DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 223 EA 025 858

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TITLE	Education in the Marketplace: School at Mall of America.
PUB DATE	Mar 94
NOTE	11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (Chicago, IL, March 19-22, 1994).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Cooperative Programs; Curriculum Development; *Educational Innovation; *Educational Technology; Experiential Learning; Learning Processes; *Nontraditional Education; Program Development; *School Business Relationship; Secondary Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Mall of America MN; Minnesota

ABSTRACT

Educators have long acknowledged that not all learning occurs in a classroom. This paper describes an innovative educational program in Minnesota, where the educational facility was built in a dedicated space at the Mall of America. The program is based on an outcomes-based, transdisciplinary curriculum for 16- to 19-year-old youth, featuring the "School to Work" transition model, technology preparation, and service learning. The school is an arrangement between Mall of America management, who wanted to create a sense of community, and the Bloomington School District, which wanted to develop an innovative educational program. This paper describes the program's governance and alliances, finances, facilities, technology, public relations, curriculum, and evaluation process. The curriculum features life/career choices, global studies, entrepreneurship, environmental issues, and arts in the marketplace. (LMI)

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ASSOCIATION FOR CURRICULUM AND SUPERVISION DEVELOPMENT (ACSD)

Chicago IL - Monday, March 21, 1994

TOPIC: EDUCATION IN THE MARKETPLACE: SCHOOL AT MALL OF AMERICA

PRESENTER: DR. MARY E. NOLAN

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ABSTRACT: Education is struggling for new paradigms. In Minnesota, a state noted for its educational innovation, a program changes both the environment and the curriculum to set the pace in "cutting-edge" schooling. The educational facility was built out in a 9,000 sq.ft. dedicated space at Mall of America, the newest and largest Mall to date and it is coupled with an outcome-based, transdiciplinary curriculum for 16-19 year olds educational program model for"School to Work" transitions, Tech-Prep and Service Learning.

BACKGROUND:
Why is there a need for "Schools without Walls" ?

Educators have long since acknowledged that not all learning occurs in a school room. In fact, it is well documented that live" hand's on" experiences in the "real" world greatly enhance the learning process. Coupled with emerging and widening accessibility to technology the ways of receiving and disseminating information all impel schools and educators to re-tool and re-think how instruction and classroom management will occur.

As Nolan and Francis indicate in their article "Changing Perspectives in Curriculum and Instruction". Traditional education has been operating out of "mindscapes" that give us intellectual and psychological images of the real world. The collective power of these "mindscapes" is holding educators hostage. Five fundamental beliefs have been identified as implicit and unexamined by most educators:

1. Learning is the process of accumulating bits of information and isolated skills.
2. The teacher's primary responsibility is to transfer knowledge directly to the student.
3. Changing student behavior is the teacher's primary goal.
4.The process of learning and teaching focuses primarily on the interactions between the teacher and the individual students.
5. Thinking and learning skills are viewed as transferable across all

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content areas.

The Mall of America program challenges all of these assumptions and developed a curriculum that intends to better serve the learner in the new millennium.

Why a facility specifically designed for educational programs and services at Mall of America?

Several factors come into play that demand that we think about education, literally, "outside the box" The cost of renovating existing facilities and the cost of building new facilities all demand that communities and educational leaders come up with cost-effective and equitable alternatives. Watching the inner city decay while new educational parks are built in surburban tiers only widens the equity in education gap.

The beginnings of an education component at Mall of America began in the planning stages. The design of the Mall required extensive parking to support a facility that burgeons into the third largest gathering of population in the state on week-ends, in excess of 125,000 visitors. To meet this need Mall management approached the Bloomington school district in order to acquire an unused parcel of district property.

In discussion, Mall of America management and Bloomington school district representatives began to talk about having educational programming available at the Mall. For Mall of America it fit into their marketing philosophy of creating a sense of community in the Mall. For the educational professionals it seemed like a perfect laboratory for developing innovative, state-of-the-art educational programming.

Eventually five surrounding district formed a Joint Powers Authority and proceeded to plan a comprehensive educational program

What steps were taken to bring this educational program into place?

Seven key components are briefly highlighted:

A. *Governance and alliances.*

Five school districts, (two urban and three suburban districts) formed a Joint Powers Authority called the Metropolitan Learning Alliance. The board was composed of 15 members. Five of whom had voting power. The five voting members were the representatives of the School Boards. In addition, the five district superintendents and five staff liaison members, one from each district attended and gave input at board and planning meetings.. Support from major organizations was

solicited and in the formation stages the two major players were Melvin Simon and Associates, the mall management company and Browning-Ferris Industries, the major environmental contractor for Mall of America

B. *Finances.* In order to devise an equitable wayto develop this "school without walls" program at Mall of America it was early on determined that the school districts would provide "in-kind" staff support beyond that the program would have to be financially self-supporting. However, one additional factor was extremely significant in making this kind of collaboration and programming possible. Minnesota is one of the first states to have open enrollment it has a funding mechanism that allows parental choice and therefore, funds follow the student and the student may attend any school of choice if space is available.

Thanks to the corporate donation of space and only utilities and actual operating costs to pay, it was determined that this educational program can be self-sufficient and operate with 50 students at $4,050 per student. $202,500 would cover staff and operations. The initial projection for enrollment was to begin with 75 and grow to 200+. As internships and work-study assignments developed the number of students enrolled could be much higher. The building of the facility and additional hard costs would come from fund-raising and corporate/community support.

C. *Facilities.*

The Mall of America educational program initially hoped to build an elementary school program of 65,000 square feet, however it became quickly apparent that cost and the time to adequately plan for this major undertaking made it not immediately feasible but remains in the comprehensive design of educational programming for young children through adults.

Instead attention was focused on a scaled back program that would occupy 9,000 square feet The programming level was designed for 16-18 year old High School students preparing to transition from school to work, additional training and/or college..

The funds for the facilities were developed with a Higher Education partner, St.Thomas University who forwarded funds in exchange for future classroom space for their evening and week-end programs. With this partnership and other Higher education and Community education programs it is envisioned that the educational space will be utilized ten hours a day, seven days a week.

The space was designed with features including "up and down" link capabilities for Distance Learning as well as "gypsy"computer labs that

could travel from learning area to work site as needed. The initial space holds 200 students with 8 classrooms, reception area and a large meeting area for assemblies. It is located on the first floor of the Mall with easy access to the covered parking structure and the transportation hub.

D. *Technology*

One of the significant trends that opens up possibilities around the feasibility of "Space Saver" or "Schools without Walls" is technology. Clearly the use of computers for enrolling, tracking attendance, monitoring progress and assigning students becomes much easier with technology. Beyond these uses, however, is in incredible array of learning possibilities.

As John See indicated in his article "Technology and Outcome-Based education: Connections in Concept and Practice" education is re-engineering and innovative programs will be consistent with the four major characteristics of Outcome-Based education:

- What each learner is to learn is clearly identified.
- Each learner's progress is based on demonstrated achievement.
- Each learner's needs are accommodated through the use of multiple instructional strategies and assessment tools (... according to their learning style)
- Each learner is provided time and assistance to realize his/her potential.

. Learners can be "untethered" from the classroom by using laptops recording electronically where they are and what they are learning.

Distance learning also creates tremendous learning vistas For example a proposed link between a remote, rural school district whose main economy is based timber in Northern Minnesota and the urban Mall of America program allows learners to be simultaneously be working on the same environmental projects.

Global classrooms were also part of the St.Thomas University partnership with an Antarctic trek and hook-up with the explorer Wallace Stegner is on the drawing boards for 1995.

The "information highway" is accessed by learners and their learning facilitators through the "Internet" and other on-line systems. David Thornburgh has described this information explosion as "Surfing through Cybersphere" and as the technologies begin to blur new mediums of information dispensed in incredible ways will require educators to become facilitators of resources and information rather than dispensers of small bits of unconnected information.

In keeping with this future trend the curriculum development

team designed a computerized learning contract that began with a description of the educational vision of the Mall of America program, and included a strong commitment philosophy for parents and learners as to what the students would be learning, where and how they would be learning as well as commitments to high standards of conduct, attendance and involvement.

Through an electronic planning and performance system, learning facilitators(teachers) and learners would design their learning objectives, determine resources and describe how they would show what they had learned. This computerized Learning planner utilizing current technology is one of the key components in making a "School without Walls' program work.

E. *Public Relations*

To create a successful educational program that would truly make changes in the way we presently offer education experiences the project was aware that it is very important to work closely with the media. Some early announcements cast questions on whether a learning program at a Mall was appropriate. Would this encourage truancy? Would this be a nuisance to the business-owners? A concerted plan with business owners, mall management and the educational administration was implemented Key to the design was the parent/learner/program contract with very specific information as to dress code, attendance, and mature, self-management required of the student. . The Mall of America educational program is a voluntary program, therefore, if parental support and student commitment and district involvement is not there it is determined that this program may not be right for this student. Keeping the school district Information officers and the media informed and focussed on the positive aspects has been critical to the success of the program.

F. *Curriculum*

A fresh approach was taken to the curriculum. A team of teachers representing one of the five districts and each having a different discipline spent six intense weeks under the inspirational leadership of the desk-top publishing expert, Pam Ludvigsen, a "transdiscplinary" curriculum developed with over-arching themes flowing with activities for learners.

Each curriculum specialist was handed a diskette with a pre-formatted instructional template designed to produce an "outcome-based" module. One of the key elements across the transdisciplinary curriculum were integrated use of technology as part of the learning.

Another key instructional element featured components of service

learning that could be accomplished within the setting of the Mall or in the wider community.

The element that most excited the curriculum design team was the inclusion of a "rites of passage" concept or "walk-about" challenging the learner to learn something over time with a group of fellow learners or independently that they thought they couldn't achieve. Expanding on "Outward Bound" and "games" processes while integrating and encouraging creativity. The element came to be called the "Satori" experience. The creativity experience was inspired by the work of J.Paul Torrance, University of Minnesota, Emeritus Professor described in his book Search for Satori and by continued work by his protege and former student Dr. Bee Bleedorn, Director of the Center for Creative Leadership, University of St. Thomas who collaborated on the concept for Satori experiences.

Dr Bleedorn envisioned presentations by community "creative" people from different disciplines who would visit and share experiences from their life and work and would spark learner's interests.

The "Satori" experience is also modelled on the successful educational program in Colorado and described in Gregory and Smith's High Schools as Communities:The Small School Reconsidered

The five topic areas initially developed are:

• **LIFE/CAREER CHOICES** - A core course for all students participating in the program. During this course the learner is introduced to the processes to self-management and responsibility for his/her learning. Using a Life/Career planner the students learn about time management. decision-making, goal setting and values. A Mentor process is introduced as well as the learner discovers how he/she prefers to learn and what subjects and careers that are likely to do well in. This information is elicited from a computerized program called: Roadmap™ Learning Styles Program. This information is shared with the parent at the initial conference and the learner's program and progress is developed and monitored from there.

• **GLOBAL STUDIES** - Learners will be given the opportunity to meet and work with Mall visitors from all over the world. Acting as tour guides they will study the country of their specialty, learn the language when possible and have learning experiences that support understanding about the effects of global economies, trade issues, environmental concerns, as well as customs and cultural backgrounds of people from other countries.

•**ENTREPRENEURSHIP** - Learners will be exposed first-hand

on what is involved in being an entrepreneur from concept, marketing. inventorying and managing a small business. After developing the concept, doing a marketing survey, having the business plan reviewed by financial people and Mall of America management staff, is financially viable, students would be able to set up their own kiosk or store. One of the unique features of the Mall of America has been their emphasis on incubator businesses and development of entrepreneurial organizations.

•**ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES** - Learners will develop an understanding on how the physical world works, earth and space. In addition the learner will demonstrate knowledge of the interaction of people and the economic, political and governmental systems involved in the environment. Using the in house re-cycling plant learners will have first-hand experience in the operation of a re-cycling plant.

•**ARTS IN THE MARKETPLACE** - Learners will be exposed to and understand the commercial applications of art in the marketplace. All forms of art from drawing to drama will be encouraged. An Imagination Celebration will be held annually. In collaboration with the Minnesota Opera an "Artist/Director-in-residence" and a set designer works with learners on developing their own opera.

These subjects are all enhanced by Mall resources and 400 retail outlets, 40 restaurant and entertainment center including the 10 acre Knott's Camp Snoopy replete with 1000 species of flora and fauna and an indoor roller-coaster ride. An incredible array of learning and working possibilities are present at the Mall. Internships and work experiences are an important feature of the program with the goal of having each learner graduate with a salable skill

F.*EVALUATION*

A evaluation process is critical to the success of the program. A model is designed composed of both internal and external evaluators. Internally the Project Director, Board members, Learning Facilitators, Parents and Learners meet frequently and take components to monitor and provide feedback on. Externally, an evaluation team who understands futuristic types of programs is utilized to provide benchmarks. constructive feedback and awareness of state and national issues that impact the educational program.

SUMMARY - Moving into uncharted territory has its risks and rewards. The necessity for "re-inventing" schools has long been upon us. It

will come, perhaps, even with a "big bang" as technology, diminishing resources and a demand for change occurs in the next few years as we rush to the millennium. For innovative educational programs and services to succeed, such as the Mall of America, risk taking must have incentives, visionary leadership and must be present.

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Key words:

"Schools without Walls"

Spacesaver schools

Outcome-Based Education

School - to- Work Model

Tech-Prep

Integrating Technology into the Curriculum

Transdisciplinary curriculum

Learning Styles

Electronic Performance and Support System

Authentic assessment

Service learning

Community/Cities-as-School model

Creativity

Walk-about