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Stimulated by the ineffectiveness of the English department's teacher preparation program that remained remote from the actual classroom situation and was conducted by a single methods teacher who had not been in a public school teaching situation for at least ten years, the department chairman at the University of Utah attempted to make his group more aware of public school instruction and to involve more of them in the actual training program. In order to achieve his objectives, he initiated a fellowship program under which a competitively selected junior or senior high school teacher joined the department for a year to teach methods courses, work with prospective teachers, and continue his studies. Furthermore, he hired new faculty with interest in public schooling; created relevant new training courses; and tried to interest more of his staff in teaching these courses. In order to have first-hand acquaintance with the public school classroom, he chose to teach poetry to successive levels of students in an inner city junior high school. Although his experience appeared inconclusive, he reflected on pacing, discipline, teacher and student response, teacher relationships, the need for variety, textbook insufficiencies, and successful teaching techniques. (AF)

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AMONG SCHOOL CHILDREN

by Kenneth Eble, University of Utah

Last fall, for reasons I will go into in this paper, I taught junior high English in a downtown school in Salt Lake City. The University of Utah overlooks the city from the East "bench," one of the levels of the old Lake Bonneville by which real estate values, economic status, and professional prestige in Salt Lake can be measured almost as surely as temperature, vegetation and freshness of air. It is not, as befits a state university, as high as "pill hill" where the doctors are said to live, but it is a good ways "up" from Lincoln Junior High where I taught. That is part of the story--coming down off the hill--and maybe in these times, the most important part. Put more personally, the experience was a response to a personal need and a carrying out of a firm conviction that University faculty members must involve themselves with the public schools.

A department chairman in a university like the University of Utah cannot escape having relationships with the schools. I know, for example, that about two-thirds of my department's students are teaching majors and minors; that English teachers in large numbers attend night courses, ask for in-service training courses, and respond in force to summer institutes and other similar programs; and that graduate work in English is highly dependent upon the enrollment of public school teachers, either pursuing graduate hours or advanced degrees as a way of moving up on the salary schedule or as a means of leaving public school teaching altogether. English professors, however, are not kept reminded of these facts, and by choice and by inclination they tend to remain distant from the public schools.

My own situation was that since I had written one book on higher education and another which extended my reflections to the public schools, I needed to find out first hand whether anything I had written was true. Like the majority of university professors, I have never taught in the public schools. I had intended to get such experience when I was writing my second book, but one thing and another had intervened. This time I made certain I'd go by telling everyone I was going and leaving no room to back out, which, at the moment of entering my first junior high classroom was just what I wanted to do. Having completed the experience, I have increased admiration for those professors who were once public school teachers, for the lessons learned there are both valuable and enduring. It is true that I had gained some experience with English in the schools through observation and by responding to requests for single class-hour visits in high school and junior high classrooms. But observing and visiting are far from regular teaching, and regular teaching was what I wanted to do.

A cluster of other matters prefaced my appearance at Lincoln Junior High. First, I had long been struck by how many teacher preparation programs within English departments consist of a single methods course and a single methods teacher. Admittedly teaching majors are exposed to a variety of professors, but how narrowing an experience to end up seeing one's future teaching duties from a single point of view. What nonsense to have education the province of a separate college and "education in English" the province of a separate teacher, even admitting the difficulty of finding English faculty members who want the department teacher training tasks. Second, I was struck by how remote methods courses were from the actual classroom. The report coming back from students who went into the public

schools was that practice teaching was the single most valuable preparatory experience. Since this was taken in the last quarter and was wholly in the hands of the College of Education, it came too late and was too removed to be much affected by or to work its effects upon the English methods course. Third, the methods teacher in our department, a majority of the professors in the Education department, and the few in both departments who had had experience teaching English in the schools had had such experience ten years or more ago. When I contemplated how little English departments did to prepare teachers and how removed even these sparse efforts were from the department itself and from the current conditions in the public schools, I was made to feel that professors of English were a strange professional group who repudiated the majority of people they trained. This whole subject was thoroughly explored in Jeremiah Finch's address at the MLA General Meeting in English in 1964 (subsequently reprinted as "College English Departments and Teacher Preparation," PMLA, May 1965), but the conditions he described have changed little since that time.[1]

When I became chairman five years ago, I realized that maintaining relations with the public schools was part of the sacrificial functions which went with the job. I also discovered that there was no real ill will against my being involved with English in the public schools. My colleagues were willing to let me indulge in this curious behavior in the same way that they permitted me to go for long periods without getting a haircut. Nor was it too difficult to gain department concurrence in a number of ventures I launched, all aimed at bringing the department into some awareness of the public schools and bringing more of the department into the actual teacher training program.

The first of these was a Fellowship program worked out with public school districts. Under this program, one junior or senior high English teacher was selected on a competitive basis to join the department for a year. The Fellow was to teach a variety of courses, particularly the methods course, was to work informally with prospective teachers, and was to take whatever classes he or she wished. The university and the district provided a stipend equal to the salary the Fellow would have received from the school, and the teacher promised to return for at least a year to the school district granting the leave. The department by now has had three Austin Fellows (named after the staff member, now retired, who had for years single-handedly taken care of the teacher training program). On the whole, the main success of the program has been in having the Fellows become an integral part of the department. Their presence has succeeded in making the department aware of English teaching in the schools and I believe has made teachers in the school districts to which they have returned aware that the university English department is

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[1]Minna Work, one of the teachers who served in the Austin Teaching Fellowship program described later in this paper, made a survey of teacher preparation programs in sixty colleges and universities during 1967-1968. In over half of the fifty-one English departments which responded, no special preparation in teaching English beyond the single methods course was given to teaching majors. Thirty percent of the departments relied on methods courses taught in the College of Education. Within the department of English, teachers of methods courses were much more likely to be women, much less likely to have the Ph.D. than other departmental faculty members. The preliminary findings in Thomas Wilcox's NCTE survey reveal the same lack of consequential involvement: sixty percent of the departments in his survey did not have methods courses within the department, and programs for training teachers within English departments (outside subject matter courses) did not exist in the great majority of departments.

not completely cut off from the public schools. The fellows have also contributed much to the revision of our teacher preparation program, which was the second major effort I encouraged the department to make.

In a general way, the revisions in teacher training were aimed at involving more of the staff in the program. We did this in part by hiring some new staff members with an interest in public schooling,[2] by creating new courses confronting specific aspects of the public school teacher's future job, and by interesting more of the existing staff in planning and teaching these courses. In the new courses, we hope to be able to get many of the prospective teachers into actual public school classrooms at the same time as they are discussing and theorizing about what and how they should teach. In time, if the Education professors don't read this paper and erect barriers first, we hope to move in on the practice teaching domain which has long been a College of Education fief. We may even be able to make use of our in-service training program for our large number of graduate assistants, and, though hope here is dim, may save some of the best and most exciting students from going into Ph.D. work and university professing.

All of the foregoing helped bring me to teaching in the junior high. Further, it seemed somewhat logical that an English professor should get some first-hand acquaintance with the public school classroom. Literature as we professors conceived it wasn't, it seemed to me, particularly turning on students who were rarely turned on by anything that didn't thump or shout or quaver. As regards language in the schools, the new grammar, largely promoted by linguists in the university, began to occupy the same suspect position as the old grammar. The necessity to leave the comparatively tidy, defined, and well-supported world of the university had become more pressing, and I felt, even as regards teaching English, that I needed to experience something a good deal poorer, rawer, and ultimately more important.

From this point on, this report is of my delayed education. Lincoln Junior High, as I have mentioned, is in what passes for an "inner city" area in Salt Lake City, an area in which the problems of schools in urban Detroit or Boston or New York are of a similar kind but not of a similar magnitude. The building sits hard by the main traffic artery in Salt Lake City. Although a freeway has removed some of the traffic, State Street still runs as the main highway from the south into Salt Lake City. It cuts through the center of the downtown area and ends at the State Capitol which overlooks the city from the north foothills. It handles six lanes of traffic, and the traffic handles a large part of the teaching in the classrooms which front on the street. In a more far-sighted society, the school would have been torn down with the coming of the automobile and another built in a healthier spot. Its setting may be inferred from the things seen from the classroom windows and used in the students' poems: two gas stations, the Theatre Candy Distributing Company, a veterinarian's office next to a place advertising "Meats--Wholesale and

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[2]At the risk of embarrassing him, I single out Ed Lueders as an example. He was formerly chairman at Hanover, which may have forced his interest in teacher preparation as it did mine. He is co-editor (with Dunning and Smith) of Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle and Some Haystacks Don't Even Have Any Needle, which, if publishers were smart enough and school districts flexible enough and college and public teachers belligerent enough, might work some changes in what pass for literature textbooks in the public schools.

Retail," the Ute Transmission Supply, a motel "$2 and up," and a neon sign "Jesus Never Fails."

The school is regarded by its teachers as either the toughest or the next to the toughest in Salt Lake. Some resent this labeling. Others seem to take pride in it. Certainly, the school has a higher percentage of families on welfare, a higher percentage of transient families, a higher percentage of students with reading problems, a higher percentage of students in trouble with the police than other Salt Lake City junior high schools. In part, of course, the experience at Lincoln was the experience of teaching in any junior high. It strengthened my belief that junior high was the place where both the English teachers and the students are most uncertain about the subject before them and where the likelihood of losing students permanently to language and literature is greatest. In a school like Lincoln, the ordinary problems of confronting junior high students with literature are intensified in an environment where books are not a commonplace, where reading is a chore, and where both rank fairly low in actual, immediate value.

I chose to teach poetry because it seemed to me to be the toughest for both students and teacher. It also offered the advantage of being easy to put before the class to become the object of scrutiny and discussion. There was even a fair chance that short poems could be handled by the non-reader, in the way that the novel, for example, could not. I also thought I might find out something about what happens to all the reading of poetry in the lower schools. Despite the real place rhythm and rhyme have in the lives of elementary school children, by adolescence most of them have become readers of prose and strangers to poetry for the rest of their lives.

The plan was simple in design. I taught one class of ninth graders for three weeks, shifted to another ninth grade for the same period, went to an eighth grade, and ended with a seventh. I had complete charge of the class; the teachers remained in the room and gained something from my continuing discomfiture if not from my infrequent success. The teachers had wanted to split me up into two-week sessions; I held out for four weeks. We compromised at three, a wise compromise for I lost almost every encounter the first week, and I'm uncertain that in some of the classes I could have lasted four. The most realistic part of the design was accidental. I failed to make any arrangement for time off from my regular administrative and teaching duties. I had to sandwich the two hours daily in between other things, and in this respect, at least, matched the conditions under which the teachers at Lincoln and at many other public schools teach: any one class is in addition to a hard full day's work.

My experience was such an inconclusive one that I hesitate to write anything about it beyond the impressions it left me with day by day. I register them here for what they are worth, somewhat in the way they struck me at the time. I should add that I yielded to the temptation to chicken out only once; otherwise, I showed up for every scheduled class.

Pace. Why do schools run the kids this way? Five minutes between classes, every period a class period. How do teachers stand it? No wonder a teacher reaches for the workbook. The principal says discipline depends on keeping them occupied. Says the police would just as soon have them start at eight and run until midnight. No time to study in school; no place at home; no thinking in school except about

getting out of school. Insane.

Discipline. The teacher whose class I now have warns me about a boy who "wanders." What's wrong with wandering? I find out. What do you do with a boy who just moves at whim rom one desk to another, in or out of the classroom? What's wrong with that? He talks, on occasion, to other students? Some scuffling? Well? That's not what's wrong with wandering. Mainly it's because he bugs you; bugs me. What to do? No place to send him; the principal just sends him back. The special education teacher has too many others to attend to. Physical restraint? How? What to do? Let him wander. He bugs me.

Another occasion. How surprising to want to slap a ninth-grade smart-ass across the chops. Personal. Not for the first offense or tenth, but maybe the eleventh. One teacher tells me he stands them against the wall on tip-toe for ten or fifteen minutes. What does that have to do with teaching poetry? It doesn't, he tells me, but you should see them hobble when they come off the wall.

Poetry. A friendly classroom teacher writes poetry. He brings some in for a professor to respond to: "To those who love both truth and wisdom/ I give both my heart and my hand./ To those who mouth on forever/ With their mouths and heads stuck in the sand./ The latter can learn not one thing/ Nor care one whit for the truth./ They waste the blazing and glory/ That's given them in their youth./ To these I say May God Bless you/ You'll certainly need His kind hand/ But as for me and those who go with me/ Let us be a blessing to man." What to say? He helps me out: "It's just a first draft."

Scared. After first two days: What to do with them today? Won't show up. Plead high level university committee meeting. World Series on. I keep my own score. About six to nothing first day, their favor; two to nothing next day; maybe a scoreless tie the third day. When am I going to win a game?

Curiosity. How curious junior high students are! And personal. "You're wearing a sweater today!" How many children do you have? Are you a real doctor? What does that mean? Where do you go to a barber? How many children do you have?

Discipline again. At mid-term, lady with yardstick standing in the hall between class periods. "Beating them?" I say in jest. "Of course not, but a cut on the ankles helps solve the tardiness problem."

Pedagogy. Few things work. Very few things which work in one class work in another. Nothing works for very long. How different from college students, college classes. How strange that my university students put up with fifty-minute monologues. Is a higher tolerance for boredom the main impact of formal education? Some old pedagogic lessons need relearning: like the need for variety and working with hands; the uses of shouting and nonsense; examples, examples; patterns, patterns.

Textbooks. An abomination. Classroom sets: another abomination. Where are books in this school? In the library (no paperbacks allowed); in classroom sets; in the anthologies--no books. Poems guaranteed not to turn on junior high students: "Gunga Din," "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," "The Courtship of Miles Standish," "Allen-A-Dale," "The Charge of the Light Brigade," "Invictus," and others. Question: Who puts this stuff together? Answer: Eminent professors of English who

aren't at this moment teaching junior high. Whoever won anyone to books with these four-pound blockbusters? A million dollars for four-color illustrations, 10 bucks for content. What a pretty likeness of Mary Ann Evans. Sort of like Loretta Young. What to do? Incinerate the lot.

Poetry. The superiority of the Watermelon Pickle book is partly its destroyability. Gets worn-looking quickly. Gives students chance to pick out their poems, not ours. One student, girl, picks out this poem:

Husbands and wives
With children between them
Sit in the subway;
So I have seen them.

One word only
From station to station;
So much talk for
So close a relation.

Why a grim kind of poem like that? I ask. Because, she says, it's true. A good day.

What's wrong (some days): Everything. The building, the textbooks, the teachers, the discipline, the class load, the age and sex and situation of the students, me, for being here.

What works (some days). Doing works. Writing poetry works. Giving patterns to follow, things to see and put down, words to work with. At Christmas, the seventh-grade wrote Christmas-tree shaped poems. Humor works, most of the time. Poems with strangeness or violence seem to work. Chaucer works. Many different poems work, if they have some portion of truth for some particular student. "Find true poem," I jot down on scratch pad. My secretary puzzles over what poem I have in mind.

Triumphs. After reading some of Canterbury Tales, girl tells me she has a book of poems kind of in old English like that. Can't think of poet's name. Brings it in. Leather-covered edition of poems of Robert Herrick with her favorite poems marked.

Original Sin. Original sin is what sets in between the seventh grade and the ninth. Seventh graders all eagerness, innocence, responsiveness. Ninth graders are devoid of grace, turned fully toward adult vices.

Impress teachers make. Teachers don't realize what an impress they make. My situation an unnatural one. I inherit each class from another teacher, his or her impress stamped on the students. Would be different, I say, if I had begun with my own class. But what about breaking my own impress?

I finished my last class just before Christmas. Three weeks after Christmas I went back to Lincoln at the principal's request to talk to the teachers. I began by offending one or two, ended by insulting them all. The one or two felt that I was knocking the school by dwelling on its problems. It was a good school, as good as any, and (though they didn't say it) it was just like a university professor to come down from the hill to find fault. I felt I had betrayed them, betrayed myself, for in sympathizing with the teachers I had created an adverse impression of the students, who at Lincoln as everywhere else, are, as individuals, the main saving

feature of public school education. To correct that impression I asked to read to them a paragraph from a report I had written strictly for my private contemplation. "In all classes," I had written, "at the ninth grade most, in the eighth grade almost as much, and even to a degree detectable in the seventh, I had a feeling that the school had steadily turned the students away from doing anything outside class. I heard over and over, 'They won't do homework,' 'They won't do anything,' 'If you can get anything out of them.' Almost as tiresome a chorus as 'This one's stupid,' 'He's a real problem,' 'Give up on this one,' 'You can't do anything with him.' When I was in the classroom, confronting the slumped over students I could believe all of these remarks. The actual learning that took place in the classes I taught was pretty small. Yet, I question whether the students' attitudes have not been shaped by the utterances and attitudes of the teachers. There are dumb kids in the world, dumb kids at Lincoln, and yet, I think far more than were being reached could be reached, could even experience the satisfaction that comes with verbal achievements and could maintain some willingness to try." When I finished reading that, I hardly had a friend left. The principal did thank me for saying the building should be torn down: he'd been hoping for a new school for years.

I had not hoped to end my teaching quarter this way. I wished there had been some of those dazzling experiences others write about, children popping around in the classroom, poems bursting out of the walls, hard cases checking in their knives for pens and pencils, and at the end even a few manly handshakes and thanks. Oh, I had some successes. A girl who had chosen the name "Cha-cha" for herself stopped me one day two weeks after I finished with her class and said, "Gee, professor, we really miss you. That class was outasight." But someone told me after my speech that she'd disappeared from school just before Christmas and hadn't been back since.

Well, that's the kind of experience it was. The shape of this paper describes it. It begins as a department head's report commenting on what an English department might do about preparing teachers for the public schools and ends in confusion, trying to make something out of a pattern of impressions. Yet, that last is the reason I went there and the reasons others like me must go: to get out of where it's safe and familiar and comfortable and go where it isn't, where literature isn't a defined and hallowed discipline, but where it's arguing for its very existence, where the working with students is not a shaping toward graduate school and an image of ourselves, but where it's working with lives that need the shaping literature can in some measure provide.

I have not, at least, discouraged my colleagues. One of them (Ed Lueders) is working in a number of different senior and junior high schools, and at this point hanging on by his teeth most days. At least one other has expressed an interest in trying Jackson, the other tough school. These are small enough things to be doing, but they are at least more than we've done. By my severest judgment, the problems of such schools as Lincoln are impossible. The social transformation necessary to affect consequentially the urban school is years and riots away. The transformation of public school teaching into an occupation which will flood these schools with teachers of intelligence, imagination, compassion, and boundless energy is just as far away. Even the transformation of the teaching of English so that it might contend with these conditions is not in sight. For all that, my experience at Lincoln was not entirely a dispiriting one. It disturbed me, excited me and humbled me, as my work in the university has not for a good many years, and that is reason enough for going back.