

Thoughts from the Year 2000

By Vivian Kapusta

The year 2000 in education is not a dream for us, it is a reality! In Maple Ridge we have built a school based on the 2000 concepts for education. Thomas Haney Center includes the Maple Ridge campus for Douglas College as well as the high school and a very active continuing education program. The intent is that students can move easily from one program to another to fit their special needs. High school students can take advance credit courses and college students can work on high school courses where they need to improve their marks to qualify for special programs.

The school 'plant' is sharply different from traditional schools. The building itself sparks the imagination and tells both the visitor and student that this is a place where new ideas can happen. The center has a low profile from the front with a rotunda area for the library. Steel structural ceilings allow for high skylight rooms with walls that defy the 'normal' rectangular shape. The spacious front hall leads to a two-story rotunda that contains the cafeteria. Hallways are spacious and the whole school glows with daylight from skylights and window. A large two-story study hall forms the core of the school, with seminar rooms along each side. A colour theme of teal and burgundy unites one area with another, creating a wonderful working space to be in!

Our system of learning has been modified considerably. We have seminar rooms, resource areas, labs and a gymnasium, but few classrooms. Only grade 8 students are on a rotating timetable. Students from grade nine to twelve work with a teacher advisor to plan the courses they will work on during the day and the activities they wish to set as goals for completion. Students fill in required seminars and check timetables for open lab dates. They may work in the area, they choose and on their subject individually or in a small group. Courses have been divided into four units that are 'stand alone' for grade twelve. Each unit is divided into five learning guides of five to seven hours work. Teachers are available for consultation in their resource areas. During a semester, a student needs to complete all twenty learning guides for course credit. They have the option of challenging sections they feel they already understand. Students have completed a Learning Guide when they achieve 70%. In the graduation courses they may design their own course by mixing units from two courses. Our end objective is to produce students who have thought about their own education and made decisions that relate to their personal goals. Emphasis is placed on communication skills and collaborative work. Students must take responsibility for their lives. Education is no longer a brain numbing process of sitting in five hours of containment. Our students learn in a setting that best reflects their own needs and learning style.

The level of technology is high in all subject areas. Our school is networked with a computer system that allows the teacher, counsellor or administrator to check student progress from a computer sitting on their desk. Our student population is eight hundred. Students have access to more than three hundred computers using a wide variety of programs. Each computer is networked to printers. Satellite dishes enable global communication. Much of the technology available at Thomas Haney has been made available in the other high schools in the district to avoid lack of balance. They are older schools and are currently being renovated to meet student needs.

You ask "How does home economics fit into this?" We have a textiles lab, a foods lab and a large general purpose classroom. Francis Samouilhan and I split the subject responsibilities. In each area we have top level equipment. Our department is supplied with a Mac classic, three Mac LCII (colour monitor) and a power book. We are currently testing software and incorporating it into our learning guides. We have a growing library of video material that supports the guides and we have the equipment in our classroom to view the videos. We offer all Home Economics courses, although not all in each semester. Our morning is spent organizing and presenting seminars, working with students in our rooms on a variety of subjects. The afternoon is spent with grade eight students who work in a normal schedule of life skills. We have many preps and find ourselves busy setting up the organizational structure for the labs, as well as organizing the learning guides and marking them. Our time use will become more efficient as we are able to videotape demonstrations and presentations. Students who are working out of sync with the time frame will be able to use the tapes on an individual basis. Our students are comfortable with the less pressured system and completing a level of work that is related to their abilities. Progress and pace varies considerably, we have students starting courses as others are completing. We are fortunate in our subject area to have learning guides that are functioning well and beautiful workspaces to be in. During this first year our goal is to get all systems in place and to survive the rigors of a new school!