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Norup's Middle School Language Arts Program for the High Achiever

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Norup Middle School is one of two middle schools in the Berkley School District. It is located in Oak Park, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. Although the majority of its 600 students come from families which could be characterized as middle or upper middle class on the basis of income and educational background, the students have diversified religious, foreign, and national backgrounds, and range greatly in academic levels, abilities, and interests. For example: 10% of the student body scores below grade level, and 1% of the student body are recent immigrants who are unable to speak or comprehend the English language. Most of the parents, however, are greatly interested in the school's academic environment and deem education extremely important. Four years ago Norup Middle School addressed itself seriously to the whole area of differentiated instruction by forming a committee, composed of administrators, staff, and parents, to recommend how the school could best meet the needs of all students. After much thought and consideration, the committee proposed a master plan to the Berkley School Board. This proposal asked:

1. That all Norup's classrooms be extended by converting the library into a learning center.
2. That the learning center be used as a vehicle to help provide differentiated instruction for students.
3. That the learning center provide the resources, programs, materials, and staff necessary to insure individualized instruction.

This proposal was approved by the Board of Education and Norup Middle School now has a unique learning center operation which incorporates many facets of instruction into the total school structure.

The center operates as a traditional library and media center and also offers students and staff a variety of services and resources. With the help of the learn-

ing center staff, community volunteers, and teachers, the center offers individual tutorial, small group, and large group instruction to the student body. Students can work in the learning center at their own level, pace, and interest areas.

One valuable program offered through the learning center operation is designed to address the special needs of high achievers in language arts. A program specifically tailored for high achievers was designed after two definite needs were recognized by the Norup staff and community; (1) a need for a formal reading program at Norup; (2) a need to challenge high achieving students. With these needs in mind, the same committee set out to plan a program to meet them. Criteria for identifying students and written objectives for this program were established.

The Iowa Silent Reading Test for Basic Skills was the standardized test chosen. Students ranging between the 90th and 99th percentile were identified to participate in the program. Also, teacher and/or parent judgment was incorporated into the criteria. Students meeting the established scores on the Iowa could be placed in the program if the teacher or parents thought he was capable of meeting the challenge.

Objectives were established to develop the students in as many areas as possible, including:

- (a) learning to analyze various literary terms (figurative language, characterization, dialogue, satire, etc.);
- (b) developing disciplines study habits and task commitment;
- (c) developing better writing skills;
- (d) developing critical thinking skills;
- (e) increasing vocabulary;
- (f) developing creative thinking skills.

The committee reviewed a number of books in order to find those which could be used most effectively to reach these objectives. After much thought and consideration, they selected 2 books from a Scott Foresman Series: *Counterpoint* (8th grade) and *Projection* (7th grade). These 2 books were selected as the basic texts for the program for several reasons. They contain an outstanding collection of prose, fiction, mythology, and drama. They present literature as an art form and encompass the study of basic literary terms. They have a wide variety of supplementary articles and activities which stimulate students. They are illustrated with purposeful activities for vocabulary growth and composition skills.

In addition to the basic texts, other resources are used as supplementary materials to focus on individual skill development: *Critical Thinking Book No. 1*, by Anita Harnadek (Troy, Michigan: Midwest Publication, 1976). This selection deals with critical thinking as if it were any other skill and is suitable for any student who has the capacity but has not yet developed the skill to think critically. This selection gradually progresses from fundamental thinking skills to higher level thinking skills.

It has a variety of interesting problems for the students to solve. Several approaches have been used to help students in creative thinking. For example, one of the first assignments in creative thinking was for them to take home shoe boxes filled with sundry items, blocks, paperclips, pencils, empty plastic containers, etc. They were instructed to simply "make something". Most students assumed (although incorrectly) that they had to combine the predetermined materials creatively, and they did construct a variety of creative things. However, a few students demonstrated a higher level of creative thinking. These students understood the assignment to mean "simply" make something, not necessarily using the items in the box. Some of these creations included candy, cookies, and paintings.

For vocabulary building and etymology, one of the sources used is the paperback *Your Heritage of Words*, by William Morris. This book provided an entertaining and delightful vehicle for learning words. It also contains self-scoring quizzes which are helpful with evaluations. Instruction on how to use *Roget's Thes-*

aurus was also provided.

Other resources and materials are used in the overall program, including: Joseph Renzulli, *The enrichment triad model: a guide for developing defensible programs for the gifted and talented* (Wethersfield, Connecticut: Creative Learning Press); *New directions in creativity* (Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1973); Paul Torrance, *Creative learning and teaching* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1974) and *Future problem solving and career education* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 1976.)

Definite classroom procedures and/or management techniques are equally essential to the success of the program. The class meets in the learning center under the direction of the learning center teacher, daily for 45 minutes. The students have definite specific, daily, weekly and monthly assignments. These requirements aid students in the development of improved study habits and task commitment. One indication of a high achiever is his commitment to the completion of a task. However, unless he has had exposure to such commitment and training in how to achieve it, he usually finds it difficult at the eighth grade level. One way to help the students develop better study habits and commitment to completion of a task is to start them out with a one week assignment, and gradually build to a ten week one. This slow progression helps the students to study better and for the most part develops commitment. The students are expected to do a conscientious job on all assignments. This will assure the students receive maximum benefits from the program. The responsibility for guiding the students by providing appropriate resources and time for the students to develop their potential is that of the teacher.

Each year after the students are identified, objectives set, staff and teaching materials selected, the parents notified, the program is ready for implementation. Parents and teachers of the identified students are informed of the program, objectives and requirements. It is deemed important to keep all concerned aware of the expectations and requirements made of the students in order to solicit help and understanding if needed, and to encourage students to do their very best.

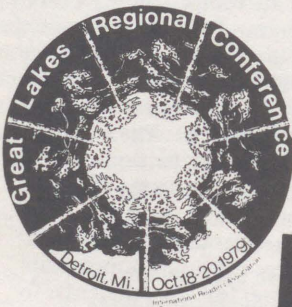
The evaluation process is both forma-

tive, which helps correct problems as they arise; and summative, which enables taking a comprehensive look at what has been accomplished. One aspect of formative evaluation is that it needs to contain an outlet for any student who is "misplaced". (This is determined by a student's quality of work, test scores, frustration level, and ability to keep up with the demands of the total program structure.) Experience to date has shown that such "misplaced" students have been anxious to leave the high level program and do perform better in another class. Also some students from other groups who have higher levels of ability benefit by a

change into this program for high achievers.

The Iowa Silent Reading Test of Basic Skills is re-administered in May to measure student achievement for the year. In addition to the Iowa, a comprehensive test on literary terms, vocabulary, and general writing skills is also administered as a pre-post test of student achievement.

The summative evaluation design also includes parental, students, and staff evaluations of the total program. All recommendations are taken seriously and considered carefully in planning for the next year.



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