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Lillian Planteen

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A STUDY OF THE GROWTH IN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF
OMAHA PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ENROLLED IN
TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL PROGRAMS

Presented to the

Graduate Faculty
University of Nebraska
at Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Specialist in Education

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Lillian Planteen

May, 1977

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FIELD PROJECT ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the Graduate Faculty, University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Specialist in Education, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Supervisory Committee

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4-28-77
Date

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of 1970, an elective English program has been available for senior high students in the Omaha Public Schools. Although all senior high schools have sampled the program called Special-Interest English, only four of the eight high schools have adopted it in toto. Since its inception, the program has become increasingly sophisticated developing somewhat differently in each school. Technical High School, which adopted the elective program, has now expanded it into an individualized program so unique and complex that that school will not be included in this study.

From the beginning, some local educators have questioned the appropriateness of an elective program for the student, especially the college preparatory student, suggesting that there are certain courses which all students should be required to take and/or that high school students are not capable of selecting courses necessary for their intellectual development and increased proficiency in English.

Statement of the Problem

It will be the purpose of this study to determine if 1976 graduates of seven high schools of the Omaha Public Schools, who were enrolled in either college preparatory or general English programs, reflected noticeable differences in growth in language arts competence from the tenth grade through the twelfth grade because of the type of English curriculum they were offered.

Statement of the Hypothesis

The elective English program, as well as other non-traditional English programs in the Omaha Public Schools, is an incentive rather than a deterrent to the intellectual development and increased proficiency of students in the language arts subject area.

Definition of Terms

1. Elective Program - In the English curriculum of the Omaha Public Schools "elective program" means that in grades ten through twelve a student is involved in the arrangement and selection of his or her English program based on his or her interests and needs.
2. Traditional - In the English curriculum of the Omaha Public Schools "traditional" refers to an English program that utilizes a survey of literature anthology, a conventional grammar-composition textbook, and selections from the great classics for the bulk of its subject matter.
3. Non-traditional - In the English curriculum of the Omaha Public Schools "non-traditional" denotes either the elective program or a variation of the traditional program which incorporates an unstructured grammar/composition program as well as a modern literature emphasis which excludes the employment of survey courses in American and British literature.

Delimitations

This study will be concerned with the growth in the English

proficiency of 1976 senior high graduates of the Omaha Public Schools who were enrolled in either traditional or non-traditional English programs.

The selection of students for this study is based on the original identification, by department chairmen during the fall semester of 1973-74, of forty sophomores in each high school who were selected by chance from heterogeneous groups to write essays as a part of the school-wide essay evaluation project in the Omaha Public Schools. Further delineation involved the selection, from those original sophomore essay writers, of those who were seniors in 1976 and wrote for the essay evaluation project a second time. Out of that final group sixty-seven students in traditional programs and seventy-one students in non-traditional programs met the criteria and are included in the study. Students from Benson, Bryan Senior, Burke, Central, North, Northwest and South are represented. Students from Technical High School are not included, as indicated earlier in this proposal, because of the individualized program in that school.

The following characteristics are common to all students involved in the study:

1. Participated in the essay evaluation program of the Omaha Public Schools both as sophomores and as seniors.
2. Took STEP (Sequential Tests of Educational Progress) as eleventh graders in the Omaha Public Schools. Of those results, only reading scores are being used.
3. Have teacher evaluation grades available for all courses taken during grades ten through twelve.

4. Have verbal I.Q. scores available as determined by Lorge-Thorndike tests given to them as ninth graders.

Other variables used in this study are common to some of the students. They are as follows:

1. Took SCAT (School and College Ability Tests).
2. Took PSAT (Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Tests).
3. Took ACT (American College Testing Program).

Procedure and Organization

Comparisons were made of the improvements in English proficiency of students in traditional and non-traditional programs in the Omaha Public Schools. These comparisons were based on evaluations of essays which students wrote in the fall of 1973 and in the spring of 1976, high school teacher evaluations for English courses taken in grades ten through twelve, STEP reading scores identified at the eleventh grade, and I.Q. scores based on the Lorge-Thorndike tests given at ninth grade. Additional correlations were studied as related to results of SCAT, PSAT, ACT, and sophomore and senior essay results.

Within this first chapter, the problem to be resolved has been stated and clarified in relation to its significance. The hypothesis proclaiming non-traditional English programs to be incentives rather than deterrents to intellectual development and increased proficiency in English has been made. Succeeding chapters will review current literature on the subject of alternative English curricula, describe the data-gathering procedures, present an analysis of the data, and summarize the findings of the research.

Significance or Implications of the Study

This study will help to determine if the type of English program available to the college preparatory and general English students greatly influences their intellectual development in the area of English and to determine changes, if any, which might be appropriate in the design of the English curriculum for students in the Omaha Public Schools.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

It is the hypothesis of this study that non-traditional programs in English are incentives rather than deterrents to intellectual development and increased proficiency in the language arts. In this chapter concerned with the review of related literature, an effort will be made to discuss this hypothesis as it applies to the validity of non-traditional English curricula, the reality of declining standardized test scores, and the universal concern over writing deficiencies of high school graduates. There will be unavoidable overlapping and interlacing of explanations and interpretations because, quite naturally, none of these areas are independent of the others.

Carl R. Rogers said in his book, Freedom to Learn, "The goal of education must be to develop a society in which people can live more comfortably with change than with rigidity."¹ It is that philosophy which provides the framework for a rational discussion of curricular changes in the secondary English program.

Non-traditional English Curricula

Surprising as it may seem, in view of the current "back to the basics" movement in our country, current literature reflects considerable support for elective, or non-traditional, English courses. In an article which traces her own daughter's experiences with the elective process, Elda Maase, an English teacher herself, concedes that her

¹Carl R. Rogers, Freedom to Learn (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1969), p. 304.

original prejudice against the program has disappeared. She feels that her daughter learned despite her choice of "less important" courses. Mrs. Maase believes that not only do elective courses give students choices, but they stretch the imagination and improve skills.²

Mescal Messmore sees today's curriculum as the "new" built on the "old." The modern trend toward "humanistic" education is not the "progressive" education of the past, but it is built on that.³ He continues, "...elective programs are not only a good example of the process of change in education, but also a good example of a positive force for change."⁴ His supportive, positive comments regarding the values of the elective concept can be reinforced by the experiences local secondary schools have had with the program. Students get opportunities to assist in creating curricula; they develop accountability; they are encouraged to evaluate courses. The "permanence of change" is visible as courses are dropped, added, revamped. For example, courses entitled "Cars in Literature" and "Sports in Literature" are no longer popular with students who seem to demand more depth than these courses provided. "Protest Poetry" lost its popularity early in the 1970's as college campuses grew quieter. Science fiction courses retain their student following; they are usually demanding in nature.

²Elda Maase, "My Daughter and the English Department; or, A Second Hand Look at High School Mini-Courses, English Journal, LX 111 (April, 1974), 36.

³Mescal Messmore, "The Curriculum of Today: A Foreshadowing of Tomorrow," English Journal, LX 111 (April, 1974), 38.

⁴Ibid.

Gordon Pradl, who calls the elective concept an "electoral fraud" seems not to oppose the concept so much as he opposes what it promises to do but cannot deliver.⁵ He says that the program works well if developed from within a school. Superimposition of plans which worked well elsewhere is not advised. In the Omaha Public Schools studies were made of projects devised elsewhere, but the development of philosophy, courses, scheduling, organization, and selection of materials was locally determined and effected. Pradl also recommended that teachers must not develop curricula independently. Where that has happened outside of the elective course concept in our school system, we have seen isolated empires rise and fall. His criticism regarding inability to provide more than theoretical freedom of choice has validity. Scheduling difficulties, negative reactions toward change on the part of some administrators and teachers, class sizes, and parent, student, and teacher apathy - though not widespread - can prevent an English department from keeping its promises.

Paul Lucas, affiliated with a small high school in Ohio (there were only 3½ full time English teachers), has described the death of the elective program in his district. The reasons he stated are summarized as follows:

1. Too much demand was placed on teachers and administrators.
2. Teacher evaluation decreased.
3. Teacher efficiency was reduced.

⁵Gordon Pradl, "Viewpoint: Elective Courses - A Case of Electoral Fraud," English Journal, LXVI (April, 1976), 9-11.

4. Interaction between teacher and students was curtailed.
5. Teachers had less control over skill building.
6. Teachers had to cope with wide ranges of ability.
7. Teachers seemed not to be communicating about courses and student achievement.⁶

Despite the obvious fact that the school referred to in this article was too small to provide real flexibility in its English program, more responsibility for failure might be placed on lack of communication between principal and staff as well as lack of coherence and sequence which seemed not to go far toward alleviating the problem which might have existed in the department previously. If, as the article says, the students were bored and the teachers were frustrated, the move back to the traditional program seems wise -- assuming the problems will then be alleviated. The issue must be: Does an elective program provide for the improvement of student motivation to the extent that the students' reading, writing, speaking, listening skills improve?

In 1975 Gyves and Clark, upon examination of charges against elective courses, said, "The important issue is that instructional programs be developed which meet student needs."⁷ They oppose "shot gun approaches." They continue, "Many who favor an elective approach fail to come to grips with how the tangible, measurable elements of diagnosis, treatment, and evaluation are included in the elective curriculum except

⁶Paul Lucas, "The Curriculum Ended with a Whimper," English Journal, LXVI (April, 1976), 54-57.

⁷John J. Gyves and Donald C. Clark, "The Interest-Centered Curriculum: Is Interest Enough?" The Clearing House, XLIX (September, 1975), 33.

in a most superficial, subjective manner."⁸ Their recommendation that the teaching of basic skills must precede "electives" is a viable suggestion except for the fact that in a traditional program many students also "move on" without having learned the basics. Ideally, remedial work continues as it should in an elective program. It is a myth that traditional programs necessarily have more continuity than elective programs. Learning - academic or practical - being as personal a thing as it is on the senior high level, must be attributed to competence in the skills but also to motivation and acceptance of responsibility toward that learning. A good elective program should provide for all facets of the learning process.

Declining Standardized Test Scores

The number of articles, appearing in current periodicals, which are dedicated to the pursuit of determining what standardized test scores have declined is overwhelming. A fair representation of the points of view of the authors sampled ranges from the theory that the basics are not being taught, to the theory that the tests are not testing what is being learned, to the theory, "So what, tests don't make that much difference!"

William H. Angoff concedes that the decline is real but counters that the reasons are not clear. He claims no hard data but says there is some objective evidence that American education has not gone down. He cites SAT testees as a self-selected group and adds that the socio-economic diversity of students, the anti-educational establishment syndrome

⁸Ibid., 37.

and the current economic pressures in the home and on the college campuses might be responsible for lower test scores.⁹ He further explains, "To attribute the score decline to a deterioration of the educational system is to neglect the other highly pervasive educational environment and more generally to ignore the broad complexity of the human learning process and the interaction of the myriad factors that affect it."¹⁰

Stokes suggests that "The issues raised concerning test reliability and bias, misuse and over-emphasis of test scores by admissions officials, and the lack of accountability on the part of test-makers have much more profound implications for society than score decline."¹¹

The attack which these two writers make on standardized testing could be misconstrued as a rationalizing of current English curricular practices if it were not for the fact that their reliability as evaluators of the current "English" scene is valued enough to have their work published in the English Journal.

Tom James, after stating that "23 million Americans - 20 percent of the nation - are functionally illiterate, according to a study sponsored by the U. S. Office of Education,"¹² adds that college officials are dismayed at lack of basic skills shown by many incoming students and are expanding their remedial English programs. He reports that College

⁹William H. Angoff, "Viewpoint: Why the SAT Scores Are Going Down," English Journal, LXIV (March, 1975), 10.

¹⁰Ibid., 11.

¹¹Ruth Stokes, "The World of English: Assessing the Assessors," English Journal, LXIV (March, 1975), 14.

¹²Tom James, "Declining Test Scores: The States React," Compact, IX (December, 1975), 9.

Board researchers say, based on their testing statistics, that student performance no longer increases as much as it used to from grades eleven to twelve.¹³ Does this mean that students learn less as they continue through school? Does this mean that school is less meaningful in our youth-oriented society where immediacy is the great concern for many students? Does this mean that highly traditional academic programs would bring all students up to where "they ought to be" on the standardized scale? Does this mean that elective English programs (not widely used until the early seventies) are responsible for lower test scores which began to appear in the mid-sixties? It behooves educators to look further for a complete study of the significant reasons.

Kapfer, M. Kapfer, and Woodruff suggest that, although some may feel that standardized tests are inadequate measuring devices, to discard them would be to lose "a tool for measuring some kinds of behavior."¹⁴ They explain:

...test scores generally do not correlate with measures of in-life success. This is true for a number of reasons, the most prominent of which is that there are many other kinds of talent in addition to academic talent, and that these other talents, either separately or in combination, appear to be the critical ones in determining life success.¹⁵

Perhaps the principle which underlies the preceding quotation is the pervasive theory behind the elective English curriculum philosophy. Maybe the theory is commendable; maybe the practical application of

¹³Ibid., 10.

¹⁴Philip G. Kapfer, Miriam Bierbaum Kapfer, and Asahel D. Woodruff, "Declining Test Scores: Interpretations, Issues and Relationships to Life-Based Education," Educational Technology, XVI (July, 1976), 12.

¹⁵Ibid., 9.

that theory still evades the curriculum designers.

In further comments about test score declines, Harnischfeger and Wiley react to the situation this way: "...after two decades of educational reform and innovation, there is now a strong movement toward restoration: Back to the fundamentals of traditional schooling."¹⁶ They further state that alarming news of test declines and resource cutbacks results in the common view that there is something wrong with American education; schools must go back to the basics.¹⁷ They surmised that since achievements measured in higher grades declined more than those measured in lower ones it "reflects differences in content tested as well as the ages of test-takers."¹⁸

In their very thorough and thought-provoking article they raise many more questions. Some of their conclusions follow:

It seems that the call for "back to the basics" is unfounded in that it is not based on thorough reconsideration of what is and should be learned in school.¹⁹

Definitely, curricular changes are highly likely to be responsible for part of the test score decline.²⁰

¹⁶Annegret Harnischfeger and David E. Wiley, "The Marrow of Achievement Test Score Declines," Educational Technology, XVI (June, 1976), 5.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., 6.

¹⁹Ibid., 13.

²⁰Ibid.

We need to value [sic] losses and possible gains in pupils' knowledges and skills responsibly against a thoughtful vision of our, but mainly their, future.²¹

The trend in secondary education toward "special" and more expressive courses indicates that the traditional common academic base may not be readily accepted anymore, either by teachers or by pupils, as course offerings and enrollments hint. Maybe parts of traditional course contents are obsolete, and perhaps instead of alternating innovation of traditional curricula, ... the practical education community has been helping itself with new "special" courses, whose contents might be highly distinctive from school to school and not attended to by test developers.²²

Such heavy reliance on the commentary of Harnischfeger and Wylie would be suspect if it were not for the very definitive attention they give to the entire spectrum of standardized testing. They open their observation to differences in educational goals; to the statement by some schools that going back to traditional obligatory courses - as well as accompanying dress codes, disciplinary rules, etc. - has reversed achievement score trends; to the ignorance educators have about our schools nation-wide; to the apparent changes of student assessment of the importance of schooling to their future lives; to the admission that there is no one cause for declining achievement test scores.²³

They sum up their review of the back-to-basic movement thus: "For a thoughtful and engaged educator, it is at this time difficult to endorse the movement. What we need, and what the achievement score trends should provoke, is a reconsideration and debate over educational goals."²⁴

²¹Ibid., 14.

²²Ibid., 13.

²³Ibid., 5-14.

²⁴Ibid., 11.

Robert M. Rippey also makes a plea for clarification of educational goals. He makes a plea for diversity in available programs suggesting that, "The secret to long term learning is involvement and commitment, and that commitment is encouraged by liking....This means that we must make school rewarding not only to the stars of the show, but also to the ordinary plodders and good citizens, and even the bad guys."²⁵

Sapone and Guiliano wonder if the public school has been made the scapegoat of the test score decline. After they discuss some of the usual reasons for the decline, they conclude, in a positive response, "Recent curricular changes, made in response to social needs, are likely to be partially responsible for test score decline in some subject areas."²⁶

In summation of this part of the related reading, it would seem appropriate to say that commentators on the subject admit to the shocking decline of standardized test scores; that they recommend consideration of many possible reasons; that they agree that elective course curricula affect test score results; that they do not universally condemn elective course curricula; and that they strongly urge a reexamination of educational goals in our nation's public schools.

Concern over Writing Deficiencies

Although there seem to be no significant statistical comparisons between the writing proficiency of current high school graduates and

²⁵Robert M. Rippey, "The Test Score Decline: If You Don't Know Where You're Going, How Do You Expect to Get There?" Educational Technology, XVI (June, 1976), 34.

²⁶Carmel V. Sapone and Joseph R. Guiliano, "The Test Score Decline: Are the Public Schools the Scapegoat?" Educational Technology, XVI (June, 1976), 43.

those of a quarter of a century ago - at least in the case of actual written essay samples - it must be conceded that many of the current high school graduates are not as proficient in writing as they are capable of being. However great the concern may be, the assessing of blame for the situation is complex. Barron B. Beshoar, in commenting upon the National Assessment on Writing conducted in 1969 and again in 1974 as a part of the National Assessment of Educational Progress, said that there were greater extremes between the "poor" and the "good" in 1974. His further comments included these observations:

1. Basics seem well in hand.
2. Language is changing; graders may be looking for outmoded standards.
3. Less motivation is provided for writing in our society.
4. Good readers are often good writers.
5. Standard English, the dialect preferred or demanded for success in our society, may not be desired by students.
6. The motivation to write is waning.
7. In large classes, teachers find it difficult to grade as many essays as they would like.
8. Schools have recently been encouraging students to use free narrative writing styles.²⁷

Beshoar's conclusion is, "Even though our language is constantly changing, it would appear that the written word is in trouble and deserves

²⁷ Barron B. Beshoar, "The Condition of Student Writing," American Education, XII (March, 1976), 22.

immediate attention."²⁸

The elective program of the Omaha Public Schools came into being in 1969-70 and was used experimentally during the 1970-71 school year. It became immediately apparent that it would be wise to institute some kind of checking system, perhaps a longitudinal study, of composition proficiency in our schools to determine if an elective English program in any way alters the attention given to writing practice. (Of course, we had no statistics on what had been done before the elective program was made available.)

The first sophomore essays were written by a random sampling of forty students in each of the eight high schools in December of 1972. Those same students were asked to write again just before their graduation in May of 1973. That identical pattern of sampling of writing continues. The spring graduates of 1977 who will write will represent the completion of the third full cycle of this study. The results of the 1973-1976 study are included in the research done for this field project. Interesting statistics are being compiled. They reveal that student writing does indeed improve from grades ten through twelve. Specific improvements are dealt with in a later chapter.

Mellon made a very definitive study of the NAEP writing surveys but feels that the writing samples are too limited not because of errors in student selection but because students write only one short essay, hardly convincing enough for absolute judgment. In the Omaha Public Schools' writing evaluation program, the students are given an opportunity

²⁸Ibid.

to revise their essays with the use of a dictionary; then they write a second essay, as seniors, with the same opportunities for revision.

Mellon summarizes his study with the suggestion that NAEP writing assessments, for those who want to continue emphasizing writing or those who want to begin again, "can serve as excellent ammunition for their cause."²⁹

Kuykendall presses for a more thorough study of writing than that which can be derived from test scores. She also suggests ways in which parents can help: "First, instead of jumping on the back-to-the-basics bandwagon, find out about the composition program in your school. If there is a problem with grammar, find out whether it is a problem of neglect or a problem of drill book overkill. Assess the program by reading real samples of student writing, not by looking at irrelevant test scores."³⁰

In a report which includes comments on a study of standardized tests of writing made by Odell and Cooper, they say about writing tests:

Our thesis is that standardized tests often do not measure what they say they measure, always fail to measure what they should measure, and consequently provide us with little or no useful information either to guide teaching or to permit us to conclude confidently that school and college students are writing worse than they used to....³¹

²⁹John C. Mellon, "Round Two of the National Writing Assessment ---Interpreting the Apparent Decline of Writing Ability: A Review," Research in the Teaching of English, X (Spring, 1976), 74.

³⁰Carol Kuykendall, "Equal Time: Grammar and Composition," English Journal, LXIV (December, 1975) 6-7.

³¹Gabriel Della-Piana, Lee Odell, Charles Cooper, and George Endo, "The Writing Skills Decline: So What?" Educational Technology, XVI (July, 1976), 32.

In reference to the Omaha Public Schools' essay evaluation program, the final grader of all of the papers is an individual, a teacher of composition, who is trained in the "holistic" method of grading which means that the grader reads the paper for total impression before evaluating it descriptively. The reader also utilizes the "benchmark" system made popular by the College Board in whose program for grading of essays he has participated. In the "benchmark" system, the evaluator samples three or four papers from each of the schools; their identity remains anonymous to the reader who then establishes the extremes as well as the middle paper. The reader then reads the entire set of papers going back frequently to re-establish extremes and middle papers. An attempt is made to read as many papers in one sitting, or under similar conditions, as possible so as to reduce the number of variables involved in the evaluation.

One of the weaknesses of this program has been that studies of individual student progress has not been possible for want of time. All growth or decline has been shown anonymously for schools only. During the current year, 1976-77, plans are afoot to trace each individual's growth specifically in light of recent school integration measures.

There has been considerable writing in periodicals on the subject of composition, test score decline, and elective English programs. There are, however, no significant studies on English proficiency available, to my knowledge, on the specific subject of traditional as opposed to non-traditional English programs. One reference was discovered regarding an unpublished dissertation on student attitudes toward traditional as opposed to non-traditional English programs; however, that

would not have been germane to this study to any great degree. It would appear, then, that little definitive study has been done and that much needs to be done before we can assess the distinct values of the two programs. In the following chapter an attempt will be made to comment objectively on the experiences the Omaha District has had with the use of diverse English programs.

CHAPTER III

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

In the initial preparation for this study all the students who wrote for the senior essay evaluation in May, 1976, were identified. Their names were recorded by school although neither students' names nor schools' names were to be revealed in the final report. School listings were separated according to program definition. Students from Bryan Senior, Burke, North, and South were placed in the non-traditional category; students from Benson, Central, and Northwest, in the traditional category. At that point in the study, 171 students had been identified for possible inclusion.

The second step was to record all sophomore and senior essay grades for these students. The third step was to check all the students' permanent records in the schools and to locate standardized test scores in the Omaha Public Schools' Research Department. An exhaustive search was made to find scores for Lorge-Thorndike, NEDT, SCAT, STEP (Reading), PSAT, SAT, ACT, and teacher grades for English 3 through 8. For various reasons not all of these scores were available for all 171 students. In some cases students had not taken scholastic aptitude tests for college or records had not been transferred from school to school. Nevertheless, of the original 171 students, sixty-seven students in the traditional setting and seventy-one students in the non-traditional setting were found to have scores for Lorge-Thorndike, STEP (Reading), teacher grades for English 3 through 8, sophomore and senior essay writing. Those combinations were used for the major part of the study.

Further investigation revealed that twenty-two students in the traditional and fifteen students in the non-traditional settings had scores available for SCAT, PSAT, ACT, sophomore essay writing and senior essay writing. Those variables were brought together for another commentary.

There was found to be one strong weakness in the scores included in the study. Although the original selection of writers of sophomore essays was to have been a cross-section of students taken by random sampling, it appeared at the senior essay level, based on the identification of senior high essay writers, that in one school particularly, students with high intelligence quotients seemed to form an unusually large majority of those tested. This situation could be accounted for in one or more of the following ways:

1. In at least one school in the traditional category, original sampling may not have been taken at random from the entire school populace.
2. Students who drop out of school before the twelfth grade, and would, therefore, not have written the senior essay, are often the scholastically poorer students.
3. In at least one school, identified as non-traditional, a very small number of graduating seniors actually wrote the final essay and so were excluded from the study. They may have been students with higher scholastic ability; if so, the statistics would have been altered significantly.

As a result of this unfortunate disparity in facts available, no study could be made by matching scholastic aptitude scores of students in non-traditional as opposed to traditional programs, especially in terms of

college preparatory students.

A second limitation which appeared was the inability to identify positively which students had been college preparatory students or which students actually enrolled in college. Not all college preparatory students take PSAT, ACT, and/or SAT tests; not all students who take those tests are college preparatory students.

Listed below is Table I followed by comments relative to its contents:

TABLE I
COMPARISON OF MEANS FOR TESTS AND GRADES

VARIABLE	NON-TRADITIONAL (N=71)	TRADITIONAL (N=67)
Scholastic Aptitude	99.282	111.269***
STEP Reading	33.859	41.642***
English 3	2.535	2.209
English 4	2.662	2.224*
English 5	2.451	2.179
English 6	2.535	2.224
English 7	2.324	2.075
English 8	2.338	2.299
Sophomore Essay	3.141	2.373***
Senior Essay	2.901	2.343***

***There is a .001 level of confidence.

**There is a .01 level of confidence.

*There is a .05 level of confidence.

With a very high level of confidence shown in the statistics as presented, the non-traditional program students included in the study registered an average verbal I.Q. of 99.282 as opposed to an average verbal I.Q. of 111.269 for the traditional program students included in the study. With the same degree of confidence apparent, it is shown that there is a strong relationship between ability to read well as measured by SCAT (Reading) and above average I.Q. scores as measured by Lorge-Thorndike. In the consideration of variables 3 through 10, which involve teacher grading, scoring is on the basis of "1" through "5" with "1" being the highest grade and "5," the lowest. Statistics reveal that the average grades of students in traditional programs tended to be higher than those in non-traditional programs although not measurably different considering the difference in scholastic ability. It is to be understood, however, that teacher grades did not in all cases differentiate between grades given to students in advanced placement or honors classes as opposed to those in regular academic or general English classes. There would have been no way of determining the weight that each grade might have even if the differentiation in classes were taken into account.

Of the teacher grades given for English 3 through 8, the greatest difference between traditional and non-traditional is in English 4 which in many schools is a speech course with no specific variations in the course at the seven high schools included in the study. Perhaps here the scholastic ability of students plays the biggest role in the difference. The evidence is not conclusive, obviously.

The least difference between teacher grades is at the English 8

level where the variation between non-traditional and traditional registers only .039.

It is perhaps appropriate at this time to expand upon the definitions "non-traditional" and "traditional." Theoretically, students in non-traditional programs are introduced to the concept of course selection at the sophomore level. They do not, however, usually have the option of determining what units they will study as sophomores. In Special-Interest English, the school district's official elective program, a sophomore orientation course is provided for. It acquaints the student with the elective program, encourages him to become aware of his reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills and attempts to get him involved with the choices he can make as a junior and a senior. Late in the second semester he makes his decision regarding the courses he will take as a junior. Senior course decisions are made the following year. It is to be noted that although less structured in design than in the traditional program, the study of English grammar and usage and the development of composition skills are stressed in the non-traditional curriculum as well.

In the traditional curriculum, although there are options for teachers and sometimes students in regard to the titles and genre which are included, the curriculum is fairly precise. The junior year encompasses the study of American literature and the continuation or introduction of expository writing; the senior year emphasizes the study of English and/or Western literature with more advanced work in expository writing. Now back to the study itself.

In the comparison of sophomore essay grades and senior essay grades which are also graded on the "1" through "5" scale, there is greater

difference between students in the non-traditional at the sophomore level and at the senior level than there is for students in traditional programs. In the case of the sophomore essays there was a difference of .768 between traditional and non-traditional. On the senior level essay, grades revealed a difference of .558 between traditional and non-traditional indicating less disparity between the two groups.

Students in non-traditional programs appeared to improve more than did students in traditional programs in regard to the essay evaluation portion of this study. The average of sophomore grades in the non-traditional category was 3.141; it had improved to 2.901, a gain of .240, by the time those students were graduating seniors. Although the average grades on sophomore and senior essays were higher for students in traditional programs than for those in non-traditional programs, the rate of improvement was less. The sophomore average was 2.373; the senior average, 2.343. The gain was only .030.

Does it mean that students of higher I.Q., as those in the traditional program appeared to be, reach their maximum competence in writing earlier because of their scholastic ability? Does it mean, instead, that students with apparent lower scholastic ability learn more about writing at the high school level than at the elementary or junior high level? Or does it mean that the non-traditional approach to the study of English motivates average and below average students so that they stay in school longer and become more involved in the progress they make in English? Unfortunately, as was stated earlier, there are not enough data available in the statistics accumulated to measure individual

students in this regard.

Tables II and III, shown next, use the same statistics as Table I but arrange those facts so as to determine correlation between variables in the non-traditional and traditional courses.

TABLE II

CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES
NON-TRADITIONAL
(N-71)

VARIABLE	Teacher Grades									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Scholastic Aptitude	1.000	.809	-.527	-.361	-.240	-.353	-.397	-.298	-.455	-.593
2. STEP (Reading)	1.000		-.478	-.295	-.328	-.404	-.392	-.263	-.453	-.531
3. Teacher Grades Eng. 3	1.000	.519	.307	.379	.382	.349	.317	.395		
4. English 4	1.000		.445	.560	.302	.397	.189	.374		
5. English 5	1.000			.683	.288	.498	.361	.331		
6. English 6	1.000				1.000	.446	.324	.393		
7. English 7	1.000					1.000	.325	.416		
8. English 8	1.000						1.000	.336		
9. Sophomore Essay	1.000							1.000	.507	
10. Senior Essay	1.000								1.000	

In the case of Table II, significant correlation is shown between scholastic aptitude, STEP (Reading), English 3, 4, 6, 7, sophomore essay, and senior essay ratings. STEP (Reading) has a high correlation with all other scores except English 4 and 8. Since English 4 is primarily speech, it is understandable that those grades might not correlate closely with reading scores. In other words, a student might communicate effectively without having the background of good reading skills. As for English 8, a senior course, supposedly dependent upon reading ability, the lack of higher correlation cannot be explained without further study.

It lends validity to this correlation study to see that English 4 (speech) grades do not correlate well with the sophomore essay grades. This might suggest that the skills needed for success in speaking and writing are not necessarily similar although teachers might think there is a close correlation. If one speaks well, he might not write well and vice versa. It is reasonable to assume that correlation is not high between grades in English 8 and the sophomore essay. On the other hand, the senior essay and the English 8 grade correlate closely.

TABLE III

CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES
TRADITIONAL
(N-67)

Teacher Grades

VARIABLE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Scholastic Aptitude	1.000	.771	-.541	-.591	-.571	-.508	-.429	-.320	-.603	-.633
2. STEP (Reading)		1.000	-.558	-.609	-.606	-.598	-.453	-.368	-.692	-.597
Teacher Grades										
3. Eng. 3			1.000	.744	.706	.707	.694	.549	.412	.495
4. Eng. 4				1.000	.621	.687	.674	.606	.364	.510
5. Eng. 5					1.000	.695	.743	.591	.360	.472
6. Eng. 6						1.000	.734	.523	.336	.513
7. Eng. 7							1.000	.655	.277	.427
8. Eng. 8								1.000	.195	.271
9. Sophomore Essay									1.000	.593
10. Senior Essay										1.000

In Table III, where we see correlation between variables pertinent to traditional English programs, always remembering the higher scholastic aptitude rating, that correlation is high in all areas of English teacher grades, scholastic aptitude, and STEP scores. There is a very high correlation between sophomore and senior essays but only slightly higher than shown by the same comparison in the non-traditional data. It is surprising that there is a low correlation between English 8 grades and the senior essay. English 8 grades and sophomore essay results would be expected to have low correlation.

Looking at the statistics of both Tables II and III, it appears as if the grades of students in the traditional group are more consistent than the grades of students in the non-traditional group. Considering the average I.Q. scores, noted earlier, and the possible motivational factors of the elective curriculum, the indication might be of a positive nature in support of non-traditional approaches.

TABLE IV
CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES
NON-TRADITIONAL
(N-15)

VARIABLE	1. SCAT	2. PSAT	3. ACT	4. SOPHOMORE ESSAY	5. SENIOR ESSAY
1. SCAT	1.000	.921	.745	-.658	-.615
2. PSAT		1.000	.798	-.657	-.450
3. ACT			1.000	-.655	-.464
4. SOPHOMORE ESSAY				1.000	.738
5. SENIOR ESSAY					1.000

TABLE V
CORRELATION BETWEEN VARIABLES
TRADITIONAL
(N-22)

VARIABLE	1. SCAT	2. PSAT	3. ACT	4. SOPHOMORE ESSAY	5. SENIOR ESSAY
1. SCAT	1.00	.598	.502	-.494	-.344
2. PSAT		1.000	.637	-.602	-.709
3. ACT			1.000	-.496	-.556
4. SOPHOMORE ESSAY				1.000	.524
5. SENIOR ESSAY					1.000

Tables IV and V pertain to the comparisons of PSAT, and ACT as well as grades on sophomore and senior essays. The correlation of these variables is consistently higher for the students in the non-traditional program although both have high variable correlations. The lower correlation between SCAT and the senior essay in the traditional program appears unusual and unexpected.

Granted that only twenty-two students from traditional programs and only fifteen students from non-traditional programs were involved in this particular correlation study, it might be reasonable to speculate that students interested in college, no matter what their program is, do well consistent with their scholastic aptitude. Quite possibly a non-traditional program has no disastrous effect on the students' progress.

This discussion related to statistical findings is cursory, at best. Many considerations are left to be studied and considered in what is an area of great concern in the public schools in our country.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Although much is being written currently about elective English programs, declining standardized test scores, and evidence of less proficiency in writing skills as exhibited by high school graduates, little proof has been shown in regard to how much of the responsibility for the decline is to be placed on the type of English program a student has had. A definitive study, as complex as it would be, could be most revealing.

Articles in current periodicals report a strong surge, on the part of some educators and school patrons, to move "back to the basics," the assumption being that schools have stopped teaching the basics. There is evidence that some schools have discarded elective programs and have returned to conventional programs. Some writers are reluctant to be too critical of the more innovative programs because of lack of proof that they are less effective than traditional programs. In any case, the dialogue concerning language arts skills, which is going on throughout our nation currently, can bring very positive results so long as evaluation is fairly made, educational goals are reasserted, and moderation is in control of all decisions.

In the Omaha Public Schools the elective program and the traditional program are compatible. Changes in both programs continue to occur but in orderly fashion. There is no indication that the concept of the elective program is passé.

Conclusions

The conclusions to be drawn from this study are as follows:

1. The non-traditional English program available to senior high school students in the Omaha Public Schools is not a deterrent to the improvement of their proficiency in the language arts, especially in the area of composition.
2. All things being equal, students of similar ability achieve commensurate with that ability regardless of the senior high English program available to them.
3. Motivational factors are of considerable significance in the language arts achievement of senior high school students.
4. Senior high school students have the maturity and the wisdom to select English courses appropriate to their needs and interests.
5. Standardized testing, although it continues to be an appropriate evaluation tool, should no longer be considered the only valid method for the measuring of student progress in the language arts.

Recommendations

The implications of the findings of this study, as they apply to the Omaha Public Schools, are clear. Listed below are the recommendations which stem from those findings:

1. Optional English programs, traditional and non-traditional, should be made available to all senior high school students in the Omaha Public Schools.
2. Prescribed evaluation procedures should continue to be followed in an effort to detect the strengths and weaknesses of the English program as well as to design changes when the need for those changes is determined.
3. A balance in curricular offerings should be maintained in the senior high school English programs of the

Omaha Public Schools so that the current "back-to-the-basics" movement, as valid as it may be in some instances, does not detract from the motivational opportunities of a varied, creative program.

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