

Anglo-American Seminar

CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK
589 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10017

November 16, 1965

MEMORANDUM

DATE _____

TO LM, AP

FROM PC *R*

SUBJECT NCTE--International Meeting

This docket is for a grant of \$174,560 to the National Council of Teachers of English for a joint meeting of U.S., Canadian, and English teachers of English, to be held in the U.S. in the summer of 1966. The nature of the meeting, the topics to be discussed, and the level of the participants is clear from the proposal itself. I should like, however, to make some covering remarks about the history of the proposal and the importance which potentially attaches to it.

The negotiations in connection with this proposal go back to a luncheon held here in March, 1964, which I arranged in order to meet some of the leading members of the establishment in the field of English. Kitzhaber's book (Themes, Theories, and Therapy) had recently appeared in the Carnegie Series; the OE's Project English was under way but was coming to an end; and there was a general feeling that reform of the field was overdue but that too many independent efforts at it were being made. At about the same time I talked to a number of other people (see various blue sheets in left-hand pocket) not intimately connected with the establishment; many of them protested against the establishment, all of them said things were in a dreadful mess, but nobody had any very concrete ideas about major directions of reform. My own view, after having met most of the people involved, was that the establishment was not all that bad, that in fact in Kitzhaber, Squire, Fisher, Marckwardt et al there was a solid core of first-rate personnel, and that we might as well capitalize on this fact in any activities in the field. The problem is so massive, and the numbers of teachers and students involved so enormous, that attacks on it from the outside must almost certainly fail. Even Zacharias would have thrown up his hands, I suspect, if physics teaching had been organized as English teaching is.

A number of trial balloons went up from NCTE after the initial negotiations, and we shot them all down (see my letter to Squire of 4/22/65). But the idea that one of the most

plausible steps towards reform in the field ought to be an exchange of ideas among the best people working in it from the three countries most heavily involved (the U.S., Canada, and Great Britain), which first came up in a conversation with Kitzhaber (blue sheet 12/2/64), seemed to me from the beginning the best chance we had to be helpful. The present proposal has grown out of that conviction.

I think there is no doubt about the quality of the plan and of the people involved in it. One of the difficulties the planners faced was the number of really excellent people available when they actually started listing names; the alternates are just about as good as the principals, and as far as that goes Squire would be sensitive to our preferences if we wanted particular people to attend. The question we have to face is whether or not this rather expensive exercise (which cannot be done for much less than is asked for) is likely to have an important and lasting effect on the teaching of English. On this score I am optimistic. First of all, it is not just another conference, with throw-away papers and a flat volume of proceedings; it is being thoroughly and imaginatively planned and careful attention is being paid to the form of dissemination of its results. Secondly, most of the people who will inevitably take the lead in prospective curriculum reform will be or can be involved. Thirdly, specific plans for follow-up activities are already being formulated (see pp. 29ff of the proposal) and an essential part of the budget is a small fund which will be devoted to seeing that key ideas do not get lost and to stimulating proposals to other agencies for further and more massive work.

You will gather from all this that I would like to recommend this proposal to the staff in the strongest terms. If you agree, it is ready to circulate.