

OBE in action: a day in a Michigan school

by Lisa Morency

On Sept. 14, Lisa Morency of Livonia, Michigan attended her child's classes in public elementary school for two and a half hours, to get a first-hand view of what is taking place there, in view of the national controversy raging over outcome-based education (OBE) and related New Age "reforms." The Livonia Public Schools are implementing a curriculum guided by the Michigan State Model Core Curriculum Outcomes. Lisa's son is in what is called "third/fourth split." "It's worse than I had read about or thought it would be," Mrs. Morency concluded. Here is her report:

The first thing I noticed is that there were *no textbooks*. The principal told me that there are no textbooks in any of the classes. This is the new education, the principal said, all smiles. The teachers work from a manual.

My son is in a program called Alternative Classroom for the Academically Talented (ACAT). This is supposed to be for accelerated learning students who have achieved a 95% or above reading and math score in a test given at the end of the second grade. I noticed one student who could not do simple arithmetic, even though this was supposed to be a class of high achievers.

At 8:30-9:00 a.m. the students were involved in solving a "Poser." They were given a problem and told that there are many ways to get answers to problems that are not simply mathematical answers. The question of the day was, "How do you get a toad out of your pocket?" The students were encouraged to work the problem out together. Many of them appeared bored and distracted. Students weren't even listening to the teacher most of the time, but the teacher did not acknowledge this.

'Doing your own thing'

The next activity was "Math Lab," from 9:00-10:30 a.m. The students had several choices. They could choose a game called Mini-Computer Math Game, which did not involve computers. Second was a game called S/Math, a game like Scrabble, but using math instead of letters. The third one was playing with blocks broken into units; the children were to add up how many of the different types of blocks were in each unit. This method of counting is called "Math Manipulative," which means having the physical objects in your hand as you count them. It may be useful for students at a much younger age, but most of these students should have already surpassed

that stage. Most of the children paid no attention. Many wandered into the halls to get their lunch boxes and started eating at 10:00 a.m., and the teachers said nothing about this.

The scene was truly one of everyone doing their "own thing," with no one feeling obligated to answer or follow through on even what they had allegedly chosen to get to work on. One student came up and told the teacher he didn't think any of this was worthwhile, which forced the teacher to assign him to one of the activities.

Then from 10:30-11:00 a.m. was "Quiet Reading Time." You can read wherever you want to. One of the students decided to crawl under the teacher's desk and spend his "Quiet Reading Time" there. This was perfectly acceptable to the teacher. She moved a box that was there to "make him feel more comfortable" while he was there. Needless to say, the "quiet" period was not very quiet. The teacher proceeded to put on an audiotape of a flute with birds chirping in the background. Very little reading went on among the 27 students. Again, many wandered unchallenged into the halls to eat or hang out, with no objections raised.

At 11:00 a.m. the students went to lunch. The lunch room was noisy and chaotic. After lunch was recess and then "Family Time," which included third, fourth, and fifth grade classes brought together for half an hour of "getting to know each other's activities." After this was gym class, which was exercises accompanied by rap music on a loudspeaker.

After this was half an hour of "Journal," which is supposed to be a true and personal account of an appropriate topic related to the child's thoughts and personal experiences. My son was uncomfortable, because he did not want to tell the teacher about his personal feelings. In the teacher's written explanation of this program that was sent home to the parents, a "Rubric" is attached which outlines the skills and behavior teachers will observe as the child engages in journal writing. The main emphasis of the "Rubric" is on whether the child is "consistent" or "inconsistent." It will also be determined whether the child has a "positive attitude" or not.

In conclusion, let me add that I saw no American flags at all in the school. The flagpole outside is bare, and there are no flags in the classrooms. The only flag I saw was a large DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) banner in the gym, which is also the lunchroom.

Documentation

According to literature published by the Livonia, Michigan Public Schools, the curriculum for gifted children is based on Barbara Clark's Integrative Education Model (IEM). Clark is a professor at California State University, where she is coordinator for graduate programs in the area of Gifted Education. She is the author of Growing Up Gifted, a book whose foreword was written by Marilyn Ferguson, the editor and publisher of Brain/Mind Bulletin and the author

of *The Aquarian Conspiracy* and *The Brain Revolution*. According to Ferguson, Clark's book "describes the emergent discipline known as transpersonal education, a cutting edge of the dynamic model of intelligence; it explores the relevance of biofeedback training, sensory awareness, accelerated learning techniques, 'centering' activities, and research in states of consciousness."

With this program, the exploration of "states of consciousness," introduced into the United States by Aldous Huxley and the rock-drug-counterculture movement, has entered the public school system.

Here is how the Livonia public schools' literature describes the program that Lisa Morency saw in action (grammatical and spelling errors in the original text have not been corrected):

Clark uses recent knowledge of the brain and its functioning to suggest strategies to optimize learning for children. The following are basic to our classrooms:

I. *The Responsive Learning Environment*. This component requires that the environment be viewed as a support for optimizing learning. Within this component is a concern for both the social-emotional environment and the physical environment. The teacher, the parent, and the student are seen to be a team in achieving effective learning.

II. *Relaxation and Tension Reduction*. The human brain processes more and retains information longer when tension is reduced. Strategies for reducing tension are important tools

for both teachers and learners.

III. *Movement and Physical Encoding*. The use of the physical/sensing function of the brain provides support for learning by increasing understanding and retention of concepts, thus movement and physical encoding strategies are considered an important part of the teaching process.

IV. *Empowering Language and Behavior*. The brain uses emotions to trigger the production of biochemistry to enhance or inhibit the thinking functions. IEM encourages the use of language and behavior that empowers learners; between the teacher and the learner, and among learners. This component includes strategies which build community and positive interpersonal and intrapersonal communication.

V. *Choice and Perceived Control*. Choice and perceived control play an important part in the success and continued achievement of the learner. Strategies that build skills of decision making, ability to align personal and school goals, and foster alternative thinking and self-evaluation are encouraged. The teacher must include choice in the environment and in the learning experiences if optimal learning is to be achieved.

VI. *Complex and Challenging Cognitive Activities*. Because there are at least two ways to process thinking, opportunities must be provided for learning that allows use of both linear, rational and spatial, gestalt processing. By providing novelty, complexity, variety, and challenge in the classroom as the standard for each lesson the education process becomes more brain compatible.

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