These goals provide general direction as to what pupils are to learn. A variety of experiences should guide pupils in achieving flexible ends.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Minnesota English Journal announces its themes for 1981-82 and issues a call for papers.

Fall 1981 - The Uses of English, manuscript deadline September 15, 1981. What are the uses of English? Where does Listening fit? Reading? Writing? Grammar? Literature? Usage. English and the real World - Connections?

Winter-Spring 1982 - Professional Concerns and the Teacher of English, manuscript deadline January 15, 1981. What are the current concerns of teachers? What about Licensure, Censorship, In-service Training, Parental Involvement in Curriculum Involvement, Class size, other items?

MEJ encourages Minnesota Teachers to submit articles that attend to the stated themes. However, articles on any subject of interest to teachers of English, Language Arts, and Reading are welcome and will be read.

ACCELERATED ENGLISH

How Valid Are Our Assumptions?

by Jean Vinton

When we think of working with talented or gifted young people, we make several assumptions about the work, or about the young people themselves. Parts of these assumptions, based as they are on our experience with young people in general, are, of course, valid; parts, however, need to be examined closely. What we can do in our classrooms depends on a careful assessment of the characteristics of our students, and a careful assessment

of talented students should influence both the material we choose for them and the methods we use in presenting that material.

Often we assume that because students are more able intellectually, they are equally more mature than their peers. True, youngsters who are capable of dealing with sophisticated abstractions may make mature decisions about such things as their use of time, or about limiting the demands on that time. They may have very solid notions about priorities and may make wise decisions about balancing work and play. Sometimes, however, very capable students simply lack the experience necessary for making mature choices. They may accept too many class or committee responsibilities. They may follow their enthusiasms and curiosities into too many activities. They may under-estimate the time they will need to polish a piece of work, or, intrigued by a new idea or theory, they may lose sight of time altogether. These young people need time to reach full maturity and they need guidance in developing an understanding of their choices and the consequences of poor choices. They may even need the experience of failing in some degree, so that they can develop their ability to assess and assign priorities. These students need what help we can give them in achieving maturity. They may, for instance, need to be given choices about managing their time. We can do such things as give assignments covering an extended period of time and including a variety of activities and make the youngsters responsible for setting up their own schedules, as they will have to do when they leave the routine of buzzers or bells. Moreover, if they fail to meet the long-term deadline, we can let them accept the consequences of that failure. By providing appropriate choices and allowing reasonable consequences for mistakes, we can provide our gifted students with experiences which are necessary for developing maturity.

Another assumption we make about gifted or talented students is that they are securely self-confident. After all, from our point of view, in most of their school careers these youngsters

have been successful. If grades are a measure of success--and in school grades are an important measure—these kids are the best in their world. Why shouldn't they be confident of their own worth? Here again, however, our assumption may be only partly true. When we listen to these talented students discuss their relationships with their peers, for instance, we hear suggestions of insecurity. Students are often cruel to one another. A vocabulary study among talented students may elicit comments about how difficult using new words is when one is accused of being a brain. Many bright elementary school children have discovered that taking a chance and volunteering an idea invites derision from their peers. Added to this cruelty is the fact that the more intelligent a student is the more aware he is that there are vast fields of knowledge beyond his own. Often getting discussion going among talented students requires some very special understanding from the teacher; good students need time to build trust in both their teacher and their peers. Teachers of advanced classes need to work just as hard to develop that trust as teachers do in any other group.

Another assumption which needs consideration is tied to the word "accelerated," often used to designate programs for talented students. In planning programs for these classes, we sometimes simply accelerate a traditional curriculum. We teach eighth grade material to seventh graders and ninth grade material to eighth graders. We bring the research paper and Shakespearean tragedy to ninth graders and expect tenth graders to produce pieces of literary criticism. We must, however, understand acceleration in a more special sense. We must speed-up the programs for talented students, but we must do it in the right direction. We must look further into a piece of literature and work more with it. Talented students do read more rapidly. They absorb ideas more quickly, respond to nuances of meaning and show an often astonishing ability to understand characters or appreciate implications in plot or setting. They sense more quickly relationships between form and theme. These abilities, however, cannot substitute for ex-

perience and social maturity. Simply speeding up exposure to regular materials for older students may move to materials beyond the experience and interests of the group. These gifted young people should, instead, be encouraged to linger over a piece of literature, to examine it from several angles, to realize that the reader is never really finished with a piece of good literature. One does not "do" a Shakespearean play and then put it back on the shelf. Acceleration should move inward, not just onward. A gifted individual or class should explore a variety of interpretations of a piece of work, examine its style, speculate about the author's intentions for specific episodes. Writing assignments should be experiments in style, exercises in levels of diction, manipulations of points of view. The goal of accelerated English classes should not be just to do more; that goal should be to do more thoroughly, creatively, and independently.

A final assumption teachers need to examine carefully is the idea that intellectually advanced young people have mastered fundamental skills in areas such as grammar. Gifted students do learn rapidly, and they often can absorb elements of grammar, spelling, correct punctuation, and other basic skills without concentrated work. As a result, the impression which these students give in both their oral and written work is that they really have mastered these skills. Occasionally, however, the impression is not completely true. As teachers we have a responsibility to provide these young people with the best background we can give them, and part of that background must be competence in skill areas. As our talented students leave the high schools and go on to college work in both English and foreign languages, they should be able to do so with a thorough grounding in their own language and its use. Good diagnostic tests and quick but intensive review may be all we teachers need to do, but we should use these regular checks.

Good work with any of our students requires that we know the students well. Most of the training which we teachers receive, as well as the experiences we accumulate, directs us toward

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The Uses of English

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work with fairly average or with heterogeneous groups of students. Consequently, when we work with students outside those average groups, we need to do some careful evaluation both before we begin and as we move through the work of the term. Part of that evaluation must be to recognize our own assumptions and to examine their validity.

PROMOTING AND PUBLISHING WRITING FOR OLDER ADULTS

by James Gremmels

The Director of the Adult Learning Center at the University of Minnesota, Morris, presented the English faculty with an idea about conducting writing workshops for older adults. Intrigued by the possibilities, although uncertain about the kinds of writing which might appeal to older people, the English staff wholeheartedly endorsed the idea and agreed to assist with the project.

Our first step in planning was to discover if older adults in our area were interested in a writing workshop, and if so, what would they like to write about? Over 60% of the 48 people in the Glenwood and Ashby Senior Citizen Centers who answered our questionnaire showed an interest in doing some supervised writing. Most of them wanted to write about things past. On the basis of our survey, we tried to develop a writing program that would draw upon their experiences and bring out their best thoughts with as little triteness as possible. We thought of different ways for them to write about themselves, their families, and their local history. If possible, we wanted to keep the four, three-hour afternoon sessions varied, relaxed, and flexible.

Ashby was chosen as the site and 25 people ages 55 to 82 signed up to attend the four sessions. Included in this group were a number of former school teachers, a retired mail carrier, an ex-postmaster, many of them daughters and sons of old settlers.

Not without some apprehension, three of us met for the first time with this group in the Home Economics Room of the Ashby