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The significance of this essay for English educators and research specialists lies in its analysis of the demands of and criteria for valid research, frequently ignored by researchers in English today. Using as a case in point Roger K. Applebee's article, "National Study of High School English Programs: A Record of English Teaching Today" ("English Journal," March 1966), the author suggests that false conceptions and stereotypes are perpetuated by the following questionable research procedures: (1) using a tone of rhetorical appeal in presentation, (2) selecting a population too small to qualify as good random sampling, (3) including only one representative point of view in English education, (4) not clearly defining vocabulary terms which have multiple meanings nor indicating measurement instruments used in the study, and (5) making misleading inferences and conclusions based on insufficient data. The essay then calls upon English teachers who are intersted in undertaking research projects or experiments in their classrooms to follow established scientific procedures so that their findings can be trusted and accepted. (JB)

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CONTENTS

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ASSESSING A NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH STUDY

C. James Trotman

A stereotype of people in the field of English is our inept use of procedures for collecting and presenting experimental data. The article in the March, 1966, *English Journal*, "National Study of High School English Programs: A Record of English Teaching Today," is no exception. This study is not nationally representative of high school English teaching in today's high schools. There is no question here about the sincerity of those involved in the study; but the study's results lead those who have no statistical background to false conceptions, and those who do to acknowledge the stereotype.

The first questionable factor in the article does not involve data *per se*. It centers on the presentation of the material. At best, the presentation is hackneyed rhetoric.

> If I were not in the midst of an age of technology, I should now invoke some fiery muse to ascend the brightest heaven of invention, to help me turn the accomplishment of these years into this little time. Instead, I must simply appeal to your imagination, so that when you read numbers or proportions or other mathematical abstractions you will see thousands of classrooms, thirty thousands of students, and parades of teachers in cities, towns and villages all across the country. (p. 273).[1]

The tone of this reflects the sincerity of the author, but it also reinforces the stereotype of the humanist's attitude toward research (i.e. appeal to your imagination, etc.) In short, the passage is significant to those who wish that the discipline would cease making excuses for itself in terms of research procedures and platitudes generally. Furthermore, the passage epitomizes the quality of research in the experiment and brings out the second questionable factor for consideration.

This factor is the number of schools involved. The number

[1] Roger K. Applebee, "National Study of High School English Programs: A Record of English Teaching Today," English Journal, 55: (March, 1966). All quotations and page references come from this article.

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of schools (168 out of a possible 30,000) is too few to judge high school English teaching; and the schools were *selected*, hence no random procedure was employed. In fact, the article reports that the schools were selected on the basis of ". . . their state or national reputation . . ." (p. 273.), with the author further stating that the schools not only represent ". . . Excellence, but extreme variation . . ." (p. 273.) The question is rhetorical: How can implications be drawn on the status of high school English teaching from a bias sample of so few schools? It cannot be done, but it is done here.

While it is possible to have a small number in an experimental design, the number's validity is dependent, in part, on the randomness of the sample. One alternative for the researchers is to have established procedures for collecting data on kinds of schools (academic, vocational or comprehensive, etc.) schools' populations (sociological and economic status, for example) and the schools' settings (rural or urban). The difficulty of this task is apparent, but its value to this report's objectives is not a moot point.

The third questionable factor is extrapolation. From this sample, the author maintains that the practices and programs observed reflect ". . . the diversity, the strengths and the weaknesses of English programs everywhere . . ." (p. 273). The point here is that the bias nature of the schools involved does not justify this statement. However, the author occasionally injects sentences to imply randomness or, at best, some feeling of objectivity. The following is representative: "Often as many as 20 classes were observed in a single school" (p. 274).

Because some schools were visited twice, once by a project member and another time by someone outside the project, this gave the schools a composite picture ". . . so that we might delineate the character and the status of English programs today" (p. 274). With this information about the schools, it is unjustifiable to make this assumption. This is another example of extrapolation. The report is full of similar misleading elements.

The fourth questionable element in this article is the people employed in the program. Although they represent interests in the field of education and/or English education, their representation is that of groups in the field who are acknowledged conservatives and moderates: the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Commission on English, to name a few. The point, however, is that a national study, with its implications for many,

would have more validity and appeal if the participants represented various viewpoints.

The fifth questionable factor involves methods for collecting data. According to the report, observers were not only to write descriptions of classes they visited, but also to indicate the proportion of time used for facets of English in the classroom. But the report did not indicate the instruments used by observers for describing classroom activities, and the proportion of time spent on these activities. Furthermore, the implication in the study is that English is being defined as language, literature and composition. While this definition is not unacceptable, it is not advocated universally, witnessed by the definition of English by the NCTE and the Commission on English. The point here is that this type of precision is requisite for the study's objectives and appropriate for research procedures.

Aside from the stated time spent on language, literature and composition, which allegedly accounted for 82% of classroom time, whatever else went on in classrooms was dismissed to the taxonomy of "Other." Here the point is that "Other" is as important in this report as language, literature and composition, a *trivium* which demonstrates the conservative nature of the participants. Moreover, the report failed to account for certain percentages of time spent on "other" things in the English classroom. And some of the data are set up to look as if the total would be 100%, when they do not add up to that figure.

The alternatives to the described methods of collecting data are numerous. Few would argue with the fact that English teachers are orientated to language, literature and composition, but had the observers established a list, for example, of things to look for in addition to the activities mentioned, the report would have been more thorough. Furthermore since teachers were informed ahead of time about observations, the validity of observing a routine day is voided. To minimize the Hawthorne Effect (or special preparation), teachers could receive notice of approximate dates on which they might be observed; a scale could be developed for recording teachers' profiles (age, sex, academic background and travel experience), kinds of classroom performances (techniques) and classroom climates (liberal, authoritarian, etc.) These suggestions do not exhaust the possibilities for enhancing the quality of this report, but they do suggest techniques and procedures for increasing the report's quality, which is in no way unrelated to the next factor.

This factor is definition. Relative to teaching methods, terms such as "discussion" and "student preparation" were used which

evoke numerous images of classroom interaction. The point is that terms with multiple meanings should be clearly defined.

The seventh questionable factor is the conclusions made on teacher preparation. First the reporting instrument was not identified: Was the data obtained by questionnaire, interviews, etc.? What were the criteria used to determine whether or not a teacher was an English major? What is an English major? What constitutes an English minor? What is the preparation of those who fall into the category of "Others?" In the same context, face validity (or saying what is possibly true, but without qualification) is involved in maintaining that 50% of the teachers had Master's degrees. These selected schools usually attract the more qualified because these schools generally pay well, and have predominantly middle-class student bodies. To say that teacher preparation in these schools is adequate is to understate this situation, but it overestimates the preparation of English teachers across the country.

The eighth questionable factor involves the teachers. The study reported the amount of time teachers spent on marking papers and preparing class lessons. The question is what instrument was used to obtain data for the figures presented on paper-correcting and class preparation.

The ninth questionable factor is the figures concerning student reading. According to this report, students are voracious readers; furthermore, these students were called representative. The credibility of this is dubious in light of the whole report. Moreover, the libraries considered in this report again pose the question of how representative they are of high school libraries across the country.

In the final analysis, the procedures used in the study are unsophisticated and awkward. The criticisms outlined here are an indication of the study's deficiencies and it is hoped that there are at least two results from ths assessment: First, that a more accurate and sophisticated study is made of English programs throughout the country; secondly, that the stereotype of research and researchers in the field of English is mitigated.