

the future

(WASHINGTON)
Bremerton Sun
10/14/89

They'll become centers of learning

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SOUTH KITSAP — The school of the future must be far different than that of today to meet the changing needs of society, say researchers like Dr. Shirley McCune, who spoke to teachers here yesterday.

The school of the future could be something like the model she described. A handful of schools in the country are already using it:

When you walk in the building, there's a row of offices. In one are drug counselors. One is for social security. Another, family and child psychologists. Yet another has a doctor and nurse who do well-child exams.

In the cafeteria, senior citizens mingle with students having lunch. Oldsters and youngsters are sometimes paired for school projects, like oral history.

There's a child-care center, and tied into it are classes for teenagers where they learn the importance of child nurturing skills.

In the gym, homemakers are taking exercise classes. After work, more men and women will show up for their fitness workout.

These are "community learning centers," not just schools.

"It's not for everyone," said Dr. McCune. But she believes the model has elements that are on track for education's role in the future.

Schools are no longer in the "schooling business," but rather in "human resource development," she said.

Dr. McCune was in SK to talk about something everyone's hearing a lot about these days — "restructuring" schools. As senior director of the Mid-continent Regional Education Laboratory, it's what her job is all about. The non-profit institution is committed to helping state agencies and local schools restructure themselves to "increase efficiency, effectiveness and relevance."

Her speech here kicked off a full day of teacher training. Across the state, most teachers were taking part in local or state-sponsored training.

In SK, workshop choices reflected the wave of the future Dr. McCune described. They dealt with topics such as celebrating differences in learning styles, using a whole language approach, using cooperative learning, and integrating technology with curriculum.

Schools must meet the needs of a society changing dramatically, both economically and socially, according to Dr. McCune.

We are changing from an industrial society to an information society, she said, but the "industrial smokestack schools" are still with us.

Few children will end up in

abilities.

We can't have the "throw-away" students of the past, she said. Today about 25 percent drop out (and that figure that hasn't changed in 70 years, she said). Another 30 percent are functionally illiterate.

In the 1950s, that was OK because they could still find jobs. Fifty percent ended up in blue-collar, industrial jobs, but today that figure is already less than 12 percent, she said.

The effect is that schools now have to teach all the children. And teach them to be thinkers.

There has been a dramatic shift in the goal of education, she said.

In the past, the idea was to learn enough facts and pass enough tests to get through school.

Workbooks are a prime example, she said. They taught students to endure dull, repetitive kinds of work — perfect training for assembly line workers. "There was always one right answer, and you could find it in the back of the book."

But today and in the future, schools need to teach "full information processing." Students need to be able to identify alternatives, and select, respond to and refine their choices.

"That's the kind of people we need on the job," she said.

And two things are very clear in producing kids who are thinkers:

First, learning has to be "interactive." She would submit that "a quiet classroom is a dead classroom," she said.

Second, there are two ways to learn to think — by talking or writing. Otherwise, students are simply absorbing facts, not learning to solve problems.

About 80 percent of teaching is still done through lectures, without regard to children's learning styles, she said, and that has to change.

Schools are still functioning as "sorters" of children, identifying and focusing on the smartest students and leaving the others behind. "Our job is to find out how every kid is smart and develop his abilities," she said.

The other half of the picture of education's future has to deal with the social, demographic and cultural changes in society.

The children are coming in "in a very different state than they were before," she said. A study in a nearby school district (she didn't identify which one) found that 30 percent of children were abused sexually, physically or emotionally, she said.

The schools have to deal with that if they're going to help the children learn.

She said a study just completed by the Department of Labor shows that what employers are looking for in employees is reliability, goals, motivation, ethics and morals. They are asking for better group and organizational skills.

Schools of the future will need to involve the whole community in order to meet those needs, said Dr.

Dept. of Education
Funding