DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 021 872 TE 500 111

By- Josephs, Lois

THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN IMPROVING THE CURRICULUM IN ENGLISH

Association for Higher Education, Washington, D.C.
Pub Date 64
Note- 4p.; Paper presented at Annual National Conference on Higher Education (19th, April 19-22, 1964).
Journal Cit- Undergraduate Education; The Proc of the Annual Nat Conf on Higher Education (19th, April 19-22, 1964). Current Issues in Higher Education
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.24
Descriptors- *ARTICULATION (PROGRAM), *COLLEGE BOUND STUDENTS, COLLEGE SCHOOL COOPERATION, COMPOSITION (LITERARY), CONFERENCE REPORTS, COURSE OBJECTIVES, *CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT, CURRICULUM RESEARCH, CURRICULUM STUDY CENTERS, EDUCATIONAL TRENDS, ENGLISH INSTRUCTION, *ENGLISH PROGRAMS, HIGH SCHOOLS, LANGUAGE ARTS, LITERATURE, *PROGRAM CONTENT
Identifiers- *Carnegie Institute of Technology Curriculum Study Center in English, Carnegie Institute of Technology, Pennsylvania

The Curriculum Study Center at Carnegie Institute of Technology developed a sequential and cumulative program in English for college-bound students in the high school. This three-year program, emphasizing language, literature, and communication, is briefly described. Also briefly discussed is the impetus for change in the English curriculum. (BN)

UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION, The Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual National Conference on Higher Education,

April 19-22, 1964

The Role of Higher Education in Improving The Curriculum in English

• **LOIS JOSEPHS**

Assistant Professor of English
Carnegie Institute of Technology

THE PRESENT REVOLUTION in the teaching of English has had a variety of historical roots: the analysis of the learning process by such diverse men as Socrates, Matthew Arnold, Alfred North Whitehead, and Jerome Bruner. An impetus for change in the English curriculum began when participants at a Conference on Basic Issues in the Teaching of English asked whether basic programs in English could be derived that are sequential and cumulative from the kindergarten through the graduate schools. A short time later the National Council of Teachers of English published a report which presented more concrete suggestions: (1) focus instruction in English upon the study of language, literature, and composition; (2) educate teachers of English to the developmental and sequential nature of the study and institute a national program for encouraging articulation of English studies throughout the school years; (3) improve present preparatory programs for teachers of English; (4) improve the preparation of practicing teachers of English; and (5) encourage significant research about the teaching of English.

Since that time the revolution has rapidly moved forward. We have progressed beyond the abstract suggestions of the Conference into the real situation of the classroom.

The role of higher education in that progress has been significant. Of major importance are the Curriculum Study Centers in English, created by Project English of the U.S. Office of Education. These centers have been designed to develop curricula to meet a variety of educational needs. The one at Hunter College is developing reading and English language materials for grades seven through nine in depressed urban areas. The center at the University of Georgia is providing curricular materials to develop competency in written composition in children from kindergarten through elementary school. The center at Columbia is formulating a set of materials designed to teach English as a second language to children of early elementary school age. Others are attacking similar problems.

The objective of the center at Carnegie Institute of Technology was the development of a sequential and cumulative program in English for able college-bound students in the senior high school. The underlying structure of the three-year sequence has been planned by four members of the Carnegie Institute of Technology English Department; the details, such as daily lesson plans, have been developed with forty teachers from cooperating schools.

We saw the field of English as triangles symbolizing three interrelated areas: literature, communication, and language. The triangles overlap and only a small part of each of these studies is unrelated to the other. The larger portion of each, in fact, overlaps significantly with one or both of the others.

We attempted to work out in summer planning sessions with high school teachers a sequential, cumulative base for a three-year program. Proceeding from an underlying concept of literature as a re-creation in a verbal art form of what it has been like to be alive, we decided upon the total literature content for the three years. Not wishing to depart too radically from the traditional patterns of high school English programs, we chose to teach world literature in the tenth grade, American literature in the eleventh, and English literature in the twelfth, somewhat as follows:

10th Grade
World Literature: U********** M********** L******

11th Grade
World Literature: U********** M********** L**********

12th Grade
World Literature: U****** M********** L**********

(U—Universal concerns of man; M—Modification by culture pattern; L—Literary art forms, genres, techniques.)

As the diagram indicates, there is a sequential pattern throughout the three years. Although all aspects of the basic concept are dealt with in all years, only the amount of teaching time and the degree of emphasis change. For instance, in the tenth grade literature program, most teaching time is spent on the universal concerns of man, less on modification by culture pattern, and still less on the literary art form. In the twelfth grade the emphasis is reversed.

The thematic units, within which the literature is organized, relate to the major emphasis of the year. The universal concerns of man emerge in the tenth grade from such units as Social Concerns, Love, or the Search for Wisdom, just as the American modification appears in the eleventh grade within units such as The American Puritan Attitude or The American Man's Desire for Success. In the twelfth grade the emphasis moves to genre—the literary art form considered in the Tale or Tragedy. We see here examples of one unit in the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade literature programs.

Tenth grade: Love (A Universal Concern)—*Cyrano de Bergerac, Psalms, Book of Ruth, The Cradle Song.* Eleventh grade: The American Man's Desire for Success (A Universal Concern modified by the American Culture Pattern) —*Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin, The Rise of Silas Lapham, The Great Gatsby, All My Sons.* Twelfth grade: Tragedy (A Universal Concern modified by a Cultural Tradition and reflected in a Literary Art Form)—*Oedipus Rex, Macbeth, Wuthering Heights.* Not only is the emphasis of each year observed by the approach within the particular unit, but an awareness of the complex nature of a literary work of art grows throughout the three-year sequence.

The study of language and communication, too, attempts to articulate subject matter so that knowledge builds within a three-year sequence:

10th Grade Communication: I********** M********** MR******

11th Grade Communication: I********** M********** MR**********

12th Grade Communication: I****** M********** MR**********

(I—Idea: the writer discovers, isolates, defines his message; M—Message sent: the writer puts it into language; MR—Message received: the writer modifies it according to the needs of his reader.)

10th Grade Language: STR********** SEM********** R******

11th Grade Language: STR********** SEM********** R**********

12th Grade Language: STR****** SEM********** R**********

(STR—Structure of the language; SEM—Semantics: meaning; R—Rhetoric: the effective use of language.)

We might look at the way in which these three aspects of the English curriculum—literature, language, and communication—actually do interrelate. While in the tenth grade we emphasize discovery of the universal concerns of man in literature, we also emphasize the isolation of an idea in writing—an idea based on the literature. Certainly, in the eleventh grade program, we also see the relationship between a study of the modification of literature by a particular culture pattern and the study of semantics within that same culture pattern. In the twelfth grade, the emphasis on the literary art form is closely tied to the effective use of language.

We also planned to emphasize the inductive method of teaching; thus the approach to the study of literature is textual rather than historical—an approach which strives for depth rather than breadth. Although a sense of the historic flow of literature does exist in the plan for the eleventh and twelfth grade programs, the primary concern is with the work of art. And the thematic approach to literature, by the very nature of what that approach is, evokes a perceptive analysis of the theme as it relates to the literature or of the literature as it relates to the theme. Lessons were devised to insure a technique of proper questioning that allows for growth in perception of the essence of the literary work of art.

The approach to communication, too, is inductive—an approach not organized around lectures on writing techniques, but rather on the reproduction and discussion of individual papers representative of typical writing problems. And in the study of language the approach is also inductive. The attempt, here, is to use what a student knows about his own language, that is, to describe the language rather than to prescribe rules for it. We see how language may be

taught inductively, when in examining a nonsense passage, we discover no difficulty in choosing various parts of speech according to their function:

> The bofer said that the sactiful dotion of the nither depended upon the frontity of the very titious callents. He quiffed them how loftly the dotion ran. In the glickest domdoons, these himberisms gamed a most illiquant purpe.

In all of this work, the college staff was isolated from the school staff only in the initial planning. Both groups worked together to translate the basic concepts into a working curriculum, now being taught and evaluated in almost 100 classes. To insure practical control of the situation and to facilitate careful re-evaluation of the curriculum, two of the college professors teach two of these classes. Thus four college professors and thirty high school teachers have turned an idea into a reality—a sequential and cumulative three-year program for college-bound students.

The initial rumblings of dissatisfaction precipitated a great change in the teaching of English; nevertheless, there is still much to be done. If sequence and articulation succeed within an isolated three-year program, they can only be totally successful within a whole school program. In addition, although various aspects of the English discipline interrelate, they must also be approached separately, especially in terms of what the expert has to offer. Problems exist because the expert in linguistics finds it difficult to communicate with not only the teacher of language in the schools but also with the expert in literature. Similarly, in reading, an experimental psychologist may be doing significant but isolated research in one laboratory, the psycholinguist in another —all reading research but all remote from the reading expert and the reading problems in the schools.

Certainly, the story, as yet, is incomplete; and as Jerome Bruner warns in *The American Behavioral Scientist:* "It would be a great pity if our zeal were too easily assuaged by partial victories. We do well to recall that most revolutions have been lost precisely because they did not go far enough." Hopefully, the forces that have precipitated change in the English curriculum will continue to erase what T. S. Eliot calls the shadows between the idea and the reality—to insure a final reality that, paradoxically, can exist only in perpetual motion. A curriculum can never exist in final form because as societies change so do the needs of both the individual and society. The Aristotelian notion of change and reality and Bergson's observation that "we change . . . and the state itself is nothing but change" are particularly true of the reality of education, the reality of the English curriculum, as a changing process.