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YE OLDE LEARNING CENTER

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As new information and technology flood the educational system, more and more educators find themselves faced with data bases, software, computer links, and other "advanced tools" designed to make teaching easier. Talking computers flash messages and beep for correct answers (to the delight of many children), and it becomes fairly obvious that we are in an "out with the old, in with the new" generation. However, there is one basic and relatively simple teaching tool that refuses to die: the learning center.

Learning centers, when used creatively, can provide lively classroom displays while providing an educational service (for example, acting as a data gathering center). Using pictures along with motor activities and cognitive processing helps to pique student interest in learning. *Weather* is just one of many topics that work effectively in this type of center.

Using the *weather* example, teams of students may be assigned as meteorologists for the day. Using a large thermometer containing alcohol (red fluid) and not mercury (silver fluid), the "meteorologists" could measure outdoor temperatures at various times during the day. Ideal times to measure outdoor temperatures are 8 a.m., 12 noon and 3:15 p.m. Data could be gathered for several days and plotted on a graph. The graph could then be used as the basis for class discussions to answer questions such as:

1. How does the temperature change during the day?
2. How does the temperature change from day to day?

The term *variables* need not be introduced, but a class discussion of the best place to take the readings (i.e. out of direct sunlight) and using the same location for each reading will effectively illustrate how different factors affect data and will help children to understand the concepts of variability and controlling variables.

The data gathering center may be constructed from three square pieces (equal in size) of #3 cardboard (each piece should be at least 24" x 24"). Place pieces of laminated posterboard (the same size as the cardboard squares) on what will become the right and left sides of the center. Cover the edges of the three cardboard pieces with book binding tape to secure the posterboard to the cardboard. Place the piece without posterboard and one of the posterboard sections so that their faces are together, and use three or four strips of

bookbinding tape to form a hinge joint and secure them. Then open this piece out, lay it flat and place a long strip of tape on the inside seam. Repeat this procedure to affix the other posterboard section to the opposite side of the bare piece. This forms the completed study carrel (Fig. 1).

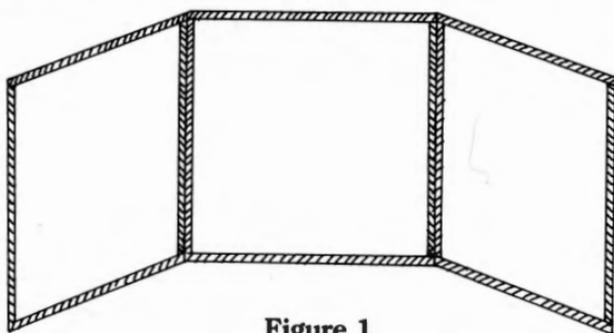


Figure 1

The center panel of the carrel can be used to introduce the topic of that center. For our center, a poster showing different pictures about weather could be glued or stapled to the middle cardboard. If the teacher desires, other topics can be introduced at the center using metal rings to add posters. Punch holes in the center section of the carrel, insert the rings and attach the displays to them (Fig. 2). This will enable the posters to be flipped to show different topics.

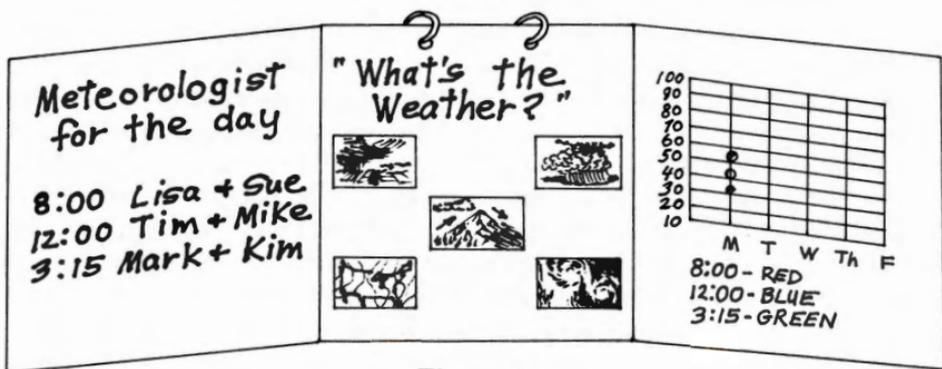


Figure 2

Using overhead projector markers, the teacher may utilize the side panels in many different ways (e.g. to list directions, schedules, problems to solve, data to gather). As the posterboards on the sides are laminated, the side panels may be cleaned and revised to correspond with other topics (included on the posters attached to the metal rings). If graphing is to be a major part of the units introduced at the center, a large graph (without labels) may be placed on the posterboard of one side before laminating. This will eliminate time wasted re-drawing the graph lines each time the center topic is changed.

As you can see, the learning center is flexible, cost efficient and easy to make. It doesn't beep, flash messages or talk, but it is a tool that can provide a classroom with stimula and spirit as students work together as a team to investigate problems and report results. It is a challenge and a change of pace that should be welcome in almost any classroom.