The Supervisor

ANNE MEEK

25 Students for 30 Years

"She's already here," the secretary told me. I hurried down the long hallway to Mrs. X's first-grade room. At least she found the school, I thought, remembering the time I had sent Mr. Mac for a similar visit. He had lost his way to the school and showed up 30 minutes late.

Mrs. X, chatting and smiling with Teacher Doe, invited me to join them. The children were in that state of suspended animation we see in the early morning—part resignation to their fate, part confidence in their teacher, mostly sleepy-headedness. Mrs. X oriented us briefly. Then, with her usual broad smile and sparkling eyes, she gave the students directions for their morning assignments.

I pounced on the opportunity to call Teacher Doe's attention to the features of Mrs. X's teaching that she could emulate. "Note her seatwork," I said. "Do you see how all the groups have seatwork on their level and on skills they need to practice?"

She told me Mrs. X had shown her these assignments and had explained about putting textbook exercises from the teachers' manuals on charts. She exclaimed proudly, "My kids can do everything they're doing and more."

I mentioned Mrs. X's careful organization of materials in the reading circle, on her desk, and at the art center. Teacher Doe took all this in with interest, interrupting me occasionally with a plaintive query about her difficulties. I tried to reassure her about her status without either lying or losing time.

Mrs. X proceeded to the reading groups. I pointed out the clear relationship between objectives and exercises in her plans; her deft, almost incidental reinforcement of review skills; and the subtle changes in pace based on the children's familiarity with the material. Teacher Doe's eyes darted around. Mrs. X possessed all the teaching skills that Teacher Doe so woefully lacked. Smiling at her students, encouraging them, challenging them, she was a paragon in the performance of that delicate dance between what the students know and what they need to know.

By now the students were working away at their assignments. Teacher

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Doe and I walked amid their desks, assessing their work. "They're about like my kids," she whispered, "only mine are better at alphabetizing." I felt a shiver of alarm along the back of my neck. Was she going to see what she needed to see to keep her job? Had she been this way with her professors?

Leaving Mrs. X, we circulated through the other first grades so that she could see the patterns of organization these seasoned teachers depended on. I thought of Teacher Doe's harum-scarum lesson plans and disorganized materials. Would she grasp the idea that control of learning might begin with neatness? In each classroom she commented brightly, "My kids are ahead of these."

Again I recalled Mr. Mac, how I had observed him at length, specified his deficiencies, and sent him to visit Mrs. K, a model of excellence in the skills he lacked. When I had asked what he had seen, he had replied, "Oh, isn't that little Mrs. K just the cutest thing?" At that moment I had resolved to accompany visiting teachers.

So here I was, accompanying Teacher Doe and pointing out plainly and patronizingly the behaviors she needed, and what was happening? Teacher Doe was seeing what Teacher Doe wanted to see. Or maybe *she* was pointing out what she wanted *me* to see. And if it was true that her students' achievement was comparable, did proper organization really matter?

Before lunch I fled to my office, and Teacher Doe meandered back to her own classroom across the district. On the phone I sought feedback from her principal. "She seemed pleased," he said. "She said her kids could do everything those kids could do and more."

As a supervisor I arrange classroom visits frequently. When teachers request them, visits are stimulating and successful. When I insist on them, they are curiously off the mark. However, I go right ahead and insist on them. After I have plodded through lesson planning, talked myself blue in the face about seatwork, sent in the reading consultant, observed informally and made suggestions—after all this, a classroom visit is a chance for the new teacher to experience an exemplary classroom holistically, to see a model of excellence in action.

But put yourself in Teacher Doe's place: just out of college in your mid-thirties, newly divorced, the major support of two children. And you're going to lose the job you trained to do. In the face of such a threat, it's hard to attend to didactic experiences, holistic or not. In the face of such conditions, the supervisor clings to the 25 x 30

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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 scientists. 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-Carrol 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-

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