

■ STATISTICS: THE COMMON DENOMINATOR IN MATH AND PE

Low math scores in the fifth grade at Central Elementary School in Moundsville, West Virginia, spurred physical education teacher Gene Pliska to introduce math through gym classes with fourth, fifth, and sixth graders in his school.

Pliska produced film strips, jig-saw puzzles, and mini-marathon games that introduce students to mileage calculation, adding machine operations, statistics-keeping, and other computation skills. Twice each week, for example, while some students dribble and shoot basketballs, others volunteer to compile their statistics.

Pliska's pre- and post-tests show positive results, but he thinks it's too early to make long-range predictions. Low anxiety seems to be an important part of the success of the experiment, he says. Students are not tied to paper and pencil activities that frequently produce anxiety.

For more information contact Gene Pliska, Central Elementary School, Moundsville, WV 26041.

■ DROPOUTS DECREASED

Exemplary high school dropout prevention programs have critical factors in common according to Craig Nauman, staff member of the Wisconsin Research and Development Center. Nauman scanned more than 300 descriptions of exemplary programs to identify the following characteristics that seem important in reducing the number of dropouts:

1. Learning experiences in the community
2. Career education
3. Use of adults as successful role models
4. Teachers who offer "unconditional concern and caring"
5. Classic apprenticeships in which students work and learn in a real setting
6. Programs with an understanding of adolescent development that help students move from adolescence to adulthood (often by offering meaningful responsibilities)

7. Opportunities for all students to experience success.

Further work is under way and a paper will be prepared on the subject. Interested persons may contact Laurence Weber, Editor, *Wisconsin R&D Center News*, 1025 W. Johnson St., Madison, WI 53706.

■ AUTHORS VISIT SCHOOLS

Walt Morey, author of *Gentle Ben*, visited schools in Washington state as part of a program to motivate students to read and write. To date, authors and storytellers have visited more than 300 schools and been heard by over 18,000 students in Washington.

Although the cost of bringing established writers into the schools is paid by the local school district, PTA, or a professional organization, the Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction's office coordinates school visit dates to reduce both travel time and costs.

Authors and storytellers are accepted in the program only after their presentations are monitored and determined to be motivational.

For additional information, contact Les Francis, Supervisor of Basic Skills, SPI, 7510 Armstrong St., S.W., Tumwater, WA 98504. Phone: (206) 753-6757.

■ COMMITTEES RAISE ACHIEVEMENT

Raising academic achievement of secondary school students requires that they take more math, English, and science courses. This conclusion was drawn from the study of student performance at five middle and high schools in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Oregon between 1977 and 1981.

According to a study by the Wisconsin Research and Development Center, the key to success is a 10- to 15-member committee of principals, teachers, counselors, and at times students and parents established in each school. These committees identify curriculum areas needing improvement and develop strategies to respond to these needs. All school personnel should be represented on the committee in order to communicate the goals of the effort to the entire staff; participation of principals and curriculum

coordinators is vital to ensure that schoolwide policies will be carried out.

The committee's efforts to improve student performance encourage students to take more advanced academic courses needed to raise achievement. Center Director Herbert J. Klausmier believes the study demonstrates that a conscious effort on the part of school personnel can bring about improved achievement.

■ TEACHER EVALUATION IN TEXAS

The Texas Cooperative Project on Teacher Evaluation is a long-range effort by seven education associations to promote improved teacher evaluation systems at the local and district levels in schools throughout Texas.

Eight basic principles for a developmental system of teacher evaluation were formulated by representatives from the Texas associations of school administrators, school boards, school personnel administrators, supervision and curriculum development, secondary school principals, and supervision. Briefly, the principles are:

1. Preconditions for Teacher Evaluation—The conditions surrounding the instructional efforts of the teacher must be conducive to effective teaching and student learning.
2. General Principles—The total educational enterprise must be supportive of the teacher evaluation system with clearly defined purposes, enabling policies, and genuine commitment to professional quality evaluation efforts.
3. Sources and Uses of Data—Systematic and selective data gathering that directly serves the purpose of improving teaching and learning must be the central focus of the teacher evaluation system.
4. Instrumentation—The instruments used to gather and analyze data must be highly reliable and valid but they must also be selected, developed, or adapted to serve local needs.
5. Collaboration—All aspects of the teacher evaluation process must maximize collaboration among all those who have an interest in teacher evaluation outcomes.
6. Training in Evaluation—Only

those who have both the technical and conceptual skills required shall be delegated specific responsibility for teacher evaluation.

7. **Due Process**—Individuals whose lives and futures are directly affected by the outcomes from teacher evaluation must be assured that procedural safeguards prevent abuses and promote development.

8. **Improvement Activities**—Teacher evaluation efforts must be linked to opportunities for teacher improvement.

For further information on the Principles and Guidelines for Teacher Evaluation and the Project's slide-tape presentation, contact Edward Leo, Austin Independent School District, Webb Elementary School, 601 East St. Johns Ave., Austin, TX 78752.

■ STUDENTS DOWN UNDER MOVE UP

Reading, writing, and number skills of young Australians improved distinctly in the past five years. A recent study, commissioned by the Australian Education Council in response to community concern about educational standards, compares data collected on 10- and 14-year-olds in 1975 and 1980.

In 1980, almost all students could perform simple reading tasks and more than two-thirds of the students could read difficult prose passages. Students showed improved understanding of newspaper articles that is due, researchers speculate, to increased emphasis on this activity in the last five years.

In numeration skills including map and scale reading, volume calculation, and use of percentages, 14-year-olds performed significantly higher in 1980.

Girls out-performed boys in reading and writing in both age groups, and 10-year-old girls performed better than boys in numeration.

Major investigator Syd Bourke thinks that improved literacy and numeracy are due to the declining student-teacher ratio and improved facilities in Australian schools in the 1970s. He suggests that the results raise questions about cutting school expenditures since improved circumstances probably improved student performance.

The study was based on a sample of some 5,600 10-year-olds and 5,100 14-year-olds from all states and territories in government and nongovernment schools in Australia.

■ MATH ADDED TO CORE

Block-time programs typically are built around English and social studies, with

the addition of science the second most popular combination. Mathematics is often taught separately, since the sequential development of math skills is felt to conflict with the flexible, problem-centered unit development favored for block-time core curricula. According to an article in *The Core Teacher*, "It is noteworthy that mathematics and social studies are block-scheduled in Lincoln Middle School in Galesburg, Illinois." David McBride, Principal, reports that the major advantage is the flexible use of the double period. Math is ordinarily taught first and extended into the social studies period if needed.

■ LINKING LIFE TO SCHOOL

Potential dropouts are approached through a program that involves core concepts in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. The curriculum, designed to meet the needs of potential dropouts in grades 9 and 10, provides experiences that emphasize the relevance of the material studied to the world in which students will live after their schooling is finished. Students study social studies, English, mathematics, science, and career education as an integrated, coordinated whole. In addition, orientation to vocational areas, contemporary living, job survival skills, and community experiences are built into the program. Emphasis is placed on student rights and responsibilities in the education system.

Inquiries may be directed to Paul S. Stefy, Project Director, Project Impact, School District of Lancaster, 225 W. Orange St., Lancaster, PA 17604.

Law in Education

PATRICIA M. LINES

■ COURT OK'S CONTROVERSIAL ROLE PLAYING

Janet Cooper, a teacher in a Texas high school, was recently awarded \$81,826 in back pay and \$37,700 for attorneys' fees based on her wrongful dismissal in 1973. The case arose out of Cooper's use of role-playing techniques to teach about events following the Civil War. The exercise stirred strong racial feelings among students and numerous complaints were made against her. School

officials instructed Cooper not to discuss Blacks or anything "controversial" in the classroom, and shortly afterward dismissed her. She brought suit, was able to prove that the reason for the dismissal was the role-playing incident, and won a judgment against the school district.

In a 1980 decision, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit affirmed the finding of liability against the school district and explicitly ruled that "classroom discussion is protected activity" under the first amendment in *Kingsville Independent School District v. Cooper*, 611 F.2d 1109 (5th Cir. 1980). The case was returned to the lower court for evaluation of the amount of damages.

■ DRAMATIC PRESENTATIONS AND CENSORSHIP

For the first time in a federal court, the extent of school authority over selection of dramatic presentations has been addressed.

Planning to modify portions of the script, a drama teacher in a public school in Delaware decided that high school students would present the musical, *Pippin* (a fictional account of the life of Charlemagne's son). Following an objection from a parent, who read the unmodified script, the district superintendent advised the drama teacher that the play was "inappropriate" for high school presentation, even as modified, and cancelled production plans.

Although the parent had objected on grounds that portions of the play mocked God and prayer, the superintendent disagreed, finding it only mocked religious hypocrites. However, the superintendent determined that the play should not be shown because of its emphasis on sexual activities. Parents and students filed suit, hoping to obtain a court order to reinstate the play, but a federal district court ruled in favor of school officials.

The court distinguished cases involving student-initiated expression and "library bibliography," on grounds that the presentation of a play could imply official school endorsement of the message contained in the play. The court felt that the matter was within the legitimate authority of school officials, and that censorship was not a motive in the decision to withdraw the play. The court found it significant that the school library retained copies of the script:

The absence of any intention to foreclose the free exchange of ideas by students or faculty is forcefully demonstrated by the continuing presence of two unexpurgated copies of *Pippin* in the

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