第二次世界大战前美国高中及大学的写作教学——新意不断的年代

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摘要

第一次世界大战将美国推上了世界舞台，相对于欧洲大陆旧强权饱受战争的伤害，美国受损最轻，因而世界政治与经济的重心往美国移动。欧洲新一波的移民潮入，美国在国际上的地位及国内的社会都在急速膨胀中，美国须要面对新的挑战，而感到最急迫的莫过于教育的改革。

自科学在十九世纪末开始大放光采，科学成为人类救赎的新希望，而在第一次世界大战中科学所讲究的「效率」更展现了惊人威力，不论是计划与执行一项战役，或是后方大量生产战争所需物资，「效率」的观念处处彰显它的成效。

战后，这个观念很自然地深入人心，因而当教育改革为当务之急时，这个观念首先就被引入，不论是具体教学目标的拟定，客观的评量学习成效，以至有效的教材，「效率」的观念充份地溶入了教育改革中。

关键词：效率、改革运动、客观的评量、具体的教学目标、能力导向

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Writing Instruction in American High School and Universities before WWII-a period of big ideas

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Abstract

The old European powers were devastated by WWI, while America emerged almost unscathed as the determining factor of Allied victory. The period between WWI and WWII saw America as a rising power on a tumultuous world stage. The upheavals in Europe pushed political and financial powers, as well as more European immigrants into U.S. Internationally and internally, America was expanding rapidly. An expanding society demands a variety of coping strategies. One of the key elements, if not the most important one, must be education.

The growth of science since late nineteenth century had manifested itself quite remarkably by this time, specifically through the chilling effects of killing machines. The prevailing key concept of war-making was “efficiency,” a concept widely fused into campaign planning as well as material production and transportation. And it did show remarkable results.

Therefore, it is only natural that the concept of “efficiency” would be heralded into educational reform. Similar to designing a campaign, the educational reform was designed in the same fashion: from school down to curriculum reform. Everything revolved around the concept: “efficiency.” So, starting from specific goals of instruction, objective measurement of achievement, down to specified instructional materials, the dominating concept of “efficiency” permeated English classroom, too.

Key Words: Efficiency, Progressive Movement, Objective Measurement, Specific Goals, Ability-Oriented
I. Introduction

The Impact of Science and Scientific Methods

Scientific breakthroughs since late nineteenth century brought in hopes of new horizon for human, for example, machines that reduce human labors, medical discoveries that reduce fatality rate, and tools that enlighten human lives. Never before had human been able to produce more with less labor and suffer less miseries from diseases, hardship, and poverty with more energy to spare.

Yet, the same scientific breakthrough also created an insatiable hunger for resources and markets. The conflicting demands for resources and markets fueled the desire to dominate, which in turn flared up more conflicts. War broke out and the effects of scientific achievements in war-making were both gruesome and chilling, but impressive. The power of sciences and scientific methods in wartime achieved stunning effects through the concept of “efficiency,” i.e. from planning to executing a campaign, from mass production of war materials to the execution of nightmarish logistics.

Ever since industrial revolution, the concept of “efficiency” had been sought after and kept evolving. Every new invention or new method only works to reinforce and improve this fundamental concept. The wartime necessities pushed the implementation of this concept to a higher level. Almost every person, from the frontline soldiers to the home front citizens, was educated in this concept.

Naturally, after the war had ended, this prevailing concept was applied to implementing social reforms.
The Impact of WWI on America

By April, 1917, America entered WWI with a regular army of 133,000, expanding rapidly to reach a target size of about 3 millions as she started moving troops to France. The army had to perform miracle to train and equip such a quickly bloating organization. Thanks to its seasoned, well-trained regular army core, US army managed to organize an Expeditionary Army for Europe.

On the material side, it was another story. US industries could not match the sudden demands, so US Expeditionary Army relied heavily on British and French equipments, i.e. Army Air Corp flew French-built fighters, soldiers wore British-designed helmet and used a variety of British or French weapons. Of course, none of the civilian and military leadership took the dismal performance of American industries lightly. America was a great power to be reckoned without a matching military and industrial might.

After the war, US Army was downsized again. The country had to prepare for transforming more than 2 million discharged former soldiers into civilians. Education and training were the most logical and reasonable solutions to transform these former soldiers.

Besides, wartime economy plus the emerging world economic power pushed America industrialization and urbanization onto a faster pace. However, wartime experiences exposed many shortcomings, in terms of quality of personnel as well as the productivity of industries. A world-class power can not survive on a high rate of illiterates.

High schools were still dominated by college-bound curriculum and the college Entrance Examination shaped the curriculum (Chen, 2006). In other words, a great portion of teenagers did not receive a high school education, because they did not perceive a need to go to colleges. For those who did, their education was focused on preparing for college Entrance Exam. English
was the primary subject

For any concerned educator, this mode of educating teenagers could not suit well with the country with an expanding society and a rising international status.

II. Focus on Efficiency

Science began flourishing in late nineteenth century and brought about a sense of great hope for humanity. Industrialization brought in great benefits to the country, the society, and individual’s daily life. Of course, there were disastrous side effects on the society and the less fortunate. But, the future seemed so much brighter.

Scientific methods helped bring about scientific discoveries and the efficient industrialization. Scientific methods and scientific management were regarded as the keys to solve the problems of humanity. Efficiency thus became the key word of the time. Naturally, people started using it to measure every endeavor. It, too, was applied in education to determine the merits of every endeavor.

One obvious example of this emphasis on efficiency is the role of school superintendents. It had turned from being a leader in educational philosophy to that of an efficient manager. The school superintendent’s job performance came to be measured in terms of efficiency, consequently, a “good education” was viewed in the context of an “efficient education.”

Other factors also contributed to this emphasis on efficiency:

1. The Progressive movement’s focus on well-educated individual student as the backbone of a healthy, prosperous, and harmonious society also contributed to pushing the emphasis on efficiency. Therefore, each student’s special needs are to be heeded. In order to help individual students, educators first need to understand each student’s condition and standing. Furthermore, students of different capability level will need different instructions, some even need
special assistance.  
2. The development of social and behavior sciences provided innovative tools for understanding and measuring students. The social sciences are concerned with collective group behavior while the behavior sciences are concerned with individual behavior. Most of all, these disciplines planted the belief that any behavior can be quantified, measured, and controlled. This belief shaped a new definition of the concept of Learning. 

Taking into account the highly expected role of English in schools and in society, no where was this urgent need of efficiency more pronounced than in English classes. In addition, English was the cheapest course to provide and the easiest to get started. Under this circumstance, several steps were taken to ensure efficiency in English courses: 

1. Objective Measurement.  

The claims of “reliability,” “validity,” and “fairness” easily won teachers’ minds, regardless their different positions on teaching English. The conservatives viewed objective measurement as a means to keep up standards and upkeep the discipline; the liberals regarded objective measurement as the means to understand individual student’s weakness and strength. 

There were all kinds of objective measurements for English (or writing instruction): intelligence test, grammar-usage test, organizational test, proficiency test, and writing scales…. Of course, there were many surveys about the state of English study or writing instruction. Specifically, many surveys were conducted to investigate writing teacher’s workload and the proper ratio of teacher to students. 

2. Specific Goals for English Curriculum.  

Objective measurements are employed to measure against specific objectives. Therefore, English curriculums were redesigned around specific goals of instruction. There were two notable attempts:
the minimum essentials and the functional essentials. All attempted to build a curriculum around specific objectives. These had most impact on language study.

3. Ability-Oriented Instruction and Materials.

Ability groups were one of the first ideas responding to the emphasis on individual differences. In order to carry through the ability group, objective placement tests were in need, of course. In addition, there is also the need to produce instructional materials appropriate to each student’s ability. Therefore, measures for reading skills were developed. There were also surveys to measure materials’ proper placement in terms of students’ ability and interests.

The movement of minimum essentials and functional essentials could not have started without the work of Franklin Bobbitt. Franklin Bobbitt (1924) of the University of Chicago meticulously formulated 821 consecutive, numbered objectives through careful analysis of “life-needs.” In addition, he also listed another category of “occupational activities” which contains even more objectives. In summary, Franklin Bobbitt listed nine “lines of training” that he thought were important for all students. The first three of his “lines of training” were all concerned with English:

1. English language: reading, oral and written expression.
2. Citizenship attitudes, judgments and activities. Social studies.
3. Literature: English and general (p. 69).

Professor Bobbitt’s work may not be actually practical, but he at least succeeded in raising one important aspect of teaching language: students’ interests. Considering the fact that he formulated his extensive “needs” and “activities” out of extensive surveys of students, it is very natural for him to raise the awareness of student interest. This awareness was later raised as

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1 Bobbitt’s 821 plus objectives seemed staggering by modern standard. At the time, this was the height of the obsession with efficiency. Actually, his model was followed by quite a few curriculum designers in 1920’s and 1930’s.
criteria to evaluate and select materials used for study.

Franklin Bobbitt’s model might appear too confusing for some curriculum designers. There were attempts to build a curriculum around the “minimum essentials” (Applebee, 1974, p. 84) – the fundamental and minimum objectives for all students. This attempt did not fare well for literary study, but showed real effects on language studies. Influential scholars of this movement published books about English usage: Sterling A. Leonard’s “Current English Usage” (1932), Albert Marckwardt & Fred Walcott’s “Facts about Current English Usage” (1938), Charles C. Fries’ “American English Grammar” (1941). Applebee was convinced that “this aspect of the movement toward essentials eventually reshaped the teaching of language and composition in American schools” (p. 85).

Under the circumstance of a relentless pursuit of efficiency, every subject felt the pressure to prove its merit. English, too, was compelled to defend itself as a functional study. The NCTE commissioned a Committee on the Place and Function of English in American Life to define the function of English study. The committee conducted an extensive survey of the uses of English in a variety of social positions. The final report (Clapp, 1926) rested heavily on language uses and very little on literature. On the subject of writing, the report listed: “informal notes and memos for one’s self; formal notes of invitation, introduction, etc.” (p. 46).

The pursuit of efficiency reshaped English curriculum to a usage-based, functional approach. One obvious outcome of this shift of emphasis was the birth of media study. The use of newspaper, motion pictures, and radio programs was incorporated into English curriculum. Writing instruction was clearly affected by this tendency. The emphasis was clearly on practical uses.
III. Writing Instruction after World War I and Great Depression

During this period, America experienced dramatic changes, because of her expanding involvement in international affairs which had profound effects on America internally. The repercussions of these changes all vibrated down to the school curriculums in order to meet the challenges confronting the society.

The World War I pushed English to the center of public education, because of its perceived function as a means “to instill a sense of national heritage and to encourage patriotism” (Applebee, p. 68). After the war, the country found it at the center of international stage, on a par, to say the least, with old European powers. This gave the country an uplifting sense of identity.

In terms of writing instruction, there were a few significant developments:

1. The push for efficient teaching brought in an examination of the curriculum and methods of teaching writing. There were surveys examining the teacher’s workload, the instructor-student ratio, class size… (Hopkins, 1912; Wozniak, 1978). Different writing courses were offered as electives, especially in undergraduate curriculum. These electives included: playwright writing, business writing, journalism writing, technical writing…. In addition to the year-long writing course required for all freshman, many colleges offered elective sophomore writing courses. The concept of efficiency led people to pay more attention to the practical issues.

2. Because of the emphasis on individual student, especially the child-centered pedagogy after World War I, writing as a part of creative
art forms was encouraged. The idea was that through these art forms the school could cultivate aesthetic capabilities in each student and, thus, bring about health and sanity for individual, and for society, too. Therefore, individual expression was encouraged. The most obvious example is the flourishing school and class play. From the Progressive Movement’s point of view, drama provides students with opportunities of self-expression, creativity, group work, and a connection of school life with the outside world. In essence, drama was seen as “socialization training” (Barnes, 1923).

3. The Great Depression of 1929 made social reform the central focus of education. Therefore, writing was seen as a social act with public consequences. Consequently, surveys found most school favored exposition as the focus of writing instruction, with description serving as part of the exposition (Shepherd, 1926; Taylor, 1928). Surveys also found that student-teacher conference was adopted as a way of attending to individual differences. Placement tests and the grouping of students according to ability - advanced and sub-freshman courses - were common practices to address individual differences. Furthermore, many universities established English Clinics to remedy underachieving students’ poor performance (some called it the Writing Laboratory). In addition, except in the East, most colleges in other regions tended to rely more on rhetoric textbook, essay collections and handbooks as reading materials “that offer challenges to the student mind, to start his thinking apparatus” (Taylor, p. 8).

After all, America is a vast and diverse country. The “significant developments” this paper discussed were referred to significant or ostentatious trends. It would be self-deceiving if we assume these trends

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4 Colleges in the East were the birthplace of English department. The tradition of making literature its central focus was still strong. Naturally, writing courses in these colleges tended to follow the tradition of teaching literature.
were dominating. There were other trends working simultaneously. Though not seemingly popular or trendy, they, nevertheless, still exerted quite some influence over its sphere of influence. To provide an overall picture, this paper will discuss the forces at work during this period, based upon James Berlin’s (1987) description:

**Current-Traditional Tradition**

Throughout this period, despite all the reform movements and new ideas, the Current-Traditional method remained the primary mode of writing instruction. The emphasis on the scientific method and the quantitative measurements all suited the long-held tradition of the Current-Traditional mode of instruction. In addition, the Progressive movement’s relying on quantitative measurements to help identify individual strength and needs also made some of its ideas easily acceptable to the Current-Traditional mode, like the ability grouping and the student-teacher conferences. In fundamental, the focus of writing instruction remained on the form and arrangements.

There were two new developments that worth mentioning:

1. The interest on teaching research paper. Ever since 1920’s, the use of research paper had been recommended in various program descriptions. The first article on teaching writing research paper appeared in English Journal in 1930. Starting from 1931, textbooks including the discussion of research paper began to appear. From 1930 on, the topic of teaching research paper appeared in English Journal at least once every year.

2. The interest on “types” textbooks. Because of the concern for individual’s life in the society, “life experiences” became an important educational issue. The NCTE appointed a Curriculum Commission to develop a new pattern for the curriculum. Its final report: An Experience Curriculum in English (1935) stressed that “The ideal
curriculum consists of well-selected experiences.” The essence of this curriculum pattern was to “survey life, noting what experiences most people have” and to look for the “desirable possible experiences they miss” (p.3).

As a result of this emphasis on life experiences, new textbooks containing various experiences under different situations appeared. The traditional “modes of discourse” approach was abandoned and the new “types” approach was the mainstream of the day. Students read different types of experiences and practiced writing about different types of experience under different situations.

The Experience Curriculum had a profound impact on English curriculum across the board, not just on a certain theory. Based on the orientation of function and usage from the twenties, the Experience Curriculum made most visible impacts on composition and literature.

On composition, the Experience Curriculum advocated the abandonment of formal instruction of grammar, in favor of a functional instruction. The Experience Curriculum advocated a formal grammar course as an elective for high school senior only. Obviously, it saw grammar as a by-product of composition whenever function and usage call for attention.

On literature, reading literature was viewed as a way of exposing students to different models of life experiences. Because of the different nature of student experiences as well as their capabilities, there is no way to expect a uniformed response from students. Therefore, teachers should encourage student response.

Louise Rosenblatt was the one who synthesized different voices of teaching literature. In her work: Literature as Exploration (1938), she made an important distinction between experience through and experience of or with literature. The function of literature was to present the many different ways of life open to any individual. Each individual student responds to each work according to that student’s life experience. “There is no such things as
a generic reader or a generic literary work;... there are only unnumberable separate responses to individual works of art” (p. 32-33).

Therefore, student response was the center of focus. The essence of English course is to enlarge and refine student responses through the curriculum. This made English, through literature, an exploration of each reader's own nature, during which he would gradually “become more aware of potentialities for thought and feeling within himself, acquire clearer perspective, develop aims and a sense of direction” (Rosenblatt, p. v-vi).

**The Liberal Education Tradition**

The Current-Traditional approach viewed literature courses as a means to “put students in touch with the civilizing influences of culture, thereby providing a basis for ethical behavior... literature helped the student acquire a humane social sense that led to high ideals of citizenship” (Berlin, p. 71). As discussed in last section, the shift to textbooks based on the “types” was a natural move for the Current-Traditional approach. Everything from reading to writing was to prepare the student for a deserving professional life.

The Liberal Education tradition, however, persisted in its emphasis on the development of creativity that leads to a spiritual vision. The spiritual vision will enable the student to govern the material world and not bound by it. Obviously, this vision is not for average students. Therefore, the mission of English was “to cultivate the exceptional students, the genius, and, at the most, to tolerate all others” (Berlin, p. 72). This aristocratic view of education had a strong foot-hold in Princeton and Yale.

To counter the appearance of being an elite in the Liberal Education, the Current-Traditional universities adopted an honors program. The program offers alternative learning opportunities for their own elite students and the

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5 The first honors program started at Swarthmore college.
bragging rights for the universities.

**Expressionistic Rhetoric**

The essence of the Expressionistic Rhetoric is that knowledge and composing are private and personal in nature. These are not skills to be imparted, but rather can be cultivated through individual efforts and self-expression.

Osgood (1915, 1922) was the primary advocate of this rhetoric. Influenced by the Liberal Education, he also did not believe writing was skills to be imparted. He believed that writing is an art and involves the self, so being able to write clearly lies in the writer’s personality. He called it “the energies of the spirit,” (Osgood, 1922, p. 162) which the teacher can reach but can’t tell the student how to attain them. In a word, writing is a task everyone can accomplish, but it can never be explained. Only through the cultivation of literature and the encouragement of self-expression, can each student reach “the energies of the spirit.”

The Expressionistic Rhetoric was derived from the Liberal Education, but it differed on the attainability of the goal. The Liberal Education clearly held the view that only the talented few could attain the spiritual vision, whereas the Expressionistic Rhetoric held that every individual could reach that goal, if only they go through the process of literature and self-expression. As Cremin (1961) claimed: “each individual has uniquely creative potentialities and that a school in which children are encouraged freely to develop their potentialities is the best guarantee of a larger society truly devoted to human worth and excellence” (p. 202).

The origin of the Expressionistic Rhetoric was the combination of the ideals of creativity and spiritual of the Liberal Education and the recognition of the unconsciousness of the Freudian psychology. Cremin (1961) urged teachers “to recognize the unconscious as the real source of motivation and
behavior…. The essential task of education was seen as one of sublimating the child’s repressed emotion into socially useful channels” (p. 209). Therefore, the aim of education was the individual transformation, not the social reform of the Progressive movement. The means of achieving this transformation was through art-language, literature, arts—and every individual could achieve it.

On writing, creativity was the focus of instruction. The task of the writing teacher was to provide an environment in which students can learn what can not be directly imparted in instruction. The ideas that the writer tries to express are private and personal vision that can not be expressed in everyday language. “The writing teacher must therefore encourage students to call on metaphor, to seek in sensory experience materials that can be used in suggesting the truths of the unconscious…. Through writing, student is thus getting in touch with the source of all human experience and shaping a new and better self” (Berlin, p. 75).

The expressionistic rhetoric initiated the first extensive discussion about the process of composing over the product, though the idea started before 1920s’.

Social Rhetoric

The Great Depression gave the Progressive movement a sense of urgency to carry out the social reform through education. Language development became an important issue for its implications on personal as well as society applications. Stories of human misery as well as social unrest added more urgency to this school.

This school attempted to provide a remedy for the extremes of the Current-Traditional and the Liberal Education. Writing was seen as a public discourse; through the process of it, students learn the role of citizenship and acquire a voice in the democratic society. Therefore, writing is not something to be taught and drilled through the arrangement of form and the meticulous attention to correctness, as in the Current-Tradition model. Nor is it a creative
outburst reserved for a few talented only. Because of the added significance of writing, students can learn only through experiencing the process of writing development.

Scholars like Taylor (1926) and Davis (1930) all argued that writing is a process through the discussion of issues related to person as well as the society, students acquire the ability to write, and, at the same time, become actively involved in the reform process of the society. Therefore, the true meaning of writing lies in the process of doing it, instead of focusing on the form and arrangement of it.

Another factor that accelerated the push toward social rhetoric is the works of linguistics whose focusing on the correct usage of language in certain social contexts in the 1920s’ and 1930s’ redefined the nature of language. During this period, many linguistics published books on English usage. Instead of giving prescriptive rules about English usage, these books stressed the correct usage under certain social contexts.

This shift did not happen just because of the Great Depression. In early 1920s’, the NCTE Committee of Place and Function of English in American Life was promoting a “functional,” “usage-based” English curriculum (Clapp, 1926), as introduced in previous section. It, too, advocated a functional usage based on practical social contexts.

**Summary: Years of Big Ideas**

The years between the two World Wars saw America wrapped in dramatic transformations because of domestic as well as international developments. This was a time of social upheavals, along which great ideas were being stimulated. The feverish pursuit of the industrialization and social reform pushed each other even further.

In such a time of the pursuit of efficiency and the Progressive movement, English study had the urgency to prove its worth through practical
applications. This movement, from another angle, can be interpreted as the attempt to reform English curriculum from the old rhetoric tradition of drills and practices, the still lingering force of Latin, and the persisting influence of the College Entrance Examination.

The obvious results of this push centered on (1) an increased attention to students’ individual difference; (2) English curriculum were oriented toward practical applications; (3) creative courses were introduced to cover a wide range of language activities, like media study (films, pictures), journalism English, school play…; (4) pressing social issues kept the focus on the social responsibility of language. In all, English’s role in personal development and social reform became the central issue for the first time.

On the other hand, studies also found that despite all the great ideas of school and curriculum reforms, daily practices in classrooms remained mostly the same. Dora Smith’s two studies (Smith, 1933, 1939) found that in classrooms, English courses basically followed the conventions of the day: Philology still dominating the instruction and most high schools still shaped English curriculum around the college entrance examination.

Yes, there were quite some “experiments” in the name of scientific methods. The NCTE spearheaded quite a few curriculum reforms, like the Experience Curriculum, the Correlated Curriculum. There were also some innovations on teaching methods, like the Dalton plan (contract plan), the unit work… et. al. These are all innovative, bold ideas designed to reform the teaching of English. However, they remained just experiments.

Unexpected practical matters asserted quite considerable influences on the ways curriculum were implemented and courses were taught. Smith (1939) found most English teachers were qualified, but their training was on “academic English.” These teachers needed guidance to implement the Progressive ideas, yet they were expected to pioneer the implementation. Teachers were expected to lead students to “experience through” or “experience with” the literature (Rosenblatt, 1938), yet this was something
not even their college professors were able to demonstrate to them what it was.

While scholars debated the role and functions of English, English teachers were expected to carry out the ideas in daily classrooms. This only added to the gap between educational ideas and educational practices.

Another example was the factor of textbooks. Because the budget was tight, so whatever textbooks were available had great influence on the curriculum. As a result, literature anthology became a cheap alternative, so extensive reading was difficult, if not impossible, and intensive reading remained the norm. Hence, the persistent influence of Philology. This gap between the big ideas and the poor conditions and thoughts on implementing the ideas would surely cause tension.

Robert C. Pooley’s (1939) comment can be a good summary of this era:

Within twenty years we have had to meet, study, and assimilate several new psychologies, at least one new sociology, and a score of isms. We have had to grapple with such concepts as “the child centered school,” the activity program, the socialized recitation, the project method, integration, correlation, two-and three-track plans, and the unit plan. The progressive movement has waxed fat in the last two decades. All these movements and schemes have added immeasurably to the science and art of teaching. But they have also bred doubts, fears, and insecurity where once there was confidence” (p.245).
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