

NOTES ON PROJECT ENGLISH

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(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 situations.

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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.