

**SPEECH COMMUNICATION IN GREAT BRITAIN:  
THE SOCIETY OF TEACHERS OF SPEECH & DRAMA**

**By Peter B. Orlik**

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The Society of Teachers of Speech and Drama, the nearest British counterpart to our own Speech Communication Association, was founded in 1953 as a result of an agreement among members of the Incorporated Association of Teachers of Speech and Drama and the holders of diplomas in the speech arts field from the Royal Academy of Music and the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. This merger carried with it built-in membership qualifications which served to largely exclude state-certified teachers since little training in speech or drama was offered in the country's Education colleges and few of the specialist school-trained speech teachers attempted to become state-qualified.<sup>1</sup>

This dichotomy between specialist schools on the one hand, and the state-certification-granting Education colleges on the other, placed the student and instructor of speech arts in the tenuous position of working in the teaching profession without possessing the document that made one a member in good standing. Conversely, since so few of the specialist speech and drama schools had working arrangements with certificate-granting institutions, the state-certified speech teacher was looked upon with some degree of suspicion by colleagues within his own discipline as to the intensity of his own training in speech or drama.

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Since 1953, fortunately, both sides have taken steps to narrow the gulf which separated most speech and drama teachers from their state-certified colleagues. In 1965, the Society's Council of Management decided that the four year Bachelor of Education (known as the B. Ed. ) with a concentration in drama should be accepted as qualification for membership in STSD. Two years later, at the 1967 Annual General Meeting, membership criteria were broadened still further to encompass the three year courses of certain Colleges of Education which offered acceptable curricula in speech and/or drama.

These liberalizations of membership qualifications have not been viewed as unmitigated boons in all quarters, however. During the 1970 General Meeting, in fact, considerable differences of opinion arose as to any further broadening of the Society's membership requirements. Many members caution against additional moves in this direction which they feel would dilute professional standards. One prominent member has even suggested that an examination be administered to prospective members. Those successfully completing ~~this test~~ would be permitted to write MSTSD after their name; thus promoting quality membership while, at the same time, creating additional incentive to join the Society.

The fact remains, however, that the question of membership qualifications and incentives is still, at base, a quandary over what constituted "professional" training in speech and drama and which institutions can best provide it or even be expected to provide it at all. As late as 1969 the Society's Autumn Newsletter stated that "the Society exists largely as an association of specialist teachers, possessing recognized diplomas which qualify them to teach in the private sector of education." (Italics mine.) Nevertheless, the same Newsletter did strive to

come to grips with the B.Ed. :

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New problems and demands are with us, especially with the coming of the B.Ed. in Speech and Drama for the state-qualified teacher. What we must note is that the two categories are distinct, although the specialist teacher may ALSO be state-qualified; conversely a state-qualified teacher, one who has fulfilled a recognized training course, may also aspire to, and achieve, specialism, for which purpose we are actively working towards an examination which may give such a qualification in the eyes of the Department of Education and Science.<sup>2</sup>

This is at least a partial answer to a question raised three years earlier by the editor of Speech and Drama, the Society's official journal, who asked, "What is the position of the specialist Speech and Drama Training Schools to be, in the face of those non-specialist Colleges of Education which will shortly be producing graduates with qualifications in Speech and Drama?"<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the above is still no more than partially answered and the complexities encompassed by it seem to be receiving more and more Society attention as the specter of wholesale realignment of the profession's traditional training avenues looms larger and larger. Despite member concern about the lack of practical training covered in the new B.Ed. examinations, the Society can exert little influence in the matter since it is not on the Board of University Senates which determines them. One Society member laments that, "while in music one had to have sufficient training (and promise) to be accepted for a course, so long as one could speak and walk one might enter a drama course in a college of education."<sup>4</sup> Another has written that "the approval of the Bachelor

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of Education degree, striking, as it does, terror into the hearts of the non-academic threatens to relegate those not blessed with university accolades into the category of second class educationists."<sup>5</sup> Yet another worried member of the Society quoted a newspaper interview which indicated that "taking a degree in drama and studying three or four years for it instead of going to a drama school and working one's way up, goes down well with parents. After all, if you find you can't make a living on the stage, with a degree you can always teach."<sup>6</sup> ?

The need for enforceable entrance requirements into the speech arts, and clear delineation of the different courses of study now providing such access have caused the Society to take a hard look at itself and the specialist schools which have heretofore been the almost exclusive training grounds for its members. As of January, 1966, less than one-third of the Society's 890 members were state-qualified teachers and many defended this condition by attacking the English lecturer in the College of Education who, it was felt, "is not himself well qualified for the Speech work he is doing with the new teacher."<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, with the coming of the B.Ed., the three-year specialist from a drama college has been placed in a less favorable financial position as compared to the person staying on an extra year to obtain the B.Ed. and its accompanying teaching certificate in "speech and drama." In June, 1969, the first B.Ed. degrees in the field were awarded by the Bretton Hall College of Education to students whose main study had been drama. For the first time, wrote the editor of Speech and Drama, "We can point to specialist teachers of the subjects who are also graduates... There are two courses open to us. We

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can close our ranks. We can refuse to admit the existence of new ideas and new people. Alternatively, we can thank God for these new developments. We can take some modest credit for some of them. And we can open our doors to admit them."<sup>8</sup>

This latter course is apparently being followed by the Society, either through choice or by perceived necessity. Promising young specialists aiming for state school work are encouraged to secure the necessary certification since it is apparently felt that if they don't fill the speech and drama teaching positions in state schools, less-qualified non-specialists will. The B.Ed. is thus being optimistically regarded, for the most part, as a vehicle for widening the impact of specialism rather than signaling its demise. Some consolation is taken from the fact that whereas the more traditional (but non-specialist) University degree in drama carries little if any practical work, the B.Ed. in drama does include some such work even though standards vary from school to school.<sup>9</sup> Conciliatory forces, anxious to avoid an all or nothing attitude are pointing out that "the broad difference between the specialist college training and the B.Ed. degree would seem to lie in the amount of emphasis placed, in the former, on personal work in acting and other aspects of training for theatre."<sup>10</sup> (Italics mine.) Though the two days per week (at most) which the Colleges of Education can devote to the special field of study cannot hope to equal the five days given by the specialist training schools,<sup>11</sup> this is still thought preferable to the University degree (many times in English) which allowed for no practical training at all. The Society's Secretary, E. J. Burton, also sees some beneficial aspects to the new B.Ed. and observes that it has brought a much-needed assessment of practical work via film, tapes, and classroom exercises; something which was missing from the old conservatory or academic

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approaches.<sup>12</sup> Reverend Burton, in fact, recently served as head of drama at Trent Park College of Education which handles its own students as well as graduates of Guildhall School, a "professional stage school," which then sends students to Trent Park for their teaching certification; an interesting amalgum of old and new drama training programs in Great Britain.<sup>13</sup>

But if the distinctions and distrust between specialist schools and many Colleges of Education have lessened, the rejection by several in the profession of University speech and drama training (sometimes under the rubric of English Departments) has not been rescinded. A recent article in Speech and Drama, for example, stated that: "As they are at present constituted, [University] Drama Departments appear to attract a grouping of dilettante, self-indulgent 'artists', a sprinkling of emotional cripples, a solid majority of non-combatants who are mystified from the start and given little help to find their way, and a small handful of tough dedicated students who will, in spite of everything, go on to be professional scholars/actors/directors/clowns."<sup>14</sup> As to the proposed absorption of the speech and drama field into the English curricula, Speech and Drama's editor comments less caustically that "the English specialist complains with every justification that he already has a massive subject to teach. Can he reasonably be expected to shoulder another massive subject in addition? Hardly. He must either double his training or be selective. And if he chooses selectivity, what areas in his present training is he prepared to throw overboard?"<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the bridge between the speech and drama field and the University

would be the creation of ~~many~~ Departments of Speech within university structures. *In the absence of such Departments not only appears to inhibit the expansion of the disciplines within British higher education, but also further contributes to the somewhat distorted impression that British practitioners in the field are only Drama, rather than speech oriented; Speech & Drama's editor, Arthur Wise.*



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*small number of*  
*the Departments which do exist are in the Colleges of Education and*  
~~Only a very small number currently exist and these~~ have met with mixed reactions. In an article paradoxically entitled "Heretical Thoughts on Speech Studies," a professor of applied linguistics advocates more such Departments since, he believes, "they would serve as links between the needs of speech education on the one hand, and on the other hand the contributing studies in literature, language, psychology, and sociology."<sup>16</sup> Many members of the Society see merit in such proposals and an editorial in Speech and Drama supported the concept of further co-operation (as opposed to absorption) between the speech educator and the "academic linguist" in order to arrive at "greater insight on both sides into the nature of spoken language."<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, some cognizance of the field at the University level would be of great aid to the profession and indeed, speech communication as a discipline in Great Britain may have difficulty surviving without it. "Human communication," wrote Speech and Drama's editor, *Mr. Wise* ~~Arthur~~, "is still not regarded here as being of sufficient importance to justify university attention."<sup>18</sup> "The introduction of practical work," states another authority, "raises the eyebrows of the majority of our colleagues in the Arts, though quite understandably is properly understood by those in the Sciences or Technology who are used to measuring their theory in terms of practice and indeed, would think it disreputable academically to do otherwise."<sup>19</sup> More disturbingly, a lecturer at a College of Education found that only 4% of the students pursuing the various teacher preparation curricula could remember having had any sort of speech instruction in their own schooling. Furthermore, the proportion would have been even smaller were it not for the Girls' School graduates who had some exposure to

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old-style elocution. The lecturer also discovered that "drama," "talking," and "acting" were "words firmly linked in our students' minds with faintly illegal relaxation... English students most rigidly felt that work and Drama were opposites."<sup>20</sup>

Little wonder that the Society's Secretary, E. J. Burton, recently observed: "We have to work in uncongenial and difficult surroundings, to face crude criticism, patiently to endure the nonsense talked by some 'authorities' knowing that in the end life must overcome negation."<sup>21</sup> To attempt to change such a state of affairs the STSD has sought to strengthen its role and clarify its goals. A campaign is now in progress to recruit more suitably qualified teachers into the Society's ranks in order to increase the influence of speech and drama at all levels and in all types of schools. "If prospective members feel we are not exerting enough influence," wrote Reverend Burton, "well, we welcome their assistance if they will join."<sup>22</sup>

The Society currently has a total membership of slightly more than one thousand including a limited number of honorary memberships (17 at present) granted by the Society's Council of Management to "such persons as have a general sympathy with, and interest in, the Society (and) who are desirous of promoting its aims and objectives."<sup>23</sup> The aforementioned Council consists of 26 members elected by the Society at large during the annual January meeting. A Chairman of the Society is also elected and, for the past several years, has been John Holgate whose wife serves as Registrar and Treasurer. The Secretary and the Editor of Speech and Drama are appointees and all four officers also hold Council seats.

Membership qualifications remain categorized into three general types, according to the STSD membership flier. The first category encompasses holders of any of a dozen recognized degrees and certificates from specified British institutions such as the London University Diploma in Dramatic Art, the Diploma in Speech and Drama of the Royal Academy of Music, and the Supplementary Certificate in Speech and Drama at Goldsmiths Training College. The holders of certain of these diplomas must also have completed the equivalent of two years' teaching. In the second category are teachers of "acknowledged experience" who do not hold any of the recognized diplomas but may be nominated for membership by two Council members. The third category includes two types of Associate members: a) those who hold the specified diplomas but lack two years' teaching experience; b) Overseas Associates from outside the British Isles who submit evidence of their qualifications in the field of speech and drama to the Council for acceptance or rejection. Overseas Associates currently make up 9% of total Society membership and reside in some 27 countries. Countries with more than five members include Australia (26), Canada (19), the United States (6 including this writer), and New Zealand (6). In addition, the STSD is affiliated with the South African Guild of Speech Teachers and the New Zealand Association of Teachers of Speech and Drama.

Just recently, interest has arisen in the possibility of closer co-operation between the Society and professional bodies and individuals in the United States. In a letter to the writer, Editor Wise commented, "I really do think that we should know far more about activities in the U.S.A. since you are obviously so much more advanced in this field than we are over here."<sup>24</sup> As a result of this correspondence, the writer was put in contact with the Society's

Secretary and is now serving as an informal liaison officer for STSD in the United States. "I'm glad to hear that you've been in touch with E. J. Burton," wrote Mr. Wise, "and I certainly hope that it leads to further co-operation across the Atlantic."25

Such co-operation would seem to offer mutual benefits for professionals on both continents. As one member of the Society put it:

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I am somewhat sad at the seeming lack of liaison between our Society and say that of the Speech Association of America or even with the English Speaking Union... We hear much about the iniquities of the 'brain-drain' and the Americans are frequently condemned for encouraging this traffic. But in contrast it seems to me that as a nation we are often over-confident and rarely look around to see what others are doing, let alone inviting them over here to do it... If communication is our job why are we failing to communicate with those sharing our language? Our resources may be small, yet our Journal is cosmopolitan to a degree! Should not we, as members, be likewise? 26

Similar overtures have, at least on one occasion, been made from the other side as well. In 1968, William Work, then-S.A.A. Executive Secretary, told a visiting STSD member, "I feel the need for more international dialogue. I think it a shame that communication between and among English speaking persons is so limited. The Speech Association of America is interested in doing whatever it can in fostering future communication."27

With the discipline undergoing vast changes and reorganizations in both countries, the present would certainly seem an auspicious time to at least lay

the pipelines for such communication. To borrow a phrase from an STSD member speaking of her Society, "We have as much to learn as to contribute and cannot afford to delay."<sup>28</sup> The Society of Teachers of Speech and Drama exists "to protect the professional interests of members, and to promote the advancement of knowledge, study and practice of Speech and Dramatic Art in every form."<sup>29</sup> Among them, the various counterpart associations in the United States (S.C.A., E.T.A., I.C.A., N.A.E.B.) circumscribe similar tasks and concerns. Exchanges of monographs, curricular materials and, eventually, personnel should not only enable us to gain a knowledge of the British speech field (from which many of our own practices took root), but may well provide substantive assistance to us in the tasks we as professionals face here. Similarly, United States developments in speech communication may prove of value to British practitioners as they wrestle with the B.Ed. and other professional complexities.

Readers with either general or specific questions and interests which pertain to British speech and drama may contact the writer at Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan 48858, who will forward these to the appropriate STSD source. American speech communication specialists are further encouraged to formally apply to the Society for Overseas Associate membership. Yearly dues for this type of affiliation are very nominal and entitle one to receive Speech and Drama (published three times yearly), the semi-annual Newsletter, the yearly Register of Members, and several other special mailings pertaining to conferences and new publications in the field. In addition, membership in STSD is a tangible manifestation of one's

commitment to the international study of our discipline. If you wish to make such a commitment, please apply to Mrs. Kathleen Holgate, Registrar, Society of Teachers of Speech and Drama, 82 St. John's Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, England. Include a vita sheet listing your professional training and activities in order that your application may be submitted to the Council of Management.

FOOTNOTES

- 1E. D. Shaw, "The Forum," Speech and Drama, XV (Spring, 1966), 14-15.
- 2Newsletter of the Society of Teachers of Speech and Drama (Autumn, 1969),  
p. 3.
- 3Arthur Wise, "Editorial," Speech and Drama, XVI (Autumn, 1966), 1.
- 4Christabel Burniston, quoted in STSD Newsletter (Spring, 1970), p. 3.
- 5Anthony Richards, "A Year Off," Speech and Drama, XVII (Autumn, 1968), 6.
- 6"Topical Issues," Speech and Drama, XVII (Autumn, 1967), 57.
- 7Shaw, Speech and Drama, p. 14.
- 8Arthur Wise, "Editorial," Speech and Drama, XVIII (Summer, 1969), 1.
- 9"Topical Issues," Speech and Drama, XVII (Autumn, 1967), 57.
- 10Sally Grace, "The Training of Teachers of Speech and Drama,"  
Speech and Drama, XIX (Spring, 1970), 10.
- 11STSD Newsletter (Spring, 1970), p. 3.
- 12E. J. Burton, letter to Peter B. Orlik, September 9, 1969.
- 13Ibid.
- 14Clive Barker, "The Universities and the Theatre, or Jack and the Beanstalk,"  
Speech and Drama, XIX (Spring, 1970), 27.
- 15Arthur Wise, "Editorial," Speech and Drama, XVI (Spring, 1967), 1.
- 16Peter Strevens, "Heretical Thoughts on Speech Studies," Speech and Drama,  
XVII (Spring, 1968), 33.
- 17Arthur Wise, "Editorial," Speech and Drama, XVII (Autumn, 1968), 1.
- 18Arthur Wise, "In Brief," Speech and Drama, XVIII (Summer, 1969), 53.
- 19Martin Banham, "Universities and the Theatre: A Plan for Development,"  
Speech and Drama, XVIII (Autumn, 1969), 7.

20John Pick, "Secondary Speech and Drama: A Survey," Speech and Drama,  
XVIII (Spring, 1969), 10-11.

21E. J. Burton in STSD Newsletter (Autumn, 1969), p. 1.

22E. J. Burton in STSD Newsletter (Summer, 1970), p. 1.

23STSD membership flier.

24Arthur Wise, letter to Peter B. Orlik, April 21, 1969.

25Arthur Wise, letter to Peter B. Orlik, November 24, 1969.

26Betty Mulcahy in STSD Newsletter (Autumn, 1969), p. 2.

27Brigid Somerset, "Teaching of Speech in New York," Speech and Drama,  
XVIII (Spring, 1969), 31.

28Mulcahy, Newsletter, p. 2.

29STSD membership flier.