

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CORRELATION BETWEEN COMMUNITY LIFE AND ENGLISH. III¹

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Motivation in composition work.—Why do boys and girls dislike composition? That many of them do, will hardly be questioned. That it is an unnatural attitude is obvious, for under ordinary circumstances the desire for self-expression is almost as universal as the desire for play. After a hard football game or an exciting tennis match, all normal boys like to “talk it over”; whoever saw a girl who did not like to chat about a party or an amusing play? The situation in the case of oral or written composition in school is quite a different matter, for with many pupils the preparation of a talk or the writing of a theme is a dreary and distasteful task. Why this dislike?

Among the various causes which may explain this attitude there are two which seem of outstanding importance. The first of these is the feeling on the part of many boys and girls that they have nothing which they care to talk or write about. If thrown on their own resources for the choice of a topic, they frequently find that their minds are blank or that they can think of nothing but commonplace trivialities on worked-out subjects. Oftentimes they find the situation no better when topics are suggested by the teacher. Painstaking pupils have been known to spend hours either trying to find a topic to write about or trying to write about a topic concerning which they were uninformed.

Another feature which helps to explain the distaste for formal composition felt by many boys and girls is the impression, sometimes well founded, that neither their classmates nor their teachers

¹ The two preceding articles described the administration and organization of a combination course in community-life English and discussed the work from the standpoint of reading or literature.

are really interested in what they write or say. Whenever this idea is held, work in composition necessarily appears artificial and in the nature of a school task which is to be done—so the pupil reasons—only because it is required. Work in oral and written expression which arouses enthusiasm must have a different motive behind it. We write letters to our friends on the assumption that we have something to tell them and that they will be glad to read what we write; the newspaper reporter who prepares a description of a fire or a wreck believes that people will read his account with interest; a lecturer or a preacher plans his address for an audience. True expression, in short, always has a social purpose and grows out of a genuine audience situation.

If this analysis is correct, it would seem to follow that the pupils' interest in oral and written expression requires, first, that they be given topics to talk and write about in which they are interested and, second, that the work be so arranged as to provide an audience situation. This would necessitate a selection of topics which concern all pupils, for anything which concerns a person, which appeals to him, which affects his welfare, is likely to be of interest to him. It would necessitate also the planning of the work so as to enable pupils not only to make real contributions to the class but to know that they are making such contributions.

It is upon these ideas that the procedure in expression in the combination course in English and social science in the laboratory schools of the University of Chicago is based, for, as stated in the first article of this series, the aim of the course from this standpoint is to stimulate boys and girls to clear, fluent, and effective expression in both oral and written composition.

Suitability of social-science topics for composition purposes.—In the light of the foregoing discussion let us examine briefly the topics included in the course from the point of view of their suitability for composition purposes. It is apparent that these topics all deal with matters which are of concern to boys and girls, although they may not at first realize it. In addition, they all relate to things with which pupils have had some experience. For example, boys and girls, like older people, are dependent upon others for much that makes life worth while. With few exceptions, they have

lived since birth as members of families. Usually, from the age of six on, they have spent a large portion of their time in school. While they may not have joined a church, most of them have at some time come under its influence in the Sunday school or in connection with its other activities. All their lives they have been members of a community, sharing its opportunities and affected by its problems. By the time they reach junior high school age, some of them have come into direct contact with the world of work, and most of them have begun to think about an occupation. Even in the realm of government they have usually had some experience, although this experience may be limited to the use of the streets and the parks, to the handling of postage stamps and money, or to the seeing of firemen and street cleaners at their accustomed tasks. Since community-life English is composed of topics which are not only of concern to the pupils but more or less related to their experience, it would seem to follow that the material of the course is well suited for composition purposes.

It is obvious, however, that the teacher must bring out the significance of much of this material by questions, illustrations, and class discussions before many of the pupils will realize its relation to them and be aware of the fact that they, too, have something they would like to say or write. For example, the teacher, in taking up the first topic in the course, "Myself and Others," may proceed by calling the attention of the class, first, to the ways in which people in the city are dependent upon people outside the city for food, fuel, and raw materials from which to make articles; second, to the manner in which people in the country must, in turn, depend upon people in the city for phonographs and pianos, plows and harvesting machinery, wagons and automobiles; third, to the ways in which countries depend upon one another, as, for example, England upon Ireland for dairy products and Ireland upon England for manufactured goods. After such an exercise it is easy to turn the thoughts of the pupils to the ways in which the same interdependence appears in the lives of all the members of the class. A suggestion at this time that pupils write short compositions, showing how they depend on others or how others depend on them, finds their minds alert and active on a subject which most of

them have never consciously realized before. The following compositions¹ resulted from such an exercise.

THE DEPENDENCE OF THE HUMAN RACE

One cold winter's morning, when the maid came in to close the windows and turn on the radiator, we found, to my great disgust, that the heat would not come up. Then I began to wonder what I should do if I had no one to wait on me and make things for me. I was astounded at my great dependence on others. For instance, just taking the things in my room, there was the very bed in which I was lying. What would I have done if there had been no men to make it? Then, there were the rugs, tables, chairs, lights, and thousands of other little things. Then I thought of food. I was dependent on others in this case, too. For breakfast I generally had a glass of milk, some toast, and peach marmalade. If it had not been for the men in the dairies I would have had no milk; for the bread, I depended on the cook to make it, of course, but behind her there were the farmers who had raised the grain from which we got the flour, the men who got the salt wherever it came from, and all of the things which go into the making of bread, even the men who had made it possible to have the gas with "Katherine, get up this minute," said mother from across the hall—and I did.

A GOLD FILLING

Before our discussion in class, I little thought of how dependent we all are on many classes of people. When one goes to the dentist for a gold filling, it is not natural to think of a man shoveling sand into a wheelbarrow, or the manager of a bee farm, as being connected in any way with the filling, but if either of these men refused to do his part, a gold filling could not be obtained.

The story of a gold filling begins in a gold mine. Here we depend upon the miner and, before that, upon the men who discovered a way to get the gold, perhaps after years of effort. From the mine the gold, mixed with rock, is loaded on to a railroad, where the railroad engineers are indispensable.

Next the gold must be separated from the rock. When all foreign material is removed, skilled workmen shape it into bars. The last part of the preparation comes when the dentist shapes it into the correct form. He could not do this if it were not for the manager of a bee farm, already mentioned, as the filling is made with the aid of a wax cast.

A great many men are involved in the transportation of the metal. From the mine it passes through the hands of railroad men. Shippers convey it to the city where it is to be used. Auto drivers take it to the dealer and, later, carry it to the dentist himself.

It is at the period when the filling is actually put into the tooth that we depend on the man who shovels sand, as without the aid of a looking-glass, it

¹ The items reproduced in this article have been slightly edited by way of omissions and the correction of mechanical errors; otherwise, they stand substantially as written by the pupils.

would be impossible to get the filling in the proper place, and sand is the raw material for glass.

In this way it is seen how many men are involved in the "simple" life of a gold filling.

HOW OTHERS DEPEND ON ME

At first when I was wondering if any one really depended upon me I thought they did not. But afterward I found that some do. Our school depends on me for my part of good school spirit, for good studying, and for good behavior around school. Our household depends upon me for co-operation in its work. My mother, who is a writer of children's books, depends upon me to a certain extent for inspiration. My home depends upon me for making some of its happiness. So I find that really the school, our household, and my mother depend upon me.

Creating an audience situation for oral expression.—The extensive reading which pupils do in the community-life course makes it relatively easy to provide a real audience situation for a considerable part of the work in oral and written expression. The "floor-talk," which was referred to in the preceding article as one of the means employed to check the reading of pupils, will illustrate this point. After the pupils have been working along a certain line for a week or ten days, they are asked to select some phase of the topic in which they are especially interested or something which impressed them in their reading as the subject for a talk to be given a few days later before the class. These talks vary in length from two to fifteen minutes; in general, there is greater difficulty in keeping pupils within reasonable bounds than in stimulating them to talk long enough.

When the pupils have selected their subjects they are sometimes asked to hand them in, together with their names, on small cards. Usually the wide reading results in such a diversity of topics that each pupil knows that he can make a real contribution to the class. This results in enthusiasm on his part and in attention on the part of the class which are difficult to secure when a pupil gives his classmates merely a rehash of what they already know. When there is a duplication of topics, the pupils concerned are asked to confer and arrange matters so that no two will present the same phase of the subject. This arrangement they are eager to make, for they are quick to sense the value of the audience situation.

Another way of taking advantage of the wide reading of the pupils, and at the same time of providing a genuine audience situa-

tion for oral expression, is to vary the procedure just described by having the class co-operate in the preparation of a "program" of floor talks. As suggestions of interesting phases of the topic suitable for this purpose are made, they are written on the black-board, criticized by the pupils, improved in phraseology, and grouped under appropriate headings. Each pupil then volunteers to take one of the subtopics as the subject of his talk. The following is a program of the floor-talks which were given in connection with the topic "The School."

I. Education in other days

1. The school life of animals
2. The education of the Spartans
3. School days in ancient Athens
4. Education in ancient Rome
5. Schools of the Middle Ages
6. The education of a knight
7. The education of an Indian boy
8. Schools in colonial days
9. Schools in America one hundred years ago
10. The Hoosier School Boy
11. My grandfather's experience as a school teacher at sixteen
12. When my mother went to school

II. Schools of other countries

1. School life in Norway
2. My school life in Germany
3. French schools of today
4. Schools in China
5. Russian schools
6. School life in Winchester, England
7. School life in Rugby
8. My grandfather's school life in Prague

III. Education of famous persons

1. Socrates, the teacher
2. Education of Plato
3. Education of a famous artist—Rosa Bonheur
4. Comparison of the education of Lincoln and Roosevelt
5. Education of Booker T. Washington
6. Education of Helen Keller
7. Formal education of Woodrow Wilson
8. The education of Herbert Hoover
9. Education of the Kaiser

IV. Other schools that I have known

1. My experience in a country school
2. A negro school I visited in the South
3. The military school I went to
4. The Ray School (a comparison with University High School)
5. What our school gives me that another did not
6. My days in a public school

V. Educational opportunities in our own city and country

1. The Belmont School
2. The Gary schools
3. Educational opportunities in Maryland
4. The junior republic
5. Educational opportunities in Chicago
6. Interesting features of our own school
7. Schools of the future

Variety in written compositions.—That social-science material affords opportunity for wide variety in oral expression is evident from the foregoing list of subjects for talks. A similar result appears in the written compositions. As an illustration of the variety which occurs in content even when pupils write upon the same subject, the following themes have interest. The first and third were written by boys.

MY IDEAL FAMILY

Mother, may I do this and may I do that, all day long from seven to twelve children, is not my ideal of a human family. In this arrangement no child receives enough attention but is constantly drifting away from care and responsibility. The children may receive enough food and clothing, but it is almost impossible to lead a normal comfortable life with half a dozen or more children tagging around all day. The mother becomes irritable and cross, and with a cross mother not much can be done. The father after a hard day's work doesn't wish to come home to find an upset, unnoraml household; and if he does, he becomes irritable also.

My ideal family is one where there are from two to five children and a kind, hard-working father and mother. "Hard-working" does not mean drudgery all day but something useful that's being done. The mother should not bear the brunt of the work, for the majority of it should be done by the father. The children should be helpful and kind and go to school regularly. The mother and father ought to be congenial with each other and endeavor to bring up the children in the best way possible together.

MY IDEAL HOME

It was a bitter cold February night. The wind whistled and howled around the corners in relentless fury. The very tree tops groaned in the gale.

But in our little living-room all was warm and cozy. The fire roaring in the grate sent its flickering shadows over the room where Mother sat knitting, the rhythmic click of her needles keeping time to Dad's gentle breathing as he sat dozing over the evening paper. From the corner, where sister was reading *Polly's Adventures at Boarding School*, came an occasional chuckle or sigh. And I sat gazing dreamily into the fire, trying to visualize my ideal home.

I built a little bungalow in the dancing flames, but it was rejected for something more inviting. I built and rejected many homes in the four corners of the earth and finally decided upon a stately mansion among the swaying palms. But it seemed so forbidding that I looked around with a contented sigh on our cozy little room. And I suddenly realized that what I had been travelling all over the world for, in imagination, was right in that very room. After all, what difference did it make where we lived as long as we were all together? And though many people before me had found this out, I had just discovered for myself that an ideal home is anywhere, be it north, south east, or west, where one's loved ones may be together.

MY IDEA OF AN IDEAL FAMILY

The father of this family is a tall man, six feet in his stocking feet and is well filled out. He doesn't smoke or chew, and when he comes home at night he is not grouchy if business was not good.

The mother is five feet ten inches and rather slim. She isn't given much to going out and is rather a home body. She cooks fine meals and makes fine mince pie. She goes to a show downtown about once every two months and belongs to the Red Cross.

The boy is in his teens and takes after his father in height and mother in weight. He copies his father in everything he does. The girl is about four feet ten inches and is a smaller model of her mother. She obeys her father and mother and, most of the time, her older brother.

Their home life is ideal because there is nothing thrown or any tongue fights and there are not any weeks of sullen silence between the parents.

Social-science content and argumentation.—But is the material which forms the core of the community-life course suited for forms of composition other than exposition and description? Teachers of English will naturally consider this question of vital importance in evaluating social-science content for purposes of instruction in expression. In answer, it is, of course, only necessary to point out that, with rare exceptions, the questions which are debated in school and college all fall within the realm of the social sciences. As might be anticipated, therefore, oral expression in the form of debate forms an important part of the work in the community-

life classes. Among the questions which have been debated are the following:

Resolved, that foreign unskilled laborers should not be allowed to enter the United States during the next ten years.

Resolved, that motion-picture theaters as now conducted do more harm than good to the community.

Resolved, that in all occupations in which it can be applied, wages should be based on piece work rather than on hours of toil.

Resolved, that a tribunal similar to the Kansas Industrial Court should be established in Illinois.

Social-science content and imaginative literature.—Social-science material, as represented by the topics in the course under discussion, has also proved its value for the writing of short stories, poems, and plays. There seems, in fact, to be no form of literary expression to which this material is not adapted. This is, of course, what might be expected, for the social sciences deal with life, and what is literature but a reflection of life? That this truth is realized by some pupils is apparent from the following answer, quoted only in part, which one of the girls gave to the question, Is “community life” properly classified as a course in English?

“Literature is a reflection of life,” said Bacon in one of his essays; and the world since then has accepted his statement as one of the truest ever made.

The literature of a nation, its writings, the thoughts of its people expressed in words, must, of necessity, mirror the surroundings and life of the nation, even if that is not the main theme. An illustration of this is O. Henry’s works. O. Henry’s stories simply radiate modern life, yet nowhere, in any of his writings, can a lengthy dissertation on modern life be found. The actions, thoughts, and descriptions of his characters and their problems furnish all the necessary material.

This is true not only of prose, but also of poetry and drama. Shakespeare’s plays picture the luxurious ease of the high-born subjects of “Good Queen Bess” and their extravagance of emotion which is “at once passionate and artificial”; in a similar way—to go to the other extreme—Sandburg’s “Chicago” pictures the roaring, hustling city of might which is, as he expresses it, “proud to be chief hog butcher of the nations.”

Since knowledge of literature is one of the main reasons for the teaching of English and literature is a reflection of life, then, because all civilized people live their lives in communities, “community life” should be classified as English.

If the writings of individuals reflect the life of their times, they should learn all about their communities, so that they may represent life more clearly. This information is furnished in "community life." In a narrow sense, English includes only the principles of grammar and a study of literature; but if the statement, "Literature is a reflection of life," is true, this gives English a much wider field, and "community life" should certainly be classified under it.

An idea of the degree to which social-science material is adapted to the various forms of literary expression may be obtained from the following work of the pupils. In some instances the limitations of space have made it impossible to reproduce the entire composition. In each case the topic, in connection with which the theme was written, is given.

THE SCHOOL: MY IDEAL TEACHER

My ideal for a teacher is very high because the teacher is the model for the students to copy. If the model is wrong, the things copied from it will be wrong. I think that first an ideal teacher must have a good education, for education makes high ideals and culture. Also, the teacher should learn not only the subjects he is to teach but how to teach well. The next thing necessary is enthusiasm. He or she must be careful to keep out of a rut, to keep wide-awake and alive, getting new ideas and giving them to the pupils.

Of course, there are certain characteristics necessary for an ideal teacher such as patience, co-operation, humor. By patience, I don't mean just enduring on the part of the teacher, but scolding when it will help the student and not when it will relieve the teacher's feelings. By co-operation, I mean the ability of the teacher to make the students feel that they are working together on an equal basis to gain the same end, knowledge. Humor helps the spirit of co-operation and brightens school work. Another thing I think important is the teacher's dress. It is one of the best ways to teach good taste to students. It is a practical application of culture.

It is very hard, of course, to explain that something way down inside that makes a good teacher, but I think if you add the right kind of education, enthusiasm, patience, co-operation, humor, good taste, or culture, together you will have, as near as I can explain it, an ideal teacher.

IMMIGRATION: WHAT AMERICA MEANS TO SOME PEOPLE

Cast

Mother	Boy, fifteen years old
Father	Girl, thirteen years old
Neighbors	Girl, seven years old

Messenger

Scene I. Peasant House in Russia

(Four o'clock in the morning. Family bustling around in the dingy kitchen. Mother packing. Father has gone out. Boy and older girl getting breakfast. Youngest child is still in bed.)

Boy: Oh mother, think, only three more days before we leave for America!

Older girl: Won't it be a wonderful place? It seems as though far-off America is nothing but a dream. Who could realize where we shall be in two months?

Mother: Yes, children, America is a wonderful place, but think of the friends you are leaving behind you.

Older girl: Oh, mother, don't remind us of that. It is so hard to leave one's friends.

(Youngest child enters)

Youngest child: Mama, how many days before we start for America?

Mother: Three days, dear.

Youngest child: Let's go now.

Mother: We are too busy getting ready to leave now. When everything is ready we will go. Run down to the store now and get me some thread to fix this carpet bag. . . .

RECREATION: SEA SHELLS

Upon the beach there lay a pile of shells,
Gathered by childish hands in happy play;
Within their fragile spirals, rose and gray,
Rings e'er the echo of sweet far-off bells.

The waves dash high and hard upon the beach
And slide back foaming o'er the well-washed sands;
But though they snatch with eager, angry hands,
The shells are ever far beyond their reach.

'Tis thus in life. The storms of every day,
The chaos and the toil of worldly race,
Not these, nor any sorrow can efface
The happy memory of childhood's play.

INDUSTRY: THE TALE OF THAND, THE WEAVER

Far off in the land of Angolan is a beautiful shrine, all made of fretted gold and studded with diamonds and rubies; and in this shrine is a tiny golden loom, a magic loom, which spins cloth-of-gold alone, and which is sacred to the god of all the weavers—Siga.

The loom is kept so bright that the land of Angolan is called Tithra—which means "two suns"—because the rays of the stars reflected on the loom make the land as bright at night as when the desert sun shines on the burnished sands at midday. Small wonder, then, that the people of Angolan guard it

jealously, and still offer sacrifices to the god Siga, although he has not moved from the temple for a thousand and three years.

Now it befell, either by chance or some decree of the gods, that the tale of the golden loom was learned by Thand, chief weaver of Zist, a land as far removed from Angolan as the north star is from the moon. . . .

Community life and intellectual interest.—One of the most encouraging features of the course, which can be only mentioned in bringing this article to a close, is the extent to which the work seems adapted to awaken or stimulate intellectual interest. This interest is shown sometimes by the extensive reading which a pupil does on a given topic. At other times it appears in a diligent search for material not on the book list which deals with a phase of the subject which has awakened curiosity; an instance of this was the investigation by one of the girls of all the literature she could find in the general library of the University of Chicago on “The Sports and Fêtes of Japanese Children,” an investigation which culminated in the writing of an eighteen-page paper on the subject, artistically illustrated with pen-and-ink drawings of her own making. Again, it has been indicated by a series of compositions, usually of the pupil’s own devising, dealing with a certain line of study. One boy, for example, became so much interested in a study of the motion-picture industry that he wrote three extensive papers on the subject. These papers, which totaled seventy-three pages, were entitled “The Motion-Picture Industry,” “Trick Movies,” and “The Morals of the Movies”; they were illustrated with drawings showing the mechanism of the cinematograph, appropriate pictures and clippings from newspapers and magazines, and portions of films. Another boy became equally enthusiastic about the steel industry and prepared a series of worthwhile papers on the subject, carefully illustrated with drawings, clippings, and pictures.

The evidence, then, seems to indicate that a combination course in English and social science of the sort described is productive of genuine intellectual interest; of extensive and purposeful reading in worthy literature; and of clear and fluent expression in both oral and written composition. Its utility as a means of civic education has come only incidentally within the scope of these articles.