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Some schools reassess 'new math' theorizing

By CORINNE ABATT

Ever since the concept of modern math hit the national scene about 15 years ago, it has met with mixed reactions.

Students who used an abacus or talked about Base 10 at the dinner table encountered bewilderment from parents who learned their math by rote drills — flash cards, plenty of homework of the nitty gritty type and practice in class until they had it down pat — perhaps even memorized it.

If parents were business people who later hired the products of modern math had some concerns about whether they could indeed add, subtract, multiply and divide, they were not alone.

Garden City followed the national trend to modern math after a careful study by a committee of administrators, teachers and resource people. They decided on the approach which is called the Greater Cleveland modern math, named after the Ohio city which pioneered it.

The Greater Cleveland approach had the stamp of approval of the highly respected Science Research Association (SRA).

Beatty says he was concerned that if, in the midst of the abstract theory of modern math, the students were also asked to learn necessary basic computational skills.

ABOUT 12 YEARS ago the Garden City district introduced the senior math testing program. Before graduation requirements are complete, each senior must pass a sixth grade level proficiency test of basic computational skills. Those seniors who fail a pre-test are given instructional materials to work with until they can pass the test.

Beatty's feeling is that the basic skills should be taught first and those youngsters who can handle the theory should be encouraged to do so.

He says, "Our present SRA material is not sufficient in drill and practice."

For a number of years, the district has been testing at all elementary levels to check math proficiency and has been encouraging the use of reinforcement materials for the basic skills.

In addition to the reinforcement, the district has taken several other major steps.

To correct what has been felt to be incorrect procedures Beatty says, "We started tooling up for a pilot program in Garden City."

THERE ARE TWO KINDS of pilot programs. Five math test book publishers were identified. Together they were willing to donate some \$6,000 worth of materials and books to the district to try on a pilot basis.

Students were pre-tested before the programs were started and will be tested again at the end of the year. These will give an indication of the effectiveness of the various materials. Teacher effectiveness is, of course, the unknown quantity.

Before this, the district had become aware of the Shaw - Hieble math program in Flint, a course of adjunctive math materials, course and put it into use in the Flint schools.

It has since been published by Houghton Mifflin.

Beatty and a group of teachers and administrators have visited Flint several times to see the program in action.

Beatty says of the Shaw - Hieble program, "The minute I saw it, as an ex - math teacher, I was extremely interested."

He says that when Brice Shaw, math coordinator for the Flint district, found Flint students dropping behind in math at the rate of about a quarter of a grade each year, he began testing and designing his own materials to reinforce math skills.

Strangely enough, this same thing was taking place in Garden City. Beatty says, "Shaw was doing the same thing we were, but he started sooner."

Garden City instituted the Shaw - Hieble programs in the Title 1 classes last year for both elementary and junior high students.

Title 1 is a federally funded program of supplemental service for students who are one standard deviation more below the norm in reading and math. The local program hasn't any financial limitations, it is for all children who need help in reading and math. It is now in Douglas, Harrison and Henry Ruff elementary schools and Hymen A. Vogel Junior High.

In the first two months that Shaw - Hieble was used, some of the youngsters gained a year and a half in proficiency and Beatty says, "all improved significantly."

Summer theater finale winds up

Remaining performances of the Obie award-winning musical fantasy, "Dream on Monkey Mountain," by Wyclef Ingraham, poet-playwright, Derek Walcott, are "rescheduled" Saturday, Aug. 13-17, at 8 p.m. in the Hilberry Theater.

"Dream on Monkey Mountain" was written by the director of the Trinidad Theater Workshop, which presented the play at its first production at the Eugene O'Neill Foundation's National Playwrights Conference, at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles, and for the Negro Ensemble Company in New York. The New York production won an Obie award for Walcott.

A PLAY WITH songs, dance and spectacle, "Dream on Monkey Mountain" is about a poor black charcoal-seller in the West Indies and his dream of becoming a resplendently robed African emperor.

Heading the Black Theater Company cast as Mabon, the charcoal-seller, is Earl D.A. Smith, WSU graduate student, former Hilberry actor and former Black Theater director at Wayne State. Among his roles at the Hilberry were Hamlet in the 1967-68

production, Mark Antony in the 1968-69 "Julius Caesar" and Wong in "The Good Woman of Setzuan."

Smith has directed such Bonstelle productions as "Blue for Yester Charlie," "Song of India" and "Les Blancs." He also has appeared at the University of Detroit-Marygrove's Theater as guest artist-in-residence.

OTHER PRINCIPAL roles are played by Janice McElroy of the Hilberry Repertory Company, Lawrence L. Thomas, Carlise C. Collins, Larry D. Hughes, Vance Dennard, Ray Adams and James Peady.

Direction is by Earl D.A. Smith and choreography by Florette Johnson. The original musical score has been composed by Michael Dinwiddie. Designers are Norman Hamlin for scenery, Daniel Thomas Fielz, costumes, and William McAdam, lighting.

Reserve seat tickets are available from the theater office in the Hilberry lobby and J.L. Hirsch's. Information about reduced-rate tickets is available from the box office.

The Studio Theater, downstairs at the Hilberry, is currently presenting the musical "Little Mary Sunshine" by the Hilberry.

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