



## General specialists

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## GENERAL SPECIALISTS

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THE replies to my article upon the scientific spirit in public speaking were such fair and lucid statements of the demands of scholarship upon our profession that I take some credit to myself for the production of a valuable discussion, even tho the fallacies of my position be proved. It is therefore with the hope of calling forth critical replies that I attempt further argument.<sup>1</sup>

The organization of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking seems to mark a successful effort to establish a recognized profession. Since the days when biology first exacted tribute from sociology, and Herbert Spencer talked of the social organism, social organizations have become self-conscious with increasing rapidity, until today every group of men with common interests is eager for organization. Witness the tremendous growth of societies, clubs, fraternities, trade unions, and associations of all sorts. Journeymen craftsmen plied their trades for years before the guilds became powerful; but the academic position of Professor of Public Speaking had hardly been in existence long enough to obtain individual recognition until the national organization was effected. And, instead of being the outgrowth of the desire of men in long-established positions to come together with the sole object of mutual inspiration, the National Association is, partially, at least, the product of a desire to establish independent positions thru organization. The National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking therefore, as other youthful academic societies, bears a closer resemblance to a labor union than to an academy of arts and letters. In this fact lies a great hope. The organization is of necessity democratic. None of its members hold positions which make their authority absolute. We now have in the National Association an effective organization unhamp-ered by precedent or tradition.

The Association will not, however, long remain in this position. The authority of the body will inevitably tend to become concentrated in the hands of the ablest members. The power of precedent cannot be denied, and the early actions of the Association will

<sup>1</sup>See "A Problem in Pragmatism" immediately following.

exert an influence all out of proportion to their true significance. The ideals of the Association may be determined by two types of men. In the first place, the ideals may grow out of the actions of men, who having immediate reforms in view, take whatever steps are most favorable to the attainment of their ends. These men, having acted, will, upon the basis of their actions, build a philosophy. These are the men whose reason is given them to justify their actions. The second type is composed of men who may seem a bit impractical, men who are more interested in the construction of ideals than in immediate action. While it is impossible to deny the need for prompt action in many branches of Public Speaking, it would be well to pay some attention to ultimate ideals. Where are we going and why? What sort of a profession are we trying to create? Just what is our function in the educational world? In answering these questions we will be guided either by the intention of creating jobs which will give us the rewards we desire, or by the desire to do most effectively the work which we can and ought to do. Our desires are so determined by the possessions of our fellows that if the first motive be followed we will make it our ideal to make our departments in all respects like the recognized science departments. Desiring academic recognition, independence, and adequate salaries, we will standardize, build up a heavy technique, and insist that we as Public Speaking teachers have a separate field of knowledge as distinct as that of any other department. If, on the other hand, we are interested primarily in the work that most needs doing, not to create desirable jobs for deserving pedagogues, but to fill the greatest need in our college courses, we will question further before deciding to be in all things like as our brothers the scientists.

In repeating the oft-quoted statement that this is an age of specialization, in education as in other realms, it would be well for us to ask ourselves why, and to insist on being shown that specialization results in improvement wherever applied. It is easy to see at once why we have specialization in the science departments. As soon as enough new facts possessing sufficient unity to warrant a new grouping are discovered, a new department is created. These facts are discovered by special effort concentrated in comparatively narrow fields. Thus each science department owes its existence to specialization. Again, while this search for facts is the result of a love for truth, there is always, in the background of

consciousness, at least, the knowledge that a single scientific discovery will create a new industry or revolutionize an old one. Can it be purely the love for truth which is leading England to emphasize the necessity for scientific research after the war is over? While the scientist may be a disinterested scholar, it is the practical results that lead men to endow institutions of research. Thus the scientist owes the existence of his profession to specialization and all his rewards to the results of specialization. But how is it with the older parts of our educational system? By what strange fate are teachers of oratory, teachers of a discipline that was the crown of Greek and Roman education, now humbly attempting to creep back into our educational system under the guise of a new science discovered by a process of specialization! The truth is we specialize in speech science because others have specialized. We are like Dakota ranchmen gazing upon a territory which has been opened to homesteaders. Every new claim filed upon lessens his range. Not being upon friendly terms with the "honyockers" his only recourse is to leave the country or else file upon a quarter-section himself and be content within its narrow boundaries. All the sciences have staked out claims. Most of them have done it by discovering new territory. Their possession of permanent abiding places and consequent rise to power and influence have led them to demand that every intellectual activity have a home of its own. If Public Speaking cannot give its street and number it is suspected of staying out nights. To be homeless and a wanderer has its disadvantages, but Public Speaking would never be able to stay at home if it had one. It were the part of wisdom, therefore, to be on such friendly terms with all the proprietors of shanties of knowledge (to retain my western viewpoint) as to be sure of welcome as a visitor.

Having pointed out by way of introduction that the origin of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking allows us great freedom in the formulation of our ideals, and secondly that the course of events by which training of students in Public Speaking came to be assigned to a particular faculty member does not warrant him in the assumption that he is a specialist, I wish to submit three assertions for consideration in determining some of the ideals of the association. First, neither speech science nor speech art can be confined to a particular field of knowledge. Second, any general acceptance of the idea that speech science or

speech art possesses a distinctive and individual field for specialization will prevent the instruction in Public Speaking from reaching its highest effectiveness. Third, the Professor of Public Speaking in a college finds his greatest work in stimulating, as a means to effective expression, a wide range of general reading and a keen interest in contemporary thought and action. In other words, the Public Speaking Professor must be a specialist in versatility.

The study of Public Speaking cannot be confined to one particular field of knowledge because speech art is not art and speech science is not science. John Galsworthy has defined art as "that imaginative expression of human energy which, thru technical concretion of feeling and perception, tends to reconcile the individual with the universal by exciting in him impersonal emotion." By impersonal emotion he means that "that is *not* art which, while he is contemplating it, inspires him with any active or directive impulse; that that *is* art, when, for however brief a moment, it replaces within him interest in himself by interest in itself." Ethel Puffer Howes Dench has also emphasized this well-known distinction. "We have a right to say that the aesthetic experience involves detachment, isolation, inhibition of action. However perfect the aesthetic moment, however harmonious and self-complete the ideal world in which we enter, it is none the less an interruption of real life. The aesthetic moment is a step out of life. . . . The aesthetic as applied to life is a contradiction of itself; because it is of the essence of life to be linked, and the essence of beauty is to be an isolated whole." Now it cannot be denied that this artistic isolation and detachment is often noticeable in elocutionary productions. Very possibly an excellent defence could be made for the predominance of the art motive in vocal interpretation of some forms of poetry. But it is undeniable that art for art's sake in oratory means the death of eloquence. To adapt a phrase from the article just quoted, it is of the essence of oratory to be linked. The supreme thing about oratory is its relationship to life and activity. Victor Cousin recognized this a half-century ago when he denied oratory a place among the fine arts. But it is unnecessary to elaborate this point. The National Association recognizes that Public Speaking is not contained within the field of art when it sets for itself a different scope of activity from the Speech Arts Association. Evidently the National Academic Association would make Public Speaking a science, and, as Professor Wool-

bert suggests, organize departments of speech science. I have no quarrel with the viewpoint of Professor Woolbert. His article is conclusive proof that he does not regard speech science as an addition to the realm of the known. The article, instead of telling of the discovery of a new science, is a plea for the academic recognition of the unity which exists among many long recognized factors. When such a unity is recognized it will be, not a thing in itself, but it will always be dependent upon a personality. Would any one attempt to make a scientific formula for the amount of history necessary to make a first-class speaker, or for the exact proportion which should exist between psychology and literature or economics? Since this cannot be done, the circle by which Mr. Woolbert has united so many branches of learning represents, not a science, but a personality. But the Public Speaking teacher who is determined to be a scientist may say that since the attempt to master all possible subject matter for speeches is futile, he will content himself with mastering the method of handling the subject matter. He will abstract from all the speeches he has read certain fundamental principles with which he will create a science. He then creates, however, not a science but a technique. Even the technique will be very imperfect as it is not applied to the same conditions twice. Since these facts are generally recognized and since Professor Woolbert's outline of a course, together with the University of Wisconsin outline, is broad and comprehensive, it may be asked why so much time should be spent in stating that the work of a Public Speaking department is not confined to one branch of knowledge and that such a department should not be called a science or an art department. It may seem like objection to the untruthfulness of the term sunset. But if emphasis is laid upon the department as an art department or a science department the supposition will soon become general that the Public Speaking teacher has a special field. From that will soon arise the idea that the Public Speaking teacher should be a specialist in the same sense as chemists or philologists are specialists. Public Speaking teachers will feel compelled to conform to the opinion of what they ought to be, which leads me to the second of my assertions, which is that any general acceptance of the idea that speech art and science possess a distinctive and individual field for specialization will prevent the instruction in Public Speaking from reaching its highest effectiveness.

The more we sacrifice to academic recognition, the more we attempt to imitate other departments in our organization, the more we will emphasize our points of similarity and minimize the points of difference. For a real development of our work, it is the points of difference that need to be emphasized. To emphasize the points of likeness is to make us specialists in technique. It cannot be denied that the technical field is large enough to supply many men with life tasks. And there are fields of usefulness for the technical expert in many of the professional schools of oratory or dramatic art. But in the liberal arts college there is no place for the mere technical expert. This is very different from saying that no teacher in a liberal arts college should be a specialist, but even here there is a marked distinction which must not be forgotten. The teacher of physics can fulfill the essentials of his task within the field of his specialized preparation. But for the Public Speaking teacher to attempt to fulfill his task within the limits of a specialized field is to fail in the most important part of his work. Such an attempt gives rise to the conception that the technique of a speech can be successfully abstracted from the subject matter and formalized; whereas it is a truism that you cannot separate the style from the man. But the average student who repeatedly goes thru the process of abstracting the mechanics of a speech can see no reason why it is not just as possible to start with the mechanics and add the subject matter. He plans like an architect and builds like a carpenter. Like Goody Rickby in Percy MacKaye's tragedy of the ludicrous, he would construct a scarecrow, expecting Dickon, or some other supernatural influence to breathe life into it. This constant separation of form and substance destroys all possibility of the functioning of the associative imagination. It makes impossible that complete union described by Ruskin in his chapters on the imagination.

“If, therefore, the combination made is to be harmonious, the artist must induce in each of its compound parts such imperfection as that the other shall put it right. If one of them be perfect by itself, the other will be an excrescence. Both must be faulty when separate, and each corrected by the presence of the other. If he can accomplish this the result will be beautiful; it will be a whole, an organized body with dependent members;—he is an inventor. If not, let his separate features be as beautiful, as opposite, or as resemblant as they may, they form no whole. They

are two members glued together. He is only a carpenter and a joiner."

In addition to the evils arising from the separation of form and substance, the technical specialist will have to assume responsibility for the growth of an idea that success in Public Speaking is to be attained by the mastery of a certain limited number of objective facts. I have frequently known students to refuse to respond to toasts or to make certain speeches which their positions demanded of them because, forsooth, they had not taken certain courses in Public Speaking. Oratory becomes identified with courses taken for credit. Faculty members often decline to act as judges on the grounds that they are not "up in the oratory business," as tho they expected oratory to be judged on much the same grounds as a stock show at the county fair. It is, of course, confessed that many contest orations require a sympathetic specialist to appreciate them. This belief that oratory is tied up with a few facts further gives rise to the belief that there are short cuts to eloquence. How many ambitious young men have spent their wages for the books and instruction of a certain "famous speech specialist" whose correspondence courses are widely advertised. The industrious clerk who spends his money because he has been persuaded that oratory is such an objective affair that, regardless of his personality or fund of general knowledge, fifteen minutes of study each evening will soon make him a convincing speaker, has been swindled.

The technical specialist in oratory soon comes to have a great faith in methods. He seems to believe that he can perfect a method and hand it to his fellow teachers as completely as he can bestow a copyrighted book. Dr. Blanton, in his contribution to the *Quarterly* for October, entitled "Scientific Truth," compares the Public Speaking teacher and his pupil to the Doctor and his patient. Dr. Blanton does not claim to establish his case by the use of this analogy; and certainly he does not expect to discover a serum which will make an orator of the "student who has a very high pitched voice, speaks very rapidly, and has a bad case of stage fright every time he gets up to speak." However, his analogy does lead him into an error. He assumes that all scientific research is of equal value, whether carried on in the field of Medicine or Public Speaking. Now it is obvious that a single discovery in chemistry may banish a disease, but Dr. Blanton would have difficulty in establishing any connection between the scientific knowledge of a period



and its oratory. You cannot by a revolutionizing discovery transform a stammering boy into an orator. The determination, however, to seek scientific methods, cannot but lay emphasis upon the importance of method. Just as Milton thought *Paradise Regained* a greater work than *Paradise Lost* because it had cost him greater effort, so your research worker will believe in the importance of a method according as he has toiled diligently in the perfection of it. Having established a "scientific truth" your researching teacher of Public Speaking is inclined to insist on using it. Very evidently Dr. Blanton is not a pragmatist. When he disapproves of the fact that "a great many teachers of Public Speaking are teaching things that are not true at all and yet are doubtless getting good results," we are led to suppose that he would be indifferent to results if only true methods were used. He shows your true scientist in preferring truth to results; and in addition seems to assert that there is no particular relationship between them. One wonders what William James would have said. As for myself, I am a pragmatist of sufficient credulity to judge of public speaking by its fruits. If every known eclipse of the sun had been followed by a plague, our scientists would agree with the Russian peasants in assuming a causal relationship. At any rate this is true: an *a posteriori* study of results in teaching Public Speaking will bring about variety and individuality in instruction; an *a priori* study of method means uniformity and loss of personality.

Again, the technical specialist makes the mistake of assuming that the student comes to him with a mind well enough stored so that the whole problem of the teacher is a problem of expression. A brief acquaintance with college students ought to dispel this illusion. Even a cursory glance at the college curriculum is enough to show that a student will receive very little material of value for Public Speaking from his required courses. The elementary science work done by undergraduates may develop good memories and accurate observation, but it calls for no constructive thinking. Students of the languages rarely attain sufficient mastery of a foreign tongue to revel in its literature. The first courses in the English language are usually taught from a technical viewpoint. Not until the student reaches his Junior and Senior electives does he work in a field that is contributory to his work in Public Speaking. Even then it is the exceptional student who is sufficiently interested in his line of study to draw upon it with en-

thusiasm. To remedy this deficiency two expedients have been resorted to by the specialist teachers. The early training has been by means of declamation and speeches upon very simple subjects. Freshmen are asked to make speeches upon the new building or the football prospects. The other device is the introduction of contests. The use of simple subjects may be effective as far as elementary training in formal expression is concerned, but it is largely a waste of time from the point of view of increasing the intellectual interests of the student. The contests are not objectionable if they are, so to speak, the blossom of the Public Speaking plant; but where they are, as often, root, leaves and all, they are almost an unmitigated evil. Since the college courses do not supply the material for young speakers, and since devices for speaking without thinking are not preëminently successful, it is obvious that the student must get his material from reading which is done independently of all college requirements, reading which is done voluntarily in an attempt to satisfy intellectual curiosity. Before calling the students strictly to account and demanding such reading it might be well to inquire if college students *can* do any general reading. In the freshman year, required courses which demand considerably more work than the previous studies in high school, and the effort of adjustment to new surroundings, effectually prevent idle hours of browsing in the library unless the student be a confirmed "intellectual" before his arrival. Throughout the college course laboratory work and the writing of notes occupy many afternoons that were free to the men who were nurtured almost exclusively on the classics. The influence of the graduate schools is almost imperceptibly extending downward, creating in the college a tendency toward specialization. The democratization of the college has increased practical interests so that the concrete fact and the joy of activity constantly overshadow the abstract principle and habits of contemplation. The activities which Woodrow Wilson has called the side shows of the college circus are too well known to need emphasis. These activities make a very subtle appeal to the student's sense of duty under the guise of school or class loyalty. Many a student has felt that he was helping the "old school" along when he was practicing for the minstrel show. It seems selfish to employ the hours in solitary reading when so many interests are beckoning. Also the herd instinct is nowhere stronger than in the college, and to defy it is

disastrous. It is, therefore, a difficult matter to point out when a student *could* read, even were he endowed with the inclination. The same influences which deprived the students of their time for general reading were almost fatal to that time-honored institution of college life, the literary society. Interest in oratory and debate dwindled almost to nothing. To remedy the situation some of the colleges established chairs of Public Speaking, a thing unknown and unnecessary under the old dispensation. This custom spread rapidly until almost every college now gives a place in the curriculum to that which used to be pursued purely as an intellectual sport. These Public Speaking teachers now often cover the field of politics, literature, economics and sociology much after the fashion of the general reader of former years.

In fact, when the teacher of Public Speaking faces things as they are, he realizes not only that narrow specialization will not produce the best results, but he will realize that, in view of the narrow range of reading covered by the average student, specialization upon technique is futile. He will realize that his greatest work is in stimulating, as a means to effective expression, a wide range of general reading and a keen interest in contemporary thought and action, which is the last of the assertions with which I am now concerned. The Public Speaking department is to serve as a clearing house of ideas. The instructor should inspire in his students a vital interest in the affairs of the world, in politics, sociology, economics, literature, and art. He must realize with Cicero that all the arts which pertain to culture, have, as it were, a common bond; and he should make his students realize it. Too many students are graduating without the slightest realization of the relationship of the various departments in which they have worked. They have no vivid sense that we live in a universe instead of a multiverse. To the question, "Has't any philosophy in thee?" they can only reply with a stare. To accept the function of a general specialist, to be chiefly a stimulator of thought, to refuse to accept the limits of one department is not making a smaller intellectual demand upon the teachers of Public Speaking, it is increasing it. It means that while other departments are progressively specializing, we must return to the intellectual ideal of the college president of a century ago who could fill any chair in the institution, even tho we realize the impossibility of actually doing so.

Such a possibility may not bring immediate academic recognition. It may take some time for specialists of a certain type to admit the worth of any profession different from their own. But since there is a real need in our colleges for such chairs of general culture, since the value of such work is indisputable, teachers of such a type may face the future with confidence.