

# Reading Improvement Through Health Instruction

**A Los Angeles project shows that communication skills can be infused successfully into the broader curriculum.**

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The National Academy of Education's 1978 report, "Improving Educational Achievement," recommended infusing basic skills into the overall curriculum as a way to improve students' skills in reading and writing. In accord with that philosophy, the Los Angeles Unified School District developed Project SWRLT (Speaking, Writing, Reading, Learning, and Thinking) to reinforce basic communication skills in the 7th grade health curriculum.

During the summer of 1983, teachers of health and science, elementary reading, special education, and bilingual education rewrote the health curriculum using a reading/language format. A pilot period was set aside in the fall to refine the new lessons, allow more teacher input regarding lesson structure and content, and match lesson objectives to the district's required reading proficiencies. Teachers attended five inservice training sessions throughout the year, each of which addressed the use of basic communication skills as part of the new health curriculum.

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## WELLNESS EDUCATION COURSES

CORONARY HEART DISEASE

NUTRITION

CANCER

ALCOHOL

TOBACCO

FITNESS

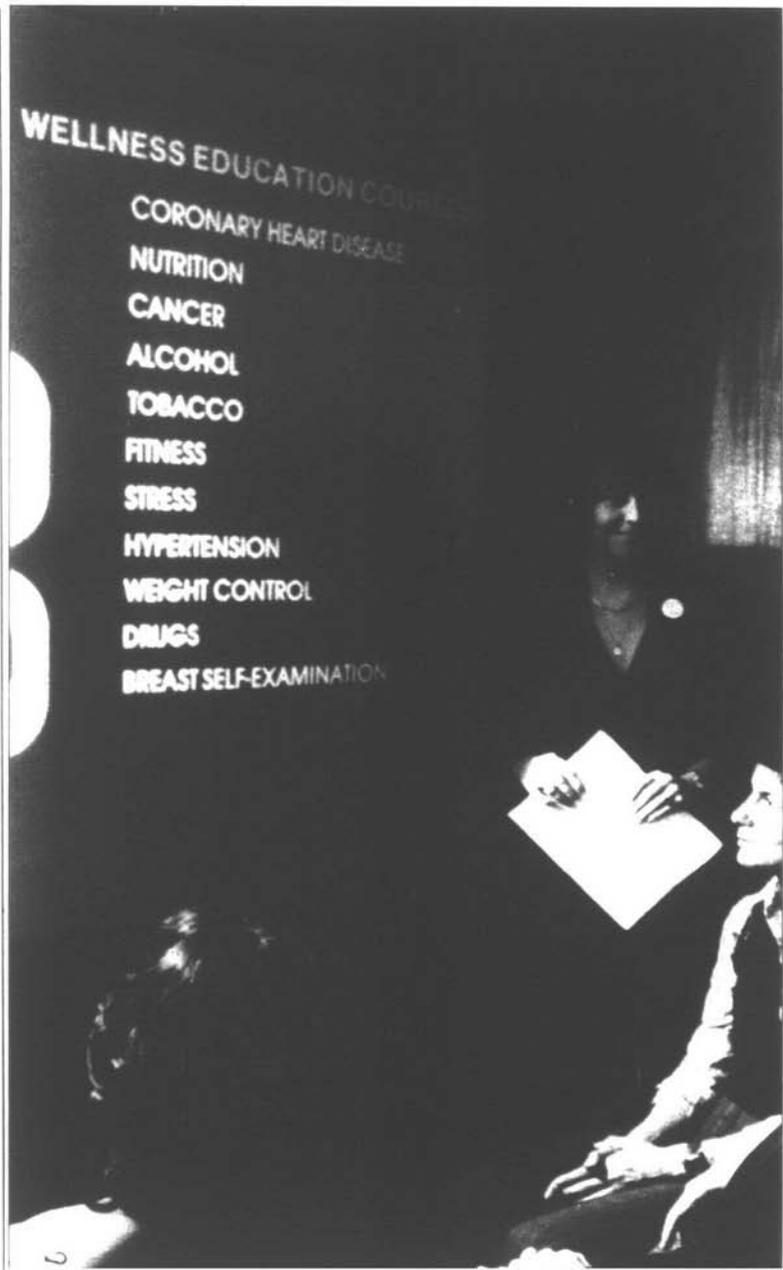
STRESS

HYPERTENSION

WEIGHT CONTROL

DRUGS

BREAST SELF-EXAMINATION



*Courtesy of Control Data Corporation*

The lessons were divided into six modules: Introduction to Health Science, Personal Health, Nutrition and Food Choices, Behavior and the Use and Misuse of Substances, Growing and Maturing, and Communicable and

Chronic Diseases. Each module addressed a health topic as well as the following reading/language skills: word meanings, complete sentences, paragraphs, sequence, main topic, topic sentences, drawing conclusions,

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cause and effect, and fact and opinion. After each module was taught, criterion-referenced tests measured the health content growth of the students, and teachers’ lesson plans were rated on the Quality of Instructional Planning Scale.

Pupils were administered the Basic Skills Inventory, a Rasch-scaled assessment instrument, at the beginning and end of the project. The post-test revealed some exciting results. First, project students’ growth in reading and language was statistically significant when compared with that of non-project students. Second, the number of project students who initially scored at the first quartile in reading and language was significantly reduced in the post-test. Almost half of all the students (project and non-project) had scored in the first quartile on the pretest. On the post-test, 49 percent of the non-project students were still at that level, but only 16 percent of the project students were.

By infusing reading and language into the health curriculum, project teachers gave their students additional reading instruction without sacrificing time or curriculum content. We view this growth as a breakthrough as we seek to improve the basic communication skills of all students.

### *Reference*

National Academy of Education Committee on Testing and Basic Skills. “Improving Educational Achievement.” Report to the Assistant Secretary for Education. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1978.

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