

## Curriculum Abstracts

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### Software Publishers and Educators Cooperate For Better Programs in New York

New York State Education Commissioner Gordon Ambach has established a Center for Learning Technology to begin work on a range of computing initiatives to improve such utilization in the state's more than 6000 elementary and secondary schools. Within the Center's program, the convening of a Software Colloquium Planning Committee, staffed by representatives from major software publishers, the state Education Department, and regional and individual school districts, has proven particularly helpful.

The Center for Learning Technology is establishing Technical Assistance Centers in specific State BOCES (regional school district authorities) to work with a Courseware Description Grid which lists important criteria for software. Companies eager for feedback have submitted copies of programs to the Colloquium for review and feedback. Over 800 programs have been submitted for review. The establishment of the regional Technical Assistance Centers will also de-centralize the software evaluation for review by local districts in each region.

To date, feedback has provided means to standardize software features such as Paging (ability to go through introductory information as rapidly or slowly as the user wishes); Escape Features (means for a confused computer user to get out of a program and begin it again); and, Error-Trapping Capability (means by which a program would not reject out of hand an answer such as "yse" instead of "yes"). Success at the

Colloquium level means that smaller colloquia may be developed in the next round to provide for greater input and interactions.

The New York State capacity to respond to user concerns of educators in evaluating and improving software has been possible because of the interaction established among publishers and educators. This approach seems worth considering by other state departments of education.

#### Reference

Hopping, Lorraine. "New York: Creating Good Software through Cooperation." *Electronic Learning* 3, 1 (September 1983): 36-39.

### Educational Mobility

The Northampton, Massachusetts, schools have established a mobile, portable teacher center as an exciting resource for their elementary school programs. The mobile center has generated enthusiasm among teachers and students as a way to personalize learning throughout the district's six elementary schools.

The center facilitates the utilization of teacher-made instructional materials and references and has organized over two hundred ready-to-use teacher-made instructional activities in the district. This presents a dimension beyond existing commercially produced materials

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and provides teachers with instructional supplements which have proven successful.

The portable, mobile teacher center focused on developing motivational and manipulative materials through means of a teacher's development of the project during a 1982 Hilda Maehling Fellowship from the National Education Association. Materials for math, reading, and language-arts are circulated from school to school every three weeks by the district maintenance staff. Within each school, the center is located in the library. The library aide, trained through an in-service session before the program was implemented, is the building representative responsible for its set up in that school.

This concept offers a relatively inexpensive means to vitalize curriculum utilization for a district which can respond to instructional needs of the school and district. Each activity concentrates upon one specific skill with additional activities to reinforce that skill. Activities can be used independently and require little or no teacher direction upon their selection or assignment. The center has proven popular with students, teachers, and parents and offers great potential in districts interested in duplicating such a program.

#### Reference

Basile, Leonard J. "How to Create a Mobile/Portable Teacher Center." *Early Years* 14, 2 (October 1983): 50-52.

### Computer-Aided Career Search

Miami, Florida's Northwestern Senior High School is one link in Project Entry, Dade County's three-phased ca-

reer education program. Supported by several computer-assistance systems, a traveling film library, and two microfiche systems, Project Entry is helping students at all levels to enter the job market.

In elementary school, an awareness phase provides students with job simulations; the exploration phase, at the middle level, explores information gathered on specific careers from job profiles on microfiche. Northwestern's own program begins in 9th grade with a required Education/Employability skills course. Utilizing the Gould Career Center, which houses a library of hundreds of short films and cassettes, students move to the Choice Career Guidance Computer program, where they begin to narrow down potential job choice options.

Under the Choice program, students complete a personal inventory in twelve assignment areas, such as interest, aptitude, educational level, working conditions, earnings, and physical demands. After "Explore Command Mode" activities, a "Compare Mode" printout allows comparison of job descriptions. Students can then use a "Relate Mode" to input an ideal job and look at options which respond to that input.

The school has a full-time Florida State Employment Service representative on site with his own terminal and the Florida Job Bank allows students to explore available jobs with the finalizing of job placement possible at that point. Students have a range of vocational courses available in the grade 10-12 program to further provide input to their choices. Students and teachers at Northwestern are justly enthusiastic about this program, which warrants serious study by schools and state education departments across the nation.

#### Reference

Files, Chris. "Computerized Career Guidance that Works." *Electronic Learning* 3, 1 (September 1983): 78-80.

### Alternate High School Special Needs Students

Alternative schools have been successful in meeting a range of student problems and needs. This new approach has been utilized to provide a more responsive school environment for learning impaired students. New York City's Alternate High School, for example, now in its fourth year, has achieved great success in meeting the special needs of hearing impaired students with low language skills and profoundly deaf learners.

The school serves students from a wide range of socio-economic classes. While the majority come from the inner city, students from both rural and suburban areas are also served. I.Q.'s of most students are average but reading levels are markedly lower. Through life-skill and entry-level vocational learnings, the program tries to help students live more independently. This varies according to student need and capacity but includes areas such as skills to locate and maintain a job and an apartment, locating and maintaining a job while living with parents, and working and living within a sheltered setting.

Academic subjects, mainstreamed vocational training, and real work experience are used as vehicles for teaching basic academic content. A competency testing program is now being developed to monitor success of students in their comprehension of elements in the program. This information will be used to help students gain specific help in areas in which they have the greatest continuing weaknesses. Work experience begins, when students enter the Alternate High School, with on-campus jobs. Work habits and responsibilities are offered to gain readiness for off campus jobs. Such opportunities are provided in areas related to student vocational training and interest.

The school monitors progress of students as they move away from campus

and helps both students and employers adjust to their situation as continuing vocational guidance. This approach appears to have a great promise for implementation in metropolitan areas across the nation.

#### Reference

Cancro, George P. "A Special Program for Special Students: The Alternative High School." *Phi Delta Kappan* 65.1 (September 1983): 66-67.

### Checking Out Computers

The Colonial Beach, Virginia, school district now has a program through which K-12 grade can check out computers from school for home use. Upon the completion of computer literacy activities students can pursue options including both Computer-Assisted and Computer-Managed instruction courses in all grades and subject areas.

With computer utilization in the school, the need to utilize equipment at home was the primary aim of these activities which began with a spring, 1982 Title IV-C grant. The program was called a "computer library" because of its similarity in function to a regular school library. While it will eventually become part of the district's libraries and media centers it still functions separately because of space and personnel considerations. The library contains a range of hardware featuring rugged and portable equipment. This includes computers of the type which connect simply to the antenna terminals of regular television sets and some "pocket computers" with built-in LCD screens.

Parents and students sign agreements to assume responsibility for abuse of equipment, which so far has proven no problem. Students stay on lists to use the library and in summer the library operates on a "by appointment" basis with sign-out periods of from two to four weeks. Computers are given test-runs after each use and a certain number of

various computer types are reserved for primary, elementary, and secondary school populations.

While more parents are purchasing their own computers, increasing use among other students has meant the school will add to hardware as finances allow. Greater attention to software evaluation projects is also being planned as this innovative project expands. Future plans also hope to make this library service available to community members who have no children in the school.

#### Reference

Savage, Earl R. "A Computer Library." *Technological Horizons in Education Journal* 2,2 (October 1983): 121-122.

#### Junior High Mastery Learning a Popular Success

Master learning at Reed Junior High School in Loveland, Colorado, has proven highly successful in the mathematics and language arts program. This

program has developed upon diagnostic efforts to have students clearly identify student learning objectives. Criterion-referenced objectives have proven especially helpful to provide both teachers and students with a "progressional road map" of the teaching learning situation.

Curriculum in both content areas has been planned on a sequenced set of learning tasks based on mastery of simple learning tasks by students as a foundation for further learning. Student success in this initial activity has proven a key to motivation for continued growth in mathematics and language-arts. Feedback and reinforcement at each level keys back to reinforcement by former task mastery and is based upon the recognition that all students will not learn at the same rate. Initial learning objectives require more time, as a rule, and as lower order prerequisite skills are mastered, students progress more rapidly. Consequently, less teaching time is usually necessary for higher order skill development.

Initially, each departmental team assesses students on specific concept mas-

tery. Objectives are sequenced to allow later concept information to develop upon prerequisite learnings. Three-week modular designs utilize criterion measurement of the comprehensive sequence of mastery skills for summative evaluation. Formative student feedback then provides the basis for effective mastery instruction.

Clinical supervision of teachers and comprehensive in-service education have both been necessary to implement this program. These components have provided feedback mechanisms necessary for students, teachers, and curriculum workers in the building. Classroom instruction developed in this setting has enhanced the effectiveness of the supervision process and a means to identify success in the program at each step.

#### Reference

Taylor, Gary L. "Mastery Learning: A Prescription for Success." *NASSP Bulletin* 67, 464 (September 1980): 84089.

## Curriculum Trends in English

CHARLES SUHOR

#### National Writing Project Booming, Seeks Continued Growth

The National Writing Project, in which skilled teachers help other teachers to improve writing instruction, has grown from a modest program in the San Francisco Bay Area to a network with 118 sites in 44 states and 5 foreign countries. Additionally, the NWP trained over 70,000 teachers in school-year inservice programs and campus summer institutes in 1981-82, according to Director James R. Gray. He adds

that NWP efforts have held up under evaluation: a collection of evaluation studies conducted at 15 sites between 1977 and 1982 shows a positive impact on the teaching of writing and on student writing performance.

The project does have some problems, Gray points out. "Some NWP sites are struggling to hang on because of continuing funding problems. The project has all of the typical problems that plague 'soft' money projects; it's always easier to find money to start a program

than to maintain it." Nevertheless, the National Endowment for the Humanities recently continued support for NWP through 1987, and a major fundraising campaign is underway to identify new funding sources—private, state, and federal. The project will expand its publications program, develop new

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