

64-12,244

SKOGMAN, Kieth W., 1926-  
CONVENTIONAL VERSUS PROGRAMMED  
INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR AT  
DANA COLLEGE.

The University of Nebraska Teachers College  
Ed.D., 1964  
Education, theory and practice

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan

CONVENTIONAL VERSUS PROGRAMMED INSTRUCTION  
IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR AT DANA COLLEGE

by

Kieth W. Skogman

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of

The University of Nebraska in the Teachers College

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Department of Educational Administration

Under the Supervision of Dr. Wesley C. Meierhenry

Lincoln, Nebraska

June, 1964

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA  
TEACHERS COLLEGE  
ADVANCED PROFESSIONAL DIVISION

TITLE

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To fully express my appreciation to all who helped me in this venture would not be possible. I am deeply indebted to so many, not only for their help and assistance, but for the friendly encouragement which made this particular task an enjoyable experience.

First, I wish to acknowledge my debt and my gratitude to Dr. Wesley Meierhenry, Assistant Dean of Teachers College, University of Nebraska, for his valuable criticism and suggestions. Also, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Robert Stake, Associate Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Nebraska, for his advice and assistance in setting up and making statistical analysis of the experiment; and to Mr. Paul Emmerick and the other members of the Department of English at Dana College for their efforts and cooperation in conducting the experiment.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

#### I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine the relative effectiveness of programmed instruction in teaching English grammar to students in the first semester of their freshman year at Dana College as compared to conventional methods of teaching grammar.

#### II. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Auto-instructional methods. A comprehensive term used to describe instruction characterized by the controlled presentation of material, the elicitation of appropriate response, guidance with respect to the subject matter, and control of the way in which learning proceeds.

Conventional method of instruction. Traditional teaching procedure in which the instructor makes assignments, lectures, leads discussions, and administers examinations.

English 2600. Written by Joseph Blumenthal and published by Harcourt, Brace, and Company, in 1960, English 2600 was the first programmed textbook material for scholastic use. The book covers much of the content of English grammar, punctuation, and capitalization. The student learns grammatical facts by checking his responses as he goes along.

Programmed textbook. A special book in which the subject matter to be learned has been arranged into a series of

sequential steps leading from familiar concepts to new materials. It differs from a "scrambled textbook" in that the content is arranged so that the student proceeds directly from one step to the next, or one succeeding page to the next, rather than skipping from section to section.

Programmed instruction. A term used synonymously to refer to the broader concept of "auto-instructional methods."

Reinforcement, immediate. The process of providing the subject with immediate feedback or information regarding the success or failure of his performance.

### III. ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM

As one of the many privately owned church-related liberal arts colleges in the United States, Dana College shares with the larger state-supported colleges and universities the responsibility for providing undergraduate training in a variety of academic fields. Although the problem of efficiency in classroom procedures is not unique to the small college, inefficiency and the attendant effect on limited financial resources could eventually be a determining factor in the survival of this type institution.

It appears on the basis of performance on achievement examinations by college freshmen that the emphasis in secondary school programs is not on content-type materials or at least not enough to satisfy the standards established by the typical small liberal arts college teacher. This condition is most evident in the midwest in the area of English grammar and has resulted in the need



at Dana College for continually increasing the size of the English department staff. Students repeat courses in which satisfactory grades have not been achieved.

There is the possibility that in dealing with large groups of students and being more realistic about their limitations, faculties in the larger non-sectarian colleges and universities objectively eliminate pupils who do not have adequate backgrounds. As one of the advantages or disadvantages, depending on a person's point of view, this procedure does handicap the individual who was educated in an inferior educational environment. Many members of church-related faculties are concerned with the moral issues involved when students fail to achieve a high level of performance. So from a feeling of moral responsibility to the student, his parents, and the church constituency, the members of the Dana College English department staff were interested in possibilities for improvement of the educational program through the use of programmed instruction materials.

The informality which exists on the small college campus and the lack of stereotyped organizational procedures which are essential in the larger school systems, provide opportunities for curriculum studies within the small school program.

Perhaps the fact that staff members do not have graduate assistants to teach introductory courses and are more or less

obligated to teach these basic content courses might have something to do with the willingness of these staff members to undertake curriculum studies.

The potential learning capacity of a pupil and the potential ability of an educator to teach are difficult to comprehend. No one can be certain of the stage to which we have progressed in the evolution of the art of teaching. Certainly we have come a long way since the "faculties psychology training" era. However, a simple survey of human conduct in the light of present knowledge would indicate we have some distance to go before human abilities are fully utilized through appropriate educational opportunities.

According to Doescher "Understanding the true ends of human life properly precedes acquiring the means of livelihood."<sup>1</sup> Without the means, however, the ends are not possible. This paradox has been recognized as one of the problems in education that has not been satisfactorily solved. Perhaps programmed instruction can at least avoid the situation whereby a teacher and pupil are so preoccupied with the fundamental details of a field that they do not have an opportunity to generalize concepts, and the material covered is not carried over by the student into the activities of his life.

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<sup>1</sup>Waldemar O. Doescher, The Church College in Today's Culture, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg Publishing House, 1963), p. 52.

Mass education is a complicating factor in developing pupil talents and utilizing the abilities of the teacher. Graded classrooms in the elementary school, elective curricula in the secondary school, and selective admissions practices in the college have helped to minimize the problems resulting from individual differences. Conventional teaching procedures often are geared to satisfy the needs of the average member of the group with the result that there is a constant regression to the mean in terms of level of teaching. It is the hope of the author that through this study some solution to the problem of enabling the Dana College teacher to perform at his highest level of proficiency and at the same time relieving him of much time consuming routine activity might be achieved.

Another reason for interest in this study was the prospect that programmed instruction could offer an escape from the trend in education of "pigeon-holing" youngsters on the basis of observed abilities at a given stage of their educational development. Educators tend to encourage the use of the achievement examination as a predictive device. Efforts to develop the student's abilities are handicapped when the results of the achievement examination are misinterpreted to express the level to which a person can achieve. These efforts of prognostication would be comparable to the efforts of an insurance agent to view his life expectancy tables and predict when a given client will die.

In our educational system today the teacher's role is to contribute to the development of the capacities of his pupils. In

this endeavor each pupil is an essential part. The role of the pupil is to cooperate in the "educational experience" with spirit and enthusiasm for without this active participation maximum development of his abilities is not possible. In our present system of employing competitive pressures to gain this cooperation only the academically successful develop to the fullest extent of their capacities. Regardless of native ability and potential, irreparable damage can be done to the attitudes of some students concerning their ability to achieve whenever they are defeated. Although this hazard of competition is accepted as a basic weakness in human behavior on the playground, and pupils are conditioned to not allow defeat to affect their attitudes, the classroom teacher tends to ignore this effect of competition with the result that teacher efforts are wasted due to the lack of pupil interest, lost in the competitive struggle for marks.

The fact that programmed instruction offers prospects for approaching 100 percent achievement for 100 percent of the pupils is further reason why the author is interested in conducting this study.

#### IV. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

For the purpose of this study, all the freshmen students except the 20 who obtained the highest scores on the Barrett-Ryan English classification test were included.