

PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

METROPOLITAN LEARNING CENTER
2033 Northwest Glisan Street
Portland, Oregon 97209

REPORT TO THE BOARD

September 22, 1969

The concept suggesting the need for the Metropolitan Learning Center is based on the premise that people learn best what they want to learn at the time when they want to learn it. We believe during a person's school years he will develop an interest and become involved in all areas of the standard school curriculum, plus a whole lot more if released to design his own learning program. Learners should be free to investigate what they want to for as long as they want to do it. The MLC began at Couch School September 9, 1968.

The following principles of operation are applied in the operation of the Center:

1. Differentiated staffing - Teachers (titled adult learning coordinators) teach classes and coordinate and direct the activities of the students with the assistance of employed aides, student aides, and volunteer aides who may be professional people, craftsmen, businessmen, etc.
2. Multi-age grouping - The Center enrolls students from age 5 through age 18. Classes and activities are not restricted to any age group by the imposition of limitations. Every class or activity is open to any student who wishes to participate and it is not at all uncommon to observe students from age 5 through 18 working in the same class or participating in the same activity together.
3. Non-gradedness - No limitations are placed upon the students' areas of interest or the rate at which they may learn. There are no grade levels nor are grades or marks given. Whether a student participates in a small, medium, or large group activity or functions alone is determined by the nature of his interest and his own inclination.
4. Individualized curriculum - Students design their own learning programs, seeking out the help they want as they see the need for it, utilizing the material and personnel resources of the Center and the community. The adult learning coordinators coordinate, guide and counsel the students through this process. The tremendous mass of data which accrues from this procedure, because it means that there is a different curriculum and program for each student, is managed through computerization by the students themselves and a data coordinator. We are a part of the integrated communications experiment in the District.

5. Process oriented - A primary objective of the Center is to develop within each of its students the ability to cope with change, anxieties, and frustrations that they will encounter in their daily lives and acceptance of education as an entirely enjoyable process. Education in the Center provides learners with as many alternatives as possible within the limits of our technology and our cultural, human, and economic resources, then allows them to select as individuals what they need and want.
6. Community involvement - Learning experiences are provided in the Center and also out in the community. Students arrange to audit or take for credit classes in the colleges, to hold classes and receive instruction at other places such as the art museum, Tektronix, or other learning stations in the community. The facilities and resources of the Center are open and available to the Community for its use. The human resources of the community, cultural, technical, vocational, and parental are invited into the Center to teach and also to learn.
7. Complete involvement of the Center in decision making - The staff, parents, and students are directly involved with the principal in the decision making process. All have equal voices in a student, teacher, parent organization. The principal and staff cooperate fully in setting policy within the Center.

The students in the MLC are a typical group of boys and girls. They are not categorically all slow learners, extremely capable, contra cultural, emotionally disturbed, drop outs or disadvantaged. They are enrolled in the Center on a first come, first serve basis if their characteristics at the time they apply contribute to the maintenance of the balance we strive for in the Center. We feel that it is essential that the Center continue to enroll a typical group of boys and girls and to be balanced in respect to ages, boys, girls, races, abilities, economic levels, religions, family backgrounds, attitudes, etc. We have had requests from more than 300 boys and girls and their parents to enroll in the Center and of these, 150 have placed themselves on a waiting list, hoping for enrollment in 1970 or 1971.

The 1968-69 learning center limited enrollment to 150 students and employed 5 certified teachers. It occupied 5 classrooms in Couch School. Of the 150 students, 9 were returned to regular classrooms either because they wanted more structure, or their parents did. These were replaced by 9 from the waiting list. Ten students were graduated and 118 returned for the 1969-70 school year. Twenty-two students have not returned. A few of these have enrolled in other schools, and some have left the city.

Board members have received an analysis of test results for the MLC for 1968-69. This analysis was prepared by Dr. Forbes, Supervisor of Testing Services.

Measurement in the MLC was difficult for the following reasons. Students in the Center accepted, literally, the idea that they were to determine what they were to do and expected the school to refrain from the imposition of limitations. They did not want to submit to testing, especially to being given tests they considered designed to measure achievement in a structured learning program. The staff objected to requiring all students to submit to testing for the same reasons, and also because such tests did not measure the affective aspects of experiences in the Metropolitan Learning Center. After much negotiation and communication of need, tests were administered and base line data was acquired for further evaluation.

An analysis of the test results reveals that reading is the strongest skill and that mathematics is the weakest. The eleven and twelve year olds did better than the youngest. Reading tends to be above grade level, language at grade level and mathematics near grade level. Compared with city wide results, the students of the Metropolitan Learning Center did as well in reading, writing, and arithmetic as we expect students in the Portland Public School to do. It is interesting to note that in the area of study skills the MLC students generally scored above the average compared to city wide norms.

The 1969-70 MLC is operating as the 1968-69 Center did with these differences: there are now 7 teachers and 3 paid aides, 10 rooms, and 210 students. There are two part time research consultants who will bring more science to our research procedures and the students and teachers have recognized the need for testing. They have incorporated the testing program into their individual learning plans and are developing means of measuring the unique learnings that occur in the MLC. The services of volunteer aides, student teachers and interns are being utilized as they were last year.

We are now preparing a proposal for the 1970-71 Metropolitan Learning Center which will introduce further innovations in the educational process. This will be submitted to the Superintendent for his consideration when completed. I would like to remind the Board that in addition to the MLC there are eight grades and a kindergarden in operation at Couch School. This situation has created a unique environment which affects both programs.

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Metropolitan Learning Center