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LANGUAGE ARTS IN A LABORATORY SCHOOL: 1906-1919

Bertille C. Gallichio

In *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958*, Herbert Kliebard claims that twenty years ago "very few people identified with the curriculum field exhibited any interest in history. The mood was one of 'sweeping away the cobwebs of the past' as the basis for a total reconstruction of the course of study" (xv). Fortunately, the reforms of today encourage study of past practices, both to insure that unsuccessful practices are eliminated and to see that effective practices are continued or revived.

Looking at the record of education in the early part of this century, it's obvious that that era of reform was one of active, vociferous, competitive theories of education. Well-meaning groups, each with its own agenda, promoted widely varying programs and methods to achieve educational success. Many schools, of course, paid little heed to the philosophical dogma espoused by reformers such as William Tory Harris, Colonel Francis Parker, and John Dewey. As Lawrence Cremin reported in *The Transformation of the School*, rural schools "remained ungraded and poorly taught," while in urban schools "problems of skyrocketing enrollment were compounded by a host of other issues" (20). Cremin continues:

Little wonder that rote efficiency reigned supreme. It needed none of Harris's elaborate Hegelian justifications; it was simply the basis of survival. (21)

In some schools, however, the influence of the reformers was clear; many incorporated not one theory, but several, endeavoring to meet the needs of various groups of students. One such school was Model School (now known as Model Laboratory School), the training school for Eastern Kentucky

Normal School, located in Richmond, Kentucky. Model School opened on September 11, 1906, four months prior to the opening of the normal school, and was the first practice teaching school in the state. The philosophy adhered to by Eastern in the establishment of its training department differed greatly from that of John Dewey and other founders of university schools. Dewey used the laboratory school label to emphasize the experimental nature of the project, and his school at the University of Chicago "was designed specifically to test Dr. Dewey's theories and their sociological implications" (Cremin). In its early years, on the other hand, Eastern Kentucky Normal School was interested in practical pedagogy, not in testing theory. The "laboratory" portion of Model School's name was not added until 1961. On the contrary, the *Eastern Kentucky Review* of June-July, 1919, stresses exactly the opposite approach:

Our training schools are demonstration schools, not experimental ones. If we ever engage in experimenting, we let the student-teacher know it. We think it our business to demonstrate daily those things which are known to be good in courses of study, in school organization, in school management, and in methods and devices of teaching. Everything presented to our students has been time tried and experience tested. They may follow and imitate with absolute confidence anything and everything they see in our training schools.
(34)

Dewey's school and Model School both suggested a marriage of theory and practice but differed in purpose. Dewey's quest was to determine best teaching practices, while Model's was to allow cadet teachers to observe what were already considered the very best methods of instruction already and to practice teach under the supervision of a critic teacher. In the quest to demonstrate best teaching practices, Model School borrowed from various theoretical models developed by others. In no area was this as obvious as it was in the study of language arts.

It was in the elementary section of the school that faculty accepted as "best practices" some of the current trends in school reform. The written curriculum for the elementary grades was very detailed and quite similar to that prescribed by William Tory Harris, regarded by Cremin as "a transitional

figure in the history of educational thought" (15). The "Course of Study for the Elementary Grades," as published in *The Eastern Kentucky Bulletin* (April, 1909), lists the following areas of study: reading, spelling, writing, language (including language lessons, composition, and literature), arithmetic, nature study, physical culture, drawing, and morals and manners (7-10). Despite the rigidity with which the curriculum is set forth in this document, there were strong veins of innovation visible in the program, stemming mainly from the methods employed by individual faculty members. Interestingly, these methods strongly evoke current trends in language arts, particularly writing-across-the-curriculum and the whole language approach to literacy.

David R. Russell, in "The Cooperation Movement: Language Across the Curriculum and Mass Education, 1900-1930," describes the cooperation movement as the "first in a series of twentieth century attempts to broaden responsibility for language instruction. . ." (399). This movement is evident in the following excerpt from the announcement of course offerings for Model School:

Under this head is outlined the subjects of Language Lessons, Composition, and Literature. The subjects, and the study of History, Natural Science, Morals and Manners, and possibly Geography, should be correlated to a large extent. The work in Language must take cognizance of the intimate relations existing between all subjects of the school curriculum, and seek to unify interaction as much as possible. The best material for language work is to be found in the other subjects of the course. (*Eastern Kentucky Bulletin* 7)

Model School students were "writing across the curriculum" over 80 years ago. Current advocates of process writing such as Nancie Atwell and Lucy Calkins would be gratified by the faculty's announcement in the very first *Eastern Kentucky Review*: "The immediate purpose of language training is to help in fixing correct forms of expression . . . The ultimate purpose is to make clear and original thinkers . . ." ("The Model School" 48).

Methods in Model differed from those of other Kentucky schools, which were tied to *McGuffey's Reader* and endless audible drill. In their chapter on Model School in J.T. Dorris's *Five Decades of Progress*, Edwards & Coates provide an example. Most primary school teachers in the state were using an

A-B-C method of rote phonetical drill in their approach to reading instruction. In contrast, the Model School employed a method which began with action sentences consisting of one word ("run," "walk," "skip"), leading gradually to longer and more difficult sentences "woven into stories or conversation" (86). The oral component of a child's language was also stressed through story-telling:

Every primary teacher should feel it a sacred duty to cultivate the art of story-telling and of good reading. There is no quicker, surer way of sending a truth home to the heart of a child. As in all lessons, there should be a full and free expression of impressions made. (*Eastern Kentucky Review* 54)

Beginning history study was approached through literature in first and second grade. Some of the titles used by the teachers were Pratt's *Legend of the Red Children*; Scudder's *Fable and Folk Study*; McMurray's *Classic Stories for Little Ones*, Cooke's *Indian Myths*, Dopp's *Tree Dwellers and Cave Men*, and the *Bible*.

Individual teachers contributed to methods which strongly resembled facets of today's whole language approach to the teaching of language arts. Although the school had purchased Ward's *Readers*, a basal series, Miss Lena Gertrude Rolling, the first teacher of primary grades, used books of meaningful content, avoiding the use of primer books. Children read pieces such as Eugene Field's "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod," "Rocka-by-Lady," and "The Little Boy Blue"; Andrew's *Seven Little Sisters*; and Longfellow's "The Children's Hour." Miss Rollings' replacement, Miss May C. Hansen, added the analytic-synthetic method of motivated drill which she had learned in the Francis Parker training school at the University of Chicago. This was a system of orally synthesizing words and phrases from portions of words previously known, thus building on children's previous knowledge. Eastern's president Dr. R. Nevel Roark insisted that oral drill be included in classes, as he was quoted in the *Eastern Kentucky Review*: "Drill in fluent and refined English should begin for each pupil the day he enters school, and should be the last thing done for him when he leaves the university" ("The Model School" 48). John Dewey's goal of leading the child from "present interests to an intellectual command of the world" (Kliebard 33) is evident in the technique employed

by Hansen's successor, Miss Margaret Lingenfelter, who used a method of developing learning processes from "purposeful activities of the children's choice" (Edwards & Coates 86).

The educational reformer who had the greatest impact on the methods of the faculty of Model School was Colonel Francis Parker. Cremin described him as the first "home-grown hero of the progressive education movement" (129). Parker came to national prominence as a result of his work in Quincy, Massachusetts. The problems in that school system have a curiously modern ring. In 1873, school board members there discovered the following through school examinations which they personally conducted:

While the youngsters knew their rules of grammar thoroughly, they could not write an ordinary English letter. While they could read with facility from their textbooks, they were utterly confused by similar material from unfamiliar sources. (Cremin 129)

The board appointed Colonel Parker as the new superintendent. His reorganization of the school system included teacher-made materials, using regular print materials such as books and magazines in the classroom, elimination of the alphabet learned by rote, moving the child to the center of the educational system, and integration of subject matter. His practices became widely known as "The Quincy System."

The notable individual who fostered Colonel Parker's innovations at Model was Miss Lelia Patridge, who served as the supervisor of practice teaching in the training school for 11 years. Edwards and Coates claim that she had more influence in teaching a philosophy of education which time proved successful than had any other instructor up to that time. Miss Patridge was a graduate of the Framingham (Massachusetts) State Normal School, which was the second such school established in the United States. She had been a member of the faculty of the Philadelphia Normal School and came to Model in 1909. According to Edwards, she was a devout disciple of Colonel Francis Parker and his philosophy of education (252). In fact, she published her own account of Parker's methods in *The "Quincy Methods" Illustrated* (1889). Her major innovation consisted of ending the monotonous process of continual "audible reading" (Edwards & Coates 92). She provided both lecture and modeling in the new area of silent reading in all grades. She

was also a profound believer in the work-ethic proposed by the manual training movement, as demonstrated in the following excerpt from an article on practical pedagogy, written by Miss Partridge for the *Eastern Kentucky Review* (Vol. III, April 1909):

The children who go to the public schools must—most of them—work for a living. Whether they will have to work hard and live poorly, or work little and live well, will depend, primarily, upon the way they are educated or trained. In these crowded days of fierce competition, there are no chances of success for the worker who is not willing to work steadily and who can not work well . . .

In the rudest of rural school houses, this education can be begun. Every day of even the smallest child's school life it can be carried on. Teachers who have no knowledge of manual training and who are quite unskilled in hand-work may, notwithstanding their lack of such knowledge and skill, still train their pupils to work—to work steadily and work well.

While the elementary school served a very practical purpose for the normal school during the early years, the Model High School was a completely different matter; in fact, they seemed to be two separate schools. Both divisions offered the "advantages of a select private school" to the community, but the high school was "in no sense a practice school" and no practice teaching was allowed (Edwards & Coates 90). Normal school students were required to observe the work there, but were not to interfere with the functioning of the school. Students from Model and from the Normal School often had combined sports teams, but Normal School students were not allowed to take classes at Model. While the elementary grades were innovative, the upper division was strictly traditional, based on its roots.

The high school's development can be traced back to a struggle for control over Centre College, in Danville, Kentucky, during the Civil War, when a split developed in the Presbyterian Church along union and confederate lines (Edwards, interview by Ron Wolfe, 1974). Kentucky Presbyterians

decided to found their own school, and Singleton P. Walters was instrumental in locating Central University in Richmond. When Centre College and Central University merged in 1901 and located in Danville, Kentucky, the buildings were used to establish Walters Collegiate Institute, a formal high school with a rigorous classical curriculum and a four year graduation requirement (Edwards, 1972). This was the foundation of Model High School. As Eastern Kentucky Normal School was established in 1906, the school agreed both to establish a graded training school and to maintain Walters Collegiate Institute as Model High School.

The description of the high school division in the *Eastern Kentucky Bulletin* of April 1909, is as follows:

A high class Secondary School— the High School. This will be, necessarily, a preparatory school. The course of study covers FOUR YEARS OF FORTY WEEKS each. Graduate will complete SIXTEEN UNITS as defined by the College Entrance Examination Board, and will be admitted to all the college and universities of this country, including Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Cornell, etc. (5)

The curriculum at Model high School was quite similar to that of other preparatory schools in the country, owing to the establishment of the "Uniform Lists" as a requirement for college entrance. Arthur N. Applebee, in his *Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English*, cites difficulties which existed in the late nineteenth century as a result of varying college entrance examinations, "prompting the National Council of Education of the National Education Association to call in 1892 for the appointment of a Committee of Ten . . ." (32). The charge of this committee was to solve the problem. Before the formation of this committee, curricular areas such as rhetoric, composition, literature, and grammar were often considered separate domains. While the committee's actions did integrate various areas of the language arts curriculum and established English as the only course required for all four years of high school, they also limited the materials which could be used in the course of high school study preparatory to college. This can be seen in comparing the lists of frequently used texts in the North Central region between 1886 and 1900 offered by Applebee with Model High School's English curriculum.

Applebee:

- I.
 1. *The Merchant of Venice*
 2. *Julius Caesar*
 3. *First Bunker Hill Oration*
 4. *The Sketch, Evangeline, The Vision of Sir Launfal*
 5. *Snowbound*
 6. *Macbeth*
 7. *The Lady of the Lake*
 8. *Hamlet*
 9. *The Deserted Village*
 10. *Gray's Elegy, Thanatopsis, As You Like It*
- II.
 1. *The Courtship of Miles Standish*
 2. *Il Penseroso, Paradise Lost*
 3. *L' Allegro, Lycidas*
 4. *Ivanhoe, Sir Roger de Coverly Papers from The Spectator, David Copperfield, Silas Marner*
 5. *In Memoriam, Dehavor, Enoch Arden, Marmion, Tales of the White Hills, The Lays of Ancient Rome, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Vicar of Wakefield, The Iliad*
 6. *Henry VIII, Among the Hills, The Cotter's Saturday Night, The Chambered Nautilus, Comus, Bryant's Favorite Poems, The Princess, Saul, King Lear (36)*

Modern School Curriculum:

First Year:

1. Shakespeare - *As You Like It*
2. Longfellow - *The Courtship of Miles Standish*
3. Dickens - *David Copperfield*
4. Goldsmith - *The Deserted Village*

Second Year:

1. Shakespeare - *The Merchant of Venice*
2. Gray - *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*
3. Spectator - *The Sir Roger de Coverley Papers*
4. Poe - *The Raven*

Third Year:

1. *The Iliad*
2. Whittier - *Snow Bound*
3. George Eliot - *Silas Marner*
4. Macaulay - *Essays on Lord Clive and Warren Hastings*

Fourth Year:

1. Shakespeare - *Macbeth*
2. Milton - *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, and Comus*
3. Washington - *Farewell Address*
4. Webster - *First Bunker Hill Narration*
5. Carlyle - *Essay on Burns*

(Announcement of Course Offering for the
Training School, 1909, *Eastern Kentucky Bulletin* 29.)

It was clear that the driving force in the high school section of the school was college admission, as evidenced by the school's first mission statement:

We confer no degrees, but will prepare students for college or university. . . . So many boys and girls are sent to college who have never considered and do not know that there are stiff entrance requirements Not being prepared, they are required to matriculate in the Preparatory departments at the same expense until they can enter the college or university. ("The Model School" 60)

The demands of this curriculum would probably satisfy current public cries for more rigorous requirements in public education. This rigor is also supported by the various admonitions listed for the teacher. These include reading and studying at home, written and oral reports, and "an abundance of written work, (a) Lengthly [sic] answers to questions on History of Literature and Criticism, (b) On books read and authors studied, (c) On themes suggested or selected by teacher" (*Eastern Kentucky Bulletin* 29).

An excellent example of the type of student that the high school grades attempted to serve is Dr. Smith Park, a 1915 graduate of the school. After attending a rural elementary school, Park's parents sent him to Model High School in order to prepare him for college. His family was financially comfortable enough to pay the tuition to the school (\$50 a year), and to pay for his board in Richmond, as it was too difficult to commute from his home. In an interview with the author on April 11, 1991, he attested to the validity of this curriculum as that being employed by the institution. He enrolled in the Model High School as a freshman, in 1913 at age 15, and was able through extra classes and summer studies, to complete the four-year curriculum in two years and graduate in 1915. Park stated that "because of the size of the library, which was virtually non-existent, the reading materials offered by instructors were limited to the curriculum and included such classics as the works of William Shakespeare, Milton, Carlyle, Poe, and George Eliot." The program was obviously successful in achieving its expressed goals; Dr. Park went on to the University of Kentucky, receiving the first Ph.D. ever awarded by that institution.

It is clear that in this one school system, many years ago, the elementary and secondary divisions had disparate methods and goals. An historical perspective on language arts instruction should involve the forming of questions, not just on the practices of our predecessors, but on our own as well. Have we grown significantly in the last 70 years? Do we encourage

innovative practices in our elementary and middle schools, only to drop the ball in our high schools in favor of preparing a small segment of students for college? Do we have curricular lists which resemble this high school's reading preparation for college and curricula whose intended audience reflects a very limited stratum of society? Today public high schools have a far wider audience, and we claim to be preparing students for far wider realms. The language-arts curriculum-makers should answer the question: Are we honest in meeting the needs of the present day student, or are we perpetuating a long out-dated paradigm? If the latter is true, as it is in many of our secondary schools, history should teach us a lesson.

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