business world and by colleges and universities, whose cry usually centers on the general idea that graduates of high schools are not able to express their thoughts clearly and concisely; furthermore, that they are unfamiliar with grammar essentials, are poor spellers, and that they have only a fragmentary knowledge of punctuation.

That the condition exists can not be denied, and consequently the criticisms made by people of the business world and of the colleges are not without their foundation. To learn more definitely the status of English instruction in the high schools of Kansas, and if possible to suggest aims and objectives which will help improve the existing situation is the purpose of this paper.

### A Criticism by Teachers

A criticism that is often made by the teacher of English in the average-sized high school in Kansas is that the teaching of English in the various years of secondary

education lacks co-ordination. That is to say, in the high school where more than two English teachers are employed all too often either a poor working organization exists or there is a lack of understanding between teachers of what subject matter is being dealt with by other teachers. For example, a portion of the eleventh grade class may have been given very specific details in the preparation of outlines, while in the tenth grade, and another group in the same class may have been given only fragmentary instruction in this phase of English, if any at all, as sometimes is the case.

The situation arising is one that may be dealt with by the eleventh grade teacher in one of a number of ways. First she may stop the class to explain the necessary steps in making of outlines; second, home work may be assigned for those not having had sufficient instruction; or third, she may omit entirely this instruction. Too many times the latter method is pursued. The illustration carries over into considerations of other items of English instruction, in which parallel illustrations can be cited.

Steps for the improvement of this situation can be taken readily by the superintendent and principal of the school. A definite codifying of the English course during secondary school can be worked out and the teachers of the subject familiarised with the entire program. By eliminating the teacher who is not conscientious in her work, and

who will not take the time to find out what other teachers of English in the school are doing, much can be done to clear the situation.

### The Need of Improvement

That there is need for improvement in the knowledge of English diction high school graduates have upon entrance in college is learned from any college instructor in freshman rhetoric. This college teacher of English will tell you that a large majority of the entering freshman group will recognize "A dull, foggy day came" as a sentence. At least half the group, however, will be in doubt about "Came a dull, foggy day". They will not know whether these words constitute a true sentence or not. This college instructor will tell you that a surprisingly large number of the freshman group will say that "Disposed of easily" is a true sentence because it begins with a capital letter. This instructor will tell you that all too many of the group will not understand items of case, and will have little conception of pronoun agreement. Furthermore, you will be told that they will paragraph three paragraphs of unrelated thoughts in one long, rambling group of unrelated lines. If you have not already heard enough, he will tell you that in addition the college freshman can not spell.

It is to be remembered that in the above the average college freshman are spoken of. It is they who have come

to college with a reasonable expectation of making something of themselves. They have come to college, but they can not write a page of the English language without errors of the type mentioned above. But they will awaken to their shortcomings, and the fact that unless they master the requirements in rhetoric they will fail their college English. In turn they will return to the high school of their graduation and lament the fact to a confidant, perhaps the teacher of English, that they did not study harder while in attendance at high school. These students will comment on the vast difference between high school and college work. They have undergone a metamorphosis; and now begins the students' task of gaining that information they should have learned as students in high school.

#### Gathering Material

Material for this thesis was for the most part gathered by means of a questionnaire which was sent to about sixty representative high schools of the state. Schools were selected in first, second and third class cities. The majority of replies were made from schools in the central part of the state, although many of them came from more remote portions. In most instances questionnaires were sent to the principal of the school who asked the head of the department of English to fill them out. The response was particularly gratifying. Considering the fact that the school year was

nearly ended, a few questionnaires were taken directly to the high school teacher in towns surrounding Manhattan. This means was taken in order to be sure to have a number of replies as a working basis.

The questions asked were developed as a result of four years of teaching experience. They were based on the writer's knowledge of the likes and dislikes of high school students in their work in English. Behind each question was the principle of determining if possible the cause of deficiencies among college freshmen in rhetoric. Throughout, an attempt has been made to give an impartial point of view:

The questionnaire used for this thesis is as follows:

1. How many years of English are given?
2. What courses in English are offered the fourth year?
3. Are the suggestions contained in the State Course of Study workable and practical when put into actual classroom use?
4. Are its suggestions of benefit to you?
5. What changes, if any, would you recommend in its content?
6. During what years is grammar review in verb form and in the following given?
7. Errors in tense?
8. Pronoun agreement?
9. Gerunds, participles, infinitives?
10. How many themes are required during one semester?
11. Is the pupil asked to correct his own paper after it has been written in final draft?
12. Are pupils asked to correct papers of other pupils during classroom time?



13. What per cent of papers are thus graded?
14. Is practice in writing given as a disciplinary or as inspirational exercises?
15. What is the length of the average written paper?
16. Are errors common to a large per cent of the class discussed before the group?
17. How many exercises are given in the preparation of outlines?
18. Do your classes have the use of blackboards?
19. How often are they used during one week?
20. Are English classes grouped according to ability rating?
21. Is any special effort made to adapt English instruction to the backward pupils?
22. Are you able to bring home influences to bear for the betterment of grammar deficiencies?
23. Have you any special methods for improving students' grammar?
24. Do you use commercial drill exercises for grammar review?
25. Are they effective?
26. How many exercises are given in descriptive writing?
27. How many exercises are given in narrative writing?
28. How many in exposition?      29. Argumentation?
30. How many lessons are devoted to the writing of paragraphs?
31. Unity?      32. Emphasis?      33. Coherence?
34. Editorials?      35. News stories?      36. Feature stories?
37. Short stories?      38. Plays?      39. Essays?
40. Business letters?      41. Letters of friendship?

42. Advertising?

43. Is the pupil permitted his own choice of subjects for written work?

44. Are pupils asked to write papers on vocational subjects in which they are interested?

45. Are they asked to write reports of their hobbies?

46. Are certain pupils asked to write special reports on subjects in which they are interested?

47. Are pupils who are expecting to enter college urged to elect the fourth year English course?

48. What special preparation is given those pursuing the college preparatory course?

49. Is there any differentiation in subject matter given those who are expecting to attend college and those who will stop at the completion of high school?

Name of school \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### THE PROBLEM

If, in the majority of high schools in Kansas, only one or possibly two years of instruction in English were offered there might be little trouble in tracing language and composition deficiencies to this source. Were this the only factor to make rhetoric instruction fall short of its aim of effective writing and clear thinking, immediate steps could be taken to introduce additional courses which would tend to reduce the criticism to a minimum. Such a step would tend, perhaps, to place instruction in English on a higher basis and would more nearly reach the ideal desired by institutions of higher learning.

The problem as it is presented, however, is that the majority of high schools in Kansas offer four years of English work, three of which are required in all schools. As many as 74.7 per cent of the schools making replies to the questionnaire used in working out a portion of the material for this thesis report offer four years of English. This leaves only 25.3 per cent of the schools replying which offer only the three years instruction.

#### The Popularity of Journalism

Upon further examination of the data gathered it is to be found that approximately 50 per cent of these schools offer courses in journalism during the fourth year. Grammar and composition courses, which rank next highest, show only 13.7 per cent, with English literature and public speech courses both ranking 10.4 per cent; American literature comes next with 8.6 per cent. For courses other than journalism such a small group reported offering courses treating grammar and composition that it can be seen little attention is devoted to this phase of English during the fourth year.

The following table shows the number and per cent of schools reporting as offering various courses in English:

Jour.	Gram. Comp.	Pub. Sp.	Eng. Lit.	Amer. Lit.	Cur. Lit.	De- bate	Short Story	Total
23	8	6	6	5	2	1	1	57
40.2%	13.7%	10.4%	10.4%	8.6%	3.4%	1.7%	1.7%	

Because only 13.7 per cent of the schools reporting offer grammar review, it would be unwise to draw the conclusion

that college freshmen are deficient in rhetoric as a result. While this may be one of the contributing factors, there are others which will be treated later in this paper. For the present the point made is sufficient in itself.

#### Grammar Review Emphasized During Tenth Grade

TABLE I. Showing the Grades in Which Grammar Review Is Given, Together with the Number of High Schools Reporting.

	Grade			
	9	10	11	12
Verb Form	10	15	10	8
Errors in Tense	9	13	13	7
Pronoun Agreement	8	12	10	7
Gerunds, Participles, Infinitives	7	10	9	7
	54	50	42	39

An examination of this table shows that grammar review is emphasized to a greater extent during the tenth grade, or the sophomore year. It will be seen, also, that the eleventh grade ranks next highest, with the ninth and twelfth following respectively in order. The twelfth year, it will be noticed, offers a smaller per cent of instruction in the items of the table than does any other year. This is true in part because English during the senior year is offered as an elective subject in most schools. Such courses are supplied when demand for them is created by sufficient students to warrant the giving of instruction in the course in which interest is apparent.

From the table the conclusion is to be drawn that school authorities place greatest emphasis on grammar review during years ten and eleven, feeling that at this time the greatest

amount of review drill is needed. If the frequencies of grammar review, as shown by the table, in grades ten and eleven are added, the total is 98. By adding the totals in the ninth and twelfth grades a combined total of 63 is obtained. By reducing these to percentages it is learned that 68.5 per cent more schools offer instruction during years ten and eleven than do during years nine and twelve.

In the ninth grade as compared to the twelfth 14.8 per cent more schools report giving grammar review during the former than did during the latter. The tenth grade shows 42 per cent, and the eleventh grade shows 31 per cent as compared to the twelfth.

Because in most high schools in Kansas review in grammar is given to the greatest extent during the tenth and eleventh years, a large per cent of students reach college rhetoric after the law of forgetting has been operating extensively. If fortunately they have taken the twelfth year of high school English, their knowledge of grammatical constructions is increasingly great. The problem with which the college instructor of rhetoric is confronted is that of dealing with these students who have not had this elective work during their last year of high school.

A greater problem confronts the high school teacher, however, for she has a less select group with which to work. She has to meet the criticism that is aimed at the high

school course in English by people in the business world and by institutions. Such criticism is usually made without taking into account some of the factors with which the English offerings in high school must cope.

#### Influences Outside the Classroom

Many influences outside the class room in high school make the teaching of English on an efficient basis the most difficult period of instruction. At the time the student may have as many as five or six different modes of expression, all of which tend to work against the type of expression he received in his class exercises. When he is with his "gang", an entirely different diction is used from that he uses in class. Again, at home his form of speech usually differs widely from that he would use at school. These influences and others, while operative at other periods than during class time, present unusual problems to the high school teacher. While these influences are seen during his years at college, they are not nearly so dominant. In order to draw conclusions as to the result of the influences felt outside the class room, and to determine the status of composition work in Kansas high schools a further consideration of the work that is being done in the schools of the state becomes essential.

#### The Number of Compositions Required

An examination of the data obtained regarding the

number of themes required during one semester in Kansas schools shows a wide variation. Two high schools report requiring as few as two. On the other extreme one reports as requiring 25. The majority of schools require one theme or composition a week. Fifteen of the 36 schools answering require this number; one reports 17; three report 15.

TABLE II. Shows the Number of Papers Required during One Semester and the Number of Schools Reporting.

Number of compositions	25	18	17	15	13	10	9	8	6	3
Number of schools reporting	1	15	1	3	4	7	1	1	3	2
Total	36									

The state course of study in English recommends that one written composition be required each week. Twenty-two of the 36 schools reporting are seen to be below that standard. In other words, 56 per cent of these schools are neglecting this provision in the instruction they give.

When a pupil has no more formal written papers to prepare than from three to ten during one semester, he is not receiving sufficient opportunity to put into practice those principles of rhetoric learned through his formal drill exercises. He is not being given an opportunity to co-ordinate his learning ability with his achievement ability, consequently, because few demands are made of him to write, he falls into a state of self-satisfaction and the false belief that he is an apt pupil in English.

The pupil may reason in this manner as is oft-times the case: "I have done all the work assigned me; my teacher has

praised my efforts; I got good grades; what else is there for me to do?" The situation is at best critical, for the student is laboring under the impression, either right or wrong, that he is learning all that he should about English. After graduation from high school, with the same mistaken idea concerning his ability in English, he ventures on to college. Here he finds life in general new and different. As concerns his aptness for rhetoric, only after he has had his first few set-backs in college English will his illusion break.

Practice work for composition writing must be more wide and varied than the efforts that each student makes in his own construction. There must be analysis of other people's work. It is obvious that a boy may learn better from an amusing example of an error printed in a book than from his own theme in which the teacher has marked a similar error.

#### Pupils Grade Papers of Others

Teachers of English are aware apparently of the truth mentioned in the preceding paragraph, for in 84.4 per cent of the schools reporting the pupil is asked to grade the papers of others. In this manner he becomes adept in finding the errors of others, and at the same time he is learning to eliminate errors that he unwittingly might make. Those mistakes of others are always more discernable than are one's own errors. The student is taught to be on the watch for



commendatory features in the papers of others, and in addition to formulate suggestions for the improvement of any portions that may be vague. Hence he is able to help the writer to improve, and also to improve his own writing.

Criticisms of the pupil's work, coming as they do from the members of the class rather than from the teacher, bring in a phase of social approval that the teacher could not otherwise aspire to achieve. If a piece of written material meets with the disapproval of his classmates, the writer perceives the necessity of improving his diction in order to win back class approval.

This practice, when under the direction of a capable teacher, affords the student of composition an experience that otherwise he could not hope to obtain. The teacher must be on the look-out for criticisms that are not of a constructive nature, and furthermore to suggest improvements as may seem necessary to points overlooked or stresses too lightly by the student who graded the paper. The class must be made to understand that criticisms made either by the student or the teacher are made solely for the purpose of bettering difficulties in diction among the students.

TABLE III. Percentage of Papers Graded by Pupils.

Number of schools reporting	2	1	7	1	5	3	1	4	2	1	3	4
Percentage of papers graded by students	100	60	50	40	35	20	15	10	5	5	2	0

The percentage of papers graded in the manner suggested

above varies widely in different schools over the state. The chart shows the percentage of papers graded by students in these schools making reports.

Four schools report that they have no confidence in having papers graded by pupils, and as a result do not follow this plan. The practice of the two schools which require the student to grade all papers is extreme. While it may be satisfactory from the point of view of the teacher, there is likelihood that for the student such procedure would create a dislike for his work. Such an ideal of having the pupil grade all of his papers may be theoretically sound, but when put into actual practice the opposite may be found to be true. He should grade some, but not all.

Figuring the median for the above data, it is found that 20 per cent of all papers are graded by the pupils in all schools reporting.

#### Pupils Asked to Grade Their Own Papers

Leaving the discussion of the grading of papers by other students than those who wrote them, and considering the correction by students of their own papers, it is found that the practice is in vogue in 72 per cent of schools reporting. Forty-four schools report on the question, "Is the pupil asked to correct his own paper after it is written in final draft?" Of this number 32 answer "yes"; 27.3 answer "no".

The high percentage reporting "yes" shows that teachers generally are taking advantage of the training the student should gain in the correction of his own errors. Without revision of one's own work, slovenly writing habits develop. There should be a careful check-up with the teacher, however, for the student may omit, through over-sight or carelessness, many corrections that should be made.

#### The Danger of This Procedure

The danger of this procedure lies in the fact that the already over-burdened teacher may be satisfied with the student's estimation of his own work, making no further suggestions or corrections. When this practice becomes prevalent, as it easily may, the value to the student is small, because he usually sees only the obvious errors with which he is familiar. Those errors involving rules with which he is not familiar, and which for various unassigned reasons he does not know, are passed over unseen. If his attention is not called to them, and measures taken for their correction, the loss to the student can not be estimated. In addition it is only a short time until he begins to assume the attitude of the teacher in regard to grading, with the result that correction of his own papers becomes less valuable to him.

#### Inspirational and Disciplinary Writing

Taking up a consideration of writing as an inspirational exercise as opposed to its disciplinary aspects, reports of

teachers of English in Kansas high schools show that of those schools reporting 59.6 per cent favor the former. One teacher characterizes it in this manner: "The ideal is to give practice in writing as an inspirational exercise, but it becomes necessary at times to make it disciplinary in character." Another states that in her work she hopes writing by students is done from an inspirational standpoint. Thirty-one per cent report that both inspiration and discipline become a part of the writing during the time spent in study of written composition. Nine and four tenths per cent report as favoring the disciplinary type of writing.

The teaching of written composition, then, presents to the teacher the problem of exercising judgment as to when to make writing an inspirational exercise and when to make it disciplinary. It is a matter of knowing the individuality of the student with whom she is dealing, and also in knowing that at times certain students are incapable of inspirational ideas as pertains to writing. At such times the student usually writes because he is required to do so, knowing the teacher wields the hand of authority. His paper, incidentally, shows his state of mind by its lack of interest to the reader, and in the construction of the contents.

There is another aspect of the problem when it is considered that the teacher is trying to make writing wholly an inspirational project. During the period of learning

composition, the gaining of mechanical accuracy should be ever foremost, because any consequent stiffness or artificiality can be outgrown. The method that perhaps proves most satisfactory to the teacher would be to devote a correspondingly greater time to drill exercises, letting this, in part take care of the disciplinary factors in writing. In the writing of papers, inspirational features may be foremost, with disciplinary elements entering as a matter of course.

#### Variations in Length of Written Papers

Just what should be the length of the average paper written for class work by high school students is a debatable topic. There are times when the pupil should be given the task of writing papers of considerable length, in which he makes a detailed study of some subject in which he is interested. At other times the teacher will find it advantageous and sometimes necessary to ask for shorter papers.

The practice as reported by high schools in Kansas shows a median length of 235 words. Two schools report requiring papers of only 100 words in length, while one school reports as requiring 300 words as the average length of papers. The table below shows the results of the report.

TABLE IV. Average Length of Themes.

Number of words	100	150	200	250	300	400	450	500
Number of schools	2	7	8	7	11	5	3	1

For courses in high school composition there needs be little concern as to the length of written papers. A

greater amount of emphasis should be placed upon learning to write, rather than the amount that is written. The course in composition should seek to fit the needs of each student. This can be accomplished through practice in the forms of oral and written discourse and the general principles of correct, clear, forceful writing to develop powers of clear thought and expression to make them convincing and interesting.

#### A Plan for Writing

A convenient plan that has proved successful in many schools is to have the class write daily some form of written composition. This may be accomplished without making unreasonable demands upon the pupil's time and strength. One plan for realizing this aim is to require each pupil to obtain a suitable blank notebook, and in it to write each day, carefully and with ink, at least five lines of whatever he will. The pupil is to be encouraged to consult the teacher, who, although, must avoid undue interference. At times he looks over the work with the writer and makes suggestions, being careful not to discourage. At times, for the sake of acquainting the class with the best work of its members, a good lively paper may be read. Finally, after much floundering, the pupil begins to see and think. This plan offers the possibility for exchange of papers for reading and correcting.

### Common Errors Discussed before Class Group

A further examination of the questionnaire shows that without exception the 44 schools making reports follow the procedure of discussing before the group errors common to a large portion of the class. In this manner the pupil is acquainted with his own errors and he can take remedial steps. In addition he is taught to watch for the errors made by other members of the class.

In Pittsburg schools it was found 25 specific errors with a frequency of over 200 constitute 86 per cent, of the total errors made in that system. These, in a total of 25, 676 errors made, are as follows:

"Was" for "were"	"Ain't got"
"Seen" for "saw"	"Have got"
"Ain't"	"Ain't got no"
"Can" for "may"	"Come" for "came"
"Done" for "did"	"It was (it ain't) me"
"Is" for "are"	"Why, there was"
"Don't" for "doesn't"	"Didn't do nothing"
"This here"	"Lay" for "lie"
"John, he went"	"Off" for "gone"
"Didn't have no"	"Went" for "gone"
"Then things"	"Give" for "gave"
"That there"	

From this table, which is given with the most common error first, the others following in descending order of usage, the teacher will be able to anticipate, in part, the errors to which he should lay particular stress, and at the time when the need is the greatest.

### The Study of the Outline

If one were to imagine a high school class in sophomore composition in which the teacher is rigorous in her demands as to the details of learning the steps of making outlines, and saw to it that outlines were prepared properly, he would see one side of the picture of what is being done in some Kansas high schools. But to complete the picture one must consider those schools in which little or no preparation on this subject is given, together with those schools which give a sufficient amount of outlining.

Considered from the point of view of the college instructor of English a large percentage of college students begin their English work with insufficient preparation in the organization of material in outline form. Others who have had ample preparation come to realize the necessity of this phase of English preparation after many futile attempts at writing without it.

Reports from Kansas high schools show a wide variety of practice in the study of outlining. Twelve schools failed to make reply to the question as to the number of outlines required in one semester.

TABLE V. Shows the Number of Exercises Required.

Number of exercises	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	8
Number of schools	3	2	2	11	5	4	2	1



### Blackboard Equipment Good

Coming to a consideration of the use of blackboards in high schools over the state, it is found that they are used consistently in class room instruction. All schools reporting have this type of equipment.

The difficulty arises in some schools in which classes are of such large size as not to permit the entire class to be accommodated at once. In a number of cases teachers have dispensed with their use for students, supplementing them with mimeograph sheets for desk work. In case this is done the sheet or sheets are prepared to contain the desired principles the teacher wishes to bring to the attention of the pupils. This practice has been worked out very successfully in the Concordia high school. In this particular instance the boards are used only for explanations by the instructor.

The average number of times classes are given board work as reported shows a range of from one to five times a week. During the semester in which composition is given, most schools make almost daily use of them, while during the time literature is taught only a minor use is made. The table shows the average number of times classes use blackboards during one week.

TABLE VI. Number of Times Blackboards Are Used a Week.

Number of times a week	1	2	3	4	5
Number of schools	6	14	6	3	4

#### The Use of Ability Ratings in English Classes

One of the most serious problems to be met by the teacher of English in the average high school of Kansas is that of what to do in a class the members of which have varying degrees of intelligence. She may face the problem of not knowing where to begin her work for the year when she becomes better acquainted with the marked ability of some of the members of the class on the one hand, and the definite lack of ability among others on the other. If she is to hope for progress, and if she is to give the highest type of instruction, she must start with instruction that will take the pupil from where he is to where he should go.

If, however, the teacher finds the high school has worked out an ability rating and has used this rating in the formation of classes, the first and most difficult of her problems has been solved. Such ability groupings place the average pupil in classes with other average students, and those with the higher achievement quotients in others by themselves. The result is that the group of pupils who learn quickly will not be held back by those for whom learning must come in a slower manner. In this fashion the bright pupil may be forced ahead just as fast as he is

ready for new details. Furthermore, the pupils with the lower intelligence quotients will not feel lost in classes of his own kind, while in classes of mixed ability he would.

#### Disadvantages of Ability Ratings in Kansas Schools

The difficulty of arranging pupils in all Kansas high schools according to ability arises when it is learned that more students come from small rural and community high schools than do from city schools. In the small high school grouping by ability becomes almost impossible, for in many subjects, and English is no exception, ten or fifteen pupils may be all that will present themselves for instruction.

That Kansas is taking steps to incorporate some system of measuring the ability of the pupil is evinced by the fact that 86 per cent of the schools making reports for this thesis state that English classes are formed according to ability rating. In this manner the work of bettering the type of instruction in English in Kansas schools should take a turn for the better, for when the teacher is permitted to fit the course of instruction to the needs of the pupil, instead of trying to make the pupil fit the course of study, much needed progress can be expected.

#### Instruction for the Backward Pupil

In the same number of high schools reporting the grouping of pupils according to ability rating in English

instruction, there is also an effort to adapt instruction to the backward pupil. This step, in itself commendatory, still lacks sufficient proportions to have any noticeable effect over the state at large. When such practice can become state-wide in scope, a better standard of English will be seen to prevail. Until that time the best that can be expected or hoped for then is that English instruction in Kansas high schools will continue to make a steady, if slow, growth.

If in the meantime the need for such criticism as was pointed out in the introduction can be lessened, better conditions should be found for the future. Growth in the betterment of English instruction can not be accomplished in an over-night dose of cure-all panacea. It must come slowly and from the pupil rather than from the instructor. When the pupil can be made to understand the necessity of better English, and when the school system can adjust itself to the task, better written and spoken English will result.

#### INFLUENCES FOR ENGLISH IMPROVEMENT

As we turn to a consideration of the betterment of English speech through influences brought to bear on the pupil from his home environment, it becomes essential to remember that while Kansas ranks second or third with other states in the item of literacy among her people, there still

remains much to be hoped for in respect to pure English among its citizenry. One teacher, replying to the questionnaire as to whether she is able to bring home influences to bear, states that the parents speak worse English than do the children, whose English she terms as "terrible". Naturally enough, this teacher is honest in her conviction that in the homes of her pupils little aid in corrective English may be sought or gained.

About one-third of those reporting on this question feel that they are able to bring about a co-operating with parents for the improvement of pupils' English. The other two-thirds, either have given up in despair, or feel that they have not obtained satisfactory results in this project.

It must be borne in mind that if the pupil is to receive any benefit from home influences for speech deficiencies, he must first be shown wherein good English will benefit him, either in a practical or social manner. He must learn to know the utilitarian value as well as the value of English from an artistic point of view. With this to arouse his interest in bettering his own deficiencies he may be induced to become interested in learning English of a higher type. To secure this co-operating between parent and pupil, a thing which obtains in most homes, the teacher must be always on the lookout for contacts between parent and pupil. Much depends on the manner in which the teacher

goes about accomplishing this end.

Ask a number of teachers of English in Kansas high schools if they have any special methods for improving students' grammar, and in three cases out of four the reply will be in the affirmative. The teacher of English is ready to admit, however, that results as judged by good spoken and written English are far from ideal, that much remains to be desired.

#### Need for Improvement

The need for the improvement of English diction, both written and spoken, for those graduating from high schools has been pointed out. Looking at speech conditions in the most optimistic light, they are found far from the standard that should exist. Pupils continue to be graduated without a basic knowledge of the principles of grammar and composition, with the result that criticisms continue to be heaped upon the high school organization.

#### Plans for Improvement

Assuming that these teachers who claim to have methods for improving the English used by pupils are getting results, an examination of some of the devices suggested by them should be worthwhile. The following plans are suggested: Two students do police duty for each other; a card containing errors frequently made is taken out of a packet or note-book and held up before the student who is speaking

to remind him that one of his common errors has beaten him. This is done very quickly. As long as no white card appears, the student knows he is speaking correctly. Another teacher suggests that her special method is being brought about by cooperative work of other departments of the school. Still others suggest "Good English Week", drills, habitual usage, various exercises and tests leading to a minimum essentials test for each composition course, oral themes with class criticisms, and a "Never Again Page", in which the pupil writes those errors he has made with their corrections.

One of the methods that have been incorporated in a majority of the high schools in Kansas for the improvement of oral and written composition is the use of commercial drill exercise booklets. These are prepared by various school publishing houses, and represent the work of the college and high school instructors in their preparation. They contain drills in the essentials of grammar, are easily filled in by the student, who must know the proper usage of verbs, adjectives, pronouns, etc., and are so arranged as to facilitate ready checking by the teacher. These exercises have become commonly used in high schools in Kansas in the last few years. That they are tending to show a much to be desired improvement in speech deficiencies will be dealt with at a later stage of this

paper.

Over 80 per cent of the schools reporting state that this method of drill is used with satisfactory results. Because of the nominal cost of these drill exercises, their use has become general. This is one method that can be used to advantage in any high school, either large or small.

A few schools in the larger cities of Kansas have their course of study worked out to the point that instead of using these commercial drill exercises they work out essentials that are to be stressed. Mimeograph copies of these drills are made, and each student is provided with his set. In this fashion students are drilled on those essentials deemed necessary by the particular school he attends. The Commercial department of these schools co-operate with the English department in the cutting of stencils and the making of mimeograph copies of these exercises.

#### WRITING ON VOCATIONAL SUBJECTS

Teachers of English in Kansas favor the plan of asking pupils to write papers on vocational subjects in which they are interested. Without exception those schools reporting state that such papers are written. In some instances the pupil is required to look up reference material on the subject of his interest, while in others he does it of his



own accord. Through this means the pupil is not only learning to express clearly his ideas, but also is learning what opportunities are to be found in various vocations. By hearing papers of others, he learns what opportunities are open to him in activities other than the one he has chosen to write.

Writing on vocational subjects offers great opportunities for the teacher really to interest pupils in English expression. In this type of writing he feels that he is working for his own interests rather than for the teacher. He feels that what he is doing has a practical value, a thing most high school pupils feel is essential to any course they pursue.

#### Pupils Are Practical Minded

Right in line with this thought is the idea that the teacher too many times forgets the practical mindedness of the pupils with whom she is dealing. The result is that for the pupil the class in English becomes a routine to be gone through with, devoid of interest to him. It too many times loses his interest, making of him a mere automaton.

Coming back to the idea of writing papers on vocational subjects, the teacher need not feel that she is giving a course in vocational guidance, for in all too many cases the teacher of English would not be qualified to teach such a course. She should feel, however, that

she is using the writing of papers on vocational subjects as a device with which to interest the class in the project of learning to express ideas clearly and concisely.

That there is a real demand for this type of work on the part of the English teacher is apparent, for even in those high schools where a definite program of guidance has been instituted students are graduated without knowing what they desire to make of themselves, and what is more disconcerting, not knowing what they can do. Furthermore, the general training received in high school does not properly fit the graduate to do much of anything, except if he has finished the College Preparatory course, he can spend four more years in delaying his decision.

Until a better solution of the problem of guidance is found the teacher of English can make use of it in class work.

#### Interest in Hobbies

That pupils are interested in hobbies is believed by 39 of the 40 teachers answering the question, "Are pupils asked to write reports of their hobbies?" This phase of interest, whether it be in raising rabbits or collecting postage stamps, places him in a position that he will enjoy explaining to his class-mates just what he is doing with his hobby.

The high school pupil who begins to write about his

hobby should formulate the idea or ideas he wishes to bring out in his discourse. It is possible that he may talk for an hour or write at length with never a clear idea. This perhaps explains the reason for so much bad writing. But behind good talk and behind good writing ideas stand dominant.

#### Pupils Asked to Write of Their Interests

In 37 high schools out of 40 it is found that pupils are asked to write special reports on subjects in which they are interested. Logically the teachers of these schools believe that where there is already developed an interest for a particular type of work that interest should be put to work, whether it be on an exposition of "How the Old Ford Holds Together", or whether it be on a narration of "A Recent Trip to the Mountains". Pupils write best those things in which they are interested.

#### PUPILS URGED TO ELECT FOURTH YEAR ENGLISH

In answering the question, "Are pupils who are expecting to enter college urged to elect fourth year English?" 25 schools out of 38 report "yes". In other words, 66 per cent of the schools report as urging seniors to elect English. When it is remembered, as pointed out earlier in this thesis, that 74.7 per cent of the schools reporting offer four years of English instruction, it is

that the majority of schools are following up their offering of the course in senior English by urging pupils to elect this work.

The questionnaire does not disclose, however, the size of the classes in high schools offering the fourth year of English instruction. If the classes are large and the training is being received by a large portion of the graduates, it is safe to assume in the face of the criticism already heaped upon the high school that much reorganization of the curriculum in English in Kansas high schools is needed. This phase of the problem alone would furnish excellent material for further investigation, and the data obtained would be of unusual value.

#### Few Schools Report Offering Special Preparatory Work

Thirty-three of the 44 schools reporting state that no special preparation is given those pursuing the College Preparatory course. In other words 75 per cent of the schools reporting give no special preparation in this phase of their work. The graduate of the average high school is left to work out his own solution of his English problem after he has begun work at college.

On the other hand 25 per cent of the schools report the requiring of special preparation for those pursuing the College Preparatory course. Emphasis is placed on the following types of work: grammar review, writing reports

similar to college assignments, intensive English essential drill, Century Handbook drill, journalism, emphasis of the necessity for preparing for tests in rhetoric. This list, while it presents some overlapping of subject matter, shows in general the special preparation that is being offered to students in a portion of Kansas high schools.

#### Differentiation in Subject Matter

Finally, the questionnaire considers the differentiation in subject matter given those who expect to attend college and those who will stop at the completion of high school. Forty-one of the 44 schools reporting show no differentiation in subject matter for these two courses.

A conflict in the replies to this question and the one dealing with special preparation of those expecting to enter college is apparent. This last section shows that either the work reported in the paragraph above is given to all pupils of the same class without thought of the course the pupils are taking, or else little or no attention, other than the usual class work, is given those anticipating college entrance.

#### Necessity of Thorough Review

It goes without saying that high school students preparing to meet college entrance requirements should be given a thorough drill in rhetoric essentials. If high schools could find it possible to institute a course during

the last year designed to meet college entrance requirements, much of the floundering of college freshmen in rhetoric would be ended. A few of the larger high schools in the state have instituted such courses, and are making progress toward eliminating much of the criticism that came to them formerly.

For the large majority of smaller high schools such a course as suggested above is almost out of the question. In the first place the added expense would be the first and most formidable obstacle to be surmounted. Because of the small enrollment in such a course in the average small high school, such a course would meet with the fate of not having sufficient numbers to warrant its existence. At best the situation is depressing.

#### EXAMINATION OF TEXTBOOKS

As a portion of this thesis an examination has been made of a number of textbooks on high school English. The purpose has been to learn wherein composition texts of today vary from those that have been in use in the past. More specifically an effort has been made to ascertain what variations exist in subject matter; what differences are found in the manner of presentation; whether the texts are written psychologically to appeal to the interests of the pupil; and finally to learn what changes have been made in

the mechanical and typographical arrangement of texts.

That high schools have been growing both in size and in the subject matter is quite generally known. In early school history the Latin Grammar school, which later emerged into the academy and that still later as the high school, had as its purpose the teaching of Latin grammar for those anticipating college entrance. No other work was required. Later, as growth was made in secondary education and new courses were being offered, rhetoric and composition were introduced.

#### Early Textbooks' Emphasis on Rhetoric

Examination of early texts on the subject shows that greater emphasis was placed on the study of rhetoric than on composition. Early texts drew the distinction that the latter is concerned with the practical exercises by which the student requires skill in writing. The former was studied for the purpose of surveying the wide field of literature. There was the fear that the practical nature of composition would result in the detriment of study in rhetoric as an educational instrument.

The earlier of the texts were more concerned with the theory of writing than they were with the actual practice of it. These authors who tried to be practical gave much prominence to mechanical processes and rules instead of giving the student a working knowledge of the subject.

Recent texts are based more on the principle that students learn by doing.

### Today Composition Is Emphasized

It is found then that today composition is stressed and not rhetoric. With this stress of composition there is the application of its principles to the art of speaking and writing. The principles that are embodied in the texts of today are vastly different than those of a few years ago. Now that the emphasis is on practice in writing, and such practice is planned to be of interest to the student. His personal likes and dislikes and his powers of observation are considered, where as before methods were more ironclad and more or less stilted.

### A Sample Table of Contents from an Early Text

A perusal of text books, both early and late, shows a variety of practice. The text "The Principles of Rhetoric", written by Hill (1896) which set the standard in rhetoric texts for many years, offers the following in its table of contents.

#### Part I.

#### Composition in General

#### Book I.

#### Grammatical Purity

Chapter	Page
I. Good Use .....	1



## II. Violations of Good Use..... 25

### Section I. Barbarisms ..... 25

#### " II. Improperities ..... 37

#### " III. Solecisms ..... 48

## Book II.

### Rhetorical Excellence

## I. Choice of Words..... 74

### Section I. Clearness ..... 81

#### " II. Force .....111

#### " III. Ease .....132

## II. Number of Words .....145

### Section I. Clearness .....146

#### " II. Force .....150

#### " III. Ease .....175

## III. Arrangement .....177

### Section I. Clearness .....177

#### " II. Force .....184

#### " III. Ease .....198

#### " IV. Unity .....208

#### " V. Kinds of Sentences..216

#### " VI. Paragraphs .....250

#### " VII. Whole Compositions..259

## Part II.

### Kinds of Composition

## Four Kinds Discriminated .....247

I. Description .....	249
Section I. Scientific Description ..	251
"    II. Artistic Description ....	254
II. Narration .....	281
Section I. Movement .....	285
"    II. Method in Movement .....	289
III. Exposition .....	300
IV. Argument .....	327
Section I. Proposition of Proof ....	328
"    II. Evidence .....	334
"    III. Deduction and Induction..	341
"    IV. Antecedent Probability, Example, Sign .....	354
"    V. Arrangement .....	379
"    VI. Persuasion .....	386
Index .....	401

#### Change in the Tone of Composition Material

A more recent text, "Practical English for High Schools", by Lewis & Hasic shows a general change in the tone of the presentation of composition material. The material is given in such a manner as to interest the pupil and so give him a type of work he can understand. There is a greater emphasis today of the practical application of English in everyday life. Authors of texts have become aware of this phase in teaching of English. The result is that work has become more utilitarian. Following are the

## chapter heads:

Chapter	Page
I. Speaking and Writing English.....	9
II. Grouping Ideas.....	28
III. The Sentence at Work.....	61
IV. Using the Parts of Speech .....	93
V. Building a Vocabulary .....	137
VI. Helping the Eyes.....	165
VII. Telling a Story.....	186
VIII. Making People Understand.....	211
IX. Making People Believe.....	245
X. Visiting by Mail.....	275
XI. Doing Business by Mail.....	303
XII. Doing Business by Mail (Cont.)...	333
XIII. Keeping up with the World.....	362
Appendix.....	391
Index.....	409

In Chapter XIII is to be found discussions of these items:

125. What is news?
126. A card index of periodicals.
127. The news story.
128. A newspaper scrapbook.
129. The editorial
130. A visit to a newspaper office.

- 131. Advertisements.
- 132. The class as a newspaper staff.
- 133. Contributions to the city papers.
- 134. Proof reading.
- 135. The magazines.
- 136. The technical journal.

The treatment of these subjects, though, brief, shows in part the trend of some of the later texts.

#### Improvement by the Student

The attitude of teachers of English as regards the improvement of the student is that any progress individuals make must come from within. That is to say, unless the pupil takes steps for the improvement of his own errors little can be done to break habits of long standing. Writers of recent English texts are including material that has the right psychological appeal to the pupil. Carrying out this idea is the text, "Self-Improvement in English", by H. W. Davis, which includes the following chapter heading on "Corrections in Composition":

- IV. Self-Improvement in Spelling ..... 49
- V. Self-Improvement in Punctuation ..... 66
- VI. Self-Improvement in Sentence Building.. 85

Other sections of this text which show the tendencies of more recent texts in composition and writing are as follows:

## (Effectiveness in Composition)

VII. Effective Paragraph Development .....	120
VIII. Forming Effective Sentences .....	143
IX. Selecting Effective Words .....	186

## II. ORAL ENGLISH

X. Formal and Informal Speaking .....	209
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## III. APPLIED COMPOSITION

XI. Effective Business Letters .....	247
XII. Friendship Letters .....	281
XIII. Manuscript Preparation and Proof Reading .....	296
XIV. News-Writing--Editing the High School Paper.....	305
XV. Advertising Writing .....	338
XVI. Exposition and Argumentation .....	360
XVII. Narration and Description .....	369
Appendix--Glossary of Grammatical and Rhetorical Terms .....	427
Index .....	441

## Attempt to Interest Pupil

This text is written in a style that appeals to the high school student. It is planned to arouse him to action, wherein he will take the necessary steps for improvement. Rules are not included because they are rules, but rather as "Helps" to spelling or punctuation. The book tries to make the student aware of those things about him, for it recognizes the necessity of developing powers of

observation in order to develop the intellect. That the book comes as near to making a direct appeal to students as any book that has been examined is true, although in any text that is written there is bound to be the lack of appeal to certain students.

### Comparison of Typographical Styles

Not only has there been the effort to write textbooks in English such as will appeal to the student psychologically, but today is seen a vast improvement in the typographical style and mechanics with which they are assembled.

Earlier texts are seen to have been printed with little regard to the typographical appearance, i.e., the type was small in the discussion sections as well as in the headings. The apparent attitude was that the information was there and that the student should have sufficient intrinsic interest to master such details as were included. Little effort was made to print the material in an attractive, inspirational way. The general tone of pages was that of heaviness. While there was material presented which may have included interesting information, still it had the appearance of a dry treatise.

Today we think of textbooks as being printed in a black-face type, easily readable. An examination of recent texts bears out this contention. Material is presented with the ideal of making it interesting to all classes of

students. Headings are sufficiently large to make them readily stand out from the material discussed. Liberal amounts of which space are used, thus giving newer textbooks neater and more attractive appearance. Pages are no longer crowded, and no longer have the appearance of law briefs.

The liberal use of illustrations makes for a greater attractiveness, adding much to reader interest. That the student is interested in illustrations is generally conceded. Having once gained his interest then the text is able to show him both directly and indirectly those things essential to his knowledge of English diction. In this connection modern texts are taking more indirect methods of teaching than direct. The result is that the indirect method places the pupil in a more receptive attitude than does the latter. He learns more readily and retains longer those principles learned.

#### Influence Felt in Findings of National Joint Committee

Much influence was wielded by the report of the National Joint Committee, Bulletin Number 2, 1917, Department of Interior, Bureau of Education, Washington, D. C., "Reorganization of English in Secondary Schools". This report states in brief that the course in composition must be laid out primarily with reference to the expressional activities of the pupils of the school, not with reference

to the logic of rhetorical theory. It states further that the gauge is the pupil's own range of observation, power and abstraction and capacity for practical application.

The paragraph above will be found to be a great variance in thought with the content of former textbooks in English wherein little or no consideration was given to the activities of the student, and a greater amount of time was devoted to the study of rules as such. Those interests of the student were subjugated for a study of the observation of others and the abstraction and capacity of recognized leaders in literary channels. It is small wonder that revolutionary steps had to be taken.

That the recommendations of the National Joint Committee have been accepted is revealed in textbooks published since the issuance of its report in 1917. There is a decided break away from the long and tedious procedure, and a replacement with real life, vital in interest. The pupil is trained to take his place in society, and is taught to provide for himself and others the enjoyment of leisure time. There is also in English instruction the emphasis of worthy home membership. Character training and others of the Cardinal Principles in education enter as a matter of course.

#### New Devices in Subject Matter

A new phase of instruction that is found incorporated



in most new texts is that of oral composition. This type of instruction, while comparatively new to composition courses, offers the pupil training in organization and presentation of material. His success is measured by the interest he is able to command from his classmates. The pupil comes to realize the practical value of being able to express his ideas before a group. His is given practice in expression to cultivate self-reliance and to overcome any feeling of nervousness. Soon he develops an ease of posture and a convincing manner of expression. His progress is apparent to him and the members of the class with the resultant feeling of satisfaction.

Text books of today have come to include lessons dealing with a wider variety of kinds of writing. There is apparently a break away from the old idea of trying to achieve a cramped literary style on the part of the pupil, and substituted in its place are exercises planned primarily to teach the pupil to express his ideas, clearly and concisely, for the purpose of making him a better social unit. This utilitarian idea is developed in lessons of effective business letters, news and editorial writing, and the preparation of advertising copy. This type of work, when coupled with the school paper, gives the pupil a satisfactory experience not to be achieved in any other way. He is taught indirectly the necessity for clearness

and accuracy. He is made to understand the necessity for neatness and legibility in his writing, and finally he comes to learn essentials of good form in English expression. The task has not been thrust upon him. His attitude toward his work is normal and healthy, for he comes to appreciate the powers he has developed.

## SUMMARY

### Findings of This Paper

Generally speaking, the material of this paper brings out the fact that in the schools of Kansas much and varied subject matter is taught in the three or four years of the English course. The paper points out the wide variation in classroom practice in schools of the state. Furthermore, it shows that a portion of deficiencies in English among students may be attributed to the apparent lack of co-ordination of teaching aims in high school English courses.

More specifically, there is shown a lack of definiteness among teachers of English in regard to the subject matter covered by other teachers of English in the same school. In this way there may be a serious overlapping of teaching, or on the other hand, there may be just as serious underlapping of teaching with the consequent omission of necessary information. There is pointed out the necessity for a definite program of study for the English department

of the high school. This for the small school may be found in the "State Course of Study in English". For the large school and for the school in which students have perhaps a wider range of interests and experiences, it remains for the school to set up a definite set of objectives and standards which will meet state requirements.

Again, in order to make other needed improvements there must be a unified co-operation among other departments of the school for the improvement of grammar and diction. In schools where such a program has been tried noticeable improvement of speech has been made. Such a program may take a little additional time from the teachers of other subjects than English, but these teachers can be made to understand the necessity of demanding a usable type of English, clearly expressed and free from errors. Such a follow-up system will result in much improvement on the part of the student.

In the Junction City, Kansas, high school each teacher in the various departments is provided with blank forms on which she lists the student's deficiencies. These forms are filled out every two weeks and returned to the English teacher, who in consultation with the pupil makes him aware of the necessary improvement desired. Students are told that a portion of their grade in any class depends upon the use of good English and neatness and accuracy in written

papers. That the plan is successful can be readily believed when it is pointed out that the teachers of departments other than English gladly co-operated in securing the desired results.

Looking at the teaching of English in Kansas even in the most pessimistic light, it cannot be definitely stated that all English is badly taught, nor that English as a whole is taught poorly and inefficiently. It would be unwise to say, in addition, that improvement in teaching methods can not be achieved in the light of the present situation. From the point of view of the teacher of English better teaching methods can be found, better devices for the creating of interest among students can be used, and finally a closer and more sympathetic understanding between the teacher and pupil can be achieved.

It is to be understood, however, that the teacher may be ever so capable in subject matter in English and still fail to arouse students to the need for good English usage. Furthermore, the successful instructor is able to lead the student to see this need, and to create in him the inspiration to gain a knowledge of usable English. Unless the pupil sees the necessity for self-improvement, results are not all they should be. Any consequent improvement must come from the pupil.

### Literary Phases Still Existent

Even though the texts of today in English composition are not stressing the literary phase of writing, teachers who have been schooled in the older method of such learning are still giving much emphasis to this work. The student inwardly revolts because the work fails to appeal to him as being practical, and many times is beyond his comprehension. He learns something, because he knows he must, but he fails to put himself into his work as he would were he appealed to in an indirect manner.

In line with this thought it is found that the English of today is taught more by indirection than direction, or that methods are indirect instead of direct. The student is first interested in what he is to do, and having become interested, is willing and ready to learn principles that otherwise he would find distasteful. He is led to understand that his English class is a laboratory in which he works for his own improvement, rather than that it is a class where rules and principles are learned because the teacher demands them.

### The Work of the College

In interviews with teachers of high school English, a means which was used to obtain much of the data for this thesis, it was learned that the scholarship contests held by the Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia and the

Kansas State Agricultural College were having a great amount of influence for the betterment of English standards. Both of these institutions have prepared groups of standard tests in English. Each institution is making efforts to bring about a widespread use of the tests.

The result of the use of standard tests in English is causing teachers in high schools over the state to prepare the student more in the essentials of good English. A greater effort is made to explain to the student principles of usage that otherwise might be delved into too hastily. The student feels the urge of creditably representing his school in these contests. When the median score of one school is checked as against another school, the teacher is able to see the weakness or success of his teaching. The student is brought to realize his success or lack of success.

That Kansas schools are making progress is seen in the number of schools requiring English classes to be grouped according to ability ratings. In addition progress is being made to adapt English instruction to the backward individual to fit him to better meet situations that he must face when school for him is finished.

Were education a stationary thing definite standards could be fixed and the necessary procedure could be mapped out. Education, though, is not stationary, and those standards that are suitable and workable today are not to

be used tomorrow. Consequently, the teacher and the school system must continually undergo changes to bring about a development of new ideas in the formulation of curriculum content. There must be a continual search into the future in order to make those things that are done today of value tomorrow.

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