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Major Differences in the Home Environment of Top-ranking and Bottom-ranking Students of English at South Dakota State College

by Marion Hvistendahl

MAJOR DIFFERENCES IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT OF TOP-RANKING AND BOTTOM-RANKING STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AT SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COLLEGE

BY

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MAJOR DIFFERENCES IN THE HOME ENVIRONMENT
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This thesis is approved as a creditable, independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Science, and is acceptable as meeting the thesis requirements for this degree, but without implying that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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INTRODUCTION

A three-part study of the background and preparation in English of selected students at South Dakota State College was made possible in 1962 by a grant from the South Dakota State College Institutional Fund for Research and Related Activities. The three main areas of the study were to deal with "a) the student's home environment, b) the student's high school environment and instructional pattern, and c) selected student's later evaluation of these factors."[1]

The study of the student's high school environment and instructional pattern (area b above) has been completed and its findings were incorporated in the thesis, Major Differences Between Ten Top-Ranking and Ten Bottom-Ranking South Dakota High Schools: A Study of English, by Phyllis Bonner Weichenthal in June, 1962.

The study in the present thesis deals with the student's home environment (area a above). The purpose is to discover and analyze significant differences in the home environment of top-ranking students and bottom-ranking students in English selected from ten top-ranking and ten bottom-ranking South Dakota high schools.

The "Application for Funds From Research Committee" describes the purpose:

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[1] C. M. Fox and M. L. Shane, "Application for Funds From Research Committee," South Dakota State College English Department, October 15, 1961, p. 2.

> It is the purpose of this project to analyze in depth the pre-college profile of selected S.D.S.C. students and the relationship of these profiles to success and failure in College Freshman English.
>
> The basic premise of the project will be that as yet unidentified or unisolated factors in students' backgrounds play a large part in their success or failure in college freshman English--and in later work calling for the possession of skills and the general maturity implied in the freshman English credits. The purpose of the work will be to discover, isolate, and describe the premised factors; and to prepare material concerning them to be communicated to the college (especially to the English Department) and to the people of the state (to parents, students, superintendents, school boards, teachers, legislators), the form of the prepared material to be typical but anonymous profiles of students prepared by their backgrounds for success or for failure in college freshman English. Ability and intangibles of motivation will not, of course, be overlooked in the profiles, but the search will be for an accurate picture of other governing factors in the environment.[2]

This study has been exploratory, to try to isolate areas of the home environment that appear significant in determining the success or failure of students in English in order that further, more detailed research may be done in these areas.

In addition to discovering significant differences in the home environments of top-ranking and bottom-ranking students, the study emphasizes factors in the background of students which may be helpful to college English teachers in South Dakota in understanding the home environment from which their students come.

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[2] Ibid.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Possibly because of the difficulty in developing reliable and valid measurements, the relationship of the home environment to the success or failure of students has not been explored extensively. The home interview method of questioning was not found in any of the literature reviewed, probably because of the time and expense involved.

The need for studies considering the environmental and personality factors in students' scholastic performance, however, is receiving increasing attention. R. M. W. Travers, commenting on the plethora of studies which evaluate tests for predicting scholastic achievement, decried the actual contribution these studies have made. He continued:

> The viewpoint behind these studies needs to be examined for it is based on the assumption that the individual's own characteristics are entirely responsible for his success or failure and that the person who has the right attitude will inevitably succeed. This idealistic viewpoint hardly seems tenable in our type of society where unplanned events are likely to influence a person's entire career. The extent to which such factors influence achievement has not yet been determined, but it is reasonable to hypothesize that their effect is considerable. . . .
>
> . . . there is need of a new trend in the approach to the study of predicting achievement. First, there is need of knowledge on the extent to which commonly occurring variations in the student's environment affect the achievement of various outcomes. Second, much more information is needed concerning the outcomes that any program of teaching is designed to achieve, and valid measures must be developed for each of these outcomes. When such basic steps have been taken, the time will be ripe for the preparation of new tests to predict achievement.[3]

The importance of the home environment has also been stressed by E. Ginzberg, Director of the Conservation of Human Resources Project,

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[3] R. M. W. Travers, "The Prediction of Achievement," School and Society, LXX (1949), pp. 293-294.

who said, "Education begins in and is largely limited by the home. . . . How the child responds to school will depend in large measure on the attitude of his parents toward education. If they ignore or deprecate it, the child is likely to respond accordingly."[4]

Although no studies were found in which the home environment was analyzed by means of a personal interview in the home, studies have probed the home environment with the use of questionnaires filled out by students or by the parents. A study by Richard Harvey Monk attempted to ascertain which environmental factors, if any, appear to be associated with school achievement.[5] The information was based on questionnaires answered by 700 seventh-grade pupils in Burnaby, B. C.

The students were grouped into high and low achievers in composition on the basis of three sample compositions. The results of the questionnaire were compared in the two groups to determine significant factors. Dr. Monk found that children who read extensively, whose parents did a considerable amount of reading, and whose homes were well supplied with books tended to be superior writers. The amount of reading done seemed to have more influence than the type of reading. Achievement tended to be higher when the father was employed in business, managerial or professional positions. Whether or not the mother was employed apparently had little influence. The recreational activities of parents

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[4]E. Ginzberg, "Problems in Developing Human Potential," Teachers College Record, LVIII (November, 1956), p. 82.

[5]Richard Harvey Monk, A Study to Determine the Relationship Between Children's Home Environments and Their School Achievement in Written English, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Washington, 1958.

also had little relationship to pupil achievement, nor did parents' participation in community work. Other factors found to be unrelated were physical handicaps, school attendance record, and foreign language background.

Mailed questionnaires were used in a study of the family background of 456 gifted children in Cleveland, Ohio.[6] Although no attempt was made to determine whether students in the present study were gifted (i.e., I.Q. of 120 and over), some of the findings of the study made by W. B. Barbe are pertinent. He found that 21.8 per cent were only children and 42.6 per cent had only one sibling; 52.5 per cent were first born and 29 per cent were second among the children. Regarding the occupational level of the father, 40.3 per cent were in the professional and managerial group, only 0.2 per cent were in agriculture, but 30 per cent were in the laboring class.

R. J. Havighurst, reporting on a study of the sixth-grade children in the public schools of a medium-sized midwestern city, concluded that socio-economic status alone does not determine good and poor environment for mental growth.

> Whenever a very bright boy or girl is discovered in a family of low economic status, it turns out that this family has unusual characteristics which give the youth an advantage. These characteristics may consist of thrift and ambition or of an interest on the part of the mother or father in literature, art, or science.[7]

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[6] W. B. Barbe, "Study of the Family Background of the Gifted," Journal of Educational Psychology, XXXVII (May, 1956), pp. 302-309.

[7] R. J. Havighurst, "Conditions Productive of Superior Children," Teachers College Record, LXII (April, 1961), p. 526.

In general it was found that the mentally superior children tended to come from urban and suburban communities rather than rural communities. The general conclusions of the study were that boys and girls were mentally superior because of one of the following:

> (1) A home and school environment which stimulated them to learn and to enjoy learning; (2) parents and other significant persons who set examples of interest and attainment in education which the children unconsciously imitated; and (3) early family training which produced a desire for achievement in the child. When these influences act upon a child with average or better biological equipment for learning, the child will become mentally superior.[8]

Raymond Linn Kirk, Jr., analyzed statistically 16 variables in an effort to isolate demographic factors in over-achievers and under-achievers in engineering. In selecting these variables, Kirk said:

> Throughout the usual student's life he has lived in a dependent status. He is pretty much what his environment has made of him when he enters college. . . . When the student enters college, he brings with him all of this past learning, putting it together in an effort to succeed in school.[9]

The data Kirk used included veteran status, travel experience, types of residence, marital status, age upon entering college, present home address, mother's education, father's education, father's occupation, number of siblings, location of high school, student's rank in school, size of high school, vocational choice, and religious affiliation. His most significant findings were that over-achievers tended to come from larger families and more of them were married students. Kirk's study has been cited because of the overlapping with the present study of some of

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Raymond Linn Kirk, Jr., Demographic Factors in Over-Achievers and Under-Achievers in Engineering, Master's Thesis, North Carolina State College, 1956, p. 7.

the areas of investigation. There have been voluminous studies of gifted children and over-achievers and under-achievers, but since in the present study the students were not selected on the basis of being gifted or over- or under-achievers, only those studies which have been concerned with the home environment have been considered here.

William D. Sheldon and Lawrence Carrillo conducted a study sponsored by eight school systems in central New York and the Reading Laboratory of the School of Education of Syracuse University.[10] This study dealt with the relation of parents, home, and certain developmental characteristics to children's reading ability. Ten per cent of student population of these schools, or 868 students, were studied. The teachers selected five per cent who were poor readers and five per cent who were good readers. One part of the study was a questionnaire filled out by parents which consisted of nine pages of questions covering areas of "environmental history, developmental history, emotional development, educational history, and physical growth and health background."[11] No home interviews were conducted.

Sheldon and Carrillo found the following factors definitely related to the reading ability of the child:

a) Size of family. The smaller the family, excepting only children, the greater the per cent of good readers.

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[10] William D. Sheldon and Lawrence Carrillo, "Relation of Parents, Home, and Certain Developmental Characteristics to Children's Reading Ability," Elementary School Journal, LII (January, 1952), p. 262-270.

[11] Ibid., p. 263.

b) Position in the family. Excepting only children, the earlier the ordinal position in the family, the higher the per cent of good readers. /Interestingly enough the per cent of good readers among only children was evenly distributed between the good, average, and poor readers./

c) Number of books in the home. As the home library increases, the per cent of good readers increases.

d) Educational level of the parents. Good readers come more often from homes where the parents have reached higher levels of educational attainment.

e) Like or dislike of school by the child. Good readers tend to like school; poor readers tend to dislike school.[12]

The present study differs from others that have been reviewed in that it deals with the success or failure of students in English and that the questionnaire was completed in a personal home interview. This afforded the opportunity to gather information and gauge attitudes and environmental conditions which might not be reflected in answers to questions in a mailed questionnaire. The studies reviewed were not directed specifically to success or failure in college English, but they do indicate areas of influence in related fields of education.

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[12] Ibid., p. 269.

GATHERING DATA

In order that correlation might be made between certain factors in this study and with that completed by Mrs. Weichenthal, this study dealt with the parents of students at South Dakota State College who had graduated from the 20 high schools selected in Mrs. Weichenthal's thesis. The total number of students from these high schools who had attended South Dakota State College during the five-year period, from the fall of 1955 through the fall of 1959, was 785.

In an effort to integrate the two remaining areas of the research project (the student's home environment and the student's evaluation of both home and school environment), the universe was narrowed to students from these high schools who were enrolled at South Dakota State College during the spring quarter of 1962. Since the interviewing of the students was to be done on campus, this restriction appeared necessary. This reduced the number of students from 785 to 187.

Using only those students who were still attending college seemed one way to control, as much as possible, intelligence as one of the variables contributing to the student's success or failure in English. The assumption is that the bottom-ranking students were intelligent enough to stay in college despite their difficulties in English. This study attempted to isolate factors <u>other than intelligence</u> which may have contributed to the students' performance in English.

In order that a new variable would not be introduced, the students whose home environments were to be studied were selected using the same criteria that had been used to select the schools in the original study.

The three factors were the student's American Council on Education Psychological Examination (1954 edition) total percentile (hereafter referred to as A. C. E. Test), the South Dakota State College English placement score percentile, and the grade-point average in freshman English for a minimum of one quarter and a maximum of three quarters at South Dakota State College.[13] If data from any of these three sources were lacking for a student, that student was eliminated as a possible subject of study.

A rank order was established for each student by ranking each student individually by his A. C. E. percentile, his English placement percentile, and his grade point average in freshman English. Thus a ranking order was established in each of the three categories. The ranking order of each student was then added to give each student a relative total rank with relation to the other students. Using this total rank number, the 42 top-ranking and 42 bottom-ranking students were selected. This provided 84 home interviews, if every home were to be reached.

The interviewer was interested in evaluating the over-all home environment without the personal bias of prior knowledge of top-ranking and bottom-ranking students. Therefore, once the 84 students had been selected, the interviewer prepared a list of the students with their parents' names and addresses but without any indication of the student's

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[13] For the rationale behind the selection of these factors as the criteria to be used, see Phyllis Bonner Weichenthal, Major Differences Between Ten Top-Ranking and Ten Bottom-Ranking South Dakota High Schools: A Study of English, Master's Thesis, South Dakota State College, June, 1962, pp. 20-23.

ranking or the ranking of the high school from which he graduated. Several months elapsed from the time the students were selected until the home interviews were conducted, a sufficient time to erase most of the rankings from memory. (It was impossible to completely eliminate interviewer bias because several of the parents and a few of the students' records were familiar to the interviewer.)

The first contact with the parents was a letter (Appendix B) informing them that a research project was in progress in which they had been selected to be interviewed. In this letter a time and date was suggested for the interview, and a postcard enclosed for the parent to indicate that the date was satisfactory or to suggest another time. Less than half of the postcards were returned. However, the interviewer assumed that the suggested time would be satisfactory unless the card had been returned indicating another time. The parents often seemed reluctant to be interviewed. However, if the interviewer succeeded in locating one of the parents, she was in no instance refused an interview. Of the possible 84 interviews, 82 were completed.[14] Even though the letters had elicited a poor return, they served as a good introduction and helped secure entry into the home.

If possible, the interviewer talked to both parents. A breakdown of the interviews completed is shown in Table 1.

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[14]Of the two interviews not completed, one family had moved out of the state; the father in the other home had suffered a heart attack and the mother wrote that an interview was impossible. Both were homes of bottom-ranking students.

Table 1. Breakdown of Interviews

	Top-ranking	Bottom-ranking	Total
Number of families	42	40	82
Number of mothers interviewed	40	39	79
Number of fathers interviewed	12	9*	21
Total number of parents interviewed	52**	48	100

*An older brother was interviewed in one home as the father was dead and the mother was living away from home.
**Four parents of students in the top-ranking group had moved out of the area and returned their questionnaires through the mail.

Statistically each home was regarded as one unit. Therefore, if both parents were interviewed their response was still counted as one. If the parents disagreed in their answers, each of the two categories of their response was credited with .5. This was done so that each home would receive proper weight.

The name of the student or the parents did not appear on the questionnaire, and the interviewer assured the parents that all replies were confidential and would never be associated with their student's name. A brief explanation was given of the study of the high schools which preceded this study but without disclosing that of the 20 high schools studied, 10 had been bottom-ranking and 10 top-ranking. The interviewer explained that parents of a selected group of students from the 20 high schools who had attended South Dakota State College spring quarter of 1962 were being interviewed. The parents were not told that these groups of students constituted the top-ranking and bottom-ranking students in English from these 20 high schools.

When possible, the interviewer seated herself so that the parent(s) would not see the questionnaire. This prevented them from choosing answers from the questionnaire rather than formulating their own answers. The questions were largely open-end questions which the interviewer coded, for the most part, at the time of the interview. Some of the questions were merely lead-in questions (such as questions 4 and 8) and no attempt was made to codify the responses. Item 74 contained a check list evaluation of home environment which was based on observable data and general impressions. It was an attempt by the interviewer to present an over-all appraisal of the home conditions which had not been covered directly in the questionnaire. This check list was completed shortly after the interview. Shorthand notes taken during the interview were an aid in preparing the check list.

Answers requiring more than a simple check on the questionnaire were taken in shorthand so that the speed of the interview was not interrupted. In this way the parents were not given the opportunity to become nervous anticipating the next question. By taking shorthand notes it was also possible to indicate environmental conditions that could be described later under the check list in item 74. In situations where the parent and interviewer were sitting adjacent, it also prevented the parent from observing what was being recorded.

Interviewing time varied from half an hour to an hour and a half. The interviewer attempted to pace the interview to the desires of the parent(s). Frequently the actual interview was followed by coffee, which afforded the interviewer the time and opportunity for additional insight into the family background.

EVALUATION OF DATA

The project was an exploratory attempt to probe areas that might expose significant variables in the home environment of bottom-ranking and top-ranking students of English. Not all of the information collected is evaluated in this thesis. Some questions did not yield useful data. The results of some were so indeterminate that they made even the most modest generalization risky; this was particularly true of questions requiring a recall from many years ago. Also, variables which might show a correlation with Mrs. Weichenthal's research have been left for an over-all evaluation when the project has been completed. All raw data, including questionnaires and original charts, are available in the English Department at South Dakota State College. The questionnaire used is found in Appendix A, and those questions which have been evaluated in this thesis are starred.

To determine the possible significance of differences in response between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups, the raw scores were converted into percentiles because the numbers of the two groups were not equal (there were 42 interviews in the top-ranking group and 40 in the bottom-ranking group). In those areas in which there appeared the possibility of a significant difference, the chi-square analysis was used. The formula applied was:

$$x^2 = \frac{N\,(ad-bc)^2}{(a+b)(c+d)(a+c)(b+d)}$$

In accordance with the generally accepted practice, for the purposes of this thesis, the boundary line between significance and non-significance

was the 0.05 probability level. Therefore, if the probability is that the difference could have appeared by chance more than five chances out of a hundred, it is assumed that a significant difference does not exist in the two groups on that particular item.[15]

The stability of the family environmental pattern is brought out in Tables 2-6. The deep roots many of these students have in South Dakota is indicated by the fact that of the parents in both groups of students, 69 per cent were born in South Dakota (Table 2). The relative stability of families in both groups is revealed in Table 3. During the time the student lived at home, over 47 per cent of the families of students in the top-ranking group and 60 per cent of the families of students in the bottom-ranking group moved once or not at all. (This is a factor which might be remembered by English teachers when new or different cultural concepts are being introduced into the classroom.) In seven of the homes visited one parent was dead; in one home the parents were separated. There were no divorces.

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[15] For further information on the logic and technique of the chi-square analysis, see Robert Ferber, Statistical Techniques in Market Research. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1949, pp. 260-267. In a few problems requiring a 3-by-2 contingency table, the following formula was used:

$$x^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{5} \left[\frac{(X_i - \theta_i)^2}{\theta_i} \right]$$

Table 2. Geographic Origin of Parents and Grandparents

	Place of birth											
	South Dakota				Foreign born				Other states			
	Top		Bottom		Top		Bottom		Top		Bottom	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Mother	32	76.1	30	75.0	3	7.1	1	2.5	7	16.6	9	22.5
Father	26	61.9	26	65.0	1	2.3	3	7.5	15	35.7	11	27.5
Maternal grandmother	12	28.5	14	35.0	11	26.1	10	25.0	19	45.2	16	40.0
Maternal grandfather	3	7.1	12	30.0	17	40.4	12	30.0	22	52.3	16	40.0
Paternal grandmother	8	19.0	13	32.5	17	40.4	8	20.0	17	40.4	19	47.5
Paternal grandfather	1	2.3	7	17.5	17	40.4	14	35.0	24	57.1	19	47.5

Table 3. Number of Times Family Moved While Student Lived at Home

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Never	12	28.5	14	35.0
Once	8	19.0	10	25.0
Twice	5	11.9	3	7.5
Three times	5	11.9	2	5.0
Four	1	2.3	4	10.0
Five or more	11*	26.1	7*	17.5
Total	42		40	

*In a comparison of the top- and bottom-ranking groups of those who had moved five or more times compared with those who had moved less than five times, the difference was found to be significant at the .30 level with one degree of freedom ($x^2 = 1.0$). Although the difference is marked, apparently it is not great enough to be considered a significant variable.

Tables 4 and 5 further reinforce the picture of the students' environmental stability. No significant differences between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups emerged in the number of different schools attended in grade school (61.9 per cent of the top-ranking group and 62.5 per cent of the bottom-ranking group attended only one grade school) or high school (95.2 per cent of the top-ranking group and 90 per cent of the bottom-ranking group attended only one high school). These factors suggest the hypothesis that frequent changes in schools are not a serious educational problem in South Dakota.

Table 4. Number of Grade Schools Attended by Student

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
1	26	61.9	25	62.5
2	8	19.0	8	20.0
3	4	9.5	3	7.5
4	1	2.3	3	7.5
5 or more	3	7.1	1	2.5
Total	42		40	

Table 5. Number of High Schools Attended by Student

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
1	40	95.2	36	90.0
2	2	4.7	4	10.0
Total	42		40	

The additional information that 90.4 per cent of the top-ranking students and 85 per cent of the bottom-ranking students attended college immediately after high school indicates that the range of their experiences, outside of South Dakota, is apt to be narrow. However, the travelling done by the families may provide a leavening influence, for over 46 per cent of the families of the top-ranking group and over 42 per cent of the families of the bottom-ranking group indicated they took frequent or regular family trips (Table 6). The figures may be misleading, for upon further questioning the general pattern of travel that emerged would frequently be one trip to the West Coast (to visit relatives) and other travel to nearer relatives or a lake. In addition, 11.9 per cent of the parents of students in the top-ranking group and 22.5 per cent of the parents of students in the bottom-ranking group indicated that they had done no family travelling. It does not add up to a cosmopolitan background. A frequent comment from parents was that the student had done more travelling since he had started college than he had ever done before.

Table 6. Extent of Family Travelling

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
None	5	11.9	9	22.5
Seldom	17	40.4	13	32.5
Frequent	11	26.1	7	17.5
Regularly (every year)	9	21.4	10	25.0
Other	0	0.0	1	2.5
Total	42		40	

Apparently the use of a foreign language in the home is not related to the success or failure of students in college English at South Dakota State College. In only 10 of the homes visited was a foreign language spoken (Table 7), and in only three of these homes was it used most of the time, including conversation with the children. Of these three, one home was in the top-ranking group and two in the bottom-ranking group. In one home the parents had been in this country for over 40 years but still conversed in their native language. Neither parent had attended school and the mother spoke very little English. Unquestionably in this home the language background was a contributing factor in the student's difficulty with English.

Table 7. Foreign Languages Spoken in Home

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
None	38	90.4	34	85.0
German	1	2.3	3	7.5
Scandinavian	2	4.7	2	5.0
Other	1	2.3	1	2.5
Total	42		40	

While some variations occurred in the pattern of the educational background of the mothers of students in the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups (Table 8), the differences between the two groups, comparing those who had completed high school or less with those who had

education beyond high school, was found to be not highly significant. (It could have occurred by chance alone 10 chances out of 100.)[16]

Table 8. Educational Background of Mother

Last grade completed:	Top-ranking Number	%	Bottom-ranking Number	%
Less than 4	0	0.0	2	5.0
4 - 8	5	11.9	5	12.5
9 - 10	4	9.5	6	15.0
11	1	2.3	1	2.5
12	12	28.5	14	35.0
13 - 14	13	30.9	6	15.0
15 - 16	5	11.9	3	7.5
Master's degree	1	2.3	1	2.5
Other	1	2.3	2	5.0
Total	42		40	

As indicated in Table 9, the employment of mothers away from home increased steadily as children approached college age in both the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups. The only significant difference occurs in the comparison of the mothers in the two groups who worked with those who did not work during the child's preschool years. In this item the difference is great enough that it would have occurred only 2 to 5 times out of 100 if left to chance. However, no significant difference was indicated between the mothers in the two groups in the

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[16] $x^2 = 2.7$, which is significant at .10 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

number employed away from home during the child's grade school and high school years.[17]

Table 9. Employment of Mother Away From Home

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
During child's preschool years	1*	2.3	6*	15.0
During child's grade school years	4	9.5	6	15.0
During child's high school years	9	21.4	9	22.5

* $x^2 = 5.8$, which is significant between .05 and .02 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

The average educational level for the fathers of students in the top-ranking group was 12.24 years and that of mothers was 12.40 years (almost identical with the fathers). In the bottom-ranking group, the average educational level for fathers was 10.02 years and for the mothers was 11.15 years. In the bottom-ranking group the mothers averaged over a year of schooling more than the fathers.

For statistical analysis the data on the educational background of the fathers (Table 10) were grouped to discover if there were significant differences between the fathers of top-ranking students and the fathers of bottom-ranking students who had completed the ninth grade or

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[17] A comparison of the mothers in the two groups employed away from home during the child's grade school years yielded $x^2 = .56$, which is between .50 and .30 level of significance. (It would have occurred 30 to 50 times out of 100 by chance alone.) Chi-square analysis was not applied to employment during child's high school years as the difference in the figures did not warrant it.

less and those who had completed the tenth grade or more. The difference was great enough that it would have occurred by chance only 2 to 5 times out of 100.[18] A comparison was also made of the fathers in the two groups who had a high school education or less with those who had education beyond high school. Again the difference between the fathers in the two groups would have occurred by chance alone only 2 to 5 chances out of 100.[19] These results support the findings of Sheldon and Carrillo that there is a significant relationship between reading ability and the educational level of the parents.

Table 10. Educational Background of Father

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
Last grade completed:	Number	%	Number	%
Less than 6	1	2.3	2	5.0
6 - 9	11	26.1	19	47.5
10 - 11	2	4.7	3	7.5
12	8	19.0	6	15.0
13 - 14	3	7.1	3	7.5
15 - 16	9	21.4	5	12.5
Master's degree	2	4.7	1	2.5
Ph.D.	1	2.3	0	0.0
Other	5*	11.9	1*	2.5
Total	42		40	

*In the top-ranking group these included aeronautical training (1), business college (2), diesel engineering (1), 1½ years of law beyond a Master's degree (1). In the bottom-ranking group one father had attended a technical school.

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[18] $x^2 = 4.8$, which is significant between the .05 and .02 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

[19] $x^2 = 4.5$, which is significant between the .05 and .02 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

Table 11. Occupation of Father

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Retired	2.0	4.7	1.0	2.5
Farmer	6.5*°	15.4	16.5*°	41.2
Self-employed	8.5*	20.2	4.5*	11.0
Employed in trade	17.0	40.4	14.0	35.0
Teacher	3.0	7.1	0.0	0.0
Other profession	3.0	7.1	1.0	2.5
Deceased	2.0	4.7	3.0	7.5
Total	42.0		40.0	

*In both groups one farmer was also self-employed: one in real estate, one in contracting.
°x^2 = 6.6, which is beyond the .01 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

The greatest difference in the occupational pattern of fathers of students in the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups appears in the category of farmer. Applying chi-square analysis to this item, it was found that only 1 time out of 100 would a difference this large be due to chance. This would suggest the hypothesis that the farm environment is not particularly conducive to developing the type of skills which are important to the successful student in English. On the basis of the interviews, the interviewer felt two factors were involved: the relative isolation of agricultural work provided little stimulus to the development of communication skills, and the relationship between the development of these skills and economic success in agricultural work is less marked than in most other types of employment. The family farm environment would appear to be more decisive in the overall profile of students who have difficulty with college English than is the type of grade school

attended (Table 22). The paucity of gifted students whose fathers were engaged in agriculture (.2 per cent), as indicated in Barbe's study, would support the hypothesis suggested here.

Since the apparent standard of living and economic status of the family were often not reflected by the reported net family farm income, and because the net income on the farm was not really comparable to net income of the salaried person, the interviewer separated income reports into farm and non-farm income.

For statistical analysis the income groups were divided into those under $4500 and those $4500 and over. The difference between the incomes in this grouping in the families of top-ranking and bottom-ranking students was not found to be highly significant in either the farm or the non-farm categories.[20]

Information on the size of the family and the student's rank among the children in the family (Tables 13 and 14) is useful in understanding the family background of the students, but no significant differences developed between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking students in either the number of children in the family or the student's ordinal rank among the siblings.

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[20]The difference between the families of top-ranking students and the families of bottom-ranking students in farm income $4500 and over compared with income under $4500 had a x^2 of 1.7, which is between .20 and .10 level of significance with one degree of freedom. In non-farm income, $x^2 = .5$, which is between .50 and .30 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

Table 12. Net Annual Family Income

	Farm				Non-farm			
	Top-r.		Bottom-r.		Top-r.		Bottom-r.	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Under $1500	0	0.0	1.0	2.5	0	0.0	1.0	2.5
1500 - 2499	1	2.3	1.0	2.5	2	4.7	1.0	2.5
2500 - 2999	0	0.0	1.0	2.5	0	0.0	0.0	0.0
3000 - 3499	1	2.3	1.0	2.5	0	0.0	2.0	5.0
3500 - 3999	3	7.1	0.0	0.0	2	4.7	0.0	0.0
4000 - 4499	0	0.0	1.0	2.5	2	4.7	2.0	5.0
4500 - 4999	1	2.3	3.0	7.5	1	2.3	3.0	7.5
5000 - 5999	0	0.0	1.0	2.5	6	14.2	2.0	5.0
6000 - 7499	1	2.3	1.0	2.5	4	9.5	4.0	10.0
7500 - 9999	0	0.0	1.0	2.5	9	21.4	3.0	7.5
10,000 and over	0	0.0	1.5	3.7	8	18.9	5.5	12.7
Total*	7		12.5		34		23.5	

* Five families did not indicate income.

Table 13. Number of Children in Family

Number of children	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
1	6*	14.2	2*	5.0
2	10	23.9	12	30.0
3	8	19.0	7	17.5
4	7	16.6	9	22.5
5	10	23.9	4	10.0
6 or more	1	2.3	6	15.0
Total	42		40	

* x^2 = 2.00, which is significant at between .20 and .10 level of significance with one degree of freedom. This is beyond the level considered significant in this thesis.

Table 14. Order of Student's Birth

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
First-born	25*	59.5	18*	45.0
Second	12	28.5	15	37.5
Third	1	2.3	2	2.5
Fourth	2	4.7	3	7.5
Fifth or more	2	4.7	2	5.0
Total	42		40	

* $x^2 = 1.7$, which is significant between the .20 and .10 level with one degree of freedom.

Questions on church membership and activity of parents in service clubs and fund drives yielded useful background information on the total pattern of family activities, but seemed to indicate no significant differences in these areas of home environment of top-ranking and bottom-ranking students (Tables 15 - 17). The extent of the community activity of the parents was indicated in the finding that 85.7 per cent of the top-ranking group and 77.5 per cent of the bottom-ranking group reported having taken an active part in some community fund drive.

Table 15. Church Membership of Parents

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Non-member	1.0	2.3	1.0	2.5
Lutheran	14.5	34.5	12.0	30.0
Methodist	5.0	11.9	9.0	22.5
Baptist	2.0	4.7	3.0	7.5
Presbyterian	5.0	11.9	4.0	10.0
Catholic	9.5	22.6	5.5	13.7
Other	5.0	11.9	5.5	13.7
Total	42.0		40.0	

Table 16. Parents' Activity in the Church

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Inactive	13	30.9	9.0	22.5
Moderately active	16	38.0	21.5	53.7
Leaders	13	30.9	9.5	23.7
Total	42		40.0	

Table 17. Parents' Activity in Service Clubs

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Inactive	27	64.2	32	80.0
Moderately active	10	23.9	5	12.5
Leaders	5	11.9	3	7.5
Total	42		40	

In Tables 16 and 17 the rating was made by the interviewer on the basis of the number of organizations parents belonged to and the extent of parents' participation in them.

Table 18. Rating of Community by Parents

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Very poor	0	0.0	0	0.0
Below average	0	0.0	0	0.0
Average	16	38.0	21	52.5
Above average	16	38.0	9	22.5
Excellent	10	23.9	9	22.5
No answer	0	0.0	1	2.5
Total	42		40	

In answer to the question, "How would you rate your community with regard to raising a family?", no parents rated their community "Below average" (Table 18). Although the parents of students in the top-ranking group tended to rate their community higher than the parents of students in the bottom-ranking group, the difference between the two groups who rated the community as "Above average" compared with those who rated it "Average" was no greater than would have occurred by chance 10 to 20 chances out of 100.[21] When pressed for an appraisal of what the parents believed to be lacking in the community, 38 per cent of the top-ranking group and 50 per cent of the bottom-ranking group replied, "Nothing." On the other hand, when asked if there was any area of the community which they felt was outstanding, 30.9 per cent of the top-ranking group and 27.5 per cent of the bottom-ranking group replied, "No." A common reply was, "Our town is better than other towns this size."

When asked how they felt their high school rated compared with other high schools in the state, more of the parents of students in the top-ranking group tended to rate their high schools above average than did the parents of students in the bottom-ranking group (Table 19). However, the difference between the two groups on this item did not prove highly significant, for the difference could have occurred 10 to 20 times out of 100 by chance alone.[22] The validity of the results of this question

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[21] $x^2 = 2.02$, which is significant between the .20 and .10 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

[22] $x^2 = 1.8$, which is significant between .20 and .10 level of significance with one degree of freedom, which is above the level considered significant in this thesis.

is doubtful, for although the question asked, "How do you think your high school compared with the other high schools in the state?", many of the answers were based on a comparison with other high schools of that size. This discrepancy became apparent through the parents' later comments on areas of strength or weakness in their high school.

Of the parents of the six students who were in the top-ranking group who had graduated from bottom-ranking schools, three parents rated their high school as above average, two considered it average, and only one felt it was below average. In these six homes, one father had a college degree, one had graduated from high school, and the other four had educational levels ranging from sixth to the eleventh grade. One mother had a college degree, three mothers had some college training and had teaching experience, one had a high school education, and one had an eighth grade education. A similar range existed in other environmental factors in these six homes, making impossible any discriminating statement about the home environments of top-ranking students from bottom-ranking schools.

The attitudes of the parents toward areas of strength or weakness in their high schools (Appendix A, questions 26 and 27) are not analyzed statistically in this thesis, for the interviewer felt that in many cases the answers were so vague that the information would not be statistically reliable. For many parents questions relating to high school required their recalling events and attitudes of four to eight years ago. In families with children no longer in school, the parents had lost contact with the school. In families with numerous children, it was difficult for the parent to recall problems which the student had encountered.

Table 19. Attitude of Parents Toward High School

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Rates below average	1	2.3	0	0.0
Average	9	21.4	12	30.0
Above average	32	76.1	25	52.5
Could not compare	0	0.0	3	7.5
Total	42		40	

This is not to imply that the parents' comments on the high schools were without value. Generally, parents of top-ranking students had more comments to make on areas of both weakness and strength in the high schools, indicating more knowledgeable interest on the part of these parents. There was one notable exception; one father of a student in the bottom-ranking group made so many comments throughout the interview that additional sheets were required to list his comments. This father, largely self-educated, was delighted to be asked his opinions about education. Some of his comments were:

> The high school has tried to take over too many of the responsibilities that should remain with the parent. . . . Students should have the finest and most adequate laboratory equipment available. No man is better than the tools he has to work with. . . . The English language as a means of communication is not stressed enough. My high school physics teacher once told me, "I think you know the answer but you don't know how to say it." Not enough emphasis is placed on the important fact that English is our means of communication, and if you can't communicate, there is nothing you can do to circumvent it.

When asked, "Do you feel the School Board reflected your own attitude toward the way the schools should be operated?", 66.6 per cent of the parents of students in the top-ranking group and 80 per cent of

the parents of students in the bottom-ranking group replied "Yes." The difference between the two groups in those who felt the school board reflected their own attitude compared with those who did not know or answered "No" was great enough so that it would have occurred by chance alone only 10 to 20 times out of 100 (Table 20).

Table 20. Attitude of Parents Toward School Board

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Approved	28*	66.6	32*	80.0
Don't know	1	2.3	5	12.5
Disapproved	13	30.9	3	7.5

* $x^2 = 1.8$, which is significant between the .20 and .10 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

None of the parents of bottom-ranking students who had graduated from top-ranking high schools singled out English as an area of either weakness or strength. Three parents of top-ranking students who had graduated from top-ranking high schools mentioned the English courses as outstanding. Four parents of bottom-ranking students who had graduated from bottom-ranking high schools regarded English as an area of weakness in the high school. One parent commented that the administration couldn't keep an English teacher in the school; two they had had "had gone to mental institutions."

Parents of top-ranking students who graduated from top-ranking schools had more comments to make on areas of weakness in their school than did parents of low-ranking students who had graduated from low-ranking

schools. The quality of teaching was frequently mentioned in both groups, and a total of 11 parents felt that sports were over-emphasized. One mother who had been educated in Europe felt that students did not know what work was in high school. Because students had so many courses to choose from, she believed they deliberately avoided hard courses. At this school only three students had enrolled for advanced mathematics when her son was in high school. This school, though small, was in the top-ranking group. Another parent of a top-ranking student from a top-ranking school evaluated the school as "weak in studying but strong in extracurricular activities."

Table 21. Parent's Evaluation of Student's High School English Instruction

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Above average	21.5	51.1	7	17.5
Average	14.0	33.3	27	67.5
Below average	6.5	15.4	6	15.0
Total	42.0		40	

As indicated in Table 21, there is considerable variation in the parent's evaluation of the instruction in English that the students in the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups received. So great a difference between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups in the three ratings

would have occurred by chance alone only 1 or 2 chances out of 100.[23] One student had attended two high schools in which there was a marked difference in the quality of the instruction in English; this accounts for the split tabulation in the top-ranking above-average and below-average ratings. The variation in the evaluations between the two groups indicates that parents were generally aware of the type of instruction the students had received.

Of the 40 bottom-ranking students, 14 had graduated from bottom-ranking high schools. Of the parents of these 14 students, one parent felt the student had received above-average instruction in English in high school, nine felt the student's instruction had been average, and four rated the instruction as below-average. When these 14 parents were asked if the student had had any exceptionally good English teachers in high school, three answered "No," eight answered "Yes," and four parents said they did not know. When asked if the student had had any exceptionally poor English teachers in high school, five parents replied "Yes," five answered "No," and four parents said they did not know.

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[23] To figure the significant difference with a 3-by-2 contingency table, as was used in Table 20, the following formula was used:

$$x^2 = \sum_{i=1}^{s} \left[\frac{(X_i - \theta_i)^2}{\theta_i} \right]$$

The difference between the three ratings in Table 21 was 8.50, which is between the .02 and .01 level of significance with two degrees of freedom.

Another group worth special attention were the six students in the top-ranking group who had graduated from bottom-ranking high schools. The parents of these six students rated the high school English instruction their students received as follows: above average--one, average--four, and below average--one. When asked if the student had had any exceptionally good high school English teachers, two replied "No" and four answered "Yes". When asked if the student had had any exceptionally poor English teachers in high school, the answer was split with three "Yes" and three "No."

In discussing high school English instruction, the parents frequently mentioned the lack of training in phonics in the grade school. Many of the parents were convinced that the student's difficulties started in grade school. Other than comments from the parents, no data were gathered on the type of training in reading and spelling the students received. More than any other single item, parents mentioned the problems their children had in spelling. Anyone who has taught college freshman English is aware that spelling is central to the difficulty many students have in English, and one that is difficult to solve at the college level. Knowledge of basic word formation--prefixes, roots, suffixes--appears to be lacking. This background is usually gained in the grade school. If it is not, bad spelling practices are established by the time the student reaches high school.

Apparently the type of grade school attended by the student had no highly significant bearing on his success or failure in college English. However, the difference between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups

in those who attended town school and those who attended country school was great enough so that it would have occurred by chance alone only 10 to 20 times out of 100, and hence should not be dismissed as unimportant (Table 22).

Table 22. Type of Grade School Attended by Student

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Town	32*	76.1	24*	60.0
Country	9	21.4	14	35.0
Part town, part country	1	2.3	2	5.0
Total	42		40	

*Significant at between .20 and .10 level of significance ($x^2 = 2.1$), which is above the level of significance acceptable to this thesis.

The truism that the better one likes a subject, the better one will do in it is reinforced by the findings in Table 23. The differences in the three attitude-ratings toward English between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups, as evaluated by the parents, is so great that they would occur less than 1 time out of 100 by chance alone.

When the parents were questioned about their own attitude toward English when they were in school, no significant difference developed. However, of the 100 parents interviewed, 79 were mothers. English has been established as a high school subject more favored by the female sex, and this was reflected in the response: 65.4 per cent of the parents of students in the top-ranking group and 52.5 per cent of the parents of students in the bottom-ranking group professed to have liked English. Nine mothers of students in the bottom-ranking group disliked English,

while only five mothers of students in the top-ranking group said they disliked English (one of them liked grammar but disliked literature).

Table 23. Parent's Evaluation of Student's Attitude Toward High School English

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Disliked English**	7	16.5	17.5*	43.7
Neutral**	9	21.4	14.0	35.0
Liked English**	26	61.9	8.5*	21.2
Total	42		40.0	

*One student liked literature but disliked grammar.
**Using a 3-by-2 contingency table to test the significant difference between these three categories, $x^2 = 13.96$, which is significant beyond the .01 level of significance with two degrees of freedom.

The parents were asked, "How much initiative do you feel your student has in getting work done?" A definite pattern emerged in the parents' response, but the difference between the replies in the two groups did not prove highly significant (Table 24).

Table 24. Parent's Evaluation of Student's Initiative

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Lacks initiative*	2	4.7	8	20.0
Normal amount*	11	26.1	13	32.5
Shows initiative*	29	69.0	19	47.5
Total	42		40	

*Using a 3-by-2 contingency table, $x^2 = 4.89$, which is significant between .10 and .05 level of significance with two degrees of freedom.

Environmental factors in the home which apparently had the greatest influence in the student's success or failure in college English concern the reading done by the student and his parents. Although the difference between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups in the extent the student was read to when he was young is not highly significant (Table 25), the difference in the response between the two groups on other questions regarding reading proved obviously significant (Tables 26 - 31). The indication is that the best way to insure a child's proficiency in English is to encourage reading at all levels, and that possibly the best means of encouragement is for the parents to set an example through extensive reading themselves and providing books in the home to promote an interest in reading.

Table 25. Extent Student Was Read to When Young

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Every day	29.0*	69.0	21*	52.5
Often	4.0	9.5	3	7.5
Moderate amount	2.0	4.7	2	5.0
Seldom	6.5	15.4	11	27.5
Older children read to him	0.5	1.1	0	0.0
Never	0.0	0.0	3	7.5
Total	42.0		40	

*A comparison between the two groups of those who had been read to every day compared with those who had been read to less often yielded $x^2 = 2.3$, which is significant between the .20 and .10 level of significance. This is slightly less than the level considered significant in this thesis.

Table 26. Reading Progress of Student in Elementary School

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Above normal	30*	71.4	8*	20.0
Normal	11	26.1	21	52.5
Below normal	1	2.3	9	22.5
Don't know	0	0.0	2	5.0
Total	42		40	

*The difference between the two groups in those whose progress was above normal compared with those whose reading progress was average or below is obviously significant and did not require chi-square analysis.

Table 27. Student's Use of Library During High School

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Regularly	27*	64.2	6*	15.0
Occasionally	13	30.9	29	72.5
Never	0	0.0	5	12.5
Don't remember	2	4.7	0	0.0
Total	42		40	

*The difference between the two groups in those who used the library regularly compared with those who used it occasionally or never is obviously significant and did not require chi-square analysis.

Table 28. Parent's Evaluation of Amount of Reading Done by Student Outside of School

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
A great deal	32*	76.1	5*	12.5
Average	4	9.5	12	30.0
Very little	5	11.9	23	57.5
No answer	1	2.3	0	0.0
Total	42		40	

*The difference between the two groups in those who read a great deal and those who read an average amount or less is obviously significant and did not require chi-square analysis.

Table 29. Parent's Attitude Toward Reading

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Favorite pastime	15*	35.7	5*	12.5
Enjoy it, but seldom have time	14	33.3	15	37.5
Enjoy it moderately	11	26.1	16	40.0
Don't enjoy reading	2	4.7	4	10.0
Total	42		40	

*Difference between the two groups in those who regarded reading as their favorite pastime and those who did not was significant between the .02 and .01 level of significance with one degree of freedom. $x^2 = 5.9$.

Table 30. Number of Books Read Annually by Parents

Estimated number of books read	Top-ranking Number	%	Bottom-ranking Number	%
13 or more	10*	23.9	2*	5.0
6 to 12	4	9.5	2	5.0
1 to 5	13	30.9	13	32.5
None	15**	35.7	23**	57.5
Total	42		40	

*Difference between the two groups in those who read 13 or more books compared with those who read 12 or less is significant at the .02 to .01 level with one degree of freedom. $x^2 = 5.8$.

**Difference between the two groups in those who read no books compared with those who read one or more is significant at .05 level with one degree of freedom. $x^2 = 3.9$.

Table 31. Number of Books in Home

	Top-ranking Number	%	Bottom-ranking Number	%
Less than 20	3*	7.1	8*	20.0
21 - 40	1*	2.3	6*	15.0
41 - 80	7	16.6	11	27.5
81 - 100	12	28.5	7	17.5
101 - 150	7	16.6	2	5.0
151 - 200	1	2.3	1	2.5
201 - 300	6	14.2	4	10.0
301 - 500	2	4.7	0	0.0
More than 500	3	7.1	0	0.0
No answer	0	0.0	1	2.5
Total	42		40	

*The difference between the two groups of those who had 40 or less and those who had 41 or more books in their home was significant beyond the .01 level with one degree of freedom (or would occur less than 1 chance out of 100 by chance alone). $x^2 = 7.7$.

The last page of the questionnaire consisted of a check list completed by the interviewer after she had left the home. The interviewer's

evaluation was subjective, based on impressions and information gained throughout the visit. The number and titles of magazines subscribed to, the favorite television programs and the importance of television in the family life, the number and variety of interests of the family (Appendix A, questions 46 and 51 - 55) aided in the evaluation. These questions did not yield data that was statistically significant in determining differences between the two groups, but they were useful in determining family interests. To aid in maintaining objectivity, insofar as was possible the interviewer completed the check list and wrote comments on the overall home environment without knowing whether the student had ranked in the top-ranking or bottom-ranking group. When the interviewing phase of the project had been completed and the questionnaires were separated into the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups, the interviewer was frequently surprised at the disparity between her evaluation of the home environment and the student's ranking. In the face of a few startling incongruities, the interviewer was tempted to state that on the basis of home environment, it was impossible to predict the student's performance in English. However, a closer analysis of the results of the check list altered this feeling.

The item "Apparent family harmony" was probably the least reliable of the evaluations attempted by the interviewer, for by interviewing only one member of the family in 64 of the 78 homes visited, an accurate evaluation of family harmony was often impossible.[24] When both parents

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[24]Four questionnaires were returned by mail by parents who had moved out of the area, and of course an evaluation of the home environment was impossible for these.

were interviewed, it was possible to get a truer picture of the prevailing atmosphere in the family. But the interviewer was surprised at the information on family problems that was volunteered in the course of the interviews. Keeping in mind the limitations of the evaluation, the interviewer presents her appraisal in Table 32. No significant differences appeared.

Table 32. Interviewer's Evaluation of Apparent Family Harmony

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Excellent	11	26.1	7	17.5
Good	20	47.6	23	57.5
Good to fair	4	9.5	5	12.5
Fair	2	4.7	4	10.0
Poor	1	2.3	1	2.5
No evaluation	4	9.5	0	0.0
Total	42		40	

"Anyone who tries hard shouldn't be failed," remarked one parent of a bottom-ranking student, commenting on college English. On the basis of comments such as this and on the parent's apparent knowledge and interest in education, the interviewer attempted to appraise the parent's attitude toward education. The difference in the two groups between those who were rated "Excellent" and those who were rated below "Excellent" was so great that the difference would have occurred by chance alone less than 1 chance out of 100 (Table 33).

Table 33. Interviewer's Evaluation of Parent's Attitude Toward Education

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Excellent	17*	40.4	5*	12.5
Good	15	35.7	20	50.0
Good to fair	2	4.7	1	2.5
Fair	3	7.1	13	32.5
Poor	1	2.3	1	2.5
No evaluation	4	9.5	0	0.0
Total	42		40	

* $x^2 = 10.0$, which is significant beyond the .01 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

Question 36 in the questionnaire asked, "Compared with other subjects, how would you rate English in importance?" The response to this question was so uniform between the two groups[25] that it has not been included in this study. However, on the basis of comments made along with the parent's answers and of other comments during the course of the interview, the interviewer attempted to evaluate the parent's attitude toward English (Table 34). The difference between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups on those who were rated "Good" or "Excellent" compared with those who were rated "Good to fair" or less, was great enough that it would have occurred less than 1 chance out of 100 by chance alone.[26]

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[25] Rating it "Above average" or "Very important" were 29 in the top-ranking group and 26.5 in the bottom-ranking group; rating it "Average" were 12.5 in the top-ranking and 12 in the bottom-ranking group; rating it "Below average" were 1.5 in the top-ranking and .5 in the bottom-ranking group.

[26] $x^2 = 7.4$, which is beyond the .01 level of significance with one degree of freedom.

This would indicate that while parents will give lip service to English as being an important high school subject, their actual attitude may be more accurately judged from peripheral comments made during the interview. This would present a distinct advantage of the personal interview over the mail questionnaire as a means of obtaining valid information.

Table 34. Interviewer's Evaluation of Parent's Attitude Toward English

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Excellent	8	19.0	5	12.5
Good	18	42.8	10	25.0
Good to fair	0	0.0	3	7.5
Fair	11	26.1	19	47.5
Poor	1	2.3	3	7.5
No evaluation	4	9.5	0	0.0
Total	42		40	

Language usage in the home is another aspect of the home environment that could be gauged only on the basis of a personal interview. An "Excellent" rating indicated that diction, usage, and vocabulary were above average. "Good" indicated that standard usage was used. "Fair" indicated a low colloquial level, including a few deviations of standard usage, such as "ain't," "he don't," "behaved real good." A rating of "Poor" indicated a considerable amount of incorrect usage, such as "He come home," "We haven't went very often," "Everyone don't notice it," "They done all right in school," and this comment on one student's college education, "He sure got what he went for. He did real good." In one home when asked the husband's occupation, the mother replied that her

husband was "diseased." There was no mistaking her pronunciation, and the interviewer was debating what her next question should be when the mother came to her rescue by adding, "He passed away last winter."

Applying chi-square analysis to the ratings of "Excellent," "Good," and those "less than good" (Table 35), the difference between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups was found to be highly significant, occurring 2 times out of 100 by chance alone.[27]

Table 35. Interviewer's Evaluation of Language Usage of Parents

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Excellent	10	23.9	3	7.5
Good	18	42.8	19	47.5
Good to fair	0	0.0	1	2.5
Fair	7	16.6	9	22.5
Fair to poor	0	0.0	1	2.5
Poor	3	7.1	7	17.5
No evaluation	4	9.5	0	0.0
Total	42		40	

The final evaluation attempted by the interviewer was an appraisal of the cultural interests apparent in the home. The interviewer based the rating on the number, kind, and location of books; types of pictures; diversity and kinds of interests of the family; and the amount of stimulation and encouragement the home environment would have provided the student. It was impossible to rate 10 of the homes; four questionnaires

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[27] Using a 3-by-2 contingency table, $x^2 = 7.88$, which is at the .02 level of significance with two degrees of freedom.

were returned by mail, and the other six interviews were conducted at the place of business or in the yard without the interviewer's being invited inside the home. To a certain extent the rating tended to be influenced by the economic circumstances of the family, but this was not a deciding factor, and in some homes it was not a factor at all. Homes of some of the parents in the highest income groups were devoid of any stimulus to anything but a materialistic approach to life. On the other hand, one of the economically lowest homes contained the highest number of books of any home visited and the variety of interests in the family was an undoubted factor in the student's proficiency in English. A comparison of the interviewer's rating (admittedly subjective and incomplete) between the ratings of "Excellent," "Good," and "less than good" between the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups revealed a difference which would have occurred from 10 to 20 chances out of 100 by chance alone.[28] Although the difference is not highly significant, it does not rule out the importance of cultural interest in the home as a factor in a student's success or failure in college English (Table 36).

The interviewer also wrote a brief summary of the home visit following each interview. In it she included meaningful information not covered in the questionnaire and a brief description of the physical surroundings. In this way the interviewer was aided in recalling details of the interviews in making overall assessments. This summary was also to provide background information for whatever use might be made of the

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[28] Using a 3-by-2 contingency table, $x^2 = 3.5$, which is significant between the .10 and .20 level of significance with two degrees of freedom.

questionnaires in further studies relating the three phases of the research project.

Table 36. Interviewer's Evaluation of Cultural Interests Apparent in Home

	Top-ranking		Bottom-ranking	
	Number	%	Number	%
Excellent	6	14.2	3	7.5
Good	10	23.9	7	17.5
Good to fair	5	11.9	2	5.0
Fair	10	23.9	15	37.5
Poor	4	9.5	10	25.0
Didn't go into home	7	16.6	3	7.5
Total	42		40	

One of the elements in the home environment which often seemed to play a key role in accounting for the student's success in college English was the amount of interest the mother had in her child's education. For example, in one home neither parent had an education beyond the eighth grade, the son's college text books were the only books in the home, and the language usage of the mother ranked in the poorest rating. Yet this mother said she would have taken in washing to provide a college education for her sons. She never went to bed as long as her sons were awake studying; she commented, "I suffered with them." Her interest apparently helped compensate for the otherwise meager home background; her son was in the top-ranking group. Similar situations were found in several homes; the general conditions correspond with those outlined by Havighurst as reported in Chapter 2.

In other homes the low economic circumstances of the family combined with other factors would appear to supply the additional impetus some students need to do well in spite of their background. In one home the father had less than a sixth grade education and a history of alcoholism; the mother had completed ninth grade and alternated between restaurant and laundry work. The boy had grown up in a small upstairs apartment in which there was no room for the woodworking hobby he had wanted. The mother appeared to have provided little encouragement, for she complained that he was slow at getting things done and later commented that she didn't know whatever got into him to do so well when he was in the service. Nothing from the interview indicated that this student was in the top-ranking group, which he was. It would appear that in some home environments, the desire to escape may provide the necessary incentive for the student to succeed.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The home environments of 42 top-ranking and 42 bottom-ranking students of English were studied by means of home interviews to determine variables which might contribute to the student's success or failure in college English. The 84 students attended South Dakota State College during the spring quarter, 1962, and had graduated from the 10 top-ranking and 10 bottom-ranking high schools studied in the research project reported in the thesis of Phyllis Bonner Weichenthal, Major Differences Between Ten Top-Ranking and Ten Bottom-Ranking South Dakota High Schools: A Study of English.

The students were selected on the basis of their A. C. E. total percentile, English Placement Test score percentile, and grade point average for at least one quarter and no more than three quarters of freshman English. The criteria was established by Mrs. Weichenthal in her selection of high schools. Each student was ranked in each of these three areas and the ranks were added. The students were selected on the basis of their relative total rank, using the 42 highest and 42 lowest.

Time of the interview was arranged by mail. Of the 84 maximum home interviews, 82 were completed and a total of 100 parents were interviewed. Although both parents were interviewed whenever possible, statistically each home was regarded as one unit. When parents disagreed, each category was credited with .5.

Insofar as was possible the interviewer did not know at the time of the interview whether the student had ranked in the top or bottom group. The number assigned each student was the only identification used

on the questionnaire. The questions were laregly asked as open-end questions which the interviewer coded, for the most part, at the time of the interview. The use of shorthand enabled the interviewer to record many comments and observations without impeding the speed of the interview.

Because the number of completed interviews in the two groups was not equal, raw scores were converted into percentiles. Chi-square analysis was used in those areas in which there appeared the possibility of a significant difference. The accepted boundary between significance and non-significance was the .05 probability level.

The stability of the family environment of both the top-ranking and bottom-ranking groups was indicated by the following findings: 1) of the parents interviewed, there were no divorces and only one separation; 2) over 47 per cent of the families of students in the top-ranking group and 60 per cent of the families of students in the bottom-ranking group had moved only once or not at all; 3) 69 per cent of the parents in both groups were born in South Dakota; 4) about 62 per cent of the students in both groups attended only one grade school, and over 92 per cent of both groups attended only one high school. In addition, over 87 per cent of the students in both groups attended college with no interruption after high school. As a whole, then, the students tend to be a homogeneous group whose experiences have been limited. These factors may present special problems to the English teacher when new cultural concepts are introduced.

The number of mothers in the bottom-ranking group who were employed away from home during the child's preschool years was significantly larger than the number in the top-ranking group. This suggests that early environment may be important in establishing language patterns which affect the student's later success or failure in English. More study in this area would be needed to determine if there is a causal relationship present.

However, the mother's employment during the child's grade school or high school years apparently had little relationship to the student's success or failure in college English. This conclusion supports the findings of Dr. Monk cited in Chapter 2.

Contrary to the findings of Kirk, Barbe, and Sheldon and Carrillo, no highly significant differences between the two groups were found in the size of the family or the student's ordinal rank among the siblings.

Comparisons were made between the two groups of the fathers who had an education of ninth grade level or less, as well as those who had an education of high school level or less. Both comparisons yielded significant data indicating a higher level of education for the fathers of students in the top-ranking group, which supports the findings of Sheldon and Carrillo cited in Chapter 2. No significant differences developed between the two groups in the educational level of the mothers.

Many variables commonly thought to have influence on the student's success or failure in English were found in this study to have little relevance. These findings, although negative, may be as important as the positive findings. 1) A comparison of the two groups of those families

with incomes under $4500 in both farm and non-farm incomes did not yield significant differences. 2) The extent of the church and social activities of the parents in the two groups was not significantly different. This finding supports the Monk and Havighurst studies reviewed in Chapter 2 which found that socio-economic levels are not significant determinants of environment for mental growth. 3) Apparently the type of grade school (whether country or town) had no highly significant relationship to the student's later success or failure in college English. 4) Of the 42 bottom-ranking students in this study, 26 had graduated from top-ranking high schools.

Since neither the socio-economic level nor the type of grade school or high school seemed to show a significant relationship with the student's success or failure in college English, the implication seems justified that the home environment may be crucial in the development of the student's language skills. The importance of native intelligence cannot be overlooked; however, in this study an attempt was made to control this factor by selecting students who were still attending college during the spring quarter of 1962. The success in college despite difficulties in English of students in the bottom-ranking group indicated sufficient intelligence to stay in college.

Over 41 per cent of the fathers in the bottom-ranking group were engaged in agriculture, as compared with only 15 per cent in the top-ranking group. The small percentage of students from farm families in the top-ranking group supports the findings of Havighurst and Barbe, as reviewed in Chapter 2. The difference suggests the hypothesis that the

farm environment may not be conducive to developing the type of skills which are important to the successful student in English.

In an address to the South Dakota Association of Secondary School Principals in October, 1962, C. R. Beck, supervisor of counselors for Sioux Falls public schools, said, ". . . the area in which South Dakota students ranked most poorly, though still higher than the national norm, is correctness and appropriateness of expression."[29] If the suggested hypothesis is correct, the fact that South Dakota is predominantly an agricultural state may partially account for the situation described by Mr. Beck.

If a high correlation exists between a deficiency in communication skills and a farm environment, as suggested by this study, the situation holds some implications for the English Department at South Dakota State College. Of the 1052 new freshman students in the fall of 1962, 499 lived on a farm at the time of enrollment, or over 47 per cent. The large percentage of the student body who have an agricultural background indicates the extent of the problem facing the English teachers at South Dakota State College.

On the check list evaluation of apparent cultural interest in the home, 13 of the 17 farm homes of students in the bottom-ranking group were rated below a rating of "Good." If the hypothesis is correct, the farm homes appear to be at a cultural disadvantage. One means which might be used to improve the situation is through the State College Extension Service. Extension programs devoted to cultural areas, involving

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[29] Sioux Falls Argus-Leader, October 16, 1962, p. 18.

the entire rural family, not only might aid the general quality of rural life but also might improve the communication skills of many students in South Dakota.

In the conclusion of Mrs. Weichenthal's study, she emphasized that before positive steps can be taken to improve English instruction in South Dakota, "Parents must care"[30] (italics hers). Mrs. Weichenthal concluded that there was:

> . . . a lack of interest in and knowledge of the English program, and a lack of cooperation with the superintendents on the part of "bottom-ranking" school boards. Since the school board represents the community and is supposed to reflect its opinions, these findings have been taken to indicate a lack of interest, knowledge, and cooperation on the part of the community as a whole which has a bottom-ranking school. Until the parents in these communities having bottom-ranking schools care--care sincerely--conditions in bottom-ranking schools have little chance of improving.[31]

From the results of the present study, it appears evident that the parents are aware of the type of instruction the students receive in high school English. This may be the first step toward awakening an interest in the parent in improving English instruction. Many parents commented that it was not until the student was in college that they became aware of the poor English instruction the student had received in high school.

Knowledge of the situation is not enough in itself to improve English instruction; in the final analysis, as Mrs. Weichenthal said, the parents must care. Questions designed to measure the parents' interest in and attitude toward their schools did not adequately measure the

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[30] Weichenthal, op. cit., p. 102.

[31] Ibid., pp. 102-103.

extent to which the parents care about improving their schools, but they have helped establish a few guideposts. Whereas 66.6 per cent of the parents of the top-ranking schools felt that the school board reflected their own attitudes toward the way the schools should be operated, 80 per cent of the parents in the bottom-ranking group were satisfied with the school board. Furthermore, of the 14 parents of students in the bottom-ranking group who had graduated from bottom-ranking high schools, 11 indicated that they were happy with the school board and the other 3 indicated that they didn't know enough about the school board's operation to answer. Parents of bottom-ranking students have a generally less critical attitude toward the operation of the schools.

The parents of students in the top-ranking group had significantly more favorable attitudes toward education and toward English, as evaluated by the interviewer, than did parents of students in the bottom-ranking group.

Just as Sheldon and Carrillo concluded that good readers tend to like school, in the present study it was found that students in the top-ranking group liked English, according to their parents, and those in the bottom-ranking group disliked English.

Although the difference between the two groups was significant slightly above the level acceptable as significant for this thesis, the students in the top-ranking group tended to have more initiative, according to their parents, than the students in the bottom-ranking group.

The greatest differences between the two groups were revealed in the areas concerning reading. Highly significant differences between the

two groups were found in the reading progress of the student in elementary school, in the student's use of the library during high school, in the amount of reading done by the student outside of school, in the parent's attitude toward reading and the amount of reading done by the parents, and in the number of books in the home. (Sheldon and Carrillo concluded, "As the home library increases, the per cent of good readers increases.")

Language usage in the home, as observed by the interviewer, appeared to be a significant factor in the student's success or failure in college English.

On the basis of this study, the following environmental factors appear definitely related to the success or failure of the student in college English.

1) Employment of mother during the student's preschool years. Top-ranking students tend to come from homes in which the mother was not employed during the child's preschool years.

2) Education of the father. Top-ranking students come from homes in which the father has a higher level of education than that of the fathers of students in the bottom-ranking group.

3) Fathers engaged in agriculture. Top-ranking students are apt to come from non-farm families.

4) The student's attitude toward English. Those who like it tend to do well in it.

5) The student's progress in reading in elementary school. According to the parents, students in the top-ranking group tended to

make above-average progress in reading.

6) Amount of reading done by student and parents. The more reading done by the student and the parents, the more apt the student is to do well in college English. Similarly, the number of books in the home tends to correlate with the success of the student in English.

7) Language usage in the home. The language usage in the home apparently has influence on the student's success or failure in college English.

8) The parent's attitude toward education and English. Parents of top-ranking students tend to have more positive attitudes toward education and English than parents of students in the bottom-ranking group.

The present study has been an exploratory probing of the home environment of top-ranking and bottom-ranking students of English at South Dakota State College from selected high schools. Statistical information in itself cannot solve problems, but it might serve to outline the extent of and pinpoint causes of the problem. On the basis of the present study, the following recommendations for further study are made.

1) More detailed questions probing the attitudes of the parents toward education would help answer some of the following questions: How much encouragement did the student receive to attend and continue in college? What kinds of pressure did the parents exert? Were children rewarded for good grades? How? How status conscious is the family? Is college education encouraged entirely for material gain? (If a college education is thought of only in terms of material gain, an additional burden is placed upon the English teacher, who is dealing largely with intangible values.)

2) The role of the mother in the family appears to explain the success of many students despite the presence of economic and cultural handicaps. Questions designed to measure the role of the mother as an influence would support or reject the subjective hypothesis offered on the role of the mother in this thesis.

3) Two of the problems of English students concern reading and spelling, for which the basic training is given in grade school. An investigation of grade-school curriculum and methods in these areas to determine the effectiveness of different approaches would be helpful.

4) The present study indicates that a significant relationship exists between bottom-ranking students and homes in which the mother worked during the student's pre-school years. Further probing of the circumstances involving child care during this period might provide information on whether or not a causal relationship exists between the home environment during this period of the child's life and later difficulties in English.

5) Further studies of attitudes of the parents toward education should be undertaken when the students are in the process of taking or have just completed freshman English. In the present study most of the students were juniors or seniors, and too much time had elapsed to obtain reliable information on the attitudes toward and problems encountered in high school and college English.

6) Questions designed to measure the extent to which parents care about improving their school or maintaining high standards would help measure objectively the extent of public apathy.

7) It is recommended that further studies probe the attitude toward and extent of writing done in the home. Is it limited to letters? The lack of practice in writing has lately been decried by critics of high school programs, but the amount of writing done in the home may also prove to be a significant factor of the home environment.

One of the mothers interviewed epitomizes both the importance of English and the extent of the communication problem in her comment: "Reading, writing, arithmetic--if you have them three subjects you can do anything and you get by swell."

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

Student Number: Date:

Parent Interviewed:

*1. In what state or country were the following born?

(1)_____Mother
(2)_____Father
(3)_____Maternal grandmother
(4)_____Maternal grandfather
(5)_____Paternal grandmother
(6)_____Paternal grandfather

*2. Is there a language spoken at home other than English?

(1)____No
(2)____German
(3)____Scandinavian
(4)____Italian
(5)____French
(6)____Spanish
(7)____Other_____

Amount of noticeable dialect present:
(1)____Very strong
(2)____Moderate (certain idioms)
(3)____None

*3. If another language is spoken in the home, how much is it used?

(1)____Most of the time, including conversation with children
(2)____About 50%
(3)____Occasionally
(4)____Only between parents and not with the children

4. What was the last school attended by the father? _____

*5. What was the last grade completed by the father?

(1)____Less than 6
(2)____6 to 9
(3)____10 to 11
(4)____12
(5)____13 - 14 (2 years of college)
(6)____15 - 16 (college degree)
(7)____Masters degree
(8)____Ph.D.
(9)____Other_____

*6. Present occupation of father:

(1)____Retired
(2)____Farmer
(3)____Self-employed
(4)____Employed in trade: _____
(5)____Teacher
(6)____Other profession
(7)____Other _____

*7. From the card, would you indicate the letter in which the family income would fall:

(1)____A (Under $1,500)
(2)____B (1500 - 2499)
(3)____C (2500 - 2999)
(4)____D (3000 - 3499)
(5)____E (3500 - 3999)
(6)____F (4000 - 4499)
(7)____G (4500 - 4999)
(8)____H (5000 - 5999)
(9)____I (6000 - 7499)
(10)____J (7500 - 9999)
(11)____K (10,000 and over)

8. What was the last school attended by the mother? _____

*9. What was the last grade completed by the mother?

(1)____Less than 4
(2)____4 - 8
(3)____9 - 10
(4)____11
(5)____12
(6)____13 - 14
(7)____15 - 16
(8)____Master's degree
(9)____Ph.D.
(10)____Other

10. Present occupation of mother:

(1)____Housewife
(2)____Secretary
(3)____Teacher
(4)____Nurse
(5)____Salesclerk
(6)____Other _____

*11. Was the mother employed away from home during the child's preschool years?

(1)____No
(2)____Yes. Occupation? _____

*12. Was the mother employed away from home during child's years in grade school?

(1)____No
(2)____Yes. Occupation? _____

*13. Was the mother employed away from home during child's years in high school?

(1)____No
(2)____Yes. Occupation? _____

14. Are you a member of a church?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Lutheran
(3)_____Methodist
(4)_____Baptist
(5)_____Presbyterian
(6)_____Catholic
(7)_____Other _____

*15. Do either of the parents now hold or have you held any church offices within the past three years?

(1)_____Inactive
(2)_____Moderately active
(3)_____Leaders in the church

*16. Do either of the parents belong to any service clubs?

(1)_____Inactive
(2)_____Moderately active
(3)_____Leaders
(4)_____Joiners but not active

*17. Do either of you belong to any other clubs? (Names)

*18. Do either of you take part in any of the fund drives in your community?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Yes. Which? _____

*19. How would you rate your community with regard to raising a family?

(1)_____Very poor Comments
(2)_____Below average
(3)_____Average
(4)_____Above average
(5)_____Excellent

*20. Do you feel that your community is lacking in any area?

(1)_____None
(2)_____Sports
(3)_____Summer recreation activities
(4)_____Cultural activities (plays, concerts)
(5)_____Schools
(6)_____Church activities
(7)_____Other _____
Comments:

*21. Is there any area in which you feel your community is particularly outstanding?

(1)_____None
(2)_____Sports
(3)_____Summer recreation activities
(4)_____Cultural activities (plays, concerts)
(5)_____Schools
(6)_____Church activities
(7)_____Other _____
Comments:

*22. Do you feel the School Board reflected your own attitudes toward the way the schools should be operated?

(1)_____Yes
(2)_____Don't know
(3)_____No _____

*23. Do you feel your School Board represented the general feeling of the community when the student was in high school?

(1)_____No _____
(2)_____Don't know
(3)_____Yes

24. Have either of the parents ever served on the School Board?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Yes

*25. How do you think your high school compared with the other high schools in the state?

(1)_____Below average
(2)_____Average
(3)_____Above average

26. Is there any area in which you feel your high school is particularly strong?

(1)_____None
(2)_____Building facilities
(3)_____Administration
(4)_____Sports
(5)_____Teachers
(6)_____Music
(7)_____English
(8)_____Science
(9)_____Other _____

27. Is there any area in which you feel your high school is weak?

(1)_____None
(2)_____Building facilities
(3)_____Administration
(4)_____Teaching
(5)_____Sports
(6)_____Music
(7)_____English
(8)_____Science
(9)_____Other _____

*28. How would you rate the instruction the student got in English in high school?

(1)_____Above average
(2)_____Average
(3)_____Below average

*29. Do you think the student had any exceptionally good English teachers in high school?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Yes. What level, and why?_____
(3)_____Don't know.

*30. Do you think the student had any exceptionally poor English teachers in high school?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Don't know
(3)_____Yes. What level, and why?_____

31. Was there any point in the student's schooling when his attitude toward school changed significantly?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Don't know
(3)_____Yes. When? Why?_____

*32. What was the student's attitude toward English during high school?

(1)_____Disliked
(2)_____Neutral
(3)_____Liked

*33. What was your attitude toward English when you were in school?

(1)_____Disliked
(2)_____Neutral
(3)_____Liked

34. Did you feel that you were able to help with the English assignments when the student needed help?

(1)_____Never asked for help
(2)_____No
(3)_____Occasionally
(4)_____Yes
(5)_____Don't know

35. During high school did you keep track of English assignments and check on their completion?

(1)_____Never
(2)_____Seldom
(3)_____Occasionally
(4)_____Regularly

*36. Compared with other subjects, how would you rate English in importance?

(1)_____Unimportant
(2)_____Below average
(3)_____Average
(4)_____Above average
(5)_____Very important

*37. How much initiative do you feel your student has in getting work done?

(1)_____Lacks initiative
(2)_____Normal
(3)_____Shows initiative

*38. Number of children in family:

(1)_____1
(2)_____2
(3)_____3
(4)_____4
(5)_____5
(6)_____6 or more

*39. How does the student rank in age?

(1)_____Oldest
(2)_____Second
(3)_____Third
(4)_____Fourth
(5)_____Fifth or more

40. Is there or has there been any unusual family situation which might have influenced the student's development?

*41. During the time the student was living at home, how many times did you move?

(1)____Never
(2)____Once
(3)____Twice
(4)____Three times
(5)____Four
(6)____Five or more

*42. During grade school, how many different schools did the student attend?

(1)____1
(2)____2
(3)____3
(4)____4
(5)____5 or more

*43. During grade school, did the student attend town or country school?

(1)____Town
(2)____Country
(3)____Part town, part country
No. of years in country school:_____

*44. During high school, how many different schools did student attend?

(1)____1
(2)____2
(3)____3
(4)____4 or more

Reason for changing school:

*45. Was there an interval between the student's high school and college education?

(1)____No.
(2)____Yes. Amount of time and reason:

46. Are there any particular family interests the family shares?

(1)____Spectator sports
(2)____Participation sports
(3)____Music
(4)____Travel
(5)____Building
(6)____Automobiles
(7)____Other

*47. What was the extent of the travelling done by the family while the student lived at home?

(1)_____None
(2)_____Seldom
(3)_____Regularly every year
(4)_____Frequent
(5)_____Other

Indicate trips taken:

48. Has the student done any travelling on his own?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Yes Indicate extent of, and where:

49. Did the student have any special interests aside from school work during high school?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Don't know
(3)_____Yes. What?_____

Did this involve reading? Yes ____ No ____ Extent?

* What was the extent of his reading?

(1)_____A great deal
(2)_____Average
(3)_____Very little
(4)_____No answer

Did it affect his school work?

50. During high school did the student work outside the home?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Yes. Kind of work:_____
How much:_____Reason:_____

51. Do you own a television set?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Yes. How long have you had it?_____

52. What are your favorite types of programs, in order of preference?

(1)_____News features
(2)_____Sports
(3)_____Comedy shows
(4)_____Serials and drama
(5)_____Quiz shows
(6)_____Musicals
(7)_____Westerns
(8)_____Other _____

53. Do you watch television during the day?

(1)_____Never
(2)_____One hour
(3)_____Two hours
(4)_____Three hours
(5)_____Four or more
(6)_____The set is on, but I don't watch it

54. Do you read a daily newspaper?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Yes. Which?_____

55. Will you tell me the names of the magazines to which you now subscribe:

(1)_____Saturday Evening Post
(2)_____Life
(3)_____Time
(4)_____Newsweek
(5)_____Redbook
(6)_____True Story
(7)_____Readers Digest
(8)_____Ladies Home Journal
(9)_____McCalls
(10)_____Playboy
(11)_____True
(12)_____Better Homes & Gardens
(13)_____Saturday Review
(14)_____Atlantic Monthly
(15)_____TV Guide
(16)_____U.S. News & World Report
(17)_____Harpers
(18)_____Farm Journal
(19)_____Other _____

*56. Do you enjoy reading?

(1)_____Yes, it is my favorite pastime
(2)_____Yes, but I seldom have time
(3)_____Moderately, but there are many things I enjoy equally well
(4)_____No

*57. Can you give me an estimate of the number of books you read a year?

(1)_____None
(2)_____1 to 5
(3)_____6 to 12
(4)_____more than 12

58. What kind of books do you usually read?

(1)____Fiction
(2)____Non-fiction. Kind?

59. Does your husband (or wife) enjoy reading?

(1)____Yes, it is his favorite pastime
(2)____Yes, but he seldom has time
(3)____Moderately, but there are many things he enjoys as much or more
(4)____No

*60. When the student was pre-school age, to what extent did you read to him?

(1)____Every day
(2)____Often
(3)____Seldom
(4)____Older brothers and sisters read to him

61. As you recall, what did most of this reading consist of?

(1)____Nursery rhymes Names?
(2)____Fairy tales
(3)____Comic books
(4)____Bible stories
(5)____Other

62. Did the student enjoy "make-believe"?

(1)____No
(2)____Don't know
(3)____Yes

*63. When the student was in the lower grades, was there anything unusual about his reading progress?

(1)____Above normal Comments:
(2)____Normal
(3)____Below normal
(4)____Don't know

64. Was there a public library available when the student was in high school?

(1)____No
(2)____Yes

*65. How often did he check out books?

(1)_____Regularly
(2)_____Occasionally
(3)_____Never

66. Do you use the public library?

(1)_____Regularly
(2)_____Occasionally
(3)_____Never

67. Do you own a set of encyclopedias?

(1)_____No
(2)_____Yes

*68. How many books do you have in your home?

(1)_____Less than 20
(2)_____21-40
(3)_____41-80
(4)_____81-100
(5)_____101-150
(6)_____151-200
(7)_____201-300
(8)_____301-500
(9)_____More than 500

69. Do you feel that the language habits of the community have influenced the student's use of the language?

(1)_____Good influence
(2)_____No influence
(3)_____Poor influence_____
(4)_____Don't know

70. How would you rate the education the student has received at SDSC?

(1)_____The best available in his field
(2)_____Above average
(3)_____Average
(4)_____Below average
Comments:

71. Are there any areas that you feel need improvement at SDSC?

(1)_____None
(2)_____Administration
(3)_____Buildings and equipment
(4)_____Quality of teaching
(5)_____Variety of courses offered
(6)_____Athletic activities
(7)_____Cultural activities
(8)_____Library facilities
(9)_____Other _____

72. Are there any areas in which you feel SDSC is superior?

(1)____None
(2)____Administration
(3)____Buildings and equipment
(4)____Quality of teaching
(5)____Variety of courses offered
(6)____Athletic activities
(7)____Cultural activities
(8)____Library facilities
(9)____Other _____

73. From your knowledge of the Freshman English program at SDSC, would you care to make any comments on the program?

74. Check List:

*Apparent family harmony:

Excellent Good Fair Poor

*Attitude toward education:

Excellent Good Fair Poor

*Attitude toward English:

Excellent Good Fair Poor

*Language Usage:

Excellent Good Fair Poor

Comments:

*Evidence of cultural interests apparent in home:

Excellent Good Fair Poor

Comments:

APPENDIX B: CORRESPONDENCE

LETTER TO PARENTS

Date

Mr. and Mrs. _____

_____

_____, South Dakota

Dear Mr. and Mrs. _____:

The English Department at South Dakota State College is currently engaged in a three-part research project to improve the instruction in English courses.

One part of this project consists of interviewing one or both parents of some of the students who have taken a course in English at State College. (Your son or daughter may already have been interviewed under another part of the project.)

Because of the amount of travelling involved, I am grouping interviews that fall within the same general areas. Often there will be only one interview in a town, so it is important that I be able to see you at the time agreed upon. The interview will last approximately fifty minutes.

I am scheduled to be in your area on and I would like to interview you at Will you please indicate on the enclosed card if this date and time is satisfactory? If it will be impossible for you to see me then, will you please check an alternate time that day, or another date if that day is possible?

If you live in the country, please indicate on the card directions for reaching you.

I am looking forward to our interview.

Sincerely,

Marion Hvistendahl
(Mrs. J. K.)

POSTCARD INCLUDED WITH

LETTER TO PARENTS

_____Time of interview is satisfactory.

Please change time of interview on day scheduled to

_____4:00 p.m. or

_____6:30 p.m. (check one)

_____Date scheduled is impossible. Please schedule interview for (suggested alternate date).

_____Neither date is convenient. Please schedule interview for _____ (you suggest a date).

Directions to your home, if needed:

Signature:_____