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Research in speech education

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RESEARCH IN SPEECH EDUCATION¹

GLENN NEWTON MERRY, CHAIRMAN
University of Iowa

THE Committee on Research Activities of the Association believes that its work is one of the most important in the Association. We believe that you should hold your Research Committee in the future to an active interest in the experimental work of members of the Association and to a program of constructive leadership. We urge upon this convention the realization, if not already apparent, of the needed service of such a committee; of a Committee that will be more than a compiler of an annual report hastily gleaned by a chairman in the closing days of the Association year,—the type of committee that shall be our inheritance unless this realization is expressed in definite terms. The work of the Research Committee has not been an easy task in the past; it must not become such in the future. The Committee must serve the Association in the capacity of largest leadership possible:—as an unprejudiced source of information for those interested in research; as a statistical bureau for those outside the Association desiring information on problems of Speech Education; as a bibliographical Committee to furnish for the Journal an Annual Survey of the researches in the field of Speech Education by those without as well as within the Association; and, as a force for poise in guiding the movement for research in a new field of scientific study related to so old an art as speech provides. This Committee must be a factor in keeping ever before the Association the point of view that we

¹The Report of the Research Committee, Read at the Cleveland Meeting of the Association, December 1920.

are teachers of an art and that our greatest service is rendered in aiding our students to acquire power in *doing*; but that for the teacher another obligation exists, he must *know* as well as be able *to do*. There are many problems in teaching speech that are not questions of artistic appreciation, but of fact. Such problems cannot be settled except by one who knows the facts as such. Not only should the teacher present an accepted example of good speech, but he should possess as wide a background of knowledge as possible as a basis for beliefs in what constitutes excellence in speaking. Individual taste in matters of speech as a sole basis for standards may be an ample justification for the layman, but not for the teacher today in our schools. He or she must *know*, must have a body of facts (of which individual taste may be one factor) which enable him or her as a teacher to justify his standards. This knowledge can come as it has come in the past through preliminary schooling; but it must come, increasingly so in the future, from the results of study and research yielding information beyond that received in the days "at school." Such a purpose for a committee is a pretentious one, it must be admitted; but is it an unnecessary purpose?

As an Association, we must remember that the field of research in problems of Speech Education exists and that we have no mortgage on it or any other field of human knowledge; and, what is of most importance, the research is going to be done either by us or sooner or later by those not represented with membership here. The field is ripe for harvest. No one in touch with the many movements in the educational world for speech improvement, "oral English," community drama, and the like, that have sprung up over night as it were, at least within the memory of almost any one here, can minimize the demand for the kind of work we have been teaching for years. It seems to your Committee that there is a special challenge, a personal appeal, to every member of the Association hungering for a wider and more substantial basis of knowledge about the principles he teaches, hungering for a wider opportunity of service in this educational program, a special challenge to supplement his artistic appreciations and powers by additional strength gained through research. For only through the training gained by research will leaders in this greater educational program be possible. One interrogation may make the point more

clear,—why are not the teachers of this Association more prominent as a factor of influence in the field of public school reading today, than they are? Who would disclaim any interest, speaking for the profession, in being a direct influence in this field of teacher-training so closely and so legitimately interwoven with our own? Most assuredly *we* cannot do it all, nor should we attempt to. But some of us can do much more than we are doing in the way of study and investigation for the purpose of developing broader and more substantial understanding of the facts related to speech, and of the needs of our public school systems, if the information gathered by your Committee in the recent questionnaire is correct. Many are eager for the encouragement and direction that your committee of Research may give. Has not the Association already demonstrated its realization of this larger vision of opportunity:—Departments continue to teach argumentation, debating, and oral interpretation of literature, but they are making offerings in many institutions based upon a wealth of scientific fact that only careful research has, or can, make available in our field from tangent fields of psychology, anatomy and physiology, x-ray, physics, psychiatry, etc.

The committee cannot emphasize too strongly the fact that there is nothing mysterious about research; too much misunderstanding seems to exist as to what is research. This need not and should not be. From replies to the Committee's questionnaire, one realizes that there are vivid misunderstandings. The mere reading and study of a book, in the ordinary sense, cannot be called research. On the other hand, no committee will ever care to be so specific as to define in detail just what is research. There are as many conceptions of research as there are people to define it. What less informed individuals term research, a well informed student of the subject in question may not accept as such. However, the committee is safe in a few general assertions that will go a great way in aiding those who are uncertain as to the research nature of their work.

Research deals with phenomena, their definition and explanation. Research deals with facts, in so far as they can be established; and, where conclusive evidence is lacking with theories that substitute for fact. It is a study, an *impression*, not an *expression*. Research deals with *knowing*, with knowledge; not with *doing*,

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which belongs to art. The training of a special set of muscles for the expression of an emotion in an artistic manner does not as such constitute research. Generalizations based upon observations of methods used by the teacher in the class-room does not constitute research, as the observations are usually carried on with little attempt to limit and know all sources of error in conclusions. Neither a laboratory, a library, nor a graduate college is a *sine qua non*, as usually thought of, for research. Let us get away from the memories or images too frequently associated with the idea of research. For, too often, such arouse the experience of studying for advanced degrees in graduate colleges at great expense and on a subject superimposed on the candidate by the head of the department's interest regardless of the candidate's interests; and of those having achieved even a degree of Ph.D settling down thereafter with the feeling that they have done their part toward the field of knowledge and the profession that they represent, making no further contribution than a thesis of a most limited nature and scope. That is one type of research, and in the main, research that is carried on in graduate colleges under competent professors along lines that arouse an interest in the student proves to be the most satisfactory type and that most advisable. But there are those who do not find it convenient to enter a graduate college or who have already received the highest degree awarded by graduate colleges. Shall they be forbidden research efforts or be excused on those grounds?

The outstanding feature of research activity is the originality element, the highly personal nature of the study. One engages in research to discover for *himself*, primarily. He must weigh all facts and fancies that he digs out in the light of *his own* information and experience. The second characteristic is the desire to find the truth, or as we generally say, to find the facts. This involves methods of investigation and thinking that cannot be uncommon to any student of the principles of argumentation. The usual accompaniment of this statement of purpose is the added phrase "in the scientific spirit." The quest of truth in the scientific spirit means nothing more or less than the investigation of facts under conditions that can be controlled, i. e., that permit of the isolation of factors for observation and the possibility of repeating these conditions identically for further study or as proof to him who may doubt

one's findings. The third feature involves definiteness, a specific point to be proved, an exclusion of irrelevant matter and a finding of the issues,—in short a stated thesis or hypothesis. Dominant in this conception is the probability that the thesis will yield to proof. Among other characteristics that might be mentioned, the fact that the results of the research may serve some human end is an essential justification. But it is not necessary to limit one's research to an immediate and urgent demand that will yield fame, wealth, or both, desirable as these concomitants are to the scholar. These are broad outlines of limitation, to be sure. But your committee feels certain that, considering such a generally accepted standard, many would have reported research activity who did not; and, that some who were so confident of their work would not have termed it research.

Work done within the foregoing named limits should be accredited. Each individual must yet remain pretty much the definer of his own work's status; and then, departments in our colleges and universities maintain definitions of research that may not be wholly common to their sister institutions, in every particular. And far be it from the purpose of any research committee in the near future to attempt evaluations beyond the pointing out of work calling for special mention. The Association is not ready to say, through its committee, what work is unprofitable research. Work of the right kind is valuable regardless of its immediate utility and should be encouraged. It was from one of the obscure scientists in an unknown laboratory, almost, that was developed an apparatus of unusual merit that would have contributed no small part in bringing victory had the war continued. Not volume of work, spectacular features of work, timeliness, wideness of immediate appeal, books written, pages of reprints, nor degrees won, desirable as these may be, are a basis just now for any evaluations of what members or non-members are accomplishing in research. These will come later, without doubt.

But just now our Association should encourage everyone to do all he can to increase and reinterpret the body of fact that forms the basis of our teaching of the art of speech.

The contribution that your committee has attempted to make this year in its work is a sort of snapshot of all the interests of the members in the field of research, a sort of cross section view, as

it were. No method seemed more potential than the use of the familiar and unpopular questionnaire. Interrogations were framed to cover about every phase of a members' interest in this type of study, provided he answered them. Three hundred and twenty two were mailed and replies came back from approximately one third of the membership. Those who did not reply were mainly teachers engaged in secondary education. No questionnaires were sent to workers that were not members. The most impressive fact revealed by these replies is the earnestness of tone, of purpose, and breadth of point of view they disclose. All replies showed an interest in research, with but one exception. Most replies stated the belief that research was an indispensable element in teacher-training, where possible.

The first question inquired as to the nature of research work that each was engaged in for himself. The range of interest is a most healthy indication of growth. The Committee accepted at face value the reports furnished. It felt that the Association should learn at this meeting just what its members are doing and what their *interests* in this regard are. The fields of work may be classified into these noted below.

Speech Correction. Wisconsin is continuing in even a broader fashion the work of Dr. Blanton who is now engaged in a survey in a number of the city schools of the State. Miss Dacey reports on a tabulation of cases in connection with her work as a specialist in the Boston Public Schools. Along with Boston in this movement come reports from similar work in Bayonne, N. J. by Marguerite Brown, and from Jersey City by Augusta Ziegner. Hannah More Creasey reports on research in the field of etiology of stuttering; the research being carried on in connection with her work as instructor of speech in Columbia University, supervisor of speech in the Jersey City schools and director of the speech clinic in the Jersey City Hospital. Miss Hedrick, in the Washington School for Speech Correction reports on a study connected with the development of the voices of the adult deaf. Ray K. Immel of the University of Michigan is giving special attention to some case types in stuttering. A study compiled by Miss Stinchfield, formerly of the University of Iowa, now at Wisconsin, is available in booklet form from the Child Welfare Research Station of the University of Iowa. Henrietta Rackham, supervisor of speech

improvement, Mankato, Minn., public schools, reports work on a special phase of her problem.

Voice Science. Research is being continued at the University of Iowa along these lines, with special emphasis this year upon the development of an apparatus which now is operating successfully that will give graphic representations of speech sounds. The voice is first recorded on the phonograph, then reproduced from the record, by means of the apparatus, by a tracing upon a smoked drum. The pitch and intensity values, the rate of utterance and time values of enunciation of such tracing are easily read and offer an absolute and reproducible bit of evidence as to what occurs in speech as far as sounds are concerned. The apparatus times these elements to within a thousandth of a second which is sufficient for present studies. With this machine it is hoped to make a functional interpretation of the use of pitch emphasis, and other studies in the near future that depend upon an exact and objective method of getting a record of the voice. In this connection studies are being carried on in the psychology of speech.

Theory of Expression. This heading embraces mainly the studies and research that is of a psychological nature. Professor Gaylord of Winona State Normal, Minnesota, is on a year's leave of absence engaged in research on human reactions in so far as they shape voice and gesture through influence on experience. Professor Weaver of the University of Wisconsin is continuing the research he reported on last year. S. L. Kennedy of Syracuse University reports work in this phase but does not outline it. Then most of us are already familiar with the contributions of Dr. C. H. Woolbert, published during the last year, a study on "Effects of Various Modes of Public Reading," published in the Journal of Applied Psychology, June-September 1920; and a book, *The Fundamentals of Speech*. Professor Drummond of Cornell reports some work he is beginning in the field of the psychology of persuasion.

Speech Composition. This heading includes such studies as involve language for expression. Professor Gough of De Pauw University is doing some work on oral composition. Professor J. M. O'Neill is completing some studies in speech composition which will likely appear in print in the near future. Mr. P. M.

Hicks of Swarthmore College is at present engaged in research in the graduate college, English department of the University of Pennsylvania. Mr. C. F. Lindsley of the University of Minnesota is continuing the work in the analysis of oratory along lines recently published in the Quarterly Journal. Professor Bromley Smith of Bucknell University is completing an elaborate bibliography of rhetoric in its broadest sense; and a special study on "Corax, the Founder of Rhetoric," will likely soon appear in the Quarterly Journal. Messrs. Hudson, Hannah, and Caplan of Cornell University, are also doing some work in this field.

History of Oratory. Professor Layton of Muskingum college and Professor Hunt of Cornell University report work in this field.

Dialects. Professor T. C. Trueblood, of Michigan, is making a study of English dialect or provincialisms, localizing certain provincialisms. Miss Prentiss of Hunter college, New York City, reports a study on the effect of foreign language as an influence on the English of certain parts of New York City. Miss Johnson of Wisconsin University is engaged in a study of dialect and its use for interpretative purposes. She also has published recently a book containing studies in oral interpretation.

Reading and Dramatic Production. Each of the following report some study in this field: Professor Mabie, the University of Iowa, Professor Fritz, Otterbein college, Miss Voight, Ohio University, Professor Hollister, the University of Michigan, and Professor Tallcott, Valparaiso University. Professor Koch wrote and produced the pageant-drama "Raleigh: The Shepherd of the Ocean," as a part of the celebration of the tercentenary of Raleigh's death.

Methods. Mr. West of the University of Iowa is engaged on a study of a basis for more satisfactory grading in public speaking contests. Professor Hunt of Cornell University reports on a study of the teaching of public speaking in Athens.

If your work, or that of your department, is not properly represented in this report it is because of the indefiniteness of inadequacy of your report.

No attempt will be made here to outline the studies that are being carried on by non-members. It is the hope of the Committee that you will provide a method for furnishing the readers of the

Journal with this information, regularly, as a part of the work of the Committee on Research Interests. In passing, however, attention should be called to the following which provide the teacher of speech-science with a store-house of fact: *Vox*, published monthly in Berlin, *Volta Review*, *The Psychological Index*, *Science Abstracts*, and articles appearing in the *Medical Index*.

The questionnaire brought out other interesting features than those mentioned above. No college or University reported any supervision in research, in class; i. e., it seems that little graduate work of a strictly research nature is being carried on by departments. If the report is correct, the situation is likely due to the fact that our departments have not yet fully recovered from the effects of the war on teaching interests. Most departments are as yet undersupplied with teachers. The Committee wishes to call attention, however, to the condition and urge its consideration; for only from our academic institutions is apt to come continuous and wide-spread discovery of the fact basis in speech-science.

Answers to the inquiry, "If not interested in research, feel free to state why," brought the following characteristic replies. "Lack of time." "Equipment and library facilities inadequate." "A college cannot carry on research; this must be left to the University." "I have no faith in research, except voice-science and corrective speech." Only one replied, "I have not the time nor inclination."

"What estimate do you place upon research as a proper basis for any teacher's training?" was the Committee's fifth interrogation. A fair interpretation of the replies is made by the following quotations from answers. "No teacher can keep up to his best who is not growing." "The more the better." "A necessity." "Makes for an authoritative broadening of this very important but much maligned subject." "Should not be given prestige over practical preparation." "Very important, but not of paramount importance." "Valuable, if the teacher remains human." "A proper basis. It is valuable, but not indispensable. Some of the best teachers have never done any original work, yet they have been successful as teachers. Nevertheless, . . . I believe work of a scholarly nature must be done. But those desiring advanced work have no place to go when they wish the professional degree of Ph.D. in Public Speaking."

Inquiry six, as to whether the school administration at "your

institution" favored and encouraged research in speech, brought out the fact that twelve University administrations encouraged the work, eight college and one normal school administration. Administrations did not seem to encourage research in speech problems in ten universities, thirteen colleges and four normal schools.

As to the chief handicaps toward research work suffered by the members of the Association in their respective institutions, question seven brought the response that they were:—"Lack of professional guidance." "Insufficient health for more than assigned work." "Teaching schedules that were too heavy to permit of additional study." "Required to teach too many types of courses to have the opportunity to specialize in any one phase." "Administrative details."

The eighth question inquired as to advanced degrees offered. Cornell University offers work for the Master of Arts degree, as also do the Universities of Iowa, Michigan, Valparaiso, and Wisconsin. Ohio Wesleyan University and Swarthmore college have special courses leading to the M. A. degree. The Universities of Iowa and Wisconsin are offering this year work for a minor toward the Ph.D. degree with the probability of offering work for a major toward the Ph.D. degree next year.

From the vote of the questionnaire as to what fields needed research the most, voice-science was the most popular, speech correction was a close second with psychological aspects of expression coming in for a close third place. Scattering votes called attention to the needs in the following fields of interest; dramatic production; courses of study, persuasion, reading, speech composition, diction, and methods.

The response was unanimously favorable and in most instances took the form of an urgent request for the service mentioned in question twelve of the questionnaire:—"Would you be interested in an annual synopsis of speech researches in all phases by psychologists, physicists, physiologists, and our own members, accumulated by the research committee and published in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education*?"

In the light, therefore, of its investigation of the research interests of the Association during the past year, the committee makes the following suggestions to this convention as possible recommendations to the Research Committee for next year:

1. That the convention program provide annually for a round table on research.
2. That the committee on research act as a co-operative agency with those desiring advice upon beginning research, even suggesting problems suitable in so far as it is possible to ascertain knowledge of conditions and equipment of the applicant.
3. That the committee co-operate with any teacher desiring to present the needs of research in the field of speech to his officers of administration in case such co-operation is likely to prove helpful.
4. That the committee on research be assigned the work of creating an annual bibliographical survey of the publications touching upon phases of speech.

Thus, to sum up the work of your Committee this year:—its purpose has been to revive the ideal of the first committee on research, namely, to become an aggressive factor in the Association stimulating all members interested in research, attempting to unite their efforts into a concrete service, and where feasible to aid those desiring to begin research. It further seeks to make clear the place of research in our field by holding that research is a subordinate but essential feature of *instruction* in the art of speaking. Your committee wishes to permit of no misunderstanding of the importance of research for the teacher, for him who would teach others the *laws of expression*. It presses home the question of standards in teacher-training which only research can provide. Shall we, as employers of teachers, accept instructors below the averages of training demanded by other academic fields such as mathematics, economics, history, French or English literature? Is there not an obligation resting upon us who employ teachers to create a situation in our institutions in which we can say to the younger, yet ambitious teacher, "You face no obstacle in this institution beyond that of any other department to your being able to secure the highest rank, distinction, and salary offered."

Such a purpose demands not *exclusively* elaborate laboratories and equipment, the environment of the Graduate college and the shadows of University buildings. These are of great importance;

but such a purpose demands an *attitude of mind* in which one observes phenomena with most careful scrutiny and analysis, in which data is compiled always watchful for sources of error, in which methods are based upon what seems to be truth—"not snap judgments" and popular conceptions which too often are misconceptions. In other words, such a purpose demands *scholarship*, the foundation of all education.