This article was downloaded by: [Central Michigan University]
On: 25 December 2014, At: 00:28
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number:
1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street,
London W1T 3JH, UK

Quarterly Journal of Speech

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rqjs20>

High school problems

Ralph E. Chapel ^a

^a Akron, Ohio

Published online: 05 Jun 2009.

To cite this article: Ralph E. Chapel (1921) High school problems, Quarterly Journal of Speech, 7:2, 116-119, DOI: [10.1080/00335632109379323](https://doi.org/10.1080/00335632109379323)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00335632109379323>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any

form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

HIGH SCHOOL PROBLEMS

RALPH E. CHAPEL
Akron, Ohio

THE writer of this article has been accused, justly or unjustly, of injecting ideas into a session of a convention of the National Association of Teachers of Speech. He has also been asked, wisely or unwisely, to "cast those ideas into form suitable for an article in the Quarterly Journal. In this request the subject is tactfully alluded to as "the issue on which you spoke;" and since the writer did not know then, does not know now, and doesn't expect to know when the article is finished what that issue was or is, a wide field is open to him. He is fully aware, however, that neither his former audience nor his future readers are in any better case and is considerably comforted by this fact.

We shall assume, however, that the desired ideas may be properly set down under the caption "High School Problems." And I am not sure that the problems in question are not rather the problems of the pupil than of the teacher. And though I myself am catalogued as a teacher of English, both oral and written, I must admit that the pupil is quite as often a victim as he is a beneficiary.

It has always been my contention that English can not be taught; that any attempt to apply the rules of the game—for teaching is, confidentially, a great old game, isn't it—to the appreciation of the beauties and the niceties of this wonderful language or ours must result in disappointment if not in disaster. Here, if anywhere, "Men must be taught as if you taught them not," and the successful purveyor of English must somehow beguile his pupil into the belief that he himself is doing something. He must get him out of the atmosphere of the pedogog, if you please, and into the atmosphere of the poet. He must make that pupil forget that he is doing a lesson and must make him believe that he is expressing—himself.

I have said that it is the problem of the pupil rather than that of the teacher. It is his problem first of all to get a teacher who will help him to find himself, for after all that's the first and last thing in speech training as it is in every phase of education. He

must find a teacher who is sympathetic; who will lead instead of drive; who will draw out instead of cram in. He must find a teacher with personality—one who can, in some degree at least, exemplify the art he is trying to teach. We do not, as a rule, employ club-footed dancing masters to instruct the youth in the lately all-important art of terpsichorean gyrations. And I see no reason why we should employ so-called teachers of English, oral or written, who do not appreciate it or speak it attractively and effectively. The teacher, too, must inspire the pupil with a confidence that he can, in some degree, gain proficiency in an art that is still worth while. For the pupil of today is a victim of his environment. It is an old story that the general public of which we must be a part, has for some time exalted the physical at the expense of the mental; that it has lauded athletics and ignored scholarship. It is of little use to talk of ways and means to make good speakers until pupils are somehow convinced that it is as worth while to carry conviction to the mind of an audience as it is to carry a football across the goal line of an athletic rival.

Of the mechanics of oral English, the writer knows little and, if possible, cares less. Speakers expressed ideas and even aroused emotions before Rhetorics existed.

The whole process of education has been more or less aptly described as one of narrowing the individual and of destroying his personality. And isn't there a germ of truth in this as regards oral English? Isn't there a school teachers' English? And isn't it, at its worst, the worst language in the world? Is it any wonder that pupils detest that English and perhaps the users of it? Can we blame them if they don't see why they should say "become" instead of "get" or "wish" instead of "want" when in fact they shouldn't? They don't see why we "want" them to say "wish" when they "wish" to say "want." Frankly, if my pupils were to use the language of some of our pedagogical monstrosities—printed ones of course I mean—my blue pencil would forthwith wear out and my spoken language wouldn't pass the conscientious censor anywhere.

My pupils tell me that the science teacher says that they must not say "the book says," but that it "states;" that their grammar school teachers have told them that to say "pretty thoroughly" is at least a misdemeanor and that a contraction, even in oral discussion—in the school room—is a crime. Now I am not unmindful

that the Master himself once wept, and I think that we who are safe in these matters may be pardoned if we feel impelled to follow his example. I myself was once told, "You speak best when you think least," and I'm not sure that most teachers are not down with the same disease. I like co-operation at the hands of our fellow teachers but I am not sure that their efforts always help us or help the pupils themselves.

Time was when the liberally educated man was supposed to use good English, but specialization has made him today delightfully free from the necessity of knowing anything outside his own field, even the English with which he so learnedly expatiates on the minutiae of his own subject. A foreign language teacher, far from where the writer teaches, of course, refused to teach English because he knew no English grammar. Can you imagine how he acquired his foreign language or how he coaxes English, pure and undefiled, from his pupils in their fluent yet accurate translations?

Realizing that the hearing of good English is perhaps the best means to acquire a good use of it, I recently urged my seniors to attend carefully to the language of their instructors in the class room. "Yes," said one, "but you ought to hear them down in the cafeteria." And when I reflect upon some of the attempts at correcting expression in the class rooms, I am not sure that the "Cafeteria English" is not best after all.

Our texts, too, seem to me to be still much at fault. The student must "introduce" his remarks instead of simply beginning them; he must "discuss" his subject instead of talking about it; he must "make a conclusion" instead of stopping when he is through. Perhaps I need not say that the result is as wooden as the head that conceived the text; as artificial, tiresome, and lifeless as the style of the text writer himself. Perhaps also I need not say that all attempts to separate the mother tongue into fifty-seven varieties is quite as futile and quite as pernicious. Let the pupil speak if he has an idea. Let him use any kind of English that is suited to his purpose. Let him put himself into his effort without let or hindrance. Mistakes there will be of course; but if there is a modicum of thought and a degree of fluency of expression, time and patience will probably eradicate most of the faults. Rules should be gradually "discovered" as the pupil continues to express himself.

Choice of subject, too, is of much importance. Experience has

taught me that if I assign a dry subject the pupil will see to it that I reap as I have sown. It is true that the pupil must sometimes talk about things not especially interesting to them. But just now we are interested in getting them to talk freely at all. It has been my privilege—or misfortune—to have in my classes pupils of socialistic tendencies. Again I scarcely need say that, given a political subject, the difficulty has not been to provoke free and unlimited discussion—but to end it. And may I not add that the language used—not “employed”—has been uniformly lively, picturesque, and forceful. If any speech depends upon “the man, the subject, and the occasion,” then the choice of the right topic, at the right time, for the right pupil, is indeed important.

But I would not have the conclusion drawn from all this that I would try to make the study of English, either oral or written, too easy. Education in general is sugar-coated enough already. Neither would I have the pupil use “slanguage” instead of language. I would try to make him distinguish between pure slang and idiom; to speak to the point instead of beating about the bush; to be clear instead of being “sufficiently obscure to seem plausible.” I would teach him to attend to his hearers as well as to his subject, realizing that he must get and hold attention before he can “put across” his ideas. I would give him much leeway and so would try to develop his talent instead of mine.

In speaking of all these general and intangible means of getting the pupil to talk I am not unmindful of the lethargic, phlegmatic, unimaginative pupil. I know that we are commissioned to teach all the children of all the people, and that many prosaic and mechanical means must perhaps be used. But these, I insist, should not be dealt out in allopathic doses—they must not be allowed to disgust and discourage by too much insistence upon them. They must not, above all, destroy that divine spark of originality to be found in every pupil. The motive force of enthusiasm must be the main-spring of all worthy effort and accomplishment in the gift of speech. And while no amount of precept or example, however enthusiastically and efficiently presented by the most conscientious and capable teacher, may make him “say it with flowers,” it may make even “one of the least of these” say it more clearly, more forcefully, and altogether better than he has said it before.