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A talented and gifted language arts/reading curriculum for a rural school, grades 5-8: Goals, objectives, and suggested implementation

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A talented and gifted language arts/reading curriculum for a rural school, grades 5-8: Goals, objectives, and suggested implementation

Abstract

As a result of the new Iowa Standards (1988), it has become necessary for all schools in Iowa to establish programs for gifted and talented students systemwide

A TALENTED AND GIFTED
LANGUAGE ARTS/READING CURRICULUM
FOR A RURAL SCHOOL, GRADES 5-8:
GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION

A Graduate Project
Submitted to the
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Arts in Education
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N. Patricia Long
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Entitled: A TALENTED AND GIFTED LANGUAGE ARTS/READING

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GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND SUGGESTED IMPLEMENTATION

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A Talented and Gifted Language Arts/Reading
Curriculum For a Rural School,
Grades 5-8: Goals, Objectives,
and Suggested Implementation

As a result of the new Iowa Standards (1988), it has become necessary for all schools in Iowa to establish programs for gifted and talented students systemwide (K-12). This required the Missouri Valley, Iowa, School District to develop an adequate and appropriate program to serve the needs of its identified gifted students.

Missouri Valley, Iowa, is a small rural community with an estimated population of 3,000 within commuting distance of Omaha/Council Bluffs. Many residents are employed in the Omaha metropolitan area. Others farm or are employed by small businesses, the hospital, or the school. A sizable population receives some form of public support, resulting in a low socio-economic status for the community. The district has an enrollment of approximately 1,000 students. These students are divided among four attendance centers in the following divisions: K-1 (the Primary Building), 2-4 (Linn School), 5-8 (the Middle School), and 9-12 (the High School).

Limited funding, limited resources, limited personnel, and problems with scheduling, all factors

mentioned by Yoder (1985) and Howley (1989) as being areas of concern to small, rural schools, necessitated the selection of only one content area as the basis of the gifted and talented program developed by the district. The school administration made the decision to adapt the language arts/reading program to meet the needs of the gifted and talented children because of the ease of implementation and content interest of staff members responsible for the development and teaching of the K-8 program. The decision also was made to staff the program by assigning one teacher to serve grades K-4, and another grades 5-8.

The teacher assigned to grades K-4 and the teacher assigned to grades 5-8 elected to develop a joint graduate project which would help to assure the development of an articulated curricular approach for the talented and gifted program. One of the two teachers is this writer who concentrated on program development at grade levels 5-8, while the writer of the companion paper, Susan L. Cathcart, concentrated on developing a program for grade levels K-4.

Commonalities in the development of the project included an analysis of the factors affecting the gifted and talented curriculum for the Missouri Valley School District at the different grade levels K-8 and the development of common goals and objectives for the

program. Individual research on each grade level area was conducted and a procedure for curriculum development in the language arts at the different grade levels was established and applied. It should be noted that differences in cognitive development in children at different grade levels necessitated such a division in the research and the application of that research, as well as in the suggestions for implementation of the common goals and objectives of the program.

Statement of Purpose

This project fulfilled two purposes. The first purpose was to establish an articulated curricular program for K-8 language arts/reading that would meet the needs of the identified gifted students of Missouri Valley in that subject content area. A second and primary purpose of the project was to develop program goals and objectives, along with suggestions for implementation.

Some major curriculum writers in the field of gifted education, Van Tassel-Baska, Feldhusen, Seeley, Wheatley, Silverman and Foster (1988) and Fisher (1989), state that a minimum of three years is necessary to develop an articulated, comprehensive curriculum. Therefore, the result of this collaborative project is limited to the development of a list of goals and objectives upon which a scope and

sequence and curriculum outline subsequently will be built.

Factors Affecting the Curriculum of the Missouri Valley School District

In order to tailor a program to fit the needs of the Missouri Valley Middle School, it was first necessary to examine the factors directly influencing the curriculum development. These include those factors related to the district, the community, and the middle school students themselves.

District Factors

One of the factors which impacts on curriculum design and development for the talented and gifted is the Missouri Valley School District's philosophy. One of its major tenets is that all children in the district should be provided with equal educational opportunities that will enable each child to develop mentally, physically, socially, culturally, and morally, to the fullest of his/her potential. Such a statement demonstrates district support of the provision for special educational services for those children identified as possessing special gifts and talents. It also reflects support of the Iowa Code's (Section 442.33) definition of giftedness: "Gifted and talented children are children who require appropriate instruction and educational services commensurate with

their abilities and needs beyond those supplied by the regular school program."

Another factor which has had an effect upon school district curriculum development and design is an informal needs assessment conducted by staff interested in the development of a program for the most able students in the district. It indicated that such children in the Missouri Valley School District required additional challenge and support to meet their educational needs and thus, implicitly, that the school district was not following its philosophy nor was it meeting the standards as set by the Iowa Code.

Rural School Factors

Although Missouri Valley is often considered a rural community, it does possess some advantages because of its close proximity to Omaha, Nebraska. Some of these advantages include the University of Nebraska at Omaha, museums, libraries, the opera, and the symphony.

The school system, however, has the problems associated with rural schools cited by Spicker, Southern, and Davis (1987). These include size of the school and staff, the funding available, resistance to change, and small and less specialized staff. Missouri Valley has been experiencing a declining enrollment which results in a lower tax base and therefore in

budget reduction. These recent budget cuts and the declining enrollment have resulted in cutbacks in the staff, programs, and materials. These have also caused the average classroom size to rise to about 27 pupils per class. Many of the staff have been teaching for twenty years or longer and tend to resist educational change. The specialized staff that are available, the vocal music, band, and art teachers, are shared by more than one building. This results in a rigid schedule. Although many of the staff have indicated their support of education of the gifted, not many on the staff are knowledgeable concerning the various components of gifted education. Because of this lack of knowledge, inservice opportunities for the staff will be needed.

These factors are reflected in the current status of the Missouri Valley Middle School which houses Grades 5-8. For example, due to declining enrollment, the scheduling has been changed frequently in recent years. At present Grade Five is self-contained with grouping for reading and mathematics, while Grades Six through Eight are departmentalized. However, the schedule has been arranged to allow for a separate class for each level in the area of language arts/reading for the gifted and talented students. A concomitant result of such scheduling changes is the frequency of shifting faculty assignments.

Middle School Factors

The middle school years are a time of change for children physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally. Wright (1983) describes this change as "rapid and erratic." These changes involve changes in height, weight, maturity, and socialization among members of the same age group. These changes are partly characterized by a transition from concrete to abstract thought. (Wright, 1983).

Middle school students, for example, have a strong desire to be independent but also a need to be liked; they have difficulty making up their minds. They desire security, but they also want the right to question the rules that give them a sense of security, sometimes making this stage of growth referred to as the age of rebellion. During this period, middle school children usually become attracted to the opposite sex, but there may be a great variation in degrees of attraction. Since there is great peer pressure, these preadolescents often evaluate themselves in relationship to their contemporaries. Self-confidence and self-esteem are often low. Because gifted middle school students are advanced intellectually, it is sometimes difficult for them to find intellectual peers in their own age range; yet

they are not mature enough emotionally for older friends (Wright, 1983).

The characteristics discussed in the preceding paragraph necessitate that the curriculum development for this age group should include strategies to promote self-confidence and to capitalize on interests. During the middle school years interests and achievement decline if the students are not encouraged to follow their interests. According to Wright, the opportunity for development of these interests and achievements may be lost forever if not supported. Programs for middle school gifted should encourage academic growth, provide opportunities for development socially, personally, and emotionally, and help develop aesthetic and personal values.

Wright also emphasizes the fact that the middle school gifted are not always "star pupils" because of the fact that they have been able to achieve with little or no effort throughout the elementary grades and are not prepared for new challenges. Indeed, Cushenbery (1987) mentions that some gifted students might require remediation or instruction in some areas when confronted with difficult work. Also, if the classroom has failed to challenge them, they may have become bored or frustrated which often leads to their underachievement or their becoming discipline problems.

Middle school is a time for development, a time to seek out all options and explore interests, a time for problem solving and decision making, and a time to develop self-awareness. In his discussion of the needs of gifted middle schoolers, Wright alludes to this when he suggests activities that provide outlets for interests, activities that allow free time and that provide the student opportunities for goal setting and decision making. These activities also should promote an understanding of what is involved in honest judgments and the consequences of making those judgments. Bryant (1989) in a survey of junior high gifted students found exploratory activities such as field trips, independent study or projects, challenging discussions and accelerated classes rated high in the wishes of these students, and concluded that such exploratory activities were of great value. Mentorships should be developed with people either from the community or staff that share the same interests. Finally, the importance of guidance and counseling at this grade level should not be underestimated.

Wright (1983) and the National School Public Relations Association (1979) especially recommend guidance in self-awareness activities as being especially appropriate for this age group. Wright, in discussing the gifted middle school student, urges

establishment of groups consisting of those students with similar abilities, at least part of the time, so they can analyze common problems, share interests, and cultivate friendships with those of similar talents and interests.

Curricular Needs of a Gifted/Talented Program

Unique qualities of the school district, the rural school, and the middle school have been discussed as factors affecting the school curriculum. The gifted and talented program also possesses attributes which are factors to be examined when developing qualitatively differentiated curriculum to meet their needs. This section addresses three of those attributes: the characteristics of intellectually gifted students, the needs of these students, and special curricular needs.

Characteristics of Intellectually Gifted Students

To consider the individual curricular needs of the district and its students, one must first be aware of the characteristics of gifted students in general. Borland (1989) states that, because curriculum is determined for a specific group of students based on their abilities, curriculum developers should be aware of those characteristics of the target population or, in this case, the gifted.

When Feldhusen, Hansen, and Kennedy (1989) and Borland (1989) summarize the characteristics of the gifted, they include the following: the ability to learn at a fast pace and with ease; a good memory; an advanced vocabulary; high reading ability; the ability to write and speak well and, therefore, express themselves effectively, advanced reasoning which allows them to understand complex ideas quickly; acute, inquisitive observation skills; risk taking; individualistic; and abilities to think critically, creatively, and analytically. Parker (1989) also mentions that gifted students master essentials and that they produce and reproduce ideas quickly. Awareness of these characteristics will provide guidance for deciding the content, process, and product skills necessary in a curriculum for gifted and talented.

Student Needs

Van Tassel-Baska et al. (1988) describe some special curricular needs of gifted/talented students. They need to have activities that allow them to operate at high levels of thought and feeling. They need opportunities for divergent thinking. They need challenging work that is based on challenging outcomes. They need discussions among peers on their intellectual levels and experiences that lead to understanding of

values. According to Van Tassel-Baska, gifted students also need an opportunity to seek interrelationships in all areas of knowledge. They need special classes in their area of interest which will accelerate and enrich the content. They need more exposure to new and varied learning experiences both in and out of the school setting. They need opportunities to apply their knowledge to real problems. Finally, gifted students need to be taught how to think critically and creatively, how to do research, how to solve problems, how to cope with their giftedness, how to make decisions, and how to lead effectively.

In order to determine the individualized needs of the students individually in the language arts/reading area, Cushenbery (1987) and Anderson (1989) recommend an interest inventory. (see Appendixes A & B) According to Anderson (1989), information from an actual inventory will give insight into interest areas and attitudes toward reading and reading behaviors that will help in the selection of content, process, and product.

Curriculum Needs

An initial step in the planning of this project involved the collection of information and an examination of elements influencing curriculum development and design for the gifted. C. June Maker

(1982) defines such gathering of resources and the collecting of information as including the consideration of models available, their philosophies, goals strengths, and weaknesses. According to Maker, the teacher and his/her philosophies, personality, skills, and prior experiences must also be considered, as well as the attitudes and attributes of the school and the community. The gifted and talented students' common characteristics must also be examined in the decision making process for the program design. All of these must be integrated into a program that fits the school needs.

McLeod and Cropley (1989) emphasize that realistic planning for curriculum for the gifted and talented must consider resources available, what existing circumstances are evident which may affect programming, and what constraints are placed on the program. Some possible constraints that they delineate are the legal definition of "gifted or talented", the financial resources available, quantity and quality of willing professional personnel, liaison or lack of liaison between elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education areas, instructional arrangement and facilities, and existing curriculum and materials available.

Reis and Renzulli (1986) state that the major goal of the school is to plan a curricular program that takes into consideration the district's local resources, strengths, budgetary constraints, problems, personalities, and scheduling procedures. In other words, each program should be designed with the individual district in mind.

Van Tassel-Baska et al. (1988) also points out that great consideration should be given to how children learn when planning curriculum. She feels that the processing of information, cognitive mapping, and differences in learning styles are examples of methods of learning that will influence curriculum development and adaptation.

The analysis of these listed factors gave the Missouri Valley planners an idea of what the proposed program should provide and what was required to meet the needs of the identified gifted students in the language arts/reading area. The school administration was in favor of the development of such a differential program. The necessary support was there; but further investigation was needed to indicate what an actual program for gifted and talented students required, and what goals and objectives should be established.

The goals of the curriculum, according to Feldhusen, Hansen, and Kennedy (1989), should adapt and

extend the existing goals for all students. The goals should be clearly and concisely written, centered around the student, comprehensive, to contain all critical components, and differentiated levels. They should focus on content, process, and product. Bryant (1989) states that such extension and enrichment of the regular program allows the students to have more challenging experiences, while Davis and Rimm (1985) suggest that sound planning with goals in mind, taking into consideration the students' time and the district's resources, can lead to the improvement of academic skills and higher level thinking processes.

In summary, a limited examination of the literature reveals several factors related to curriculum development which clearly become curricular needs to be met in building a curriculum model as envisioned by the writers of this project. Initially the curriculum must reflect the common needs and experiences of all those involved in the school community. Also, the curriculum must be built within the existing financial and educational constraints; it must be designed to enhance the characteristics of the school district. Once these needs are determined, goals for the specific curriculum must be developed with special attention to extending and enriching the regular curriculum. These curricular needs were given

great consideration in the establishment of the goals and objectives for the proposed K-8 language arts/reading curriculum for identified gifted children in the Missouri Valley Schools.

Curriculum Design

There are many curriculum models and programs available for use. Fortner (1989) classifies the programs into three different categories: Acceleration, grouping, and enrichment. Acceleration allows the student to complete the required material in less time. Grouping separates the learners into different groups for a specified amount of time. Enrichment selects learning experiences that broaden the views of and are more appropriate for the needs of the gifted.

Most models, either combined or alone, according to Maker (1982), place emphasis on higher level thinking skills and the development of creative, divergent thinking. Whether combined or used separately, the similarities and the differences of the models must be considered in order to make a decision that is most advantageous to the system. According to Joyce Van Tassel-Baska (1986), it is "...not advantageous to select one model over another when planning appropriate curriculum over a span of years, for each approach responds to different characteristics

and needs..." (p. 8). The National School Public Relations Association (1979) agrees with Van Tassel-Baska by saying there is no right answer to which design is best. The school must look at the characteristics of the children, the nature of their giftedness, and the resources of the community in order to determine the approach.

After analyzing the various models and taking into account the limited funds and staff in Missouri Valley, it became clear that no one model would work for this system. What was needed was a unique program that would meet the special needs of Missouri Valley and its gifted students.

Van Tassel-Baska (1986, 1988) suggests using a curriculum design that combines three models: the content mastery model, the process/product model, and the epistemological model. Similarly, Maker (1982) suggests modifying content, process, product, and learning environment in order to develop a differentiated program for the gifted. The combination of these elements is easily adaptable to the language arts/reading curriculum and the combination has been found to be effective with the gifted.

According to Van Tassel-Baska, the first model, the content model, emphasizes the importance of learning skills and concepts in a particular subject

area. The student moves rapidly through the content using a pretest and the proper materials to allow mastery. It has the capacity to reduce the regular curriculum by two-thirds. The content mastery model is not costly to implement because it uses the regular program and materials. However, used alone, it could leave the highly gifted student unchallenged (Van Tassel-Baska, et al, 1988).

Because the curriculum should allow for enrichment as well as acceleration, the second model used is the process/product approach. This places emphasis on learning investigative skills and allows the student to develop a product that centers around his/her area of interest. The model allows the student to use problem solving skills and skills involving preinquiry, inquiry, and interpretive inquiry.

The third model is the concept-based, epistemological approach. This focuses on the understanding and appreciation of knowledge. The student is exposed to key ideas and themes.

Van Tassel-Baska (1988) relates each of these models to one area of the language art/reading curriculum. The content model is connected to reading because it allows independent learning and high achievement. The process/product model with

its problem finding and problem solving components correlates to writing because of the high interest in a single topic and its attention to task commitment. The high verbal reasoning skills necessary for the epistemological approach are found in the study of literature.

Evidence in support of the combined model is found throughout the literature. Van Tassel-Baska's (1986, 1988) combination of models are the three suggested by Fortner (1989). In support of the content component of the model, Kaplan (1989) states that acceleration is not effective unless accompanied by enrichment, and enrichment is not effective unless accompanied by acceleration. The findings of the Richardson Study (Cox, Daniel, Boston, 1985) and the Pyramid Project (Cox, Kelly, Brinson, 1988; Cox & Gluck, 1989; Ondo and Session, 1989) also suggest a balance between acceleration and enrichment. Anderson (1989) states that acceleration, as well as enrichment, is needed to maintain the original enthusiasm for reading. The combination of both add depth and scope to reading.

Other evidence in support of a combined model includes that of West (1980) who argues that the gifted should not be confined to basic drills. He also states

that the gifted should be taught to be investigators and observers. Fisher (1989) suggests that elementary gifted students should study Shakespeare as a basis for analyzing human emotions and then extend the theme by studying other famous authors in order to stimulate development of reasoning powers. This seems to support the concept-based or epistemological model because of the key idea or theme-based approach. Root-Bernstein (1987) suggests designing an integrated curriculum which includes a common body of skills that underlies imaginative thought. He suggests that a change of perspective is needed in order to transfer knowledge and skills to other areas.

Evidence in support of the combined model suggested by Van Tassel-Baska gave the planners of the curriculum for the Missouri Valley Talented and Gifted Program what they needed as a basis for the basic outline of the program. This outline contained modifications in content, process/product, and concepts. Including these elements provided a solid base upon which to design the curriculum. The utilization of this design, with close attention to the factors affecting the curriculum and the unique curricular needs of a gifted and talented program, provided a foundation for the development of relevant goals and objectives and an appropriate scope and

sequence. The next section will examine the specific subject content area of language arts from the viewpoint of preparing language arts curriculum for able learners at the middle school level.

Language Arts Curriculum for 5-8

The important areas to be considered in language arts, according to Gallagher (1985) and Robinson (1986), are writing, speaking, reading, and listening. They both also classify language arts as a skill based part of the curriculum. Anderson (1989) lists essential questions to be addressed when developing an articulated reading curriculum: What should be taught? When should it be taught? How should it be taught? How will it be evaluated? Answers to these questions will give structure to the curriculum and will assure that the program will not be haphazard. Feldhusen, Hansen, and Kennedy (1989) also emphasize the importance of articulation. Students need learning opportunities that become progressively more complex and challenging. This development of skills and ideas avoids a piecemeal curriculum.

Content

Anderson (1989) claims that gifted students with an aptitude in reading will benefit greatly from a program that is differentiated and individualized. Kaplan (1989) gives suggestions for a differentiated

language arts program saying it must be responsive to the needs of gifted students who require a differentiated program and should include aspects of the regular curriculum. The curriculum should provide opportunities for the students to demonstrate those qualities that caused them to be identified as gifted, should not isolate them from their peers, and should not be used as a means to reward or punish a student. When limited to the regular classroom, the students who are gifted in language are not able to reach their full potential. (Kaplan, 1989)

Robinson (1986) states that language arts is often a favorite subject of gifted students early in their educational experiences. However, she suggests it will not continue being their favorite unless adaptations are made to the regular curriculum. Anderson (1989) claims that those students who are gifted and talented in reading will profit from a curriculum that has been modified to suit their needs. Robinson (1986) suggests modifying the language arts curriculum for the gifted by developing vocabulary, moving away from the emphasis on basic skills, and achieving skills in listening, speaking, and writing.

Cushenbery (1987) offers several suggestions for instructional challenges in the reading area. The curriculum should offer a variety of material with

broader reading purposes, not just reading for details. Teachers should have a flexible schedule in the classroom in both teaching and grading. They should base reading assignments on a problem-centered approach, have a well-defined purpose, and use challenging materials. Included in assignments should be oral presentations, panel discussions, and artistic projects rather than long written reports. Anderson (1989) states that placement of a gifted and talented student in a reading situation below his/her abilities should be avoided.

Guidelines for a reading program for the gifted are offered by Donald Cushenbery (1987). He and Robinson (1986) suggest that the program should be as individualized as possible by evaluating and capitalizing on students' interests and abilities. Adequate amounts of inquiry or investigative reading and many opportunities for extended reading, the reading of books, literature, and other print materials dealing with a wide variety of subjects should be available. He also advises that the materials should be used in accordance with the students' strengths and weaknesses and contain limited drill exercises. The learning activities should be challenging, contain social situations, and build around the learner's potential and interest. In addition, Borland (1989)

and Sawyer (1988) emphasize that homework should be related to what is being covered and should never be busywork or meaningless material .

Kaplan (1989) suggests three areas of emphasis in language arts curriculum. The first is the acquisition of the basic concepts of reading in context, perspective reading, and reading beyond the page.

The second is the appreciation of languages. This area consists of studying the impact of words, their purpose, origin, and evolution. She includes three different types of languages: the languages of learning, decision making, and leadership. Essential in each of these languages is an understanding of when and how to use each language appropriately.

Kaplan's (1989) third area of emphasis is the specialization of language usage. This area is technical and creative and can be used as a tool. It contains a personal language profile which consists of language that reflects individual interests, values, and the abilities of the learner.

Joyce Van Tassel-Baska (1986, 1988) offers the five key elements that can be included in a language arts program for the gifted. These elements summarize the suggestions by the experts that have been discussed so far. Essential to an effective curriculum are these five areas: literature, broad based reading,

composition, oral discourse, and language all qualitatively differentiated for the gifted.

In literature, the students should be exposed to all areas early in their school experiences. Focus should be placed on analysis and interpretation skills; symbols, and analogies should be used. Teaching should lead to critical reading with an emphasis placed on reading comprehension. Learning should occur in social situations such as group discussion.

Students in broad based reading should be reading biographies, domain-specific readings and reading about great ideas. While doing the reading, students should again be placing emphasis on comprehension and learning through group discussion.

In composition, free expression of ideas, writing skills, expository writing, creative writing, and technical writing/research are areas to be included in this category. In oral discourse, speech, drama, debate, and oral interpretation should be emphasized.

Language is the last area that should be emphasized in the language arts curriculum for the gifted. The language skills that should be developed are vocabulary, early linguistic proficiency, two foreign languages, and studies in etymology, linguistics, and semantics.

Kaplan's suggested areas of reading emphasis are similar to Van Tassel-Baska's: the acquisition of basic concepts is related to literature and broad based reading components; appreciation of languages is similar to that of the language emphasis of Van Tassel-Baska; and the area of language usage is not unlike that of Van Tassel-Baska's areas of composition and oral discourse. Including these areas of emphasis in a curriculum would allow for a well-balanced reading/language arts program for gifted and talented students.

Process/Product

Anderson (1989) suggests including the element of critical reading in the curriculum. Critical reading is comprised of the process of analyzing content, elements, trends, and patterns. These help the reader to focus on (a) relationships that are unique, (b) key ideas, (c) propaganda techniques, and (d) the bias of authors. Anderson (1989) also suggests a vocabulary development strand that includes the opportunities for connotative usage, figurative language, and also the study of etymology.

Dirkes (1988), Robinson (1986), and Betts and Neihart (1986) suggest teaching self-directed thinking and learning. This includes teaching students strategies that can be applied to other areas to enable

them to solve problems and work independently. Wright (1983) and the National School Public Relations Association (1979) state that the goals of a language arts program should contain opportunities to develop fluency, flexibility, and originality and practice in elaboration, synthesizing, and evaluating. Polette (1981) suggests using picture books at all levels to develop critical and creative thinking skills as well as communication skills and language development.

Root-Bernstein (1987) advises teaching communication skills in all areas so they can be applied to real life situations. West (1980) advises teaching problem finding and problem solving as a component of a gifted program. Feldhusen and Treffinger (1980) include as instructional goals: creative thinking, problem solving, and higher level thinking skills. Parker (1988) suggests including a strand on leadership processes as part of the curriculum for the gifted and talented.

Missouri Valley Middle School Program

To apply what the literature suggests, the language arts/reading program at the Middle School, as envisioned, includes an investigation of literature, reading a broad variety of materials in many subject areas, composition, oral language activities, and an emphasis on language skills. The goal for the language

arts program in the Middle School is to provide a differentiated program that contains opportunities for developing the above mentioned areas of emphasis using these processes: higher level thinking skills, activities that encourage creativity and originality, problem solving skills, independent study skills or research, leadership training, and advanced communication skills. Relating the program to the student and capitalizing on his/her interests will be accomplished by giving the previously discussed reading inventory to each student as he or she enters the program.

Scope and Sequence

Once the content is determined, a scope and sequence should be developed. Maker (1986) lists the necessary elements for such a scope and sequence. She states that it should be flexible, so students and teachers can focus on interests as suggested by Cushenbery (1987). It should focus on abstract principles, not specific facts. In addition to the content, higher order thinking skills and problem solving should be included as separate components and integrated with the content. Emphasis should be placed on the development of high quality products in conjunction with content and process. The scope and sequence should not restrict the acceleration of

content, process, or product. It should include input from scholars and researchers and provide an opportunity for exposure to a variety of areas and related skills.

According to Maker (1986), a scope and sequence can result in determining how the skills being developed in the students fit together at each level. An understanding of the skills and values taught and how and what the student learns at one level and how that fits in with what he/she learns at the next level should be in evidence.

Van Tassel-Baska and Campbell (1988) describe a scope and sequence as a method for determining stages for curriculum experiences. This is necessary to develop the proper developmental transitions and to shape order. It organizes experiences and places content, processes, and products in a logical order as extensions of the regular curriculum.

The following are guidelines based on suggestions by Van Tassel-Baska and Campbell (1988) for developing a scope and sequence:

1. Conduct a curriculum needs assessment. This provides basic ideas that help to focus on what the curriculum is, how it differs and what it needs.
2. Develop an overall plan for K-12. This provides cohesiveness and a clear set of goals and

expectations that are linked to learning objectives.

3. Develop content based goals and learning objectives K-12.
4. Write K-12 outline for each strand not included in the regular curriculum. Examples include creative thinking and research.
5. Coordinate content goals and objectives with activities and objectives. This is linked to lesson plans.
6. Identify areas that can be developed into a curriculum unit.
7. List material to be used.

Missouri Valley Approach

These guidelines provided a basis for the outline for development of the total program as well as the goals and objectives for the scope and sequence for the Middle School Language Arts/Reading Program. This program is envisioned as an ongoing project and a joint effort of Susan Cathcart and this writer. It will take place over a span of three years. At this point in the development, a general idea exists of what will be covered and when it will be covered, but objectives need to be written and units need to be developed. In addition, the regular curriculum will need to be accelerated and enriched.

Using the Program Goals and Objectives to Implement
the Reading/Language Arts Program in
Grades 5-8: Suggested Approaches

The Missouri Valley School students who have been identified in the specific ability area of language arts/reading in grades 5-8 will meet one class period per day, five days per week. The language arts/reading program will replace the regular program. The program will be a comprehensive program. It will accelerate, enrich, and provide opportunities for independent study.

Given the appropriate ability level materials, the goals of the total program, in addition to the goals of the regular reading/language arts curriculum, will be as follows:

- A. Each student will become an independent, self-directed learner.
- B. Each student will be presented with opportunities to develop growth in the affective domain.
- C. Each student will develop and utilize higher level cognitive thinking skills.
- D. Each student will improve in his/her ability to use creative thinking techniques.
- E. Each student will be given the opportunity to participate in accelerated and enrichment

activities in the area of language arts/reading.

(see Appendix C)

These specific goals were created because, according to the reviewed literature, they possess commonalities as effective components of a program for gifted learners at all levels of achievement.

Goal A at the middle school level will be accomplished by matching each student with his/her area of interest so that he or she can explore it in depth. After learning how to set and attain goals and to make decisions, each student will use the information gathered from research to plan and develop a project/product. Evaluation of the project by the student will then occur.

To develop the affective domain as stated in Goal B, the students will participate in group discussions centered around the feeling, problems, and attitudes of the middle school age as well as those associated with gifted learners. Students also will be encouraged to attempt new challenges, and in doing so, will become aware of their own and others' strengths and weaknesses. Students at the Middle School also will study leaders and the qualities of effective leadership. They will be given opportunities to demonstrate their own leadership capabilities.

Goal C, the utilization of higher level cognitive skills, will be met in the Middle School by applying the objectives to the content. Activities will be designed to include differentiation between fact and opinion, classification of information, cause and effect, and higher level questions and statements related to the material they are studying. They then will be encouraged to apply these to real life situations.

To improve the students' abilities to use creative thinking skills (Goal D), Middle School students will be taught creative problem solving using the creative/productive thinking techniques of fluency flexibility, originality, and elaboration. These techniques will be applied to problems related to individualized/group subject content as well as to real life problems.

The program will be planned with a focus on the major content areas of literature, broad based reading, vocabulary development, writing, and speaking, as outlined earlier, as well as the regular materials that are to be covered at the level of the student involved. Each student at the middle school level in the gifted language arts/reading program will be pretested, taught the skill if necessary, and then tested to ensure mastery at a faster pace than the regular classroom

students. This will ensure that Goal E (acceleration/enrichment) will be met. An integrated design incorporating the skills of research, higher order thinking skills, creative thinking, affective development and problem solving, all of which are closely related to the goals, will be used to design each teaching unit (see Appendix D). The model will illustrate the content, process, and product focus recommended in much of the literature on curriculum design for the gifted.

Evaluation

Any program designed to challenge the gifted student should be evaluated in an ongoing and systematic manner for its scope, content, and management of the specific programs of study. Indeed, according to Cox, Daniel, and Boston (1985), the evaluation should be planned as the curriculum is designed. Robinson (1986) and Khatena (1983) also add the degree of differentiation beyond that of the regular language arts/reading program as an area to be evaluated.

The National School Public Relations Board (1979) summarizes very effectively the purposes of an evaluation plan. First, examine how well the program is doing. Is it meeting its objectives and goals? Then look at the effects of the program on its

participants, the school, and the community. Finally, examine how the ineffective elements can be improved to make the program stronger. Evaluation involving student benefits from the program, the growth in independence of the students, the effectiveness of the identification process, and how well the staff development procedures work should be found during evaluation. (Cushenbery, 1987).

Feldhusen (1985) points to the importance of evaluative practices for gifted and talented programs when he warns one of the major weaknesses in existing gifted programs is their evaluation process. Too often, he says it is no more than an opinion survey of the reactions of the students involved. Van Tassel-Baska (1987) reinforces Feldhusen's concerns and adds the importance of the evaluation of curriculum content as an important factor in the process. What seems to be necessary, then, is a system of evaluation which will seek continuous information from all of the constituencies affected by the curricular program concerning strengths and weaknesses and its perceived need for improvement.

To meet the criteria suggested in the literature, evaluation of the program designed for this project will include surveys to be completed by the Challenge teacher, student, parents, administrator/school board,

and regular classroom teachers. (see Appendixes E, F, G, H, & I) The Challenge teacher will be evaluating to what extent the program goals are met. The student will be assessing his/her accountability and the opportunities available for to him/her for self-development. Parents will also evaluate the opportunities available to his/her child in the program. The administrator will look at budgetary items, facilities and overall organization. The classroom teacher will rate the available teacher inservice education and the human and material resources related to the gifted program.

Where applicable, the evaluation questions are keyed to the five program goals. Additional information is needed to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the total program. Those questions not specifically addressing program goals are included to provide that additional information. These questionnaires will be used to evaluate the program from the viewpoint of perceptions of the program as a part of the district curriculum as well as its success in the meeting the unique needs of the gifted. They especially address themselves to the five program goals and or sub-sets of objectives which form the foundation of this particular model.

Results of these questionnaires will be transferred to building level matrices based on one suggested by Maker (1982) and found in Appendix J. Such comparisons will enable the teachers to identify easily the strengths and weaknesses of the total program so that necessary adjustments can be made. In addition, a careful record of student progress will be kept by the teachers involved. Formative evaluation procedures throughout the school year will include formal and informal conferences by the program teachers with other teachers in the system, parents, and students. This information will be used to make necessary changes in the program, either immediately, or for the following school year.

Summary

This writer and the writer of the companion paper, Susan L. Cathcart, established commonalities for the total K-8 program, researched specific grade levels, and developed program goals and objectives in the area of language arts/reading for talented and gifted students. The long-term result should be an articulated and comprehensive program K-8, providing a differentiated curriculum for talented and gifted students in the Missouri Valley School District. To achieve full implementation, further work needs to be done in the development of curriculum. Specific units,

based on the goals and objectives of the program, need to be designed. To provide continuity throughout the grade levels K-8, the two writers will need to collaborate further in determining the scope and sequence of the content presented at each grade level.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

Interest Inventory

1. How much do you like to read?
 _____ very much _____ not very much
 _____ quite a lot _____ not at all
2. What are the titles of several books which you really enjoyed?
3. What are the titles of some of the books in your home?
4. Do you have a library card?
5. How many books have you checked out from the library during the last month? _____
6. What part of the newspaper do you like to read the best?
 _____ comic section _____ editorials
 _____ sports section _____ letters to the editor
 _____ news section
7. What magazine do you read regularly?
8. What type of comic books do you read regularly?
9. What are the names of your three favorite television programs?
10. What sports do you watch on television?
11. What do you usually do after school?
12. Of all the things which you do after school, what one thing do you like to do best?
13. What do you often do on Saturday?

14. Of all the things you do on Saturday, what one thing do you like to do best?
15. What kind of hobbies do you have?
16. Do you have any collections? If you do, what do you collect?
17. What do you want to be when you grow up?
18. Where do you usually go on vacation with your family?
19. Have you ever gone to camp in the summer? If you have, what did you enjoy the most about camp?
20. What other state have you visited?

Based on a reading inventory by M. A. Anderson (1989) in Teaching Gifted and Talented Learners in the Regular Classroom edited by Roberta Milgram.

Appendix B

Reading Interest Inventory

1. Name _____

Grade _____

2. Where do you secure most of the books you read for pleasure?

City library _____ Friends _____
 Bookstores _____ School library _____
 Home library _____ Other _____

3. Approximately how many books have you read during the past year?

4. Give the titles of three or four books you have read.

5. Do you have any hobbies? _____ If so, what are they?

6. How many hours a week do you watch TV? _____ Name two or three TV shows you like best.

7. Have you visited any countries beside the United States? _____ If so, what are they?

8. Do you read the newspaper on a regular basis? _____ If you do what is the name of the newspaper?

9. Which of the following sections of the newspaper do you generally read?

_____ A. Sports _____ D. Feature stories
 _____ B. Comics _____ E. Want Ads
 _____ C. Editorials _____ F. Other

10. If you had at least an hour of free time for reading each day what kinds of reading materials would you likely select? Why?

From Reading Instruction for the Gifted by Donald Cushenbery.

Appendix C
Goals and Program Objectives

A. Each student will become an independent, self-directed learner.

	<u>K-1</u>	<u>2-4</u>	<u>5-8</u>
1. The student will demonstrate individual interests and abilities through the completion and evaluation of learning styles inventories, interest finding and focusing instruments, etc.	X	X	X
2. The student will participate in general awareness exploratory activities at an accelerated level with a willingness for in-depth work.			X
3. The student will use multiple written and nonwritten sources on his/her own.	X	X	X
4. The student will demonstrate the ability to extract pertinent information needed for projects.		X	X
5. The student will show an understanding of the ingredients of independent self-directed learning and enrichment.	X	X	X
6. The student will demonstrate the ability to exercise higher level thinking and writing skills.	X	X	X
7. The student will demonstrate task commitment by following through on long and short range goals.	X	X	X
8. The student will demonstrate increased ability to research and organize projects on self-selected topics and will evaluate his/her independent projects.	X	X	X

B. Each student will be presented with opportunities to develop the affective domain.

K-1 2-4 5-8

1. The student will demonstrate the ability to work positively in peer groups of like ability and interest.	X	X	X
2. The student will demonstrate continued improvement in his/her ability to be self-reliant in resource finding.	X	X	X
3. The student will demonstrate an awareness of his/her strengths, interests, and abilities.	X	X	X
4. The student will demonstrate an awareness of the strengths, interests, and abilities of others.	X	X	X
5. The student will demonstrate increased capacity for leadership.		X	X

C. Each student will develop and utilize higher level cognitive thinking skills.

1. The student will be able to differentiate between fact and opinion.	X	X	X
2. The student will be able to classify information in logical categories.	X	X	X
3. The student will be able to see the relationship between cause and effect.	X	X	X
4. The student will be able to write questions and make statements using increasingly higher levels of thinking.		X	X

D. Each student will improve in his/her ability to use creative thinking techniques.

	K-1	2-4	5-8
1. The student will be able to solve problems using the creative thinking skills of fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration.	X	X	X
2. The student will show flexibility of ideas and/or solutions.	X	X	X
3. The student will be able to recognize the possibility of more than one suitable answer to a question or problem.	X	X	X

E. Each student will be given the opportunity to participate in accelerated and enrichment activities in the area of language arts/reading.

1. Each student will move at his/her own pace.	X	X
2. Each student will become involved in accelerated content topics/subjects.	X	X
3. Each student will recognize the different enrichment types and purposes and understand why they are appropriate.	X	X

Note: Page 53 was missing from the original print copy

Appendix E

Challenge Teacher Evaluation Form

	Great Amount	Some	Little	None
1. To what extent do you allow opportunities to deal with real world opportunities? (A,B,E)	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. To what extent do you teach skills of critical thinking (i.e. studying facts and basing decisions on those facts)? (C,D)	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. To what extent do you teach research skills?	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. To what extent do you teach skills of creative thinking (i.e. brainstorming webbing, synectics)? (D)	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. To what extent do you teach skills of problem solving? (D)	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. To what extent do you teach the skills of decision making? (A,B,C,D,E)	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. To what extent do you allow opportunities to explore new areas of learning within your classroom? (A,E)	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. To what extent are your classes allowed to study an area of interest going farther and faster than usual? (A,E)	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. To what extent do you allow students to work individually or with a group to produce a finished product? (A,B,E)	_____	_____	_____	_____

10. To what extent do you give students opportunities to participate in activities which call for creating, analyzing, and evaluating? (C,D) _____
11. To what extent do you provide students opportunities to help them get to know themselves better and to express their emotions? (B) _____
12. To what extent do you allow your students to have experience in accepting leadership? (B) _____

Appendix F

Student Evaluation of the Challenge Program

To help us assess our educational program, please indicate in the columns below your reactions to the following questions.

	Great Amount	Some	Little	None
1. I learn about subjects and ideas that are new to me. (E)	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. I have opportunities for thinking in group discussions. (B,C,D)	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. I learn to select and pursue topics of interest to me. (A,B)	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. The reference materials that we use are varied and of good quality. (A)	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. I am held accountable for my work. (A)	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. The things I study are challenging and hard enough. (C,E)	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. I am allowed to express my feelings and emotions. (B)	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. I am asked to make decisions and thoughtful judgments. (A,C,D)	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. What I liked best about the Challenge Program was...				
10. What I would like to see added to the program is.... because....				
11. What I feel should be excluded from the program is... because....				
12. Some consequences of being in the Challenge Program are...				

Thank you. Your opinions and feelings are very helpful.

Note: Objectives measured are noted.

Appendix G

Parent Evaluation of the Challenge Program

To help us assess our educational program, please indicate in the columns below, your opinion of how these needs are being met in the children's classrooms.

	Great Amount	Some	Little	None
1. Are you aware of the identification process used by your school?	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Are there ample resources made available, both human and material?	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Have you had the opportunity to attend a meeting this year concerning the challenge program?	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. To what extent is your child allowed to develop critical thinking ability? (C)	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. To what extent is your child given opportunities to think creatively? (D)	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. To what extent is your child given the opportunities to make things, experiment and use new ideas? (E)	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. To what extent is your child given opportunities to understand himself or herself? (B)	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. To what extent is your child allowed experience in accepting responsibility? (A,B)	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. Are you give an opportunity to make suggestions?	_____	_____	_____	_____

Thank you. Your opinions and feelings are very helpful.

Appendix H
Administrator/School Board Evaluation
of the Challenge Program

Please indicate your reaction to the following questions.

	Great Amount	Some	Little	None
1. Does your school have a written philosophy for gifted education?	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Are there written program goals for gifted education?	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Is there a defined curriculum for gifted education?	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Is the gifted education continuous K-12?	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Is the amount of service to gifted students appropriate?	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Are the kinds of experiences provided the gifted students appropriate?	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Are facilities adequate in each building for your type of program?	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Are curriculum materials adequate?	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. Is there sufficient number of teachers to serve the numbers of students?	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. Is there a written budget that funds the challenge program?	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. Is there an identification procedure?	_____	_____	_____	_____

Thank you. Your opinions and feelings are valuable and helpful.

Appendix I

Classroom Teacher Evaluation of the Challenge Program

Please rate your feelings concerning the following questions in an effort to evaluate our Challenge Program.

	Great Amount	Some	Little	None
1. The identification procedures are valid effective.	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Inservice provided to enhance your skills in providing for the gifted students in your classroom is adequate.	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Human and material resources are being used effectively.	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. The staff is familiar with the nature of the gifted program.	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Staff who are directly responsible for the gifted students are adequately prepared.	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Adequate number of staff are available to meet student needs.	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Sufficient amount of time and materials are provided in order to meet the students' needs.	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. To help provide for gifted students, I would like...				
9. Some consequences of the Challenge Program are...				

Appendix J
INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

PROGRAM GOALS	CHALLENGE TEACHERS	CHALLENGE STUDENTS
Question #'s	1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9	3, 4, 5, 8
A		
Question #'s	1, 6, 9, 11, 12	2, 3, 7
B		
Question #'s	2, 6, 10	2, 6, 8
C		
Question #'s	2, 4, 5, 6, 10	2, 8
D		
Question #'s	1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9	1, 8
E		

MODIFICATIONS NEEDED

4 = Great Amount
3 = Some
2 = Little
1 = None

PROGRAM COMPONENTS	PARENTS	ADMINISTRATOR SCHOOL BOARD	CLASSROOM TEACHERS
Questions #'s		3, 4	
Goals and Objectives			
Questions #'s	4,5,6,7,8	5, 6	7
Opportunities available			
Questions #'s	2	7,8,9,10	3,6
Materials and funding			
Questions #'s	3, 9	1, 2	2, 4, 5
Administrative concerns			
Questions #'s	3, 9	1, 2	2, 4, 5
Identification procedures			

Modifications Needed:

4 = Great Amount
 3 = Some
 2 = Little
 1 = None

Adapted from matrix by June C. Maker (1982)