

National Project Field Tested In Hampden

THE HOW OF LEARNING

The design is to teach children to become competent learners. But when the kindergarten students, in groups of five, are walking with a teacher through the supermarket looking at labels printed in capital letters or noting that all soups are grouped or that all the produce men wear the same kinds of jackets, they are oblivious to the sophisticated thinking backed by years of interdisciplinary research that has decreed that such an experience will contribute to the heady process of becoming a competent learner.

The kindergarten students in that particular supermarket are students at the McGraw School in Hampden, just south of Bangor, and their trip was planned late the afternoon before by their two teachers and the Hampden Implementation Team members of the American National Institute for Social Advancement (ANISA). ANISA has a contract with Hampden, funded by Title III, for an implementation project of a scientific and sophisticated theory of learning formulated by the Amherst Center of the University of Massachusetts. During the past six years its interdisciplinary staff has researched learning theory; they have some answers now and Hampden is one of four implementation sites where the ANISA model is being field tested for the first time. The other three implementation sites, initiated this fall, are Suffield, Connecticut; Fall River, Massachusetts; and Kansas City, Missouri.

The supermarket project is but one of numerous activities introduced by the ANISA team since September and enthusiastically accepted by the McGraw teachers. Meeting with the kindergarten teachers after school one day last November, Mrs. Nancy McCormick Rambusch, Mrs. Linda Pratt, and Michael Kalinowski, comprising the ANISA Hampden team, and ANISA Associate Director Dr. Don Streets, outlined the project for the next day. They had traveled from Massachusetts for the week as they do each month.

The meeting began with preliminary evaluations of the Metropolitan Readiness Test and the Prammski Test, administered earlier. Evidently some of these young students were ready to read. Planned for the next day: First, the students would discuss with their teachers what they think a supermarket is. Then, they would break into small groups with their teachers and the ANISA team members for a trip across the street to a supermarket to see the numerous labels consisting entirely of capital letters. They would also see firsthand how the supermarket is organized and the redundant display of merchandise.

Supermarkets are excellent for this study, explained the rapid-speaking Mrs. Rambusch (of Montessori fame) because "things that go together are put together," making it an excellent example of a classifying system. And supermarkets abound with labels in capital letters. She produced a three-page list of capital-letter labels on articles carried by the supermarket to be visited.

On future trips students would look at the human environment as well as the physical environment. Phrases like "manipulative activity," "social activity," "recycling the environment," "cooperative activity," and "organic social activity" were used frequently by team members and teachers. The potential for school-home partnership was mentioned. One of the visits would be videotaped for study later.

With the supermarket visits planned, the ANISA team was off to a quick dinner and then back in the school to videotape a lesson on classification using golden bead materials which the McGraw teachers will keep for future reference.

That was but one late afternoon and evening in the lives of the Hampden ANISA team. It takes a lot of energy to field test a learning model — one that is hopefully both comprehensive and applicable.

The ANISA implementation project is funded in Hampden with a Title III funding amounting to \$39,841 for this year. That includes in-service training, equipment, salaries of two teacher aides and preservice training. Seven teachers, the principal, and one board member spent three weeks at the University of Massachusetts receiving training from the ANISA staff last summer. The teachers received stipends and graduate credits. These were kindergarten and first grade teachers who then came back and taught a two-week course to any of the McGraw teachers who were interested; as it turned out, all attended except one who had already arranged to be out of state. These teachers received recertification credits.

Teachers at McGraw have welcomed the project as a resource that aids them in teaching. The consensus here is that ANISA has not changed their school; teachers at McGraw School are and have been committed to teaching. They are proud of their reputation. Here is a school where all the children belong to all the teachers, where teachers expect to share with one another, where Hausermann walls enable, for example, the four third grade classrooms to work together in one large area or divide into four self-contained classrooms, and where the teachers look to their principal as an instructional leader.

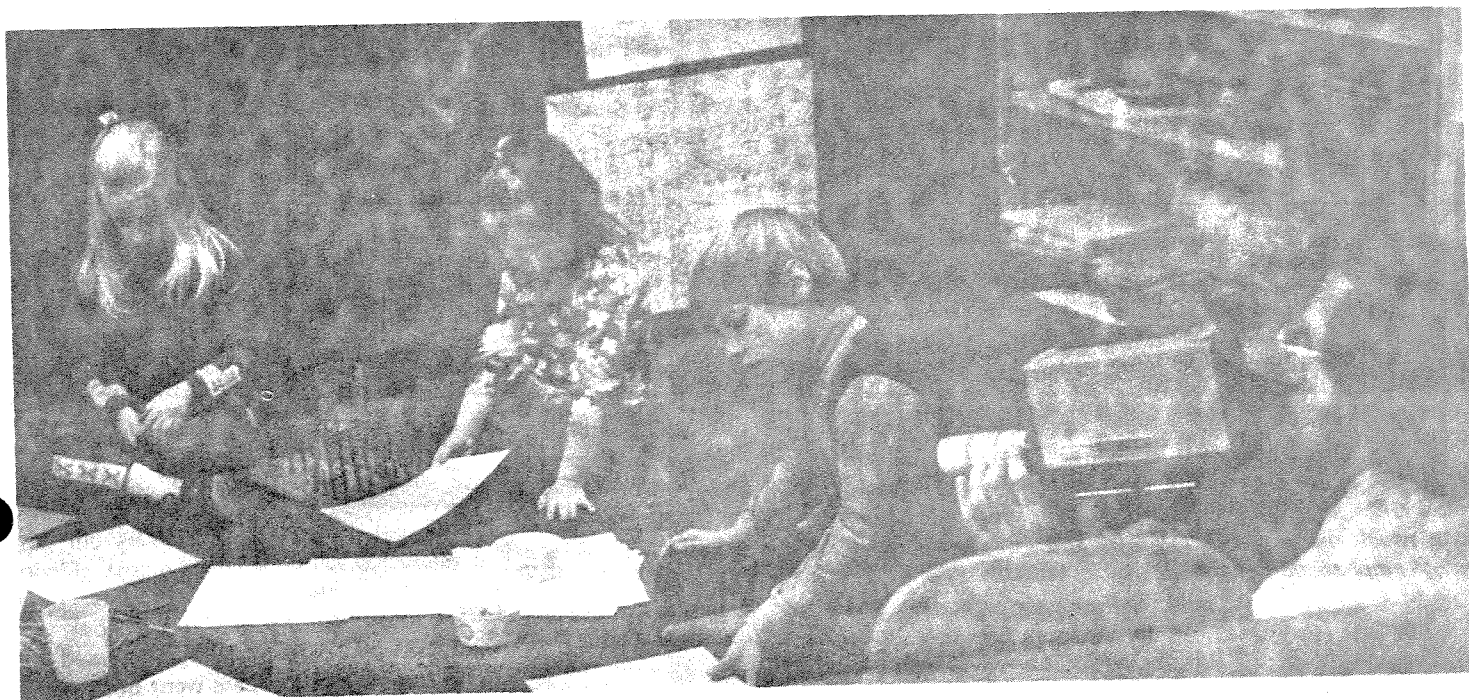
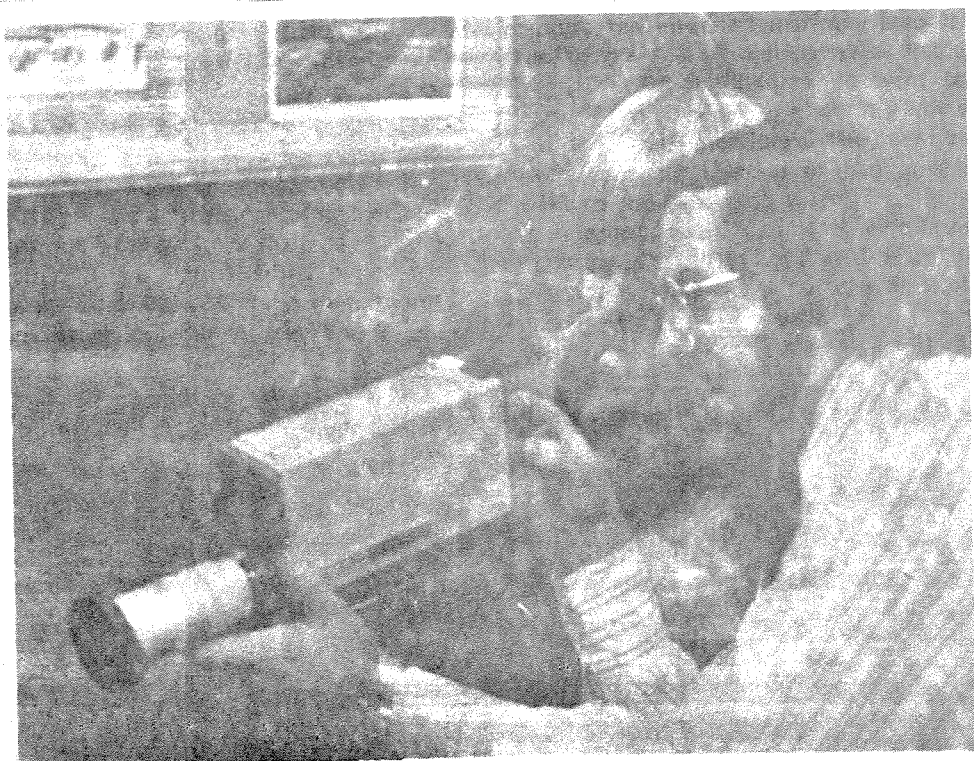
The ANISA project has codified thinking and given structure to many of the activities that the teachers had been practicing through the years. As one teacher explains it, ANISA has reinforced what she had long been doing but she welcomed that reinforcement. It has encouraged teachers to become more involved in sophisticated methods of implementing learning theory. And although it calls for an additional time and energy commitment on the part of the McGraw teachers, it has been enthusiastically received.

Principal Willard Hillier and the teachers have become enthused enough to voluntarily of their time and energy. He was instrumental in writing the Title III project and selling it to the school board. And although all teacher participation is voluntary, all teachers in the school are now involved to some extent — due in part to the careful guidance and obvious enthusiasm of Mr. Hillier. When the ANISA team visits, it is Mr. Hillier with whom they work first and through him with the classroom teachers.

He believes in the ANISA project because he sees it helping teachers teach and thereby helping students learn. He is proud of the enthusiasm of his teachers but expected nothing less. Although designed for kindergarten and first grade this year, all teachers have access to the Wednesday afternoon in-service training sessions and "teachers seem to be accepting as much as they can."

Mr. Hillier readily admits that a school

Teachers asked that team members observe individual students to help them analyze learning patterns. Below: team member Michael Kalinowski video tapes students who are so engrossed in their own work that they pay little attention to him. Right: Immediately after the taping, Kalinowski shows a delighted little boy the tape of himself.



has to be at a certain point before the ANISA project could be incorporated the way it has been at McGraw. While the McGraw School is welcoming the ANISA team, the ANISA team speaks enthusiastically of the McGraw faculty. The ANISA model itself is not simple. It is a study of human potential with very practical application for the classroom. In 1970 the New England Program for Teacher Education (NEPTE) funded the interdisciplinary idea which was developed at the University of Massachusetts. Its goal is nothing less than to plan a new system of education — to codify learning theory into a discipline. Dr. Streets explains that in the field of science, for instance, the time lag between discovery and implementation is at most three years; in education, he figures that same time lag to be 50 years. The ANISA proponents do not intend to abandon storage and retrieval or accumulation of factual information; they intend instead to incorporate what has currently been proved as worthwhile into a theory that sees adjustment to change as critical. They want to teach young people to become competent

learners on the theory that only the competent learner is truly in control of his own destiny. Dr. Streets regards the rejection of what has been found good in the past to be a "fundamental error" of many learning theories; ANISA addresses what already exists and builds on it.

ANISA is fundamentally concerned with the translation of potentiality (which is unlimited) into actuality; the process by which this is sustained is through interaction with the environment.

The ANISA model gives the classroom teacher specifics to implement the philosophical rationale — to understand the "how of learning."

One of the specifics readily viewable in the McGraw School is the orderly environment. Dr. Streets explains that the basis of all learning is the ability to pay attention and believes in the principle of parsimony; the environment can be so rich as to be confusing, he explains.

There are provisions in McGraw classrooms for auditory shelter and visual shelter. There are specified places for various kinds of activities in these rooms and the children know where they are.

Students practice moving in certain traffic patterns that are least disturbing to others.

Another example: Dr. Streets has no use for library materials locked away; they should be displayed and be accessible to students.

(The June 1973 issue of *Young Children*, a publication of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, is recommended by Dr. Streets as a comprehensive explanation of the theory of the model.)

The ANISA implementation project in Hampden, Maine, is now being watched as the years of research find their proving ground in the classroom. Its belief in unlimited learning potential could capture the imagination of any teacher. Part of the ANISA philosophy as stated by Dr. Streets: "Children do want to learn. They do want to know the why's and how's and wherefore's. They are not aware of what is good or bad in the methods used to teach them. Thus it is the teachers, not the students, who have the responsibility for not only developing the student's potential but also for not blocking that development."



The enthusiasm of Project Leader Mrs. Nancy Rambusch was matched by that of kindergarten teachers Mrs. Carol Kelsey and Mrs. Christine MacGregor as they planned the next day's activities for McGraw School's youngest students. All team members, Mr. Hillier and the involved teachers are present at such planning meetings.