

Trends

Their second task is to provide teachers with answers that work.

Monitors must know where to go for help. Often they can consult monitors in other buildings, the district curriculum or subject specialist, the publisher's consultant via the toll-free 48-hour return answer telephone number,¹ or teachers in other school districts identified (and visited) during the in-depth selection process.² If these resources fail, monitors get back to the individual teacher and say, "I can't find an answer, so our districtwide monitor team will try to do something to fix it. Thanks for alerting us!"

How does this system help you? First, districtwide analysis of verbatim questions and page references will spotlight concrete evidence of potentially serious problems. Second, getting back to individuals with answers, gratitude, or even concern will reinforce that your district cares about and respects individual teachers.

What happens when a district follows this system? Fifth-grade teachers in various buildings throughout a district observed, "My students can't read and understand the concepts"; "I skip those chapters; my students don't like them"; "These chapters are boring; they're just too difficult." Because

teachers in the same grade level identify the same pages, it is easy to identify that the textbook is likely the problem. Further analysis of the fifth-grade text proves that answers to end-of-chapter questions cannot be found in the text. The writing is dull and ambiguous. By collaborating with the publisher's consultant and other user schools in the area, teachers devise new questions, write study guides to supplement the troublesome chapters, and purchase for their libraries multiple copies of far-better-written trade books. In the fall, the curriculum director holds a special districtwide grade-level meeting to thank all fifth-grade teachers for identifying the problem, inform them of the proposed solution, and encourage continued evaluation.

In another situation, logged comments state: "Too many answers vary"; "I don't have time to teach the program"; "There are too many papers to correct." However, the program's purpose, to teach critical thinking and problem solving, means student responses should vary. It appears at first that the teachers are at fault until subsequent contact with the publisher's consultant reveals a combination of problems: the district has not scheduled enough time for discussion, which is essential for the program's

success; and teachers are coping by requiring students to write out all answers. The solution: class time is rescheduled and a series of teachers' workshops is offered for college credit on how to teach critical thinking and creative problem solving through class discussion.

The key to success with any new program is *monitoring*, which includes a system for listening to teachers in every building, and then *modifying*, responding with specific grade-level help. If new programs are installed without such a system, then questions and concerns will rapidly grow into serious problems, and the program will be rejected. □

1 See Connie Muther, "The Service Guarantee Means Help from the Publisher," *Educational Leadership* 42 (May 1985): 79-81.

2 See Connie Muther, "Alternatives to Piloting Textbooks," *Educational Leadership* 42 (March 1985): 79-83.

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Please send questions, ideas, responses, or suggestions for this column to Connie Muther at the address below.

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Home Economics

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Home Economics Places New Emphasis on Basic Skills

Two movements are at the forefront of home economics curriculum today. The first aims to strengthen the contribution of home economics to the education of students who learn basic academic skills more easily in a real-life context.

Barbara Hanauer, for example, is a consumer and homemaking teacher in Indiana's Bloomfield School District. She reinforces students' computation skills as they figure the unit price of grocery items for different package sizes or multiply or divide ingredients to change the quantity of a recipe. In her unit on child care, Hanauer, who is also a certified science teacher,

makes sure her students learn that many common household cleaners contain poisonous chemicals.

New state legislation requiring schools to enhance academic skills and to increase mathematics and science graduation requirements has stimulated a reexamination of the home economics curriculum. Oklahoma, for example, permits students to satisfy some of these requirements in vocational home economics courses. Teachers such as Hanauer apply the academic basics to real problems students must solve.

In a recent study, however, Darlene Moss (1985) found that home economics teachers regret they are not able to incorporate mathematics and

science as much as they think they should. Many home economics teachers recommend more collegial interaction and inservice work with academic teachers to strengthen basic skills in both areas.

A second trend affecting home economics curriculums is toward stating learner outcomes in terms of critical-thinking and decision-making skills. For example, students in a consumer education class contrast the results of impulse buying with deliberate buying. In another example, Joanna Connors' Interpersonal Relationships students in Northview High School (Brazil, Indiana) predict outcomes of alternative actions, compare them with individual goals and values, and take

reasoned action. Connors believes this thinking process is essential for students as they learn to recognize the power of peer pressure in their own life decisions.

Lorraine Ewing, Mount Vernon High School (Fortville, Indiana) is using a new cocurricular program of the Future Homemakers of America, which provides a framework to enable students to set and achieve goals. Students carry out individual home economics projects that cultivate skills in leadership, communication, time management, relationships, and self-discipline. A student-selected team evaluates their projects.

Teachers like Judi Merkel of the South Adams School Corporation (Berne, Indiana) teach critical thinking as students research various fad diets and products, apply nutrition information, and judge the merits of each diet or product. Merkel's Food and Fitness class takes a holistic approach to wellness, incorporating physical fitness instruction with nutrition. Merkel's partnership with physical educators in her school combines related disciplines and allows students to select, manage, and evaluate a reasonable plan for their nutrition and good health.

The two trends discussed here, toward incorporating basic skills and higher-order thinking in home economics courses, are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they support the more effective contribution of home economics to the mission of public education and to young people's work and life after they leave school. □

Reference

Moss, Darlene P. "Perceived Application of Basic Mathematics Skills and Science Strategies in Secondary Vocational Home Economics." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Vocational Association, Atlanta, December 1985.

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English

CHARLES SUHOR

NCTE Task Force Searches for Successful Teacher Development and Rewards Programs

A report prepared by the Task Force on Teacher Competency Issues, National Council of Teachers of English, includes a search for model preservice, inservice, and career ladder programs.

Global recommendations focus on establishing "multiple and varied measures" of teacher competency, influencing national and state groups that define competency, recruiting and retaining minority teachers, assuring high admission standards for teacher education programs, and recognizing excellent state and district programs for teacher support and advancement.

The last recommendation will involve a search for well-articulated career development programs "in which

advancement is not equated with leaving the classroom," programs for beginning teachers that employ experienced classroom teachers as consultants, school-based assistance programs for teachers needing help, effective inservice and staff support programs for minority teachers, and programs that make use of strong peer evaluation designs.

Commenting on recent paper-and-pencil testing programs, NCTE Task Force chair Maia Mertz noted that "many potentially good teachers will be eliminated from the teaching force unless current patterns of teacher testing are reevaluated." The task force stressed the need for viewing teacher competency issues more broadly. □

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