

SUMMARY OF GROUP REPORTS

Asilomar Conference

OCTOBER 14-16, 1949

STUDY COMMISSION OF THE
CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION
OF
TEACHERS OF ENGLISH
(Central Section)

PALO ALTO

Copyright 1950

CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

CENTRAL SECTION

Officers

President: Marjorie Mc Gilvrey
Vice President: Esmer Clark
Secretary: Mary Golding
Treasurer: Edith Garin

STUDY COMMISSION

Officers

Chairman: Eason Monroe,
Secondary: Margaret Heaton
Henry Meckel
Elementary: Myrtle Gustafson
Virginia Reed
College: John Patten
Teacher Education: Fred Willhelms

FOREWORD

This report of the October Asilomar Conference has multiple significance.

In its most direct sense, it documents the satisfaction which 130 teachers of English found in meeting for a three-day period, under the auspices of the Study Commission of the California Association of Teachers of English, to consider intensively the problems of their work. The report is a straight-forward record of the problems considered throughout the conference and the proposals advanced to solve these problems.

With a view to the past, this report demonstrates the validity of the Study Commission idea--that teachers of English need organized opportunities to share their thinking and experience for the improvement of their work. Upon the basis of this idea, the Study Commission was initiated in the fall of 1948. Exploratory meetings in March and May of last year set the Commission program in motion.

The Asilomar Conference was a culmination of the initial stage of the Commission work. Invited by an enthusiastic secondary school committee, representatives from all levels of educational work took part in the conference. The report testifies to the scope and diligence of their labors.

Looking forward - this report surely promises that there will be future Asilomars. It promises, too, that the Study Commission will continue to serve as a channel through which the energies of the most alert teachers may be directed toward the solution of problems in the teaching of English and the steady improvement of our contribution to the children and young people we teach.

Eason Monroe
Chairman, Study Commission
California Association of
Teachers of English

SLOW READERS AND NON-READERS

- Problems:
1. How can teachers learn to know their children?
How can teachers discover psychic blocks to progress in reading?
 2. How can we handle the non-readers in large classes?
 3. What about materials for non-readers and slow readers?

Problem: *Ways of learning to know the children.*

Suggestions:

1. *Sociograms.*
Finding out who the most popular children are,
and who the most isolated are.
Scattering the most popular children in the room and allowing
others to group around them.
(Sociometry in group relations, Amer. Coun. on Educ.,
Washington, D. C. \$1.25)
2. *Interest Questionnaires.*
3. *Records:* - health - scholarship - citizenship - reading age.
4. *Conferences with former teachers.*
5. *Drawing out interests through conversation techniques.*
6. *Notice problem children and give them security through attention.*
7. *Projection techniques.*
Use of pictures to draw out interests and backgrounds.
Use of "completion sentences". Begin sentence, - ask children to finish it.
8. *Watch and work with children on the playgrounds where they are
less inhibited.*
9. *Visit homes; get acquainted with parents.*
10. *Work for a comfortable feeling between the children and the teacher.*

Problem: *How to handle non-readers in large classes.*

Suggestions: *Group work and individual work.*

1. Use of the Keystone primary set of slides to teach word recognition.
2. *Stereographs.*
Children think of words to fit the pictures.
Children spot words in descriptive material on the backs of the pictures.
Children give reports on material studied.
3. *Use of pictures to draw out interests and desire to learn words and to read.*
4. *Use of picture dictionaries. (Little Golden Dictionary, Simon & Schuster)*
5. *Important to make the non-readers feel that they are part of the group.*
6. *Establish such rapport among the children that they are willing to help
each other.*
7. *Use of conversation to draw out interests and problems.*
8. *Kinesthetic methods.*

DEVELOPMENTAL READING GROUP

The question that occupied most of the time of the group was "How can we build a classroom program with reading at the center?" The following imperatives emerged:

GET STUDENTS TO READING. Start where they are - within their areas of interest and within their ranges of reading ability.

Interests can be located by means of individual conferences, class and sub-group discussions, student writing and talks, guidance folders, talks with parents, and interest inventories.

Reading abilities can be gauged through standardized reading tests, (the Triggs Reading Test was recommended for grades 7 - 12), measurements of reading vocabulary, and through analyses of the pupil's responses to the reading he undertakes.

GET BOOK AND STUDENT TOGETHER. The value of a *classroom* library and the assistance of a *trained* librarian were stressed.

Too often the skills and special training of competent librarians are dissipated in the performance of clerical drudgery and in the supervision of library "study halls". English teachers should unanimously and specifically protest the diversion of energies that at best will be sorely taxed in building and maintaining an adequate reading program.

The public librarian should be invited into the classroom and to meetings of English teachers when the reading program is under discussion. The librarian can help bring ~~book and~~ student together by displays and classroom circulation of book jackets.

PROVIDE FOR INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES. Not until each student has in his hands a book or magazine which engages his interest can the program of reading development - growth of reading power and expansion of reading interests - get under way. Only such a reading situation can insure privacy and freedom from interruption during individual conferences concerning current reading, the selection of further reading, writing based on what has been read, the preparation of oral reports based on reading, and the analysis of test results.

LET READING EXPERIENCES BE SHARED. The value of the traditional "book report" was vigorously assailed, but it was agreed that reading was motivated, stimulated, directed, and rewarded by the communication of reading experiences, whether through panels consisting of a few who have read a particular book, individual oral reports, informal class and sub-group discussions, and writing which is a genuine expression of important reading experiences.

A classroom file of 3 x 5 cards containing students' written reactions to books they have read or tried to read will provide suggestions and warnings for other students.

Cumulative reading records should follow the student from grade to grade and from one English teacher to another.

ENCOURAGE THE EXTENSION AND DISCIPLINE OF VOCABULARY. Misinterpretation and blurred verbal concepts account in large measure for reading failure. Youngsters

should be encouraged to keep cumulative records of words added to their reading vocabularies. (See Appendix B.) Investigations of the relationship between auditing ability and reading ability suggest that auditing training is a short and sure cut to improved reading ability. The reading of thoughtfully selected examples of responsible writing, with opportunity for inquiry about the meaning of unfamiliar words while interest is high, the experience intense, and the context fresh in mind, is a relatively painless and effective method of building vocabulary.

EVALUATE IN TERMS OF GROWTH. Evaluation and grading should be in terms of reading growth, as determined by standardized reading tests, vocabulary measurements, and by the quantity and quality of reading undertaken.

Don Brown, for the Committee

EVALUATION OF THE ASILOMAR CONFERENCE

The plan for the Asilomar Conference came as a result of the series of meetings held in 1948-1949 under the auspices of the Study Commission. Each of these meetings raised many problems important to the participants but no meeting was long enough to give adequate analysis of the problems or to consider possible solutions of the problems.

The first plan for the Asilomar Conference was that a group make adequate analysis of all the problems raised and plan and provide sessions to deal with specific topics.

The Commission reviewed the plans formulated for the Asilomar Conference and made an important modification of them. The discussion in the Commission made in effect these comments: first, you who are planning for Asilomar have formulated very definitely the needs of all the teachers in the light of your particular interests and concepts. It is not going to be possible to convey adequately to the other resource people your perceptions or your plans because of the time set-up. Second, the problems discussed in last year's meetings will be "cold" and somewhat "remote" from the experience of the teachers who come to Asilomar. In accordance with the practice of group dynamics, a new problem census is necessary and will raise perhaps the very same problems but in more meaningful form for the participants. This will put aside your carefully made plans, will seem to "waste" considerable time but will provide a more informal and relaxed atmosphere and will set the stage for much immediate discussion of problems on teachers' minds.

The plan for the Asilomar Conference was then modified to include a problem census on the first night and the formation of discussion groups for talking through problems on the next two days. Coffee in the morning and afternoon was planned to foster friendliness and informal exchange of ideas. Only one general session for discussion of a particular theme was planned--using literature for human understanding-- and that was followed by small group meetings to discuss particular stories.

In short, the Asilomar Conference was definitely planned to have these kinds of "grass-roots" objectives:

1. To bring into the open problems that teachers felt were immediately impinging upon them.
2. To give each teacher awareness of how her problems were like or different from those of teachers in other schools.
3. To provide through discussion in small groups some analysis of problems.
4. To share some on-top solutions to immediate problems but no complete analysis of curriculum construction.
5. To give each informal discussion group a chance to know one or two resource people engaged in teacher training but not to place these resource people necessarily in responsible leadership roles.

Some important values were sacrificed in this planning. First, many participants, both teachers and resource people, had plans of value and accounts of experience to share. Ways were not provided by lecture or demonstration whereby these participants

gave "answers". However, each teacher was asked to bring a successful plan for a lesson. These were mimeographed so that there was considerable distribution of "workable ideas".

Second, there was very little effort to analyze for the whole group the objectives in language arts teaching nor to present adequate ways of developing curriculum nor to show how new kinds of emphasis could be incorporated. In short, the thinking of the conference remained at a "grass roots" sharing level and did not give participants a new focus or the challenge of feeling that their ways of dealing with problems needed revision. Third, many participants did not get well acquainted with the resource persons and several of the resource persons neither were adequately used nor felt that they had made the kind of contribution which they were competent to make.

Many delegates returned the evaluation sheets sent to them several weeks after the Asilomar Conference. The responses showed very warm appreciation of the friendliness and informality of the conference. They indicated clearly that most participants learned a great deal from each other, both in the discussion groups and in informal talks at coffee sessions and at meal time. Many teachers seemed to have found other teachers who had "answers" for them. Many other participants appreciated knowing others who had problems like theirs and still others found great value in seeing the wide range of problems.

A few comments indicated resentment of discussion which wandered or of individuals who tried to dominate the group. These participants would have preferred sessions in which they listened to an "authority".

Some thoughtful comments on the part of both resource persons and participants indicated that they felt the need for sessions which clarified issues or worked more definitely on analyzing problems. Such comments point the way toward so structuring the next Asilomar Conference that there are sessions for informal sharing of problems but also some sessions when resource persons and experienced teachers present points of view, ways of constructing curriculum, units, challenges to present procedures, and new content for language arts programs.

Margaret M. Heaton