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Students learn firsthand

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plastic bags with water and prepare everything for the class. Students are able to watch tadpoles grow in small aquariums set up in their own classrooms. They also have tanks for fish, chameleons and frogs, and can actually witness the major stages of the various life cycles during the year.

"When a class is finished with a project and moves to another, the creatures are returned to the center. We plan to continue breeding the animals and, in that way, hope to become self-sufficient by next year," he continued.

When the program was begun last year, the district received starter kits for each part of the program. Since most specimens are returned to the center, the creatures can continue to multiply, providing more animals for future classes. Otherwise, replacement would be too costly for the district to continually provide classes with live animals.

Since Johnson's hobby is collecting and working with animals, the district asked him to run the culturing center. In his room at Larkshire, Johnson keeps a 12-foot, 40-pound boa constrictor, several birds, a tarantula and many other small animals.

"The kids really loved it. They get a chance to see these different animals and how they live. They all want to see the boa eat and come down to the class in groups just to watch her eat small rabbits," said Johnson. "It's a valuable learning experience and helps them understand life cycles. Where else can a youngster see this?"

The other part of the program deals with physical sciences. In the sixth grade, for example, students conduct 16 experiments during the semester. As they progress and learn the more through each session, they are able to invent their own experiments and pursue different areas.

"The program is a lot of fun for the students. They really get excited and involved in some of the experiments. After they finish what they are supposed to do, they can go off on their own to discover things related to what they are learning," explained Larkshire sixth-grade teacher, Bette Buckler.

"And we get a lot of comments about the program from parents. They say the kids come home and tell them what they learned and talk about science," she said.

"I'm really glad. It makes my job more interesting because these kids are really turned on to what they are doing. They're doing the learning themselves and experiencing it firsthand through actually working on the experiments, not just reading about some scientific happening in a book."

THE PHYSICAL science sessions deal with material objects in the first grades and build upon one another through the sixth grade. In other grades, students learn about interactions and systems, sub-systems, relative position and motion, energy sources, and electric and magnetic interactions.

Each classroom in the district has lab equipment for the various levels of experimentation. Each unit comes complete with everything a teacher needs to conduct the experiments.

"The major difference between the new method and the old textbook approach is that the students themselves are active participants in the projects. They watch the creatures eating, being born and living. That's what

makes it so enjoyable for them," said Delewsky.

"When students do their own investigating and discovering, they are apt to learn more. I have found that teachers and students are doing things they never did before. Teachers are keeping the aquariums and tanks in the classrooms longer. Students are going out to buy chameleons because they are really interested."

"Because the kids are so turned on by the new program, a teacher doesn't have to be a great science instructor. He can just introduce the project to the students and they usually take it from there."

"And many times," Delewsky concluded, "the teacher becomes a better teacher because the students get so ex-

cited that the teacher gets turned on too. And that makes the program even better."



Chris McKenna, a sixth grader at Larkshire, works on one of the 16 science experiments students experience as part of the elementary science program in Farmington schools. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

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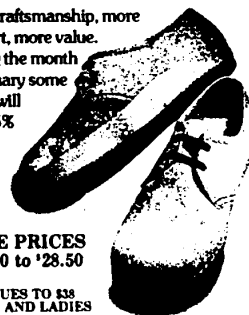
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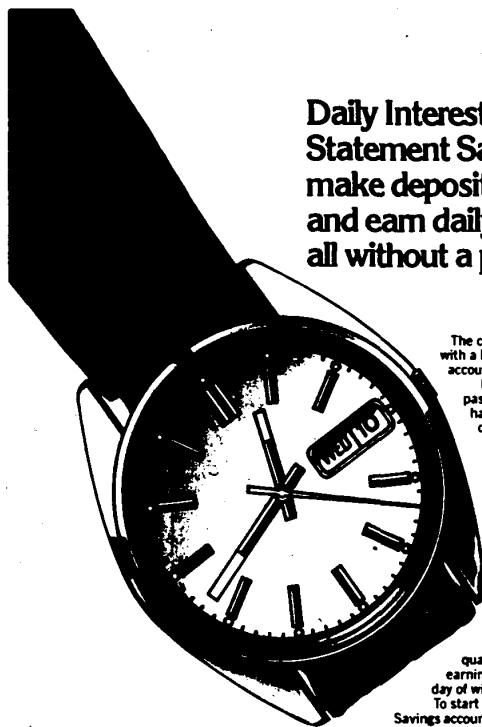
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