

News Notes

ROBERT C. MCKEAN AND BOB L. TAYLOR

■ SATURDAY SEMINARS FOR THE ABLE AND AMBITIOUS

The Catskill Seminar Program is one approach to gifted education that is the oldest of its kind in the country. This rural, small-schools enrichment program has been in operation since 1958.

About 20 schools send an average of seven students to the campus of State University College at Oneonta (New York) to attend seminars on ten Saturday mornings each semester. Participants (two-thirds are girls) are mostly 10th, 11th, and 12th graders although a few come from grades seven–nine.

Topics have had a wide range over the years. For example, "Anatomy of a Hospital," a career exploration seminar, dealt with hospital specialities. Students have also studied computer technology, criminology, television studio techniques, and American arts and crafts.

Prior to the start of each semester, faculty members at SUCO and area residents who have expertise of interest to students propose topics for seminars. Guidance counselors then publicize the offerings and students sign up for the seminars of their choice. "School boards sometimes hesitate to pay the \$40 for ten sessions fee. If so, then either the students don't come or they pay the fee themselves. An average class of 17 students is required to make the seminars economically viable.

This program offers "enrichment experiences, exposure experiences, careers exploration opportunities to the able and ambitious. There is no homework, no demand for product development" and no credit. Coordinator Robert Porter concludes, "They come because they, their parents, and schools, realize that there is something more to Saturday morning."

Individuals interested in more information may contact Robert Porter, Coordinator of the Catskill Area School Study Council's Saturday Seminar Programs, State University College, Oneonta, New York 13820.

■ WHY DO STUDENTS DROP OUT?

High school dropout rates are up according to a recent study by the Institute

for Educational Finance and Governance at Stanford University. Evidence for this conclusion comes from a number of sources. Enrollment data from Ohio showed that the number of dropouts rose 15 percent between 1975-76 and 1978-79. In California, the dropout rate between the ninth and twelfth grades increased from 12 percent in 1967 to 22 percent in 1976. Furthermore, National Census data revealed that the percent of 16- and 17-year-old white males not in school grew from 7.9 percent in October 1968 to 11.1 percent in October 1978.

Many reasons for leaving school were cited by dropouts. Females, especially blacks, cited marriage and pregnancy. Many male dropouts left because they did not like school. Almost 40 percent of the Hispanic males dropped out because of economic reasons. Others mentioned lack of ability, poor grades, and expulsions or suspensions.

Data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth Labor Market Experience, which included 12,700 respondents, ages 14 to 21, covering their background characteristics, attitudes, aspirations, and educational and labor market experiences, and personal characteristics, showed that the likelihood of dropping out of school was influenced by certain factors in family background. For instance, parental education and the presence of reading material in the home exerted a strong positive influence while family income did not. Other factors influencing the decision to drop out included educational and occupational aspirations, the educational aspirations of peers, and knowledge of the world of work. White females living on a farm were less likely to leave school; living in the South increased the probability of dropping out.

Father's education affected the dropout rate for males but not for females; local unemployment rate affected minority males but not others. The study presents policy alternatives that could encourage students to finish high school.

Copies of "Why Kids Drop Out of High School," are available for \$1 from IFG Publications, School of Education,

CERAS 402, Stanford, CA 94305; (414) 497-2754.

■ RETIREMENT FOR PERIPATETIC EDUCATORS

Today large numbers of educators work under the threat of RIF actions as the budget crunch and declining enrollments continue. According to Robert J. Gerardi, many "might consider moving to those parts of the country where there is still a shortage of certified teachers, supervisors, and administrators" if they "had the opportunity of transferring their pensions to another state fund." Gerardi continues, "As it is now, voluntary mobility from one state to another is impeded by the educator's fear of forfeiting retirement benefits" and RIFed teachers often choose another career.

One remedy would be to allow educators to buy a specific number of years into the retirement system of the new state of residence if they did not have the required number of years of service to vest pension rights in the former state system. However, 16 states do not allow such a "buy back" action according to Gerardi: Arizona, California, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. States having "buy back" vary greatly in their policies. Delaware, for example, allows four years of buy-back for prior out-of-state service; most states allow ten years. Some states have no limit on the number of years buy-back allowed, if individual provisions of the funds are met.

Most professional educators who want to accept a job in another state would be willing to pay appropriate costs involved in transferring retirement money deposited in one state fund to another where they may remain for the balance of their careers. Gerardi notes, "The opportunity to be able to purchase prior service is not 'double dipping' because when the money is withdrawn from the first state fund, all benefits are lost, even if the person could have vested."

Gerardi calls for action among educators on this matter. Anyone interested in

further information may write to Robert J. Gerardi, Superintendent, Mukwonago Area Schools, Mukwonago, WI 53149.

■ HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY USES MICROCOMPUTER

Librarian Judy Graham, Point Pleasant High School, Mason County, West Virginia, uses a microcomputer to handle time-consuming chores. She has data on titles, authors, categories, copyrights, publishers, and Dewey decimal codes on the computer, and can call up displays or print outs instantly of borrowers, how long the book has been on loan, who is on the waiting list, and the course for which the book was assigned. Graham estimates the microcomputer saves more than six hours a day of staff time.

While large universities with elaborate inter-library loan networks have used this kind of system, the system has not been developed widely at the high school level. A computer manufacturer, a grant from the West Virginia Department of Education and from student volunteers assisted with the project.

The county's three high school libraries will eventually be linked by microcomputer to eliminate wasted effort, enabling the schools to share many books. For more information, contact Judy Graham, Point Pleasant H.S., 2317 Jackson Ave., Point Pleasant, WV 25550; (304) 675-1350 or 675-1825.

■ CENTERS HELP PARENTS OF HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

Parents are often at a loss when they discover their young child has a handicap. Forty-four Early Childhood Direction Centers in New York now assist bewildered parents by providing a clearinghouse for children who need specialized education and medical services or transportation and home relief care.

"Early" is the key word; many children receive adequate treatment once they enter school. The centers, funded by grants from the State Education Department, simplify life for the families of young handicapped children, and especially for families without private medical care.

■ UTAH MIDDLE SCHOOL DEVELOPS BLOCK-TIME CLASSES

The Jordan School District in Sandy, Utah, is changing its seven junior high schools to middle schools that will include grades six-eight. According to *The Core Teacher*, a newsletter published by the National Association for

Core Curriculum, Inc., the new curriculum developed for the reorganized schools includes a three-period block of time in 6th and 7th grades for English, reading, and social studies. A two-period block of time for English and reading is optional in the 8th grade.

For further information write to the Jordan School District, 9361 South 400 East, Sandy, UT 84070.

■ FREE METRIC INSERVICE AVAILABLE

The U.S. Department of Education has funded Educational Support Systems, Inc., to conduct a national metric education program. The program will provide staff development services, at no cost, to school districts that have received little or no federal funding for metric education in the past five years.

Two components of the project are a field-tested, long-term inservice program for elementary teachers and supervisors to be implemented in 25 school districts in the northeast and southwest and short-term inservice programs to districts in all parts of the country.

For additional information concerning the short-term inservice component or for scheduling a specific session within your state, contact Barbara Berman or Fredda J. Friederwitzer, Directors, Project STAMP, Educational Support Services, Inc., 456 Travis Ave., Staten Island, NY 10314.

Research on Teaching

JANET EATON
AND PATRICIA NISCHAN

■ ATMOSPHERE OF GENERAL MATH AND ALGEBRA CLASSES DIFFERS

Ninth-grade general mathematics is traditionally the last math class many students take, something to be endured rather than enjoyed. Why is it so different in this regard from ninth-grade algebra?

According to researchers at the Institute for Research on Teaching, the social organization of the classroom is the biggest difference. In each algebra class observed, a group of students responded to the teacher at strategic moments and helped keep the class in order and the

discussion moving. No such cohesiveness existed in the general math classes.

Algebra students commonly joked with their teacher about sports, the weather, and other such things; the atmosphere was more formal in general math, where very little joking went on.

Teachers expected higher achievement and better behavior from algebra students, and seating arrangements and disciplinary measures reflected these expectations. In algebra classes, students received more direct instruction, content was outlined more specifically, and tests were scheduled and announced more regularly than in general math.

Students in the two types of class did not differ significantly in their attitudes toward mathematics, but the general math students thought less of themselves than did the algebra students, and felt more externally controlled.

IRT researchers and math teachers will use this and other information to help make general math class a better place. To learn more about the study, write to Perry Lanier, Institute for Research on Teaching, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824.

■ PROBLEM BEHAVIOR NEED NOT CONTINUE

Problem behavior costs students valuable learning time and diverts teacher and student energies from constructive, successful experiences.

Jean Medick, a former IRT teacher-collaborator and currently a fifth-grade teacher, synthesized three inservice programs (Glasser's Reality Therapy, Gordon's Teacher Effectiveness Training, and Focus, a preventive mental health program) to develop effective classroom strategies for helping students whose behavior is hostile-aggressive, passive-aggressive, or withdrawn failure-image.

Her strategies include holding democratic classroom meetings to set up classroom rules; consistent enforcement of those rules; establishing friendly, caring relationships; and insisting that children "own" their own problems. For instance, she "inflicts no punishment on a child" with a behavior problem, but does not interfere with the natural consequences of misbehavior and works with the child until change comes about.

"All the strategies address children from the position of their strengths," says Medick, "helping them to learn to make good decisions regarding behavior, learning, and conflict resolution.

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