

Summer Programs

Teaching Lessons About Jobs

By Sherry Matthews

With Hoke County's unemployment rate hovering above 10% and jobs becoming increasingly harder to find, area youth are beginning to "plan" for the future by attempting to master computer and vocational skills.

During the summer months at Hoke High School, students from the fifth to the 12th grade are learning new skills which are hoped will lead them into a "better job market" when they graduate.

At one end of the high school building, fifth through eighth graders are going through a week of "computer camp" for just that purpose.

"These students spend nearly three hours a day attempting to master the computer and learn how it operates.

"They are really enjoying this learning experience," Hoke Instructional Director Marilyn Semones said.

According to Semones, the computer camp provides students with a chance to "enjoy" while they learn.

The 11 students enrolled in the camp will come out ahead of the game, Semones said.

Using the computer as a "tutorial device" is one of the many ways the students are taught, Semones added.

Through this technique, the computer presents information to the student, the student responds to that information, and then the computer takes over again.

If the child gives a wrong answer, the computer will help that student to see his mistake. If the answer was correct, then the machine may choose to test the child's skills further, Semones explained.

The computer can be used as a media device, a motivational technique or a simulator, Semones said.

No matter how the computer is used, it appears to be a helpful device.

According to Semones, new jobs

that are being created today are 90% informational and only 5% manufacturing.

"We are going from an industrial age into an informational age and our kids should be prepared for this," Semones said.

In addition to the camp, computer classes are being taught during regular school semesters at Hoke High and Upchurch School.

Although computers are not available at all of Hoke's schools, Semones said that librarians (media specialists) have received computer training that will benefit students later.

"Once we get the computers, our media specialist will be ready to teach the children," Semones said.

Semones appears to be a firm believer in computer learning.

"It used to take entire libraries to hold all the information, now it can be stored on one computer chip," Semones said.

Parents, too, are excited and standing behind the program, Semones said.

"Parents want to see their children have access to as much knowledge as possible and the computer offers this," Semones said.

"Everyone is enthusiastic," Semones added.

Another group of enthusiastic, hard working students can be found just across the parking lot from the computer room.

These students are getting "hands on" experience through the Vocational Summer Work Experience Program.

With this program students get the benefit of working in different areas, learning different skills and getting paid for their efforts.

Over 80 students are enrolled in the program that features on the job training in 20 different work environments.

Program Director George Ashley attributes the numerous "job sites" to the cooperation of the city and county officials.

Students are presently working

in all the county departments as well as helping out city employees, Ashley said.

"Without the city and county's cooperation, this program would not have gotten off the ground," Ashley said.

Jobs range from working in the county offices to building picnic tables and podiums in vocational classes.

"We have tried to match job skills with jobs," Ashley said.

Along with the experience, students get paid \$3.35 an hour for their services and normally work 35 hours a week.

Student salaries come from an \$80,000 grant the school system received for this program, Vocational Director Harold Gillis said.

Within the vocational component, students learn horticulture, blueprinting and food service skills.

"They learn a lot of job skills through this program," Ashley said.

Weaved into the program is a counseling service that also benefits the students.

According to Ashley, counselors sit down with students, sometimes weekly, and "just talk."

"They talk with students about how to conduct themselves on the job and about how to secure full time employment," Ashley said.

Since the program began in middle June, three students have already found full employment, Ashley said.

"This program helps to enhance job prospects for the disadvantaged students," Gillis said.

"It enables kids to develop skills that will help them when they get into the job market," Gillis added.

"With this program students are earning and learning at the same time," Ashley said.

Although jobs may be increasingly difficult to obtain, both Ashley and Semones feel that these types of training will benefit students in the future.

"It prepares them for a lot of different things," Semones said.



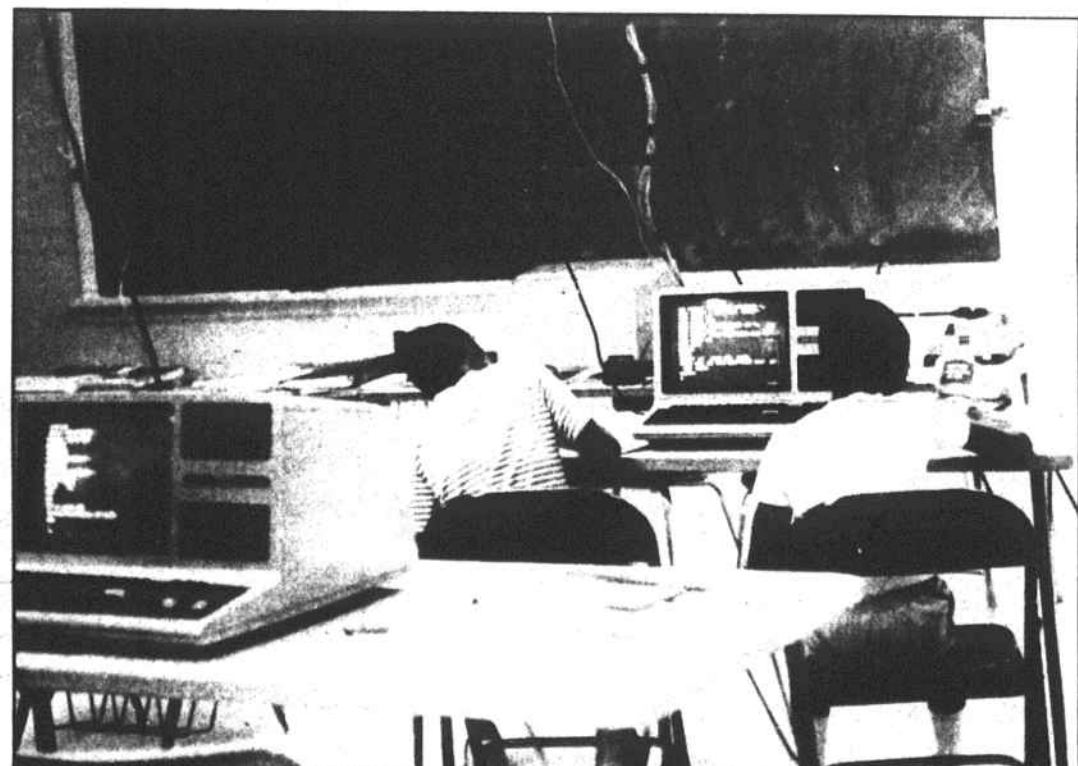
Perfecting their craft

Students taking part in the vocational component of the Summer Work Experience Program take their trade seriously as they prepare the wood they will use for a podium or picnic table.



Helping each other

Students in the Computer Camp are not only willing to work, they also willingly help each other with difficult problems. This appears to be as much a part of the learning experience as the "hands on" work in which these youngsters are involved.



Hard at work

These students, enrolled in Hoke's Computer Camp, are hard at work as they attempt to study and practice using their newly taught computer skills.



Cleaning it up

As part of the Summer Work Experience Program, students are scattered around the county to do various jobs at minimum pay. This high school student has been placed in the Hoke bus garage to take care of the motors as well as making sure the vehicles are clean and shiny.