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The Choral Speaking Movement

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THE CHORAL SPEAKING MOVEMENT

BY

CHLOE JAMES WADE

A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

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Approved:

Major Professor
Department of English
Minor Professor
Graduate Committee

Earl A. Moore
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Steinreich
PREFACE

Notwithstanding the difficulties and delays experienced in securing material for this study, the work has been a real pleasure.

In the preparation of this thesis I have had in mind the teacher who may be looking for information concerning choral reading, and whose sources of information will be necessarily limited by the comparative newness of the subject. I have tried to include material both factual and suggestive which would be helpful to the teacher in deciding to enter the field or in conducting a class after the decision has been made.

Acknowledgements are due to Dr. Earl A. Moore, of the English Department of the Western Kentucky State Teachers College, for his patient and efficient supervision of the work.

To Dr. Mary I. Cole, of the Education Department of the Western Kentucky State Teachers College, I wish to express my appreciation for the encouragement given me in the selection of my subject.

Thanks are due Miss Mary Frances Eaton for her cooperation in the experiment conducted with her pupils, and to Dr. Gordon Wilson, Head of the Department of English in the Western Kentucky State Teachers College, thanks also are due for encouragement given from time to time.
I wish to thank Miss Margie Helm and Miss Martha Orendorf for their helpfulness in securing necessary material. Mr. J. Reid Sterrett, of the English Department of the Western Kentucky State Teachers College, supplied helpful material for which I am grateful.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the study or practice of choral speaking it becomes necessary to have the subject technically defined. In this study the following adequate definitions have been noted.

"A verse-speaking choir is a group of children (or grown-ups) speaking rhythmic prose, or dramatic or lyric poetry in unison, or antiphonal rendering -- speaking with force or charm or delicate precision of diction, with beautiful or convincing modulation of tone, in interpreting the moods and messages of the poets."¹

"When analyzed, choral speaking is found to be group expression of delicate senses of interpretation, in which the individual child retains his individualized powers, while enhancing the results of the group."²

Those who are not familiar with the terms verse-speaking choir, choral reading, and choric speech ask how the performance differs from the old-time concert recitation of poetry. There is a great difference in sound and results. Voices are usually classified as high, medium, and low; and only those that will harmonize speak together. This classification gives a sameness of tone, and the number gives a volume

that is pleasing to the ear. Poems that present contrasts
give variety in color and volume.5

There are two methods of conducting a speaking choir.
In the school that imitates the Gregorian chant the emphasis
is on sound. Since a high degree of skill is necessary in
using this method to render a selection, it should be attempt-
ed only with adults. "The chant strikes midway between an
air and recitative, with certain sections of the poem recited
in fast tempo, followed in regular time by a note or notes of
indefinite length. It is rather difficult to describe and
must be heard to be appreciated." The second method is more
concerned with the meaning than the sound. There is great
variety in delivery. The children feel the poem and interpret
it as they feel it, sometimes with surprising or humorous
results.4

The next question from the inquiring mind would probably
be: Who may take part in the verse-speaking choir? It is for
"any group of people who wish to gather under a leader who
understands that true leadership requires a drawing out of the
ideas of those who form the group, not an imposing of his own
theories nor an attempt to arrive at a uniform interpretation."5

The same author in another article gives her conception of the aims in these words: "As a choir we wish to broaden and deepen our appreciation of poetry, enjoy it together, and share our enjoyment with others; to use bodily movement when the poem suggests it, to speak distinctly, our interpretation to be the result of every one's contribution."6

"The finest thing choral speaking does is to bring poetry back to the group, where it began. Our folk-poetry came from the group; small wonder then that this saying of good poetry together appeals to the heart of man."7

In this study the second chapter deals with the history of the movement; the third is a summary of the books and a few of the articles on the subject which were examined by the writer. The fourth chapter treats of the technique used in organizing and conducting a class in choral speaking. The fifth chapter is an attempt at evaluation of the movement. An appendix contains an account of certain observations and experiments in connection with this study.

7 Carrie Rasmussen, "Choral Speaking with Children," Elementary English Review, X (1933), 223-5.
CHAPTER II
HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

The Verse-Speaking Choir as an organized vocal activity dates from early Greek drama, about the sixth century B.C. Greek drama consisted of choral odes recited, or chanted with rhythmic bodily movements honoring the god of the vintage Dionysus. After individual speakers were added the chorus still played an important part. In the play The Suppliants written by Aeschylus, 500 B.C., a chorus of fifty maidens was the chief character. Some parts were spoken in unison, some called for part speaking, and some for antiphonal speaking. This chorus speaking gives us the source of modern verse speaking.

In Europe in the days of the minstrels verse refrains were recited by assembled groups. Many of the song rhythms were accompanied by bodily movement. But since those early days verse speaking has almost disappeared, even in the countries where it played a prominent part in the social life of the people.

Not only was this form of amusement in use in early Greek civilization and medieval Europe, but we find it among the most primitive peoples even of contemporary times; for example, the American Indian uses a measured chant at his various festivals.¹

The idea of a revival of the old Greek chorus on the stage was the beginning of an attempt at choric speech in England as early as 1904. Prof. Gilbert Murray of Oxford published, about this time, his first translations from Euripides. They were so unusual in vividness, rhythm, and metrical movement that they were soon produced on the stage. But the idea of the speaking chorus was not further developed at that time.2

Since the World War a revival of this speech activity has been observed in Germany, Russia, and England. The youth movements in Germany and Russia have given rise to youthful verse choirs. In England choral verse speaking has become a part of the national and civic music festivals. Some evidences of the revival of this interesting social speech activity are radio presentations of verse choirs, verse-choir contests, and the inclusion of verse speaking as part of school curricula.3

It was John Masefield, present poet laureate of Great Britain, who gave the name "Verse Speaking" to this newly revived type of speech work. He became interested in the work when he heard the speech choirs of Scotland several years ago. Consequently he founded "The Oxford Recitations."

3 Keppie, op. cit., p. 10.
which is an annual contest for adult speakers of verse. At other verse speaking contests conducted annually in England, people of all ages take part from kindergarten children to adults, all participating with equal sincerity.

Several books on the subject of the verse-speaking choir have been written in England, but in America printed matter on the subject consists almost entirely of magazine articles. Summer courses on the subject have been offered at Oxford, Stratford-on-Avon, London, Barry, and at other places in England. In many colleges it has become part of the regular college program. While it is practically new in America, extension and summer courses are offered by the University of California and other colleges.4

At the Glasgow Music Festival of 1922 choric speech had its real beginning in the performance of the Glasgow Nightingales. John Masefield praised them highly, his praise going the rounds of the British press, the attractive feature being that these Nightingales were speakers, not singers. Mr. Masefield suggested to their teacher, Miss Marjorie Gullan, that such voices, heard together, might attain a new revelation of beauty; and in choosing test-pieces for the following year's festival, he included several excerpts from Euripides' Trojan Women, in Prof. Murray's translation, for an experiment in

4 Ibid., pp. 9-11.
group speaking. Miss Gullan united her best pupils in attempting these selections, thus founding the first Speech Choir. Their success in the 1923 Festival is still spoken of. Miss Gullan should be given credit for her discovery and experimentation in the field of choral reading. Her work as a pioneer in the movement has had a far-reaching effect in the theory and practice of drama, although her own work has been principally educational. Following the first success, her original Glasgow Speech Choir for several years gave demonstrations in Scotland and England. Before the end of the first year the London Times said:

"Their most striking achievement is the extremely difficult one of speaking by twos and threes, and all together, in perfect time and unison. . . . They speak, not sing, nor chant. But they speak on the same tone, varying it by equal degrees; and every word that they are all saying can be heard. . . . Evidently the aim has been to get the patterns right first; and each poem was patterned before our ears in a single modulated whole."

After her transference to the London Polytechnic Institute, Miss Gullan founded the London Verse-Speaking Choir. It has confined itself mainly to reciting lyrical poetry but has also to its credit the production of one choric drama, Culbin Sands, written by Dr. Gordon Bottomley, for the expressed purpose of exploring the resources of the Verse-Speaking Choir. This play was a success, as, also, was the work in the choruses of the play The Acts of Saint Peter given in March, 1924. In the spring of 1925, they did further praiseworthy work on the Antigone of Sophocles, translated in the original metres by R. C. Trevelyan.
The achievement of the first Glasgow Choir stimulated the production of a series of choric dramas on Scottish themes — Ardvorlich's Wife, The Singing Sands, Suilven and the Eagle, Culbin Sands. The first two of these were produced in the Poet Laureate's Garden Theatre at Boar's Hill in 1929, and at Rudolf Steiner Hall in London in 1930. The first enjoyed a popularity in both Scottish and English Community Drama Festivals of 1931 under the choric training of Duncan Clark and the choreography of Constance Herbert.

In the previous year an interesting experiment with a choric element was successfully conducted by Terence Gray at the Festival Theatre in Cambridge in a Norse play, The Riding to Lithend.

The next advance in the choric speech movement came in Sean O'Casey's play The Silver Tassie, in 1931. In Act I he uses the device of putting the utterance of the suffering of the army privates in unison, "which causes one to feel the terrible impersonality of these nameless privates of the war."

W. H. Auden, a poet of the younger generation, has used the idea of choric speech in his new play, Dances of Death; T. S. Eliot has helped in forwarding the movement in the chorus based on Biblical cadence which he wrote for the Pageant of the Churches at Sadler's Well Theatre in May, 1934.5

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5 Bottomley, op. cit., pp. 551-5.
Educational departments in South Africa have found it necessary or advisable to foster speech training among both teachers and pupils. This is necessary to counteract the external influences of geographical situation, history, and politics. The work covered in this speech training includes verse-speaking choirs along with other important phases of English. Cecile de Banke, Wellesley College, prophesies that in twenty years South Africa will be able to claim the best spoken English in the Colonies.6

In the summer of 1929, John Louis Horn witnessed some work in choral reading which was being done in a girls' gymnasium in Dusseldorf. The ages of the girls engaged were from fifteen to seventeen. It was in a private institution called St. Anna Schule. The teacher was Oberstudienrat Dr. Hans Stahl. The exercise they were carrying on was very much like the Greek chorus in action but in function quite different. While the Greek chorus was supplementary, in this Sprechohor the chorus was the entire performance. The group of children was led by one of their own number. Their reading might be compared to responsive readings which we hear in church, or we might call it a rhythmic chant, but by expressing varying emotions, monotony was lessened to an appreciable extent. It was as if one were reading poetry splendidly, bringing out the rhythm, the general flow, and above all creating the mood of the poem in the interpretation.

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The girls were presenting some material from the Old Testament, which had been worked over for purposes of presentation. They were reciting it slowly, rhythmically, and with deep earnestness. The aim was not so much to convey thought as to transmit mood. It was an art form in the realm of speech. Minor objectives of the work, according to Dr. Stahl, were improved pronunciation and enunciation, poise, bodily control, rhythmical movement in the presence of the public as a preparation for individual work of the same kind. But Mr. Horn thought he saw an even greater value than these in the art of teaching appreciation. "When the objective of creating a mood is reached the emotions aroused are those which are involved in the higher appreciation of art."

This exercise seems to have all of the advantageous results of the school play and more, since it features no individual and gives every member of the group an opportunity to participate. Dr. Stahl was at that time almost the only one in Germany engaged in this work. He said he had begun with children as young as six years but that he found early adolescence the most responsive age. He said he preferred tragic material to joyous. He used good literature already in existence, such as Bible or epic poetry, but did not necessarily follow the text as written, using a great deal of repetition for emphasis. He always started with something simple. Sometimes he used costume, but did not consider a background of music of any value. Neither had he been able to combine dancing with choral speech successfully.
According to Mr. Horn's statement, he wrote this article hoping to cause American teachers of English to experiment with this new and interesting art form in the realm of speech. Though Mr. Horn did not seem to be aware of the fact, work was being done at that time in England and in several schools in America. Mabel Smith Reynolds, of the University of Colorado, and H. D. Roberts, of the Chicago Normal College, were among the Americans experimenting with this new method of teaching poetry appreciation.

The popularity of Miss Gullan's original verse-speaking choirs caused interested educators from America to go to England for the purpose of observation. Consequently the verse-speaking choir in America preceded Miss Gullan's visit here. However her visits, beginning in 1933, caused interest in the movement to spread more rapidly in the United States. Miss Gullan has visited American cities from New York to San Francisco, lecturing and offering courses in choral speech, working with children of junior high school age as well as college students.

In September, 1935, Miss Gullan was appointed to the teaching staff of Teachers College, Columbia University.

In 1930 H. D. Roberts prepared a paper on "The Chanting of Poetry" and read it before the Kansas City Council of English Teachers. In this paper he emphasizes the need of

some activity to counteract over-stressed silent reading. He considers the values of chanting poetry (the term "chanting" is defined elsewhere in this paper) to be: first, it provides a major emphasis for the music found in all significant poetry, and second, it furnishes the child with an enjoyable and uplifting activity to be added to his life experience. One feature of the paper was a demonstration of unison chanting by a ninth grade class. The chanting was almost wholly social, carried out under the children's directions. Another interesting feature was the dancing by a smaller pupil of Vachel Lindsay's poem, "Potatoes Dance."\textsuperscript{9}

Hortense Moore has experimented with college students in Mount Vernon Seminary, Washington, D. C. Their choral reading consisted of ballads which were read while actors interpreted in pantomime. At Mount St. Joseph's College, Philadelphia, a verse-speaking choir was used to carry the narrative between the scenes of the Christmas play \textit{At the Well of Bethlehem}. To this choir was attributed much of the success of the play. The verse choir of Talladega College Little Theatre, Lillian W. Voorhees, director, is one of the first two organized in negro colleges. It gives several recitals each year. At the University of Denver, a chorus of twenty girls and twenty-five boys presented "The March of the Colorado Indian Tribes," a series of poems from \textit{The Pageant of Colorado}, by Lillian

White Spencer. Of Donovan Rhynsburger's Verse-Speaking Choir at the University of Missouri, one reviewer said that it possessed to a high degree the elements of emotional appeal. Vachel Lindsay's "Congo" and "General Booth Enters Into Heaven" were among the numbers presented.10

The educational possibilities of choral speaking were illustrated at the Western Association of Teachers of Speech in 1931 by a group of students under the leadership of Miss Elizabeth Jenks of San Jose State College. She was at that time continuing the work started by Dr. Virginia Sanderson. There was an enthusiastic reaction of many of those who heard the group, which seems to point to the use of choral reading in oral interpretation of verse.11

Miss Elizabeth E. Keppie of Pasadena Junior College who is the author of The Teaching of Choric Speech, founded the Pasadena Verse-Speaking Choir.12 She is well acquainted with Miss Gullan's work in England because of her observations there.

Choral speaking at John Burroughs School in St. Louis had its beginnings in a pageant called The American Heritage, which was written and staged by the pupils of the school in the spring

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of 1934. The speech chorus work in this school is the result of two days which Miss Gullan spent at the Shipley School at Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. Here Miss Delia Smith, teacher of English at John Burroughs, watched Miss Gullan work with children of grammar and high school age. She brought back the idea with her and put it into operation although the faculty of her school had no member specially trained for the work. 13

The University of Colorado was a pioneer in choral reading. It was perhaps the very first group in America to try this artistic method of reading poetry. Their first attempt was in a dramatic performance of Rossetti's *Sister Helen* in January, 1926, Mabel Smith Reynolds directing. Since that time Mrs. Reynolds has used the method to a considerable extent as a class exercise in Oral Interpretation. In a recital on January 26, 1932, her classes, made up from the common run of students, gave three passages of concerted reading. On May 12, 1932, in a second recital the reading choir gave several selections, including a repetition of Vachel Lindsay's "The Congo" which had been used in the January recital, and also eleven verses of the fortieth chapter of *Isaiah*. "The Congo" seemed to be the most popular; the reading of *Isaiah* was liked for its dramatic impressiveness; the whole program was well received. The audience consisted of about four hundred students and citizens.

by no means a specially picked group except by the interest which caused them to be present.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1935 the University of Colorado made choral speaking a competitive activity in the college open to all students selected by try-outs. Its nine-year-old choir under the leadership of Mrs. Reynolds is still gaining favor.\textsuperscript{15}

The San Jose State Teachers College Choir, in California, started in 1928, is perhaps the best known; there is an active choir at Pasadena Junior College, California. Ohio State University Laboratory School has an active high school choir. Maryville College, in St. Louis, Missouri, is definitely enrolled in the activity of choral speaking.

"In the spring of 1933 a chorus of eighteen from the sophomore class gave a program for the Maryville alumnae. . . . The class did several types of poetry but the triumph of the performance was Kipling's 'Boots.' The program was so well received that now choral reading is well established in Maryville College.\textsuperscript{16}

On November 10, 1933, a group of forty-two pupils made its debut before the Detroit Parent Teachers Association as the "Sherrard Verse-Speaking Choir." The interest was so great that the program was repeated seven or eight times at the request of various groups. Several who were present be-


gan experimenting with the idea. The public library helped in getting books containing material to be used. The In and About Detroit Music Club negotiated with Miss Gullan for a lecture. These facts indicate that verse-speaking has a genuine appeal.\textsuperscript{17}

The verse-speaking choir was introduced into the Louisville schools in the spring of 1935 by means of a demonstration given by Miss Dorothy Probst and her sixth grade pupils. Miss Probst, teacher in the Shawnee Elementary School, worked with her class for several weeks before the demonstration. Poems from A. A. Milne, Vachel Lindsay, and Rose Fyleman were used. Other teachers tried the plan and were delighted with the pupils' increased interest in poetry.\textsuperscript{18}

Dr. Virginia Sanderson has worked with choirs at San Jose State College, California, in New York City at Riverside Church, with junior high school pupils, and with a private volunteer group. She says no matter what age the participants, everybody was enthusiastic about the idea.\textsuperscript{19}

Dr. R. R. Macgregor, Head of the Department of English, Kansas State College, has played an active part in establishing


choral reading in William Picken Training School. Miss Esther Lanning has also had a prominent part in the work at that institution. The choir was composed of thirty volunteers from the eighth, ninth, and tenth grade pupils and is providing today artistic expression for hundreds of boys, girls, men, and women.20

"Oral interpretation of literature as an element in voice training and the release of personality is a large factor in public speaking courses of today. Illustrative is the practice in the Lewis and Clark High School in Spokane, Washington, of the choral chanting of Vachel Lindsay's 'The Congo,' the lament of 'The Trojan Women,' and other selections quite different in tone, recited in unison with bodily movements indicative of abandonment to the mood of the poem."21

"In America the history of the choral speaking movement is closely related with the work of Vachel Lindsay and his insistence upon the fundamental unity of poetry, music, drama, and the dance."22

In the preface to Every Soul is a Circus, Lindsay has left a brief history of his verse speaking activity in the Spokane High School and notations on choral speech are scattered throughout his published writings.

Since 1926 verse-speaking choirs have appeared with increasing frequency. They are in many teacher training institutions. A recent survey of educational institutions reveals the fact that verse choirs are speaking in schools of every
level in every section of the country, and much excellent work is being reported. 23

Richard B. Lewis, Drama Department, Glendale, California, Junior College, and Holland D. Roberts, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California, Public Schools, are engaged in gathering information for a national directory of all those in charge of choral speaking activities. In addition to names of the leaders and schools special data are being collected such as lists of poems, types of verse-choirs, rhythmic movement, staging, size of groups, role of the leader, dramatization, evaluation of results. Communications should be sent to Mr. Lewis at the address given. 24

"Anyone interested in choral speaking should know of the Verse Speaking Fellowship of England, with headquarters at the Polytechnic School of Speech Training, Little Tichfield Street, London, W. 1. The Fellowship exists to form links between all those who are working for the betterment of speech and who believe that the speaking of fine poetry and prose, whether chorally, or in solo, may be a means of education and expression in the widest sense. It emphasizes the beauty and use of Choral Speaking and the value of Rhythmic Movement in the training of speech. Members pay what approximates a dollar and a half and receive a quarterly journal, Good Speech, to which they are invited to send problems to be answered or reports of experiments which may be of general interest to readers." 25

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23 Loc. cit.


CHAPTER III

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT OF THE
VERSE-SPEAKING CHOIR

To anyone interested in the verse-speaking choir, the question of what has been written on the subject will at once occur. It is one of the purposes of this study to answer that question. Unsuccessful efforts have been made to obtain certain articles in magazines published in the far West and in England; also writings of Elizabeth M. Jenks, Marjorie E. Burdsall, and L. C. Raines could not be obtained. However, it has been the privilege of the writer to examine two books on the subject written by Miss Marjorie Gullan, two by Marjorie Gullan and Percival Gurrey, one by Miss Elizabeth E. Keppie, one by M. E. DeWitt, and numerous magazine articles written by pioneers and observers of the movement.

Choral Speaking, by Miss Gullan, is a practical treatise on the subject, containing ninety-two pages, published in 1931 by Expression Company, Boston. The introduction contains a short history of the origin of Verse-Speaking, the first chapter discusses the values, the second and third are discussions of the conductor and the choir. Chapter four treats of the material to be used; the fifth mentions technical equipment such as breathing, oral resonance, range of tone. The next seven chapters are written in the order that they are needed.
in training a choir: recognition of rhythm, stanza and rhyme pattern, refrain, antiphonal speaking, group work, unison speech. Difficulties and dangers are discussed in the last chapter, followed by a book list, and selections listed under the phases of choral reading for which they are suited. This is a book which the beginning choir leader can not well afford to be without.

*Spoken Poetry in the Schools*, by Miss Gullan, has been through six editions from 1926 to 1935. It has such interesting chapter headings as "The Weaving of Speech and Rhythm," "Pattern and Pictures in Poetry," "The Speaking of Narrative Poetry and Blank Verse," "The Joys of Ballad-Speaking."

There are in this book many poems and parts of poems with explicit directions for teaching. A close-up acquaintance with this book, added to an inherent recognition of rhythm, and a real love of poetry should fit the already competent English teacher to be a speech choir director. It is a London publication; so are the following books by Gullan and Gurrey, *Poetry Speaking for Children, Part I* and *Part II*, the first and second of a series of three books for Infants, Juniors, and Seniors. The series is an amplification of the methods described in *Spoken Poetry in Schools*. The two books contain over one hundred jingles and short poems with detailed instructions for presenting to children's verse-speaking choirs. These instructions are usually divided into three lessons for each poem or jingle. These lessons introduce much movement to the rhythm, movement necessary to make the child free and
easy in the enjoyment of poetry. The lines are accented to show the number of beats. If the choir leader must limit herself to one book, that book should be the one of this series suited to the age of her class. The third book of the series has not yet come to publication. Book I was published in 1930, Book II in 1932 and a second edition in 1935. They can be obtained from Methuen and Company, Ltd., 36 Essex Street, W. C., London.

In Poetry Speaking for Children, Part I, the authors emphasize the part that rhythm and rhyme play in the life of a young child. "The Dance of the Words" is the heading of the chapter on jingles and rhythms; "The Song of the Words" has a special treatment for rhyme and rhythm; "The Spirit of the Words" is a chapter on beginning interpretation, getting the story from the jingle. "The Power of the Words" is on the practice of imitative sounds. Chapter seven gives suggested lessons in make-believe. Story poems with refrains make interesting lesson plans in the next chapter. "The Dialogue in the Words" offers opportunity for "line-a-side" type of reading. Line-a-child work is explained in the chapter on "The Individual and the Team." In "The Romance in the Words -- The Poet's World," the student is introduced to the first real poetry of the book. The book is a series of lessons gradually approaching a higher level of verse-speaking; it is systematic, logical, and worthy of close study by teachers of primary grades.

The Teaching of Choric Speech, by Elizabeth E. Keppie, was most helpful in the experiment which the writer conducted
in connection with this study. Miss Keppie's instructions were carried out as far as possible considering the conditions prevailing. The book is distinctive in the matter of dividing its treatment into five periods according to the age of the class. The five periods are "The Motor and Rhythmic Age," "Imaginative Period," "Heroic Age," "Romantic Period," and "The Adult Period." Literature and method of approach in each period are divided into Rhythmic Movement, Refrain Speaking, Antiphonal Speaking, "Line-a-child" Speaking, Group or Part Speaking, and Unison Speech. To add to its practical value, the book contains lists of poems suited to each age and phase of speaking. Chapters nine and ten deal with choric speaking of prose and adult choirs. Miss Keppie thinks that the suggestions in material and method as given in The Teaching of Choric Speech should culminate in the establishment of adult verse-speaking choirs. The appendix of the book contains forty pages of poems and jingles suitable for choral speaking. This book should be very helpful to a teacher who is starting out with a verse-speaking choir of any age or stage of advancement.

Let Us Recite Together, by M. E. DeWitt, contains about twenty passages of prose and verse for choral reading with ample notes on technique. It contains material of varying mood especially suitable for adults. "It is for friendly people who are learning to enjoy group or choric recitation." Illustrative of the contents of the book are "The Trail That Ends by the Sea," "We Consecrate Ourselves to Work," "Rodon,"
"I'm Going Off to India," "Fool of the World," "Spell of the City."

Magazine articles on the subject of the Verse-Speaking Choir generally deal with experimentation and observation of English teachers and speech directors. They usually agree on technique but not always. As a rule they cite similar selections for use in verse-speaking. From the magazine articles examined in this study the writer has selected two as representative of what has appeared in magazines on the subject. The articles are "The Verse-Speaking Choir in High School," by Grace Loar, *English Journal*, November, 1932, and "The Verse-Speaking Choir for Children," by Eloise Ramsey, *Childhood Education*, February, 1936. The former article is an interesting account of the initial use of choral speaking in a junior high school English class. It was necessary for the class to prepare an assembly program. Their teacher having explained her purpose, secured volunteers among the students who could spend one hour each day for three weeks in practice on the program. She made diligent search for the right kind of poems considering the ability of the class, the occasion, and the time of year. She used stage decorations and colored lighting. The choir was in white. For the devotional she used Psalm 136, antiphonal speaking, the girls at the front of the stage, the boys at the back. A poem-prayer was given by one girl. The play poem, "The Potatoes Dance" by Vachel Lindsay was next presented with the choir divided into three groups -- high,
medium, and low voices. "The Shell," by James Stephens, was used to express mood. "The Welcome," by Arthur Powell, was used because it was spring. For patriotic reasons "A Toast to the Flag," by John Daly, was given with the choir using red, white, and blue scarfs in an effective arrangement and speaking their parts to an American Flag. Much enthusiasm was displayed by the audience, causing a movement for a permanent organization of a verse-speaking choir.

Miss Ramsey's article is especially good on how to start a choir, and on the teaching of rhythm. It contains suggested poems for recognition of rhythm, for rhyme appreciation, for solo and two-part speaking, for refrains, and for "pattern in poetry." Miss Ramsey would not use stage settings of any kind; she emphasizes the one and only function, that of verse-speaking. She gives us her ideas of values, of the amount of time to be spent in the activity, and the number of individuals to be trained in one class.

Two other articles which the writer wishes to mention here are by Carrie Rasmussen and Virginia Sanderson.

Miss Rasmussen in Quarterly Journal of Speech, April, 1934, answers the question, "Why do so many children not like poetry?" The article contains explicit directions for teaching Rachel Field's "The Dancing Bear" and the "Marching Song" by R. L. Stevenson. The author gives reasons for physical activity in connection with poetry. She closes the article with two lists of poems which have been successfully tried out, one with primary grades and the other with upper
grades. Another interesting feature of the article is the inclusion of three folk songs, "Ole Mr. Rabbit," "Peep, Squirrel, Peep," and "Monkey Motions."

Dr. Virginia Sanderson, Associate Editor of The Quarterly Journal of Speech, in her article on "Choral Speaking" of June, 1933, writes that questions coming into the "Department of Speech in the Schools" concerning verse-speaking choirs are many more than she has information to justify her answering. She asks that directors of successful verse-speaking choirs send to her information concerning their choirs. Items which she wishes included in the reports are the date of organization, the most satisfying poems, the number in the choir, age and sex of members, and major difficulties. These facts would make the report worth publishing. Dr. Sanderson is at Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
CHAPTER IV
TECHNIQUE

In starting a class in verse speaking there is much to be considered. The teacher should first examine her own qualifications. Having satisfied herself as to her own fitness, she has left to consider the questions of her group, the material, and the method of procedure.

The question of how to start a class is of vital importance -- just how vital an inexperienced director will realize sometimes too late for the best advancement of her class. It pays to take time for preparation, at least for the mastery of two or three of the best books to be had on the subject. Then there are magazine articles with encouraging accounts of successful experiments that should be read to give the proper inspiration for a "running start."

The conductor should, above all, be a lover of poetry, know how to speak it and how to lead others in speaking it. She should be acquainted with the various periods and types of English poetry; she should have a keen sense of rhythm and be able to recognize readily poetic sound patterns. If she has had some dramatic training, she will be able to make her work with a choir more varied and interesting.¹

If it is the purpose of the leader for her choir to

give public performances, she should have had careful training in speech and voice production. If she is making verse speaking an end in itself, or if she is using it to increase appreciation of poetry, or for any other purpose for which it is used, she must still be able to obtain from her group distinct enunciation and well modulated voices. The choir leader will do well to use stimulation and guidance rather than dictation in dealing with her class. She should be able to inspire the class to respond to the thought and mood of the poem. She sets the tempo, watches for observance of silent beat, listens for correct enunciation, and uses discrimination in selection of material, yet all the time she makes herself as unobtrusive as possible.

She must at all times be in full view of her group as she guides them in their activity. Her position creates no problem unless her members are presenting a public program. In that case her problem may be how to be seen by her group and as nearly as possible unseen by the audience.

The group itself has much to do with the procedure in establishing a verse-speaking choir. In most cases it is better to let the idea grow than to introduce the subject at once. If the group is a voluntary one and the members have already had some speech training, the leader's work in organization is relatively easy. In upper grades and adult choirs the members will be grouped according to high, low, and medium voices. Organization in intermediate grades is less difficult because of the narrow range of voices. They are often
grouped according to sex. The number in a choir varies greatly. The writer found in her investigations that the most popular number is fifteen to twenty members. However, there are very large numbers doing excellent work together. Miss Gullan speaks of her class of one hundred to one hundred and fifty members, with whom she has worked for several years. When there are difficulties the class may be broken up into small groups in order to detect and remedy the fault.

While the low, the medium, and the high voices are three separate units, the whole choir should be grouped as closely together as possible since this arrangement lends itself to unity of speech. It is preferable to have women outnumber men in order to balance the light voices against the dark.

In starting a speech choir with adults the leader, after explaining the meaning and origin of choral speaking, will read to the group a few poems adapted to the work and of such a diversified nature as to cause a desire to take the first steps in learning. Without further preliminaries the leader may start one of the poems containing the best refrain and rhythm. There will be much interest in selecting material and testing voices. The technique with adults is quite similar to that used with children.

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2 Ibid., p. 11.
If the class is a group of primary children, the approach may be made through poem-games. If they are self-conscious older children it will take more tact to get them to respond to the rhythm of the poem. They will want to begin to speak the verse before they can move to the rhythm. It will test the teacher’s skill and knowledge in any case to be able to organize and conduct a successful verse-speaking choir. There is one thing she may do without fear of making a mistake; that is to give them a chance to hear much good poetry well read. Of course it will be necessary to use poetry that will appeal to the age and advancement of the group. It is necessary also to use suggestive conversation to draw out comment.

In continuing the discussion on technique the writer has in mind ages eight to eleven, although the procedure would not differ greatly if ages should vary considerably either way.

In a time schedule of forty minutes per week divided into two periods the following is a suggested scheme for a lesson in choral speaking preceded by twenty minutes of speech and voice training:

“A. Speech and Voice Training . . . . 20 minutes
1. Breathing Exercises . . . . .5 minutes
2. Resonance Exercises . . . . .5 minutes
3. Vowel Exercises . . . . . . . . .5 minutes
4. Consonant Exercises . . . . .5 minutes
B. Poetry Speaking . . . . . . . . 20 minutes

1. Teacher's Reading and Talk  
   with children . . . . . . . . 5 minutes

2. Children's Practical Work . . 15 minutes.

The small textbook Speech Training in the Schools, by Marjorie Gullan, contains the necessary exercises for breathing and resonance, consonants, and vowels. The twenty-minute exercises will not seem tiresome since the children will be speaking nonsense rhymes and jingles as part of their practice in voice training. During the first month the aim of the teacher should be teaching recognition of rhythm. In the next month the class should be given refrain work followed later by antiphonal, group, and unison work. Circumstances will govern the progress but as a rule the teacher will introduce a new aspect of the work each month. At certain intervals, once or twice a month, a period should be given to reading and commenting on lyrics or story poems. If the teacher is not able to introduce a new phase every month, she should not feel that she is failing in her work. Two examples of each phase may be more than she is able to teach well in four weeks. She will at least have given the children some variety of experience. The eagerness of the class for the work is the best indication that it is being well done.  

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5 Ibid., pp. 3-6.
Recognition of rhythm is the first step in the teaching of choral speaking. The best jingles to use are those with regular beats; irregularity of rhythm causes confusion. The use of two jingles of sharply contrasted rhythms is the surest way of getting results in rhythm recognition. As the teacher speaks the jingle, she "finger tips" the rhythm, the children listening, as she suggests, for something amusing or interesting. "Finger-tipping must be done with precision, or it will not produce the desired results in the speaking. "The cushions of finger and thumb-tips should be neatly brought against each other, the palms of the hands almost touching." In the "pull away" movement the same distance (from two to three inches), should be observed between the wrists as between the fingers. The elbows should not move but should lightly touch the sides of the body while the "finger-tipping" is going on. When the teacher asks the children to join in the "finger-tipping" it may require some time and effort to secure accuracy but it is important that they be taught to observe the beats accurately.

After the first reading the teacher leads the children to comment; when she has read the selection the second time she gathers more comment on the nature of the story and the rhythm; at the third reading she invites the children to join in the "finger-tipping." She asks for volunteers to come out and move to the rhythm. "The Cat Game Fiddling" (from Mother Goose), and "James, James, Morrison, Morrison," by A. A. Milne, are suggested for marked contrast in rhythm.
In the latter the children will meet with the silent beat in poetry which will be observed in different ways in several poems. After the third reading the teacher invites the children at their seats to join in speaking the lines and marking the beats. It is obviously not the thing to do to ask them to remember and repeat together lines that are very rapid in pace, but instead, they can join accurately on the refrain while "finger-tipping" and moving to the rhythm of the whole poem.

The following selections are taken from a list of poems suggested for recognition of rhythm:

"A Cat Came Fiddling," (Mother Goose) Fiddling and skipping.

"James, James, Morrison, Morrison," A. A. Milne A strutting walk.

"Sweet and Low," Tennyson Rocking a cradle.

"John Had Great Big Waterproof Boots On," A. A. Milne Tramping.

"The Swing," (Garden of Verses) Swinging movement.

The second, third, and fourth phases of the work will be taken up with the teacher varying her method of presentation as subject matter, needs, and ability suggest. The teacher should keep in mind the fact that children are great imitators, and give them a chance to interpret the lines for themselves. At the same time she must remember that her first presentation of the poem will either fire her class with interest and

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6 Ibid., pp. 7-10.
7 Ibid., p. 15.
enthusiasm or will leave them cold and unresponsive.

She should be able to realize the four artistic values in the verse speaking of her class, the four M's: the movement, the music, the meaning, and the mood of the words. These four are mentioned in the order in which they should be presented and in which they will be learned with the least difficulty. Bodily movements are encouraged to help in realizing the first; hearing and speaking much poetry will help the children to realize the second; the teacher takes the leading part in the third and fourth, striving to get the children's own interpretation of meaning and mood.

From a list of twelve movements suited to twelve different jingles, the following seem to be most helpful:

Marching, "The Grand Old Duke of York."

Tramping, "Diddle Diddle Dumpling."

Skipping, "Hickety, Picketty, My Black Hen."

Clapping, "Pat-a-cake, Pat-a-cake."

Hammering, "Rap-a-Tap-Tap."*9

Under the phase of refrain speaking the use of the following poem is suggested:

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9 Ibid., p. 8.
ONCE I SAW A LITTLE BOAT

Once I saw a little boat, and a pretty, pretty boat,
When daybreak the hills was adorning, (')
And into it I jumped and away I did float,
So very, very early in the morning. (')

CHORUS:

For every little wave has its nightcap on,
Its nightcap, white cap, nightcap on.
For every little wave has its nightcap on,
So very, very early in the morning. (')

All the fishes were asleep in their caves cool and deep,
When the ripples round my keel flashed a warning;
Said the minnow to the skate, "We must certainly be late,
'Though I tho't 'twas very early in the morning."

CHORUS

The lobster, darkly green, soon appeared upon the scene,
And pearly drops his claws were adorning.
Quoth he, "May I be boiled, if I'll have my pleasure spoiled,
So very, very early in the morning."

CHORUS

Said the sturgeon to the eel, "Just imagine how I feel,
Thus roused without a syllable of warning;
People ought to let us know when a-sailing they would go
So very, very early in the morning."
CHORUS

Just then up jumped the sun, and the fishes every one
   For their laziness at once fell a-mourning.
But I staid to hear no more, for my boat had reached the shore
   So very, very early in the morning.

CHORUS:

And every little wave took its nightcap off,
   Its nightcap, white cap, nightcap off,
And every little wave took its nightcap off
And curtsied to the sun in the morning.

Laura E. Richards.

This poem contains a musical racy refrain which is sure to make it a favorite with choral speaking groups. Its mood is happy and gay, its rhythm is light and dancing. From the first reading the children will want to join in the speaking but it will add much to their zest for the poem if they are led first into bodily movement suited to the rhythm. They should draw on their imagination for the movement. They should try different movements -- tossing of the nightcap tassels to the four beats in a line, pressing the waves back lightly with the hand observing the four beats, advancing four steps and receding four steps in imitation of waves.

When the refrain can be spoken with some facility, it is time to pass out typed copies and assign different parts of the poem to different groups. One group should be the
narrators, three different groups should be given the parts spoken by the fish, all repeating the refrain.\footnote{10}

Another favorite in refrain speaking is "Shoes and Stockings" by A. A. Milne. The words and rhythm of this poem suggest at once interesting ways of speaking it and marking the rhythm.

Antiphonal material suitable for children is not so plentiful as poems with refrains. A very good poem for the purpose is "The North Wind doth Blow" suggested in Gullan and Gurrey's book, Part II, with plans for teaching.

Three lessons are taught in presenting the poem:

THE NORTH WIND DOOTH BLOW

"The North wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow
And what will the robin do then, poor thing?"

"Oh, he'll go to the barn
And to keep himself warm
He'll hide his head under his wing, poor thing."

"The North wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the swallow do then, poor thing?"

"Oh do you not know
He's gone long ago,
To a country much warmer than ours, poor thing."

\footnote{10} Marjorie Gullan and Percival Gurrey, \textit{op. cit.}, Part II, pp. 27-9.
"The North wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the dormouse do then, poor thing?"

"Rolled up in a ball
In his nest snug and small
He'll sleep till the winter is past, poor thing."

"The North wind doth blow,
And we shall have snow,
And what will the children do then, poor things?"

"Oh, when lessons are done
They'll jump, skip and run
And play till they make themselves warm, poor things."

Lesson One

The teacher as usual begins by reading or speaking the jingle twice. Discussion of birds and animals follows. They will discover that the two people talking in the poem are in sympathy with birds and beasts. Another reading will follow, accompanied by tapping out the rhythm. Then the teacher allots the four answers, she herself taking the questions. They now "lip" and "finger-tip" the jingle, taking parts as arranged. By "lipping" is meant a light forward whisper with the lips, taking care that the whisper is not felt in the throat, but putting every consonant before the teeth.11

11 A description of "lipping" is found in Miss Gullan's little book, Speech Training in the School.
The "lipping" will be followed by speaking the jingle with light soft voices, using neatness of articulation and sympathy in the tone of the answers.

Lesson Two

In Lesson Two the class will improve on the work done at the previous meeting. First they will run over the poem as they did in Lesson One. Then the teacher will divide the class into two groups, giving the questions to one group and the answers to the other group. Simple movements to mark the rhythm and also individualize the characters may be introduced by the student. It is better for the teacher to speak the words while the children are acting.

Lesson Three

In Lesson Three the finished plan takes place, one group asking the questions, another group answering, while the third group will be imitating the movements of the robin, the swallow, the dormouse, and the children. The teacher helps out those who have the speaking parts until they are able to make movement and speech coincide.

The first steps in presenting all material are practically the same. If response to rhythm has been established in the first two phases, bodily movement in the other phases may be dispensed with. Individual corrections will be used in the line-a-person phase. Each individual's skill will be tested in his ability to fit into the rhythm scheme and to maintain the tempo set for the whole group. Two simple selec-
tions to be used are: "For Want of a Nail" and "A Man of Words and not of Deeds;" two selections for group speaking are "The Camel's Hump," by Kipling, "Drake's Drum," by Henry Newbolt. Unison speaking is the most difficult phase. It is the culmination of all that has been done before. A short selection to start unison speech with is Shakespeare's "A Merry Heart." "Breathes There a Man," by Scott, is a patriotic selection suitable for unison speech; "The Wind," by C. Rossetti, and "When all the World is Young," by Kingsley are found in the wealth of material suitable for unison speaking.  

Choice of poems may cause the leader of a group quite a bit of concern. Miss Keppie has conceived the idea of dividing speakers into five different ages or periods and selecting her material according to these five divisions. They are (1) the motor and rhythmic age, (2) imaginative period, (3) heroic age, (4) romantic period, and (5) adult period. For (1) use Mother Goose; for (2) fairy tales and fanciful poetry; for (3) brave deeds of heroes, such as the child imagines himself doing; for (4) the idea of the brave defending the weak. The adult period is a culmination of all the others; therefore poetry suitable for any age will be enjoyed by the adult.  

12 Keppie, op. cit., pp. 64-69.  
If the teacher has Miss Keppie’s book at her command and anthologies from which to take the suggested poems, her problem of material will be solved. However, if she must rely on her own resources she will naturally select poems which the children like to hear, remembering that they must have a definite rhythm, and be suited to the phase of choral reading with which her class is working. She will also remember that children enjoy hearing the rhythm and music of poetry which is too difficult for them to interpret; therefore it is easy to make the mistake of selecting poetry beyond the range of the class.

For advanced classes it is safe to begin with poetry which has a traditional basis. Ballads with refrains, and certain passages from the Old Testament are suitable for choral speaking. Poetry which contains appeal and response, or questions and answers is excellent for antiphonal speaking. Three-part work can be found in dialogue poems containing refrains. There are poems in which each stanza or each line has a certain independence in itself — such poems make good line-a-person or “individual sequence” work. Some lyrics may be spoken in unison but it is necessary to be very careful in the choice of lyrics. For unison speech it is best to choose poems that have some predominating value, those of melody, rhythm, prevailing emotions, strongly contrasted moods, or pictures or thought and feeling moving to a climax.

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14 Cecile de Banke, "Notes on the Verse-Speaking Choir," The Harvard Teachers Record (1934), 150.
Poetry with an individual rather than general point of view does not make good material. "The purely personal, the introspective, and subtly worded poem should never be used." The sonnet is too personal in content to be used. An attempt to use it in choral speaking would result in harm rather than good.

For members of the choir who have dramatic ability, there are dramatic parts in the old ballads and also choric dramas written especially for choric utterance, for example, Culbin Sands, by Gordon Bottomley.

Greek dramas translated by Dr. Gilbert Murray are excellent for choric speech. Some English dramas are equally good. Scenes from Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest are examples of these.

Prose material is seldom used in choric speech; one reason for this is that suitable prose is hard to find. Some one has divided all literature into two classes, one to inspire, the other to instruct. It is the inspirational type of prose that furnishes material for choric speech. Some prose has its own rhythm which is determined by the mood of the selection. This rhythm is less definite than the rhythm found in poetry. In selecting prose for choral speaking the leader must recognize the rhythm of each selection. The Bible is an excellent source for prose to be used in choric speech. The following passages are taken from a list of selections for use in the choric speaking of prose:

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When a verse-speaking choir is planning a public performance the question of stage setting arises. It is the opinion of some authorities that colored lights and similar devices detract from the real performance of verse speaking. Others quite as competent to judge think such additions to the performance are very effective. It is only by experience that we can really judge for ourselves as to the advisability of using such devices; however, it is the writer's opinion that anything spectacular is not in keeping with the true intent and purpose of choral reading.

There is a difference of opinion among writers on the subject as to whether teachers should plan for public presentations of programs in verse speaking. A selection finished to the point of artistry capable of being appreciated

\[\textbf{Keppie, op. cit., pp. 38.}\]
by an audience requires a large amount of time. Also there
would be a tendency to select the best speakers to take
part in the program. This is a custom followed in other
speech activities from which the verse-speaking choir movement
intends to get away. Since one of its purposes is to give the
ordinary child a chance to express himself, it will be neces-
sary to lower the quality of the group product rather than
sacrifice the individual. Will the choir leader be willing
to make this sacrifice if she brings her production to
public performance?

On the other hand public presentation of verse-speaking
choirs has served a great purpose (and will continue to do
so) in forwarding the movement which is yet new and in need
of stimulation or advertisement. It is an incentive to a
class to do their best if they have an audience, even of
another group of children. There is a psychological value
in knowing a task has been creditably finished; this assurance
they will have from their audience when a program in verse-
speaking has been well given.

In spite of the fact that some of the best authorities
on the subject say no public performance should be given and
no stage settings be used, we must credit other leaders and
observers with knowing what they are about when they report
enthusiastic receptions of programs given by their speech
choirs. Just as each group must make its own anthology, so
must they decide for themselves whether they have the time,
ability, and inclination to present a public program.
It is the writer's belief that much good can be accomplished in the classroom with groups and leaders who have neither the desire nor the ability to present a program on the stage. Without taking extra time for drill or for stage settings a group may have the joy of choral reading and their activity may serve as a revelation of beauty to an occasional school or parent organization. This should be the extent of the entertainment function of the great majority of verse-speaking choirs. However, this takes none of the privileges from the director who is trained in speech and the talented members of his choir. They have a duty to the public to perform which should not be overlooked or denied.
CHAPTER V

EVALUATION

The question of values and definite results is one of extreme importance. If time is to be spent in a certain activity, there must be proof that it is well spent. Values as set forth in magazine articles and books written by directors and observers on the subject of verse-speaking are numerous and convincing enough for the most skeptical.

Is the activity worthy of a place in our school curriculum? What does it do that is not being done otherwise? What definite and good results may we logically expect from the organization and development of verse-speaking choirs?

It compares favorably with a singing choir in developing team spirit for a unified product; it is like the school play so far as it causes a sense of responsibility to the group; it can be compared to school athletics since the individual is submerged in the group, and credit does not come directly to the individual but to the class. "So from the ethical view-point we secure self-discipline, impersonal interest, sacrifice and joy in the success of others, as great as the satisfaction in one's own achievement." 1

There is also a question of individual development to be considered. The student is improved in speech habits by the constant demand of the activity for good speech. He

has opened to him a new door of appreciation of good literature. He learns to be discriminating in his taste, to be skilled in his selection of the best.

Timid persons who have been held back by fears and complexes, those who can not sing, who have not dramatic ability to act even on an amateur stage, or speaking ability to serve on a debating team, all these may yet find a satisfying self-expression in choral reading. By this means they find that they can really do something with poetry, for none of these limitations are serious in this activity. They have the joy of doing their part in this new program of verse speaking.2

Their success in this group activity carries over into their individual lives giving them new confidence in their own ability.

It has been put on record by teachers who have used choral speaking that results have been very satisfactory, not only because of improved diction and tone, but because of the enjoyment the children have in expressing together rhythm, rhyme, and vivid word pictures. They have a desire to learn more and more poetry on their own account. What they have learned to do well in group speaking they take pride in speaking individually. These teachers' records show that (1) the children speak more accurately, (2) they memorize more quickly, (3) they

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2 Ibid., pp. 12, 13.
learn much more poetry, (4) they respond to training in the use of tone to express meaning and feeling. Besides all this the child will have this store of jingles and ballads which he has learned in the group to serve as a foundation for his appreciation of literature when he goes exploring and learning of his own accord.

The enthusiasm aroused by this group activity is by no means to be overlooked; an enthusiasm which asks for more, and which causes memorization to take place without conscious effort; it also sends the members of the group in search of suitable material, thereby increasing their individual reading experience. As each poem is studied, the child may add a typed copy to his collection. When the term is completed, each member has his anthology finished. This he treasures as concrete evidence of an enjoyable activity. The list usually consists of from sixteen to twenty poems, as the finished product of one-half a school year.

Another value that children receive is a socializing one, causing them to be more friendly toward, and less critical of, another's efforts. They learn to see value in the interpretation of others while holding to their own. The children are drawn together in appreciation and understanding.

Next to children's verse-speaking, if not before it in importance, is the experience for adults. They need the

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release that abandonment to the poet's mood brings to the participant. Wherever an adult verse-speaking choir is presented in a platform performance, the reaction of the audience is to organize one for the same purpose. The values are quite marked in the case of adult members. They counteract the tendency in modern grown-ups to be anti-social, pre-occupied, and exclusive. Community groups may well extend their activities to include choric speech in order to combat these anti-American tendencies. Some adults suffer from timidity almost as much as children do. This activity affords a release from self-consciousness in their case also. Its inspirational and cultural value is much to be noted in producing literary appreciation and better articulation and pronunciation. In what better way could one spend his leisure than in a verse-speaking choir with a capable conscientious leader?

One of the values with which we must credit our verse-speaking choir is the ability to serve a whole group instead of a single individual. Practically it offers training in voice production, distinct articulation, and sensitive expression to every member of the group in about the same time in which one member could be taught. As time and training proceed a class will grow in sensitive response until the mood and music of poems can be artistically expressed.

It is a revelation for an observer to see the members of a class in choral speech projecting themselves into the mood of a poem; the writer saw this happen; she saw the children
literally place themselves under the spell of the poem in preparation for interpreting the thought. They lived the poetry; they experienced the mood of the author to the extent that their sensibilities were refined. Emotionally they were near the artistic plane of the poet himself.

There are some attendant dangers which, if not recognized and guarded against, will counteract some of the values of choric speech. The student should guard against straining the voice in an attempt at variety and volume of tone. He should not attempt a pitch too different from his normal tone. Imitation of voices and inflections will sometimes result in mechanical tones. Each person must keep his own individuality while blending his voice with the whole. The director must guard against discouragement of the less gifted of her class. Likewise, she must see that the over-confident student does not dominate the group. The leader of the class must constantly watch for the right material. If she does not choose and use her material correctly, she will do harm rather than good. She must use care in interpretation, in treatment of rhythm, and in breaking up the stanzas for group speaking. She must never vary in technique for the sake of variety alone.

When movement is used, it must not be allowed to dominate the words. There are two dangers concerning this of which the leader should be warned. One is hammering out the beats to strong movement, destroying the color and life of the words; the other is that of making the movement so elaborate
that the children speak carelessly and almost inaudibly, being confused by the variety of movements. These are difficulties created by subordinating words to movement -- a serious mistake.  

Dullness of tone is another danger to be avoided -- the speaking of every poem in exactly the same way, regardless of mood. Sound at the expense of sense leads to singing the words. The group must steer clear of the use of heavy, labored utterance instead of a light delicate pace. To remedy or avoid this, practice lightly using firm articulation.  

To cope with difficulties, puzzling questions, and new experiences, to realize the values necessary for success -- this is a work for the energetic, wide-awake lover of poetry and humanity. 

In summary, there are three values in choric speech which are outstanding. They are enhanced appreciation of literature, speech training, and social values. The third is almost wholly incidental in the sense that it is an outcome that will be realized, regardless of whether the first or second value is considered paramount. As between the first and second values the importance of each will depend upon

the leader of the class. If he is a speech specialist, he will probably look upon the procedure as a means of teaching speech. On the other hand the teacher of literature may look upon it as a means of teaching appreciation.

The study and experience of the writer seem to justify the belief that choric speech is a valuable device, even if used solely for the purpose of increasing the literary appreciation of the participants. To make choral speaking of the most value in regular English courses, the teacher chooses material which will appeal to the class and, at the same time, by its increasing literary quality, will bring the students to a higher appreciation of all the various types of poetry and rhythmic prose.

The fact that the movement has gained ground so rapidly of late indicates that it is more than a passing fad; it is an activity being used to solve many problems of the teachers of English and related subjects. It seems almost a certainty that it will eventually win a regular place in the curriculum of many American schools.
APPENDIX A

OBSERVATIONS AND EXPERIMENTS CONDUCTED
IN CONNECTION WITH THIS STUDY

On June 15, 1936, I began an experiment in choral speaking in the Training School of the Western Kentucky State Teachers College with Miss Mary Frances Eaton's class of seventh grade boys and girls, fourteen in number, about equally divided as to sex, and with little range in age.

Lesson One

This lesson was used as a poetry appreciation exercise. I read poems from A. A. Milne, using few comments except introductory ones concerning the poet and his little son, who was the direct inspiration of the poems. The poems used were "Sneezles," "Binker," "The Mirror," "The Wrong House," and "At the Zoo." Pictures in the poetry book and a few leading questions were used to draw out comment. The response was very good. "At the Zoo" contains a simple refrain, and at the second reading the class was asked to tap out the rhythm with their fingers, while I led in the movement. A few responded. On the third reading a heartier response was given. This consumed our period of twenty minutes.

Lesson Two

At the second meeting I gave a quick review of the poems used the day before. As a background for the real lesson a poem from the same author was read; then the business of trying
to get on with a verse-speaking choir began. "Shoes and Stockings," by A. A. Milne, was used because of its distinct rhythm in the refrain. In directing, I stood before the class keeping time to the lines as I read. Each time the refrain was repeated the children joined in, first by tapping out the rhythm, then by repeating the words, "Hammer, hammer, hammer," suitting their movements to the words. Of course the first trial was far from a unified success, the children showing by their hesitancy in keeping time that the rhythm in poetry had heretofore escaped their observation or at least their thoughtful consideration. It was an entirely new experience for both teacher and pupils. My task would have been lightened considerably if I had had the poem memorized at the first presentation. Carbon copies of the poem had been prepared for each pupil and student teacher in the room. These were passed out and the pupils allowed to read the lines together, the boys reading the first stanza and the girls, the second. This was a step which they were not expected to take very successfully, so the result was not a disappointment. The whole period of fifteen minutes served only to break the ice and to free our craft for future travel. I noticed on the second morning the need for socializing. The boys were too critical of the girls' efforts.

Lesson Three

At this time I began the lesson by offering a partial explanation of what we were doing. I only told them that
it was a new way of reading poetry, so new that it had been
done in America only a short while. They took up "Shoes and
Stockings" and handled it with better success than at the
previous meeting. They kept together and really tried to get
the desired effect. We used one other poem, "Rookety Coo,"
selected for its easy refrain. I read the lines, the class
joining in the refrain which had been previously copied on
the board. They enjoyed imitating the pigeon; one little
boy said he was sorry for the time to be up; another called
for "Binker," a poem used at the first meeting. We closed
with a promise to let them try "Binker" next time, and a
suggestion that they might bring to class any poem with a
refrain which they wished the group to try out.

Lesson Four
At this time there were expressions of the class wanting
more choral reading, wishing we could meet every day. The
time was taken up with "Binker," and "Rookety Coo." We made
only a start on "The Road to Town." Our allotted time was
up before we made very much progress on the last mentioned poem.

Lesson Five
"The Road to Town" was taken up first. Reading the first
two lines of each stanza, I asked the pupils to join me on the
last three lines. The purpose in this was to begin slowly at
first and increase the tempo each time the refrain was read,
until the reading of the refrain and the preceding line be-
came very rapid. The success with this was not very marked,
but considering all the conditions present, it was not at all discouraging. As a little variation from asking the children to respond, three short poems from *Under the Tree*, by Elizabeth Madox Roberts, were read. These poems were read to illustrate a quiet, dreamy mood. Then as it was time in the experiment to start the antiphonal work, we tried "The Dandelion," the boys asking the questions and the girls responding. This poem did not call forth very much enthusiasm. One of the girls had brought a book to school containing poems which she thought suitable for refrain reading. The period was closed with a promise to read one of her poems on Wednesday.

**Lesson Six**

The book mentioned above was a collection of Riley's poems, a number of which contain refrains. They, of course, are in dialect which is not considered suitable for group reading, but as "Our Hired Girl" was asked for, it was read and the class joined in with a will on the refrain. Then the real lesson, which proved to be the most interesting of all, began, when I (as previously arranged) asked Dr. Earl A. Moore to direct the class. His introduction of "The Road to Town" gained for him at once the interested attention of the whole room. He varied the tempo from very slow to very fast, and made other interesting variations and interpretations. The children were highly pleased and showed their appreciation by clapping.
Lesson Seven

Poems differing in mood from any previously used were passed out and read antiphonally. "Cheek," by James Stephens, was used first, then "Someone," by Walter de la Mare. A feeling of quietude, of stillness and darkness, and of imaginary noises was awakened. The poems were not of a type to call forth enthusiasm, but the class responded fairly well to the mood and the mental pictures.

Lesson Eight

We thought best to make this lesson a review, allowing the children to call for their preference. "Binker" was first on the list; "Rookety Coo" and "Shoes and Stockings" were called for. The responses were made without the typed copies. The results showed that the memorizing had been accurate, and considering it had been unconsciously done, to this particular phase of the work we must ascribe success at this stage of the experiment. The time was consumed before we had reviewed our repertoire. At each successive class meeting there was evidence of a genuine and growing appreciation for literature.

Lesson Nine

"Bingo," from Miss Keppie's selections in Teaching of Choric Speech, was introduced. A marked enthusiasm was present in the suggestions of different ways of presenting the lines. The time was about equally divided between reading for appreciation only and choral reading. Time so used is well spent, for a class needs a wide acquaintance with poetry to be able
to judge and appreciate. These two objectives were kept steadily in mind during the experiment.

**Lesson Ten**

This class period was spent with a new poem from *Poetry Speaking for Children*, by Gullan and Gurry. The poem was "Once I Saw a Little Boat" by Laura E. Richards. It had previously been typed so that a copy could be furnished each child. It was first used for refrain speaking only; then it was used for group and refrain speaking, one group taking the narrative, other groups speaking for the fish, and the whole class coming in on the refrain. Our time had been used, but under an insistent invitation from the group, Dr. Moore led the class in reading "The Road to Town" much to the delight of those participating. The meeting ended several minutes past our allotted time, but we carried with us the feeling of something done that was well worth while.

**Lesson Eleven**

This being the first day of the last week of our experiment, we thought best to spend the time in review. In this way memory work could be tested. After two readings of the long poem "Once I Saw a Little Boat" in the same way as it had been previously done, "Some One" by Walter de la Mare was reviewed and also "Shoes and Stockings" by A. A. Milne. The majority of the class could speak the two shorter poems without the assistance of a written copy. The writer in directing used her own voice just enough to give them confidence in
starting a stanza. Sometimes the start was made with only
the beating of the rhythm by the leader.

Lesson Twelve

On the following day in my absence, Miss Mary Frances
Eaton reviewed the class on poems they had already had, using
about thirty-five minutes in the exercise. The children were
asked to do without copies of all the short poems in order
to test the amount of memorizing that had been accomplished.
This extra period was used to compensate for the short time
(four weeks) available for the experiment.

Lesson Thirteen

In this period we took the class over more review work
using all the poems possible in a twenty-minute period. In
spite of the extreme heat of the day and the lassitude neces-
sarily attending it, the pupils showed very good interest and
kept together well for their stage of advancement.

Lesson Fourteen

On July 10, we met the class for the last time completing
fourteen periods in four weeks. "We were granted all the time
that we could use. Some reading for appreciation was used,
and reviews of selections previously read and spoken. Dr.
Moore, who had been present at most of our meetings, lending
encouragement by his presence and timely suggestions, pleased
the class by taking them through some varied exercises on
their favorite selection, "The Road to Town." The student
teachers were given the opportunity to speak for one group
in the group speaking. The time passed so quickly that forty minutes were consumed without our becoming tired of experimenting with our beginning choir. The whole procedure was, of course, only a beginning, but, at the same time, the experiment was carried far enough to show some of the values of choral speaking.

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In preparation for this experiment I had access to certain magazine articles and a few especially helpful books. Also, I had the experience of three observation lessons which were given by three different verse-speaking choirs in Louisville, Kentucky.

At Miss Eaton's request Miss Bonnie Howard, Supervisor of Intermediate Grades, Louisville City Schools, made arrangements for these demonstrations to be given for our benefit. We observed in the sixth grade and second grade rooms of the Belknap School and in the fifth grade of Beechmont School. Of course we observed the technique being used; we saw the anthologies which the children had made themselves by taking the typed copies furnished them as they studied each poem, and placing them in suitable blank books. We noted the kind of poems; A. A. Milne and Walter de la Mare seemed to be quite the favorite authors. The children reported the number of poems they had learned. One of the children announced each selection before it was read. We were shown how to start a poem and many other details. But the greatest thing,
the most surprising thing, was the enthusiastic enjoyment
the children were getting out of the activity. One grade
was demonstrating in a most delightful manner when it was time
for their play; another grade cheerfully showed us how they
did choral reading while their lunch hour waited for them.
The second grade would scarcely let us leave the room because
every one was so anxious to show what he could do. Such
enthusiasm is contagious. Miss Howard’s enthusiasm was almost
as great as the children’s. We came away very grateful for
the opportunity of seeing the possibilities of choral speaking.

As we do not have the power to go back and live over
what is already past, the next best thing is to look back, see
our mistakes and profit by them. In this particular case I
have in mind some things I could have done better in the ex-
periment just completed. I think that too little time was
spent in getting recognition of rhythm. We should have "made
haste slowly." Another time I should take a different poem
first, one not especially for the refrain but for definite
rhythm. I should use "finger tipping" and insist upon its
being accurately done. I should use only one, possibly two
phases of speaking in fourteen lessons of twenty minutes each.
I should try more for response to rhythm by bodily movement.
I should like to have students with whom I worked other parts
of the day. I would not use so many different poems but would
try to have a few finished poems, rather than the experience
of having tried a large number.

As far as increased appreciation of literature and
Increased memorization are concerned, the experiment was comparatively successful. We did not expect finished products in four weeks.

The children were interested in the poems presented; they wanted more class periods and longer ones, and so expressed themselves. They were responsive to all requests made. They memorized without conscious effort five short poems and parts of the two long poems attempted. The other poems read and practiced lightly were for variety, appreciation, and the additional experience they offered. The experiment was also helpful in enunciation, especially when we were working on group speaking.

From time to time we had observers, some of whom were interested enough to plan the organization of verse-speaking choirs in their own schools. If no other good had been accomplished, I should feel in this way amply repaid for my efforts. To be instrumental in forwarding, even in a small way, a movement of such vital importance as choral speaking is to me distinctly a privilege.
APPENDIX B

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Note: In the following list of references the items which were available for use in this study are marked with asterisks (*).


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