

Iowa Science Teachers Journal

Volume 8 | Number 1

Article 14

1970

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Recommended Citation

Ellis, Charles J. (1970) "Far-nix and Lar-nix Diesected," *Iowa Science Teachers Journal*: Vol. 8 : No. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/istj/vol8/iss1/14>

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FAR-NIX AND LAR-NIX DIESECTED

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High school teachers do a wonderful job. This observation is of long standing and particularly true when



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one considers the "handicaps" under which these teachers operate. They not only must give of themselves and of their time, but each must be the disciplinarian, father-confessor, and big-buddy of the students. They must cope with school boards and parents, take tickets and usher! For all their expertise in these many areas, we on the "outside" thank these teachers.

One problem they have that may be on the fringe of their recognition is that of teaching the correct pronunciation of certain *basic* words, words that are knowledge-indicators. In turn, probably some of this problem turns on the phenomenon of sight transposition which is common to many of us.

Many people will transpose the digits "1431" into "1341." We all make this mistake. Just as common is the transposition of letters. For instance, in the word "pharynx" many teachers transpose the "n" and "y". After this transposition they pronounce the word incorrectly, "far-nicks". The

same problem accrues to "larynx"; it becomes, by transposition, "lar-nicks". The explanation of these transpositions is unknown; it is known, however, that the mispronunciations that result are unprofessional and belie the teacher's knowledge.

Another common mistake, one of "oversight," not transposition, is the pronunciation of "dissect" meaning "to tease apart for examination." Far too many teachers pronounce this word as if it were spelled "disect." However, no such word exists; "bisect" is the word. If "disect" did exist, and it does *not*, it would mean the same as "bisect," "to cut (-sect) in two (bi-)." The latter meaning is not what is meant by the biologist when he "cuts up" a frog. The pronunciation difference between the two words is quite obvious. With one "s" the word, if it were actually a word, would be pronounced "die-sect"; spelled correctly with two "s's", it becomes "duh-sect."

While it is just a guess, but one based upon experience, I would say that at least 50 per cent of the students entering college make one or both of the mistakes just pointed out. Some will insist, quite vehemently, that they are correct in their pronunciation because "my high school teacher told me so!" This statement is su-

perfluous because regardless of who said it, if it is wrong it is wrong! Furthermore, the statement incriminates the high school teacher because it is wrong. Probably worse than incrimination is the indication that the teacher either did not care enough about his subject to notice this difference or he was slipshod and overlooked it. Yet neither of these explanations is complimentary to high school teachers in general. Most are *good* teachers and should not have this derogatory reflection cast upon their ability. But, it IS cast there because of these pronunciation errors.

So, biology teachers of today, arise! Arise and watch your pronunciation. Err if you will in subject matter (it should be controversial so you will have some support in your position!)—this can be corrected. But, err not, in such a common skill as pronunciation. “Mispronounce” such words as “*Microtetrameres*,” “duodenum,” “arthropoda,” or “hematophagous” but not “pharynx” or “dissect”! You will sound, vicariously through your students, the fool as the so-called experts have gone through this stage before you and are alert to others making the same mistakes!

How Much Does It Cost To Synthesize a Gene?

How much does it cost to synthesize a gene, and who pays for it?

University of Wisconsin President Fred Harvey Harrington made an effort to tie down such costs in a report to UW Regents on Dr. Har Gobind Khorana’s announcement of the first complete laboratory synthesis of a gene.

President Harrington called Dr. Khorana’s accomplishment “the most significant event of the year for the University of Wisconsin,” and said he could answer questions about its cost only in terms of the total support of Dr. Khorana’s work since he came to Wisconsin a decade ago.

“In the 10 years Dr. Khorana has been with us he has directed projects totaling \$2.7 million,” Harrington reported. “In this total were \$226 thousand of state appropriations. Thus for

every dollar the state of Wisconsin put into the studies by him and his group over the period, Dr. Khorana’s group attracted \$10 from the outside. In addition to the state appropriation, the university invested a similar amount (\$230 thousand) from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation—which included Dr. Khorana’s full salary as Elvehjem Professor since 1964.

“The major support of the Khorana group’s work came from federal agencies, just over \$2 million. Of this, \$1.5 million came from the National Institutes of Health, \$.5 million from the National Science Foundation, and \$1,000 from the Atomic Energy Commission for a fellowship for one of the members of Dr. Khorana’s group.

“Private agencies which supported their work include the Life Insurance Medical Research Fund, the Upjohn Pharmaceutical Co., and the American Cancer Society. Together these totaled \$159 thousand.”