

Voices

equation. Should this person teach 25 children each year for 30 years?

Is it possible to do better with classroom visits? I'm not ready to give up.

Maybe I'll take the next teacher out to breakfast before we go to the school. A session of concentrated briefing and reassurance prior to the visit may be

just the ticket. □

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Trends

Social Studies

WALTER C. PARKER

An Interdisciplinary Curriculum with Thinking at the Core

Third-graders in Adams County (Colorado) School District 12 began the 1986-87 school year with a lesson on how scientists study problems. They drew pictures on butcher paper representing what they think science is and studied similarities and differences among scientists. Thus did their teacher introduce them to *Explore*, an interdisciplinary social studies/science curriculum, which has them searching like scientists for their own answers to questions like these:

- What does it mean to be "alive"?
- What makes animals, animals, and plants, plants?
- What are some kinds of plants and animals?
- What does it mean to be "human"?
- How do individuals develop?
- What people work with and for living things?
- What is the natural environment?
- How do living things survive in different natural environments?

• What people work to study, use, protect, and improve the natural environment?

- What is a community?
- What are some different kinds of communities?
- What people work within and for communities?

As you might guess, the curriculum's organizing concept is *orderliness*—pattern or consistency in living things, the natural environment, and communities of people and other living things. Sample learning units are:

- common characteristics of living things,
- stages of development,
- similarities in occupations and avocations dealing with living things,
- common adaptations to different natural environments,
- common characteristics of different kinds of communities, and
- similarities in occupations and avocations within and for communities.

The curriculum takes care to teach students *how* to think, particularly in ways that will make them better sci-

tists. That is, students learn to use thinking strategies and other relevant skills so that they can think through these units of study and search for supportable answers to the curriculum's key questions. For instance, they are learning to compare, contrast, conclude, form concepts, classify, and infer attributes and meaning.

The late Sydelle Seiger-Ehrenberg, working with Adams County's Pat Willsey and many others, developed *Explore*. Their accompanying 800-page teacher's guide specifies the key questions, science/social studies concepts, thinking strategies, skills, data, and resources for each lesson along with learning activities that tie them together.

A cognitively rich, interdisciplinary curriculum, *Explore* makes explicit the connections between social studies and science. □

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Curriculum Capsules

CONRAD F. TOEPFER, JR., SAMUEL J. ALESSI, JR., AND JAMES A. BEANE

High School Interdisciplinary Unit Deepens Students' Understanding of Race Relations

A combined English and history unit on southern race relations prompted

eleventh-graders at Berkeley-Carroll Street School (Brooklyn, New York) to do some critical thinking on the topic. The 10-lesson unit was based on primary and secondary sources as well as on a variety of short stories and essays.

Students kept journals of their reactions to problems and implications of the assigned readings. Teachers helped to place the fiction studied in historical perspective by assigning primary source readings on the socioeco-

conomic conditions in the post-Civil War South. These readings exposed students to attitudes prevalent among southern whites at that time and to the legal segregation and disenfranchisement enacted to maintain white superiority.

Teachers asked students to comment on white people's fears of social and economic competition from blacks and then introduced them to literature and commentaries offering the views of blacks living during that period. For most students, this was their first exposure to a black viewpoint, let alone one of that historical period. Study and discussion focused on why blacks lost the political and civil rights they had gained during the

Reconstruction Period, on issues involving blacks and whites in the early twentieth century, and on changing conditions for American blacks and whites. Students also participated in simulations.

Reviewing students' journals and final papers, teachers learned that they had developed more specific understandings of race relations issues since the end of the Civil War. In evaluating the unit, students observed that the interdisciplinary approach had helped them to read more critically. The teachers who developed and taught the unit concurred that this approach helped students better synthesize information and concepts from diverse sources. □

Reference

Pollock, Marvin, and Ellen Zimmerman. "Team Teaching in History and Literature: A Unit on Southern Race Relations." *Curriculum Review* 16 (September/October 1986): 35-37.

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