minnesota english

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of Teachers of English

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NEITHER NEW NOR TRUE*

Martin Steinmann, Jr.

(Professor Steinmann spoke at last May's MCTE Spring Conference on the topic "New Research in Rhetoric and Composition." In response to a request from the editors, he is allowing Minnesota English to publish this paper, which was delivered at the annual meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication at Denver, Colorado, March 24, 1966. He is Professor of English at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.)

If an academic subject has been taught long and almost universally but without results commensurate with the time, the energy, and the money expended upon it, then we may safely conclude that something is radically wrong with it -- that there is a fatal flaw either in the pedagogy of the subject or in the discipline that lies behind it. Two examples in our time of such a subject are foreign languages and English grammar. Foreign languages, it turned out, had a pedagogical flaw (the false principle that the ability to recite the grammatical rules of a language entails the ability to speak the language). English grammar had a disciplinary flaw (several false principles, among them the principle that grammatical forms can be classified upon the basis of meaning). A third example in our time of such a subject is freshman composition. For about seventy-five years, it has been an almost universally required subject in American colleges and universities; yet, by common consent, the teaching of it is a failure. We founded the Conference on College Composition and Communication sixteen years ago to discover what fatal flaw accounts for this failure, and we are still looking for it. I should, I suppose, be guilty of hubris if I were to announce that I have discovered what so many have so long looked for in vain; but perhaps I may venture a hypothesis.

We have not discovered the fatal flaw, I think, either because we have assumed that it is pedagogical rather than disciplinary (with the result that freshman composition has become the most tinkered-with, and vainly tinkered-with, course in the curriculum) or because, believing it to be disciplinary, we have looked for it in disciplines that are not central to freshman composition (with the result that we have cultivated nearly every discipline except the one central to freshman composition: not only linguistics and semantics, which are on the periphery of that discipline, but philosophy, psychiatry, cybernetics, literary criticism, the history of ideas, sociology, and political science, to mention a few). In doing these things, we have not been altogether the fools that one might imagine us to be. Certainly there are pedagogical flaws in the teaching of freshman composition, though not fatal flaws; and, as I shall suggest in a moment, there are in a sense almost as many disciplines central to freshman composition as there are topics to write about.

Let me state my hypothesis. The teaching of freshman composition is a failure because, paradoxically, no discipline does lie behind it and every discipline must lie behind it. In one sense of "central," the discipline central to freshman composition--namely, rhetoric--simply does not exist, not at least in the way that linguistics and semantics exist. Consequently, far from having true or even false principles upon which to base the teaching of freshman composition, we have scarcely any principles at all. In another sense of "central," every discipline that can provide a topic is central to freshman composition. Consequently, we have a set of principles infinitely numerous and infinitely various upon which to base this teaching; and, to teach our subject, we must be universal geniuses.

Perhaps I can clarify my paradoxical hypothesis by describing the three sorts of knowledge that (it seems to me) one must have, and the corresponding sorts of choice that he must make, if he is to write effectively, and by describing also the disciplines relevant to these three sorts of knowledge and choice.

First, in order to write English at all, one must know the English language, know how to choose between English and non-English expressions. The disciplines relevant to

this sort of knowledge and this sort of choice are (1) linguistics, structural and transformational (concerned with the form of expressions); (2) semantics (concerned with the meaning of expressions); and (3) mechanics (concerned with the graphic representation of expressions). There is no question about the existence of at least two of these disciplines, linguistics and semantics; research in linguistics, indeed, has been one of the great intellectual achievements of our time. Unfortunately, however, these disciplines are not central to freshman composition. On the whole, our freshmen know the English language well: their ignorance of it rarely makes their themes bad, and their knowledge of it cannot make their themes good. This knowledge is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of effective writing.

Second, in order to write English effectively, one must know how to choose well between different ways of saying the same thing, between synonymous expressions. The discipline relevant to this sort of knowledge and this sort of choice is rhetoric, the study of effectiveness of expression. Unfortunately, however, this discipline, though central to freshman composition, simply does not exist in the way that linguistics and semantics exist. In our time, rhetoric as I have characterized it has not been a serious systematic study. There is no new rhetoric, and no true rhetoric either. There are, for example, few undergraduate or graduate courses in rhetoric; and the few that bear that name generally turn out to be either courses in the history of rhetoric, courses in composition, or courses in the teaching of composition. Valuable research in rhetoric has certainly been done, and more is underway. But, compared with research in linguistics and semantics, research in rhetoric has not amounted to much; in any case, it has had little influence upon freshman composition. (Cf. Steinmann, "Rhetorical Research," College English, XXVII [1966], 278-285.)

And, third, in order to write English effectively, one must know how to think effectively, how to choose well between things to say, between nonsynonymous expressions. All disciplines are relevant to this sort of knowledge and this sort of choice. As the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle has shown (The Concept of Mind [London, 1949]), thought and expression are inseparable. Though a given

thought may have different expressions (for there are different ways of saying the same thing), a thought does not exist until it is in some way expressed. One does not know the solution to a problem, for example, until he has in some way (in an essay, perhaps, or in a diagram) expressed the solution. Most bad themes are bad because the freshmen who wrote them are bad thinkers or, at least, thought badly when they wrote them. When we say (as we often do) that our chief task in freshman composition is to teach freshmen how to think, we are right: it is our chief task. Unfortunately, however, this is a task to which we are not, and cannot become, equal--or to which we are equal only if we restrict theme topics to those disciplines in which we happen to be experts --literary criticism, say. For no one can teach, and no one can learn , thinking-in-general. To put the matter another way, to teach freshman composition well, we must teach at least one discipline well. To be sure, this fact gives us a good excuse to make freshman composition a course in whatever discipline we believe ourselves to be expert--in literary criticism or linguistics or semantics or the history of ideas. But, to the extent that we make it that, we are preparing our freshmen to write good essays in literary criticism or linguistics or semantics or the history of ideas. We must not imagine that we are also preparing them to write good essays in world history or anthropology or electrical engineering or botany.

If I am right, then, the teaching of freshman composition is a failure for two reasons. First, that discipline that is central to freshman composition whatever the topic --namely, rhetoric -- does not exist. Second, because all disciplines that do exist are also central to freshman composition, it is a course that no one can teach well. What, if anything, can we do to improve the teaching of freshman composition? At least two radical things.

For one thing, we can encourage rhetorical research so that, in preparing teachers and building courses, we can begin to replace rhetorical ignorance with rhetorical knowledge. To the extent that we are ignorant of rhetoric, we are no better qualified to teach freshman composition to botany majors, for instance, than are our colleagues in botany. Indeed, we are worse qualified; for

our colleagues in botany are experts in botany, experts in the relevant sort of thinking, and we are not. If we are unwilling or unable to encourage rhetorical research, then we had better confine our teaching of freshman composition to English majors.

I must ward off a possible confusion. I urge that we as teachers of freshman composition encourage rhetorical research, not so that we can teach our freshmen rhetoric, but so that we can teach them composition. Though rhetoric is a discipline central to composition, teaching rhetoric is not to be confused with teaching composition. The principles of rhetoric would, if we discovered them, constitute a body of knowledge that, like any other body of knowledge, could be taught as an academic subject. But learning the principles of rhetoric is not identical with learning how to write themes that conform to them, any more than learning the rules of French grammar is identical with learning how to utter sentences that conform to them. Writing good themes, like speaking French, is a skill. One may learn a skill without learning the principles that lie behind it, and one may learn these principles without learning the skill. Once the principles of rhetoric are discovered, it remains to discover how to use them in teaching freshman composition; and this is a problem for pedagogical research. My point is that rhetorical research must precede pedagogical research; otherwise there are no principles to use. Our failure in teaching freshman composition is in part due to our failure to grant this point.

The other thing that we can do to improve the teaching of freshman composition is to share this teaching with our colleagues in other disciplines, to devise some practical ways of making this teaching a genuinely interdisciplinary enterprise. If our colleagues in other disciplines are unwilling or unable to share this teaching, then (once again) we had better confine our teaching of freshman composition to English majors. Ours is not, and cannot be, the whole duty of man.

(Cf. Steinmann, "Freshman English in America," Universities Quarterly, XIX [1965], 391-395; and "Freshman English: A Hypothesis and A Proposal," Journal of Higher Education, XXXVII [1966], 24-32.)

COLLEGE REQUIREMENTS FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS

Committee on Preparation
of Elementary Teachers

(At last May's Spring Conference in Bloomington, one of the sessions concerned the newly-completed study of requirements in English and Language Arts for elementary teaching candidates in undergraduate colleges of the state. This report and the resolutions approved by the Council at its annual business meeting were prepared by the Committee on the Preparation of Elementary Language Arts Teachers, Sister M. Andre Marthaler, St. Cloud, Chairman.)

The Minnesota Council of Teachers of English in its concern for, and interest in, the language arts instruction in the elementary schools of Minnesota, appointed a committee to examine the preparation required in English and Language Arts of the elementary education majors in teacher training institutions in Minnesota.

Membership on the committee was based on willingness to explore, and interest in, the committee's objective, current involvement in elementary instruction, and a commitment to attend all committee meetings. Members were elementary instructors from each grade (1-6), a college education department member who advises elementary majors and teaches methods in Language Arts instruction, and one Language Arts consultant. Members were graduates from state and private teacher training institutions.

The committee began its work with a few basic assumptions: (a) today's student lives and will continue to live in a primarily verbal society, (b) the student whose performance in language arts competencies is weak is also weak in those other areas of the curriculum which require reading, writing, speaking, handwriting skills, (c) the responsibility to adequately prepare the elementary major for classroom teaching belongs to the teacher training institution involved. But it may be that the English departments should be alerted to the proportion of graduates in elementary education in respective institutions and then, to examine whether these majors are prepared to teach with some degree of competency in a classroom oriented to language, reading, speaking, and writing.

Four members who work closely with student teachers as supervising and critic teachers and one who works closely with teachers in the classroom believe that college English departments need to become aware of the elementary major in their institutions; experienced teachers and the student teacher show a lack of awareness of current research in language, literature, and composition for elementary instruction. The committee believes that English and Education department chairmen should examine the program of required courses in Language Arts in their respective institutions so that the program is current, relevant, and realistic, and so that it evidences an awareness and study of the guidelines for the preparation of elementary teachers in Language Arts as proposed by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the Modern Language Association.

A survey of required courses in English and in Language Arts was implemented by committee members in three areas: General Education, Subject-Matter Specialization, and Professional Education. They wrote to English/Education department chairmen of all the state and private teacher training institutions in the state. These chairmen were asked to send the Committee a composite of all courses in English and Language Arts required in the three areas for all elementary majors. The committee believed that a composite would produce a more reliable report than could be obtained by checking bulletins.

On the basis of the correspondence, the committee identified eighteen elementary teacher training institutions in Minnesota. Seventeen sent some form of composite. The eighteenth was visited by a committee member and a composite was obtained. The information is complete for all such institutions in the state.

The tabulations were then compiled and charted in three categories:

(a) General Education: English courses required of all students matriculated in the institution;

(b) Subject-Matter Specialization: English / Language Arts courses required only of elementary majors;

(c) Professional Education: English/Language Arts cour-

ses related to methods in teaching required of all elementary majors.

Teacher training institutions reported in this tabulation are: Bemidji State College, Bethel College, Concordia College (Moorhead), Gustavus Adolphus College, Hamline University, Macalester College, Mankato State College, Moorhead State College, Dr. Martin Luther College, Saint Benedict's College, Saint Catherine's College, Saint Cloud State College, Saint Scholastica's College, Saint Teresa's College, University of Minnesota -- Duluth, University of Minnesota--Minneapolis, University of Minnesota--Morris, and Winona State College.

The tabulations showed that there are three types of required language arts programs for elementary majors in the teacher training institutions of Minnesota. The types generally are related to the kinds of program requirements in the freshman year of college.

In departments of English and/or Education, in the 18 teacher training institutions of Minnesota, the tabulations indicate:

GROUP I (13 colleges): In addition to a requirement of 6-15 hours of literature and composition in general education, six colleges require 3-9 hours of literature, one requires three hours of language, four require 3-4 hours of speech, two require 3-6 hours of speech as needed, with exemptions based on interviews. Of the thirteen, eight require 1-1 1/4 hours of children's literature as a subject matter specialization requirement. Nine of the thirteen require 3-5 hours of reading and language arts methods and one requires four hours of speech correction as part of the professional education requirement.

GROUP II (four colleges): In addition to a requirement of 3-12 hours of literature in general education, two colleges require 6-8 hours of composition, one requires four hours of language and composition, and two require four hours of speech. Of the four colleges, two require three hours of children's literature as a subject matter specialization requirement. One college requires three hours in methods in reading and language arts as part of the professional education requirement, one requires three hours in developmental reading, one requires nine hours in reading, language arts and curriculum methods, and one has

no language arts or English in the professional education program.

GROUP III (one college): In addition to three hours of speech in the general education program, this college has no English/Language Arts requirement in the subject-matter specialization and requires five hours of methods in elementary education.

Summary

Of the 18 teacher training institutions in the state of Minnesota:

++Sixteen require no preparation in language for elementary teachers.

++Fourteen require no preparation in American literature, the native literature of the majority of elementary school children in Minnesota. The four which do require American literature are included in Group I above.

++Nine require no preparation in oral English/speech.

++Eight require no study of children's literature, either in English, in Education, or in Library Science.

++Two require no work in composition.

++Five require no work in special methods in reading or language arts.

MCTE Resolutions

As a result of the report and discussion, the membership of MCTE passed the following resolutions at the May business meeting:

"WHEREAS,

The Minnesota Council of Teachers of English has studied the college requirements in English Language Arts for elementary majors in the teacher training institutions of Minnesota, and

"WHEREAS,

"The Minnesota Council of Teachers of English is interested in the teaching of English Language Arts in the elementary schools of the State of Minnesota,

"THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED

"1. That the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English direct letters to the English department chairmen and the

Education department chairmen of the teacher training institutions in Minnesota stating its concern with the inadequate college preparation of elementary teachers in the English language arts.

"2. That the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English direct or appoint one of its members to send stories/articles to all major newspapers in the State of Minnesota to inform the citizens of Minnesota of the importance of English Language Arts instruction in the American system of education and invite them to examine the English Language Arts curriculum in the schools in their communities.

"3. That the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English send letters of commendation to academic deans of the teacher training institutions of Minnesota which have regularly offered or which now offer in-service courses particularly for teachers of elementary Language Arts and English.

"4. That the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English encourage, by letter, academic deans of the teacher training institutions of Minnesota to provide in-service education, in literature for elementary children, in the English language, and in composition.

"5. That the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English encourage English and education department chairmen to become alerted to the English Language Arts needs of the elementary teachers whose formal education in Language Arts is dependent on English and Education departments of the teacher training institutions which accepted the students' applications for admission."

A NOTE ON SECONDARY ENGLISH IN MINNESOTA

Gerald Kincaid, State Department of Education consultant in language arts, provides this estimate: Of approximately 3,700 teachers of English in the public secondary schools of Minnesota, about 60 percent are <u>not</u> full-time English teachers.

TEAM TEACHING IN ENGLISH

Margo Elvin

(One of the most interesting recent developments in secondary school curriculum has been the growth of teaching teams of various kinds. This article investigates some current practices in English at the secondary level. Mrs. Elvin teaches ninth grade English at Valley View Junior High School, Edina.)

Team teaching as an organizer for subject content has gained impetus in schools throughout the United States in recent years. It has met with widespread approval and enthusiasm which is reflected in the growing number of physical plants designed to accommodate large lecture groups, small discussion groups, and independent study areas. The problem in defining the team teaching concept is similar to that of attempting to find an adequate definition for the English curriculum. Definitions of team teaching therefore vary from theory to theory and theory to practice: they range from any attempt to economize teaching to complete revamping of the curriculum. Generally one might consider team teaching as a system designed to economize teacher resources while at the same time improving instruction; this two-fold aim becomes the primary objective of any team teaching plan.

Extensive reporting of team teaching theory is to be found in professional journals; however, fewer reports have been made of actual experiments in the schools, fewer in the field of English, and fewer yet in junior high school English, probably because team teaching requires maturity in students. Studies of team teaching vary from carefully controlled experiments, analyses and evaluation of results to informal attempts within a given school. The remainder of this discussion will attempt to examine several such studies of team teaching.

Only those studies directly relevant to the teaching of English are included. Several aspects are common to all programs. Where a particular advantage or disadvantage of team teaching has been mentioned once, it is not repeated in discussion of a subsequent report.

The purpose in presenting data from readings is to give the reader a clearer picture of the state of team teaching in English and to provide a ready resource list. Further study of those programs which seem most likely to fit a particular set of needs is recommended; the list of readings notes those studies which lend themselves to practical adaptation.

Some Promises and Warnings

In an article "Team Teaching in Muskegon, Michigan, Senior High School," Harrison[9] stressed the importance of careful preplanning. A teacher workshop readied them for the task. Independent study was considered the most important phase of the program; students had free times in which they could use the reading laboratory, city library, school library, project resource library, audio-visual center, or other community resources.

Clark's[2] conclusion to his own title, "Team Teaching Threat or Promise," is that team teaching has a great deal to offer curriculum organization. Team teaching, he says, is not economical, for it requires many employees and materials to guarantee its success. The teacher-pupil ratio is often less in team teaching than in traditional organization, and the paperwork is increased. Obvious advantages are improved quality of instruction, change of pace from period to period and day to day, and opportunity for more student writing; slow learners are no longer discipline problems and learn as well as in a traditional class. For the teacher, team teaching offers the opportunity to learn from each other, the psychological benefit of being on a team, and the status and financial reward of being classified as a master teacher.

According to Polos[13], a "hierarchy of teachers" is created under the team teaching plan. Such a system recognizes comparative abilities of teachers and leads to differentiated pay scales; it has the potentiality of drawing highly capable people to the teaching profession. New teachers and student teachers receive a wealth of training under master teachers, and the system is analagous to that in other professions, which train recruits through intern programs. A program for training successful team teachers

is presently in operation under the direction of the Claremont (California) Graduate School.

Experimental Studies

Some studies of team teaching are more scientific than others in their experimental approach. The following three experiments were undertaken after thorough long-range planning, including provision for evaluation of the individual program at its conclusion.

William Grammar[8] reported in "Senior English and Team Teaching" on a 1960 controlled experiment in two New York schools. The plan was a rigorous one in which composition received extensive attention; each student wrote a minimum of 36,000 total words a year. A research team handled the evaluation of psychological testing of the students themselves and their performances on the Regent's Examination. Both weaknesses and strengths were apparent, but one significant factor corroborated by research was that the experimental group was more highly motivated than the control group.

A second controlled experiment is described by Leo Weitz[15]. This New York experiment sought to determine whether team teaching was effective in developing independence and self-direction. Team teachers also had an individual class in order to provide evaluation of both groups at any given time and provide a personal viewpoint. The major finding of the study was that team teaching does develop habits of self-learning and greater independence in the students than the traditional method. Further evaluation of the groups was carried out by student questionnaires and analysis of results of the Regent's Examinations. No significant differences were found in test scores or rates of failures. Slow learners achieved better in the team groups than in the traditional classes, indicating that team teaching may have as much value for such students as for the academically more able.

The third experiment in team teaching is reviewed in "Designs for Team Teaching in English" by Stevens and Elkins.[14] The experiment had two objectives: promotion of more effective ability grouping, and improving and economizing instruction. This program made use of college and

high school faculty members in organizing the seven-man team used in the study.

Some Practical Suggestions

Only brief reference to a final group of readings is necessary. These accounts are excellent resources of practical suggestions for implementing a team-teaching program.

Florence Diesman[3] describes her observation and study of team teaching in twenty-one schools with highly-rated team programs. Her report consists of information and evaluations of the programs. Grace Lindahl[12] gives two excellent detailed plans adaptable to most needs. Lewy and Delia[11] report the results of their informal team teaching and stress the possibility for great flexibility in grouping. Structured seminars, independent study, and individual help were realized in a program which emphasized intensive and creative work. Two closely related articles by Giltinan[6,7] are accounts of informal arrangement for team teaching. Again, careful planning both before and during presentation is stressed. Excellent plans, ideas, and even a model discussion form encourage the novice to try his hand at team teaching.

Some Conclusions

The following significant points summarize the readings:

1. A conclusive definition of "team teaching" is impossible because it varies in concept and practice; however, the pooling of efforts in the common goal of student learning is central.

2. The most successful programs have carefully laid groundwork before the experiment is attempted.

3. Lack of the kind of physical plant recommended for team teaching is no great deterrent; practical solutions to the problem of space may be the school auditorium or the cafeteria.

4. Benefits to the students are numerous: variety of instructional techniques, reception of the best that the teachers have to offer, development of self-direction, and the opportunity to become critical thinkers, articulate speakers, and critical and creative writers. Individual help and enrichment through ability grouping is a major advantage of team teaching.

5. Team members must be congenial; this is not to say that they must agree entirely, but a good working relationship is mandatory.

6. Teachers benefit from the opportunity to learn from each other, increased interest in teaching as an art, increased time to prepare in areas of greatest background and ability, and time to read and increase professional stature.

Team teaching is not a magic formula for ridding education of its ills. There are weaknesses, but they seem to be outweighed by specific benefits. The universal enthusiasm expressed in the readings can lead to only one conclusion: try it!

For Further Reading

(+) designates those articles particularly practical for teacher reference.

1. Blount, Nathan S. "Fructify the Folding Door: Team Teaching Re-Examined," English Journal 53 (May, 1964).

2. Clark, Esmer K. "Team Teaching Threat or Promise," Journal of Secondary Education 36 (November, 1961).

+3. Diesman, Florence. "Team Teaching Has Many Forms," English Journal 53 (November, 1964).

+4. Fisher, Mildred Ogg. "Team Teaching in Houston," English Journal 51 (December, 1962)

5. Figurel, J. Allen et. al. "Emerging Instructional Procedures in English," Education 85 (January, 1965).

+6. Giltinan, Betty. "We Solved the Problem of Size," English Journal 52 (February, 1963).

+7. Giltinan, Betty. "The Rise and Demise of a Team," English Journal 54 (May, 1965).

+8. Grammar, William R. "Senior English and Team Teaching," New York State Education 50 (February, 1963).

+9. Harrison, William J. "Team Teaching in Muskegon, Michigan, Senior High School," National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin 460 (January, 1962).

10. Kasdon, Lawrence M. "In-Service Education in a New Key," Reading Teacher 19 (March, 1966).

+11. Lewy, Rosalind P., and Mary A. Delia. "The Practice of Cooperative Teaching," Clearing House 40 (October, 1965).

+12. Lindahl, Grace A. "Team Teaching in English is Flexible, Stimulating," Chicago School Journal 46 (November, 1964).

13. Polos, Nicholas. "The Teaching Team in Action," Journal of Secondary Education 36 (November, 1961).

+14. Stevens, Martin, and William R. Elkins. "Designs for Team Teaching in English," English Journal 53 (March, 1964).

+15. Weitz, Leo. "Team Teaching in James Monroe High School," High Points 46 (January, 1964).

FROM THE EDITORS

As another school year begins, MCTE members will be attending a variety of programs and conferences on the various problems and possibilities of teaching English and language arts at all levels of education. No doubt you will find some of these meetings more valuable than others and some of the speeches more worthwhile than others. As editors of a publication which exists to provide information and assistance to teachers of English throughout the state, we have one request to make of our members and our readers.

Whenever you hear a prepared speech which you think is worth a wider hearing than it can receive at the meeting you attend, would you please inform the editors? We do not promise to publish everything that anyone thinks is worthwhile, but we do promise to follow up every suggestion. The talents of Minnesota provide the sources of our articles; every MCTE member has an opportunity to help identify those talents. All we need is a note from you to:

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THE THEMATIC APPROACH TO LITERATURE

Karen J. Garvin

(Much has been said about a "thematic" approach to literature. Miss Garvin offers a summary and some implications for those who must decide how much attention to pay to statements about theme as a basis for organizing the teaching of literature. She is a graduate student at the University of Minnesota.)

R. S. Hennis says that "for more than thirty years English teachers have been in the throes of a controversy concerning the nature of the literary experience and the philosophy underlying the teaching of literature,"[11] and this controversy is reflected in the variety of approaches to the teaching of literature advocated by individuals or groups of teachers. In all of the questioning of approach and content in literature in the schools, two questions emerge again and again:

1. Can programs be devised that are sequential and cumulative from the elementary school on upward?

2. What are the most profitable ways to approach a literary work at various educational levels?

This investigation is concerned with the thematic approach as a possible and profitable means to a sequential and cumulative program of literature study in secondary schools.

Jerome S. Bruner, in The Process of Education, reasons that cumulative learning is made possible by specific transfer of skills from one task to a similar one and by non-specific transfer involving utilization of principles and attitudes. Mastery of the structure of a subject matter is necessary before the non-specific transfer can take place. In Literature Study in the High Schools, Dwight L. Burton points to agreement among literary scholars that this structure is to be found in literature in its recurring themes and modes and in the various forms and genres. Burton identifies four human relationships as universal themes of literature--man and deity, man and other men, man and nature, man and his inner self. He uses Northrop Frye's Design for Learning to identify four modes--romantic, comic, tragic, ironic. A curricular structure lead-

ing out of these categories might emphasize theme as an over-all category, mode as the next most inclusive classification, then form or genre. Work on a specific selection would consider it in this structural framework.

Various Practices

As "thematic" organization is described in existing or suggested curricula, the patterns evidence a great deal of diversity. Personal problems most frequently recognized by students become topics or themes of units in literature classes. Broad thematic categories which are treated in each grade of a six-year program may be filled in with more specific themes appropriate to a single grade level. An integrated language arts curriculum may be organized around such themes as "the individual in relation to God and the universe." A six-year program may be based on the single theme of "Man's Search for Guiding Principles in His Life," with sub-themes designated for each grade level. Within such organizations, matters of chronology, national literatures, types of literature, and other conventional considerations are typically specified at certain points.

Differences may also be noted in the substance receiving emphasis within a thematic framework. Stress may be placed on keen observation and application of observation to writing. Ideas from "new criticism" or some other formalism may be related to practical aspects of communication. Concern with universals at one grade level may lead to emphasis on these universals in American literature at another level and the art forms used to express these universals at a third level. Study of levels of meaning and form and genre may proceed from a thematic basis in early years. Curricular diversity comes when the curriculum designer opts for specific themes and particular emphases within these themes.

Research and Observation

The paucity of experimental research in instruction in literature forms a significant contrast to the extensive reporting of curricula and classroom activities. Few controlled experiments are reported to substantiate guidance offered to curriculum organizers. The problems of research are complicated by the absence of tools for investigation; Paul Farmer, reporting for the special committee appointed by the National Council of Teachers of English, states that one noticeable obstacle to research in teaching literature is the lack of "an objective measure of growth in literary tastes and appreciation at all levels."[10]

In one such attempt at research, Dwight L. Burton[5] conducted a controlled experiment comparing three methods for teaching appreciation of fiction--analysis of technique of craftsmanship, illumination of a central topic or theme, and general study of the short story in conjunction with original writing by students. Equivalent control classes were taught grammar and mechanics during the five and one-half weeks of the experiment. Three tests were used to evaluate results--a short story selection test, a short story comparison test, and a prose appreciation test. In addition, intensive analysis was made of free responses by students to the stories used in the experiment. Burton concluded that the three methods for teaching appreciation were equally effective, and that all were beneficial when students in the experimental groups were compared to students in the equivalent control groups. On a related topic, Burton concluded that studying short stories in a thematic unit did not sacrifice appreciation of the literature as art. There appeared to be no significant advantage of one method over another, but the emphasis provided by a specific approach did have an effect on student responses. Those who had been taught by thematic approaches more readily discovered the theme of a new selection and those taught by analysis responded more to the literary techniques in the test literature.

Polar opposites to such investigations are the generalized observations of classroom teachers. Thematic organization is said to be more difficult to teach than the pattern provided by literary anthologies but greater interest is shown by students in thematic organizations. A student may report that a thematic approach has provided a new way to look at books--or at people. Thematic approaches are characterized as ideally suited to the unit

method of teaching and lend themselves to relatively simple organization of materials.

What Can Be Said?

Casual observations and individual rhapsodies aside, there is much to be said for a "thematic" approach to literature. If one supports Charles Calitri's indictment that "The whole stuff of education has been too far removed from the stuff of life,"[7] he may find additional evidence in studies which reveal that most teachers utilize contemporary novels for work outside the classroom rather than for classroom instruction and that many teachers comment about unfavorable attitudes in their communities, among their students, and in their schools toward use of contemporary novels. Selection of themes which the student can recognize as pertinent to his own situation and use of contemporary materials (for the sake of their literary value and not simply for their modernity) seem logical means of involving students of varying intellectual capacities in the "stuff of education."

One must be careful, however, not to assume too much for the method; Burton issues some appropriate cautionary remarks. Thematic units in a literature program can result in using literature rather than teaching it. Particular attention must be paid to selection of themes which are truly significant, to selection of literature for some over-all purpose of the program (not just because it fits into a specified unit), to controlling and directing what can become a directionless study of vaguely related selections, and to adequate teaching of language, vocabulary, and reading skills.

The various curricula being developed and utilized in the teaching of literature seem to indicate that the thematic approach is one means of achieving a "sequential and cumulative" program, but the Burton study and the informal observations of teachers do not clearly establish this as the most profitable of approaches. Other structures for the literature curriculum have been suggested as logical and effective as well. What is clearly needed is more experimental research under carefully controlled conditions to determine priorities among approaches. The Burton study does seem to indicate that the choice of approaches ought to be based upon the goals of the curriculum: if one wants to stress the relevance of literature to the choices of action being made by students, one would hardly teach literature according to the method of analysis which leads students to respond to the literary techniques of the writer. There has been too little conscious thinking about approaches in teaching literature; this should be the starting point for anyone designing a program for instruction in literature.

For Further Reading

Among the materials which formed the basis for this article, the following may be of interest to teachers who are involved in deciding how to approach literature.

1. Balliet, Conrad. "On the Teaching of Literature," College English 25 (May, 1964).
2. Bettina, Sister Mary. "Teaching Frye's Theory of Modes," English Journal 54 (February, 1965).
3. Broening, Angela M. "Development of Taste in Literature in the Senior High School," English Journal 52 (April, 1963).
4. Bruner, Jerome S. The Process of Education. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1963.
5. Burton, Dwight L. "An Experiment in Teaching Appreciation of Fiction," English Journal 42 (January, 1953).
6. Burton, Dwight L. Literature Study in the High Schools. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1964.
7. Calitri, Charles. "Macbeth and the Reluctant Reader," English Journal 48 (May, 1959).
8. Dyer, Prudence. "An Expression, a Possession, and a Dream," English Journal 53 (September, 1964).
9. Early, Margaret J. "Stages of Growth in Literary Appreciation," English Journal 49 (March, 1960).
10. Farmer, Paul. "Conference on Research in Teaching Literature," College English 25 (October, 1963).
11. Hennis, R.S., Jr. "A Broad Unit Approach to Literature" High School Journal 45 (February, 1962).
12. Heilman, Robert B. "Genre and Curriculum," College English 24 (February, 1963).

13. Hillocks, George, Jr. "Approaches to Meaning: A Basis for a Literature Curriculum," English Journal 53 (September, 1964).

14. Ojala, William T. "Thematic Categories as an Approach to Sequence," English Journal 52 (March, 1963).

15. O'Malley, Rev. William J., S.J. "Literary Craftmanship: the Integration of Literature and Composition," English Journal 52 (April, 1963).

16. Rockas, Leo. "A Program of Literary Theory," Journal of General Education 14 (January, 1963).

17. Tanner, Bernard R. "Tone as an Approach to The Scarlet Letter," English Journal 53 (October, 1964).

CALENDAR OF EVENTS
Fall, 1966

Oct.	15	MCTE Advisory Board	St. Cloud
	20	MFT State English Section	St. Paul
	21	MEA State English Section	Minneapolis
		MRA State Meeting	Minneapolis
Nov.	4	State Dept. Workshop on Use of the Newspaper	Worthington
	11	State Dept. Workshop on Use of Overhead Projector	Marshall
	24-26	Annual NCTE Convention	Houston, Texas
Dec.	2	Overhead Projector Workshop	Mankato
	9	Newspaper Workshop	St. Cloud
	27-29	Annual MLA Convention	New York City
Jan.	13	Overhead Projector Workshop	Wayzata

NOTES ON PROJECT ENGLISH

Rodger Kemp and George Robb

(Minnesota's Project English Center is beginning its fifth year of operation. This article summarizes PE activities and anticipates future developments. In addition to responsibilities in Project English, Rodger Kemp is instructor in secondary education at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, and George Robb is Executive Assistant of the Upper Midwest Regional Educational Laboratory.)

The Minnesota Project English Center is a cooperative undertaking of the University of Minnesota departments of English, Speech and Theatre Arts, and Secondary Education. The center is devoted to the development and preliminary evaluation of a series of teaching materials on the nature and uses of the English language. Under the direction of Stanley Kegler of the College of Education, Harold B. Allen of the Department of English, and Donald K. Smith of the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts, the staff of the center has written and field tested a series of resource units.

The project was funded by the U. S. Office of Education in the summer of 1962 and is presently in the final year of its five-year program.

Development and Revision of Materials

Thirty-one units are being developed for use in grades seven through twelve. Units are built around a series of generalizations drawn from fields of study such as rhetoric, historical linguistics, descriptive linguistics, semantics, history of the language, psychology of language, and anthropology. The decision to draw from these disciplines is based on the supposition that few presently available materials include accurate and orderly information from these important fields.

In most cases, key generalizations are introduced in junior high school units and are treated more fully and precisely in senior high school units.

In completed form, units ordinarily include an outline or summary of content, student readings (usually in a separate booklet), suggested study or discussion guides, sample assignments and tests, and teacher references.

Most of the units were written during the first three years of the project by experienced classroom teachers who worked from outlines prepared by the permanent staff of the center. These units were then field-tested by the teachers who wrote them or by teachers in a few cooperating schools. After field tests the units were revised, largely to incorporate the suggestions of the teachers who had used the materials. The major effort of revisions this past summer was to include more activities for students, provide more and better sample tests, and furnish better bibliographies for teachers.

Demonstration and Evaluation Programs

This year, with planning and financial assistance from the newly-formed Upper Midwest Regional Educational Laboratory, the materials are being used widely in at least two Minnesota school systems, Burnsville and Detroit Lakes. Further, the Laboratory and the Project English Center are considering at least one more school, with hope of expanding the program next year to include centers in North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

In each center teachers are using all units available, adapting and supplementing them as the situations demand. Teachers are developing suggestions for further revision and gathering student performance data using their customary testing and evaluation instruments.

In addition to the evaluation functions, the centers are open to teachers, curriculum specialists, and administrators for observation and demonstration. Visitors have the opportunity to observe classrooms in which the units are being taught, and whenever possible they can discuss the lessons with teacher before and after class.

The process of adaptation is a central concern of both the Project English Center and the Regional Laboratory. The Center has stressed that the units are to be regarded only as starting points, subject to major changes required by specific classroom stiuations.

Visits to the Evaluation and Demonstration Centers may be arranged with their directors, Don Engberg in Detroit Lakes and Mary Ronzani in Burnsville. Arrangements can also be made through the Project English staff. More formal demonstrations and conferences are also being planned.

The Detroit Lakes center is using the materials in a multi-track, quarter-length course structure which has been organized during the past year.

The Burnsville program, operating under the conventional year-long course structure, demonstrates the wide possibilities for adapting and supplementing the units. Teachers have spent considerable time this past summer revising the units and extensively increasing the supplementary activities and reading materials.

Informing Interested Persons

A major portion of the information-giving function of the project will be accomplished through the demonstration and evaluation centers. However, other means have been used and will continue to be used. Teachers in the Hopkins schools met with members of the permanent staff for a series of meetings during the 1965-66 school year. Other school systems have expressed an interest in similar programs, and arrangements for these are pending. Undergraduates and a few graduate students at the University of Minnesota have been invited to attend a series of evening meetings on a voluntary basis. Such meetings have been held for the past three years.

Members of the permanent staff have met with numerous groups of teachers in pre-school workshops or curriculum development workshops, addressed meetings at conventions such as the MCTE or the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals, or welcomed visitors to the Project office.

Understandably, most inquiries concern the availability of materials. Unfortunately, the distribution of the materials awaits a clear statement of policy from the U. S. Office of Education. However, inquiries about the materials or any other aspects of the project are invited. Inquiries should be directed to 230 Peik Hall, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 55455.