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ABSTRACT

A perusal of back issues of the "English Journal" since its beginnings in 1912 reveals a sense of continuity in the teaching profession. Over the years, the journal has addressed topics of interest to teachers. Some of these topics, even those from the earliest issues, shed light on current topics in English teaching, including the following: (1) teaching conditions, (2) competency testing, (3) the value of teaching literature, (4) grading, (5) beginning teaching, (6) basic writing, (7) teaching materials, (8) English as a second language, (9) writing across the curriculum, (10) dialects, (11) teaching techniques, (12) film, (13) book selection, and (14) special students. The reading of back issues provides members of the profession with a sense of where they have been and also reveals what is and is not new. In addition, back issues reveal a sense of history--not only of English teaching, but of American education and society as well. (HOD)

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The "Archives" of English Journal

Two Novembers ago, a colleague of mine was cleaning out the closet in his office and unearthed a surprisingly large collection of journals. "I've got to clear this place out," he said, "and I guess these will have to go." Having spent much of my life collecting things--books, records, furniture--I couldn't pass up the chance to acquire an enormous set of journals in English, so I asked if I might have the back issues of English Journal.

The day before Christmas break, I found a stack of back issues at least four feet high blocking the entrance of my office. I was delighted to find issues dated as early as 1946; my own collection, measly by comparison, had begun with my membership to NCTE in 1976. I had inherited a "library." So I shoved the journals inside my office and began sorting them.

Although my time was limited (after all, I had other work to do), I began perusing a few issues. But, unfortunately and fortunately, my "perusal" often amounted to reading the articles in an entire issue, checking for the editor's name, reading some of the advertisements, and noticing the variations in the printing formats from year to year.

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As an archeologist discovers something about a culture by examining its artifacts, I began to learn more about the profession I had chosen.

One 1946 article began:

"Writing a composition is little short of punishment for the majority of our English students" (McDonald, 5:7, 390).

And I realized that times, and students, haven't changed that much.

A hypothetical student in a 1953 article asked:

"You are not going to make us do reports, are you?" (Brochick, 42:5, 262).

And except for the notable "are not" instead of "aren't," the student and the situation seemed all too familiar.

A 1961 article began with this premise:

"When teachers of writing and speaking seek guidelines for their future, they will find them, I believe, not primarily in grammar, linguistics, and logic, but in the ancient and honorable art of rhetoric" (Wallace, 50:6, 384).

And I was surprised--for I had somehow (naively, I'm sure) come to believe that the rhetorical focus of composition belonged predominantly to College Composition and Communication.

A lead sentence in a 1967 article stated:

"It has become an educational platitude to speak of 'reading deficiencies' as a primary problem of American education" (Wimmer, 56:3, 453).

And that reminded me that perhaps A Nation at Risk had discovered nothing wholly new in American education.

A 1973 article ironically began:

"Here we are again: English teachers talking to English teachers about censorship" (Olson, 62:5, 779).

And that stressed that some issues neither die nor go away.

A likeably frantic poem in 1979 began:

"No time for lunch. I'm grading papers now:  
No Fritos, no Velveeta, no Gruyere.  
From separate pages, M. Gustave Flaubert  
And Blanche DuBois approach and nod and bow,  
And soon they're wrestling, yelling, pulling hair.  
'Blanche! Gustave! Please! Transition! Comma splice!'  
I rush in brandishing my felt-tip Flair" (Romines,  
68:5, 33).

How easily I am reminded of balancing the art of living and the art of teaching.

What a treasure I had acquired in my back issues of English Journal, for in them I discovered a sense of continuity as well

as a sense of change--and I found some excellent articles and poems as well.

Some weeks later, I was in the library tracking down a source for a paper, and I came across Indiana State's bound collection of English Journal, shelf after shelf of blue-bound volumes. It was a large body of material to look at, but I began. Let me share some of what I discovered.

In 1912, the year NCTE began publishing the journal in the field, the editor was James F. Hosis--a name familiar to readers of J.N. Hooks' A Long Way Together (Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1979). The journal was an all-purpose forum for teachers of English at any grade level. How interesting it was to see articles on teaching practices in the elementary classroom next to theoretical articles about college-level works of literature. English Journal, in the ten years of Hosis's editorship, was eclecticism at its best. Issues both small and large were addressed; articles, both short and long, were included; ideas, both practical and esoteric, were presented. Even the advertisements--ranging from teaching aids to the newest editions of literary texts--suggested that the scope of the early English Journal was expansive.

In 1922, W. Wilbur Hatfield assumed the editorship of the journal after a long term as associate editor. For six years the journal remained the same, presenting materials of interest to English teachers at all grade levels. Then, in 1928, English Journal began a publication pattern that was to continue for seventeen years: printing two separately prepared versions--a

high school edition and a college edition. Assuming, I suspect, that some subjects were of concern to teachers at all levels, the first three to five essays of both editions were the same; however, the remaining articles in each issue addressed specific concerns at the two levels. Very interestingly (and in what must have been a tactical nightmare), the numbers of pages in the high school and college editions were always the same, allowing paired articles in subsequent issues to receive the same page designations. During these years of dual editions, members received a single version. To make readers aware of what appeared in the other edition, however, the end-of-the-year indexes were cross-referenced.

Also during these years of split editions, NCTE began publishing College English (1938), with Hatfield editing that journal as well. The six-year overlap in publications, with both the college edition of English Journal and College English, must have seemed unnecessary, for in 1944 English Journal became an exclusively secondary publication.

Hatfield's long editorship of English Journal, thirty-three years, ended in 1954 when Dwight L. Burton assumed the position. During Burton's tenure, English Journal remained much the same, with one exception: Jarvis E. Bush was introduced as poetry editor for two years.

From 1966 to 1972, Richard S. Alm was editor, and in 1973, Stephen Judy (who still spelled his name J-U-D-Y at the time) became editor and redesigned the format of the journal. Gone was the 6 1/2 X 9 1/2 inch format of the first sixty-one years; replacing it was an 8 X 11 inch expanded format with much more

emphasis placed on attractive graphics and visual layout. Very soon, colors other than the traditional red and white or beige were used.

And then, in 1980, Ken Donelson and Alleen Pace Nilsen assumed the joint editorship--something previously unheard of in NCTE publications. Under their joint editorship, through their use of artful covers and photographs, English Journal achieved a glossiness, a visual appeal commonly associated only with trade magazines.

Although English Journal has changed editors and printing formats many times, its continued value to the profession is clear. For over the years, EJ has addressed issues of interest to teachers--and some of them, even those from the earliest issues, shed light on current issues of the teaching of English:

TEACHING CONDITIONS: Volume I, page 1 begins with Edwin Hopkin's "Can Composition Teaching Be Done Under the Present Conditions?" We may have come far, but our questions, it seems, remain the same.

COMPETENCY TESTING: In February 1912, a Committee of the NEA presented a report titled, "The Influence of Uniform Entrance Requirements in English." Though our current focus seems to be on exit requirements, the issue of competency remains the same.

THE VALUE OF TEACHING LITERATURE: Edna Williams' "How To Make English Literature Teaching Utilitarian as well as Cultural," in

March 1912, offered early insights into a recurrent topic for teachers of English.

GRADING: The first treatment of demoralizing grading appeared in May 1912, in Alfred Hitchcock's "A Composition on Red Ink." It is still an issue which needs to be addressed.

COMPARATIVE RESEARCH: The first discussion of what we can learn by studying other educational systems appeared in Karl Young's June 1912 essay, "Observations upon the Teaching of Composition in French Lycées."

COGNITIVE SKILL: The issues of learning skills and subject transfer are the subjects of Cyrus Hooper's "The Influence of the Study of Latin on the Students' Knowledge of English Grammar," appearing in September 1912.

TEACHING: Allan Abbott's "To Beginners in English Teaching," September 1912, highlights problems which new teachers still face.

ARTICULATION: The continuing problem of how secondary schools and colleges can effectively work together was discussed in October 1912, in Clarence Stratton's "How Can the University Be of More Help to the Secondary School?"

SPEECH: "Oral Composition in the Secondary School as a Basis for Effective Written Composition," Horace Hollister's October 1912

article, established the earliest connection between speech and writing in our classrooms.

SELF-INDULGENCE: Raphael O'Leary's "Pity the Poor Teacher" showed that we aren't the only English teachers to feel sorry for ourselves sometimes. It was natural, even in November 1912, when this article appeared.

DRAMA: Allan Abbott's "A High-School Course in Drama," February 1913, presents an early justification for a course that has long since become standard in most curricula.

Business and Technical Writing: "The Demands of the Business World for Good English," by W.R. Heath, discusses expectations outside the classroom, as early as March 1913.

BASIC WRITING: C.E. Thomas discusses the particular problems of less capable students, regardless of what we call them, in April 1913's "English for Industrial Pupils."

TEACHING MATERIALS: The idea of using English Journal as a teaching aid was presented in September 1913, in Edward Thurber's "The 'English Journal' as a Textbook," which made me realize that my "innovation" was merely a rediscovery.

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: Mary Free's November 1913 article, "Teaching English to Filipinos," is an early exploration of

teaching non-native speakers, an issue currently being addressed in a more systematic way.

WRITING ACROSS THE CURRICULUM: In May 1914, Roland Gray argued for a close relationship among the disciplines in "The Correlation of English with Other Subjects."

DIALECT: Daniel Redmond, in "A Study in the Correction of Dialectic English," in October 1914, approached the subject of dialect, albeit with a prescriptive point of view.

TEACHING TECHNIQUES: In May 1915, Wahnita DeLong must have surprised her colleagues by writing "The Use of the Conference Hour."

FILM: In 1915, the year that The Birth of a Nation was released, Carolyn Gerrish discussed "The Relation of Moving Pictures to English Composition" in the April issue.

NEWSPAPER: Harriet Lee, in March 1916, assessed "Student Newspaper Work," suggesting that students learn writing from a major media.

BOOK SELECTION: The troublesome issue of what to teach in our literature classes was addressed in "New Classics for Old," A.M. Hall's October 1917 article some of whose "new" works have become our "classics."

JOURNAL WRITING: "On the Value of Journal and Letter Writing as an Introduction to a Freshman Course in Expository Writing," Helen Magee's September 1919 article, described an activity that might not be associated with early 20th-century teaching.

SPECIAL STUDENTS: Lelia Bascom's "English Lesson's for Naval Recruits," published in April 1920, shows that current teachers aren't the only ones to address the needs of specialized groups of students.

This sampling of topics and articles only suggests the wealth of materials teachers will discover if they leaf through the admittedly dusty but also intriguing back issues of English Journal. As current teachers, we know the value of keeping up-to-date--and we know that reading our own recent issues of English Journal offers that opportunity. Of additional importance, however, is what reading back issues of English Journal can offer us.

First, the articles in back issues can give us a sense of where the profession has been. We can see what the important topics were and see how teachers approached those topics. We can see that supposedly "new" topics like English as a Second Language and Business and Technical Writing have been discussed for decades. That can give us a sense of continuum, a sense that we are not facing wholly new issues.

Second, we can find out what's new and what isn't. So much of what we do, so much of what we try has been done, has

been tried before. Even topics that are really new, like work with computers, can be seen in a context. In the past, other technological advances were supposed to revolutionize teaching and solve all problems--or, in the alternative view ruin the schools and spoil the students. Movies were to have had one of those effects, and yet now we are amused by the great claims made for film in the classroom, just as we are amused by the nay-sayers. Both enthusiasts and critics alike overstated their cases, often laughably so. As current teachers, we can learn a great deal from reading these early discussions--mostly about being realistic and withholding premature judgment.

Third, we can find excellent ideas buried in our bound collections of EJ. I rediscovered the use of the précis for practicing paraphrasing in researched work--not in a recent issue but in a 1936 article I paused to read. Writing précis is not especially fashionable today, but its value in the classroom is still apparent.

Fourth, we can gain a sense of history--not only of English teaching but of American education and society as well. The plethora of articles during the "war years"--those of WW I, WW II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War--all suggest the English teacher's basic struggle to make meaning out of senselessness, to help students cope with conflicts and change. Much to its credit, English Journal has reflected its time; "great war" support changed to "immoral war" despair, and through the articles we gain a sense of the altering of American sensibility--outside the schools and in them.

Fifth and finally, through the pages of English Journal we can come in contact with people who have added life to the teaching of English: editors, well-known contributors, and hundreds of other lesser known teachers who chose to share their ideas. Their work is sometimes entertaining, offering us ironic glimpses into the daily lives of students and teachers; it is sometimes informative, offering us solutions to problems which we face; it is sometimes provocative, challenging our assumptions about English teaching. But most of all, through these articles we meet the people who helped to shape our profession, and we should get to know them, at least in print.

But where does that leave us, after this brief review of English Journal? It leaves us, in a sense, looking back. It leaves us looking back at a journal which has reflected the teaching of English with all its strengths and weaknesses. But looking back is not necessarily a passive response to our profession, for by understanding the past we can more effectively move into the future. We need only go back--with our students, friends, and colleagues, or alone--to discover the ideas of hundreds of people who have helped to shape our profession. We have much to learn from this enjoyable search in the "archives" of the English Journal.