

By MARGARET MORABITO

It's a common situation. A school gets a few computers, and then they sit idle while the teachers warily wonder what to do with them. Well, the Prospect Hill Elementary School, in New Berlin, Wisconsin, faced this problem back in 1983 when it was given three C-64s.

Now, three years later, the 350-student school has an active computer lab with confident teachers using it, thanks to the combined efforts of dedicated parent volunteers, interested teachers and the school's administration.

How It All Began

Bonnie Nebel, a parent in the New Berlin school district, contacted me early this year to tell me the story of how Prospect Hill got started with C-64s.

The parents' organization, called the Parent Advisory Board (PAB), had been interested in getting computers into the school since 1981, but had not made much progress until the 1982-83 school year, when the school board allotted money for computer funding. This went to buy three C-64s. At that time, however, neither the teachers nor the principal knew what to do with the computers, and they had no time or money to learn.

Nebel joined the PAB that year, and when the other parents found out that she was familiar with computers and was willing to share that knowledge, they decided to start a parent volunteer program to help the teachers learn to use the computers. They appointed Nebel as coordinator of this project.

Over the course of two months, Nebel and the PAB implemented the volunteer program, which sent par-

*Sometimes, teachers
can't do it all by themselves.
Parents can then play a critical
role in the computer education
of students, as happened
at one elementary school
in Wisconsin.*

ents into the school to help in the small computer lab, thus making it more readily available and attractive to the teachers. Three years later, the parent volunteers are still at work in this capacity, with eight volunteers currently active in the school.

How They Got Started

Actually locating interested parents was quite easy. Word of the project quickly spread, and Nebel, along with another computer-literate mother, volunteered to hold training sessions for the parents. After a couple of two-hour sessions, they let the volunteer parents go into the computer lab as teacher aides.

These early training sessions focused mainly on fundamental information. A C-64 fact sheet was created. Volunteers were introduced to the keyboard to learn how it both resembled and differed from a traditional typewriter. They discussed floppy disks—how to handle them, how to place one in the drive and how to load a program.

The volunteers had no specific computer background. As Nebel puts it, "They just had to know how to turn on

the computer and load a program. Then, it was up to the teachers."

Nebel coordinated the parent volunteer project with the school's principal, Lester Graves, who set up a computer lab schedule for all of the teachers. The first year, every class had a scheduled time period in the computer lab. But not all the teachers took advantage of this. Says Nebel, "It was rough then. We'd have half the class sitting at the computers—three per computer—and the other half sitting at their desks doing other things.

What Did the Parents Do?

The parents' function in the lab was primarily to turn on all of the computers and load in the appropriate software. During the class session, the volunteers would answer students' questions, and at the end of the class would turn off the equipment and put away the software.

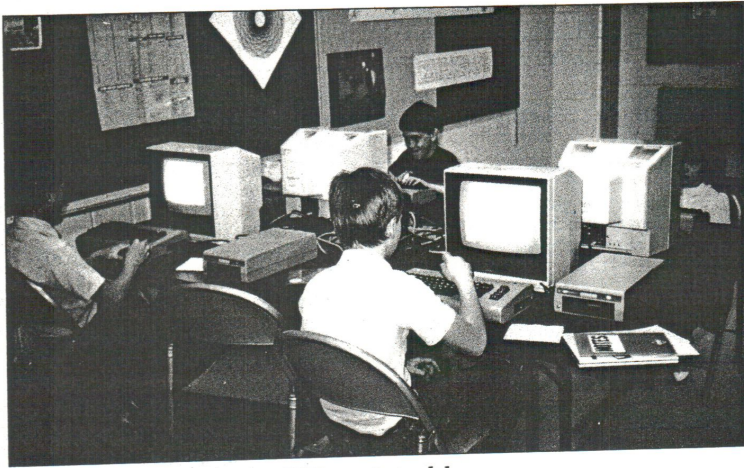
Some of the parents with teaching backgrounds would also help the teachers plan classes and sometimes actually teach lessons themselves. Ideally, parents should only monitor the class, not actually teach. However, during the early years, this was the only feasible way to get things done.

Each year, the Prospect Hill teachers have learned more about the computers and how to use them in their classes. Even more important, they have gained confidence. Although the parent volunteers are still used in many computer classes, some teachers now prefer to handle the entire job themselves.

What Are the Advantages?

Nebel is quick to point out that teachers just don't have the time to

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Children at work in Prospect Hill's computer lab.

load up all the machines before their kids arrive for class and then shut off everything afterwards. The parent volunteers arrive before the class begins, so the computers are ready to go when the teacher arrives with the class.

"Now, that's where the parent volunteers are really helping out," says Nebel.

Another advantage is the collaboration of volunteers and teachers in selecting software. The volunteers have the opportunity to test out new software and so can recommend the programs that are likely to work well with the class.

An additional benefit is simply the presence of another adult in the computer lab to answer questions. Says Nebel, "We have 12 computers in there now, and when you have 24 kids on 12 computers, questions do come up. With the older kids, it's a lot easier. They can load their own programs and even tutor others. It's with the younger grades (K-3) that the parent volunteers are most helpful."

What Are the Problems?

Did the parents organization have any problems in getting the computer lab going at Prospect Hill? "Yes," says Nebel. "The biggest problem was convincing the principal and the teachers that they really did want the computers. The first time some of the teachers looked at the C-64s, they thought to themselves, 'Who needs this?'" Nebel is quick to add, though, that there has been a tre-

mendous change over the last three years in the teachers' perceptions of computers.

How did this come about? A turning point came early in 1985, when Susan Copp, a former teacher, became the president of the PAB. Her goal was to get the computer lab moving in Prospect Hill, so she consulted Nebel about what ought to be done. Nebel's answer was direct: "You're not going to be able to do anything until you get the teachers trained."

The teachers needed to be taught how to utilize computers in their courses. In some cases, the parent volunteers were doing so much of the work in the computer lab that the teachers weren't advancing their own computer know-how. Moreover, they didn't have the time to further develop their skills.

Teacher Training

Copp and Nebel decided to team up to provide the needed teacher training themselves. They offered free sessions during the summer of 1985, inviting the teachers and the principal to attend classes one afternoon a week throughout the summer.

Says Nebel, "When Mr. Graves, the principal, took our class and started to understand what this was all about and see what the computers could do, his attitude really changed. That's what really turned things around."

In the 1985-86 school year, a big change is evident. The teachers feel more confident now with the com-

puters, and they are bringing their students into the lab more often. The PAB has contributed by donating money this year specifically for teacher training, rather than for buying more equipment.

Hands-On Computer Training

The training sessions during that first summer were so successful that Copp and Nebel formalized the course and applied for state accreditation. They now have a partnership venture called Hands-On Computer Training, which is an accredited course specifically aimed at teaching teachers how to use computers in the classroom.

Briefly, the Hands-On Computer Training course is a six-unit course covering the keyboard, disks, educational software, LOGO, word processing and programming. All of these topics are addressed with consideration for the specific grade levels taught by the teachers.

Nebel and Copp go to the schools in the district that have computers and do the training right there on the premises. They use both C-64s and Apples, "But," says Nebel, "the C-64 is our main machine, even though we do handle Apples. We think that Commodore is the best tool for education."

It's interesting to note that one-third of a 22-student fourth grade class at Prospect Hill have their own C-64s at home; one has an Apple. Their teacher also has a C-64 at home, as do four others in the school.

Conclusion

These two educators have done an admirable job in promoting the use of computers in education, and they have kindly donated to The Resource Center a list of recommended educational software that they distribute at their Hands-On training sessions. (See Table 1.)

Furthermore, Susan Copp is in the process of evaluating the available Commodore public domain educational software and will share that list with us when she finishes the project.

If you'd like more information about the Prospect Hill computer program, contact the principal, Mr. Lester Graves, at Prospect Hill School, 5330 S. Racine Ave., New Berlin, WI

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Scholastic

Computergarten (P-1)
Rainbow Keyboarding (2-3)
Spell Diver (1-up)
Bank Street Writer (4-up)

Spinnaker

Alphabet Zoo (P-3)
Facemaker (P-3)
Delta Drawing (P-7)
Kids on Keys (P-4)
Rhymes and Riddles (K-5)
Kidwriter (K-4)
Snooper Troops (5-up)

Weekly Reader

Stickybear Math (1-4)
Stickybear Town Builder (1-3)
Other Stickybear titles

The Learning Company

Reader Rabbit (P-2)
Rocky's Boots (4-up)
Addition Magician (1-5)

Sunburst

The Factory (4-9)
The Pond (2-up)
Teasers by Tobbs (4-up)

Broderbund

The Print Shop (3-up)
The Print Shop Graphics Library (3-up)
The Print Shop Companion (3-up)

Simon & Schuster

Kermit's Electronic Storymaker (P-2)

Sierra

Donald Duck's Playground (2-6)

Grolier Electronic Publishing

Friendly Filer (3-9)
Easy Graph (3-9)
EduCalc (5-12)
The Information Connection (5-12)

Koala Technologies

Muppet Learning Keys (P-1)

CBS Software

Webster: The Word Game (1-up)
Coast-to-Coast America (3-up)

Fisher-Price

Alpha Build (P-3)
Logic Levels (2-9)

Springboard Software

Mask Parade (P-5)

Davidson

Math Blaster! (1-6)

DesignWare

States and Traits (6-up)
Remember! (7-up)
Spellagraph (2-9)
The Body Transparent (3-11)


Sight & Sound Music Software

Incredible Musical Keyboard
Kawasaki Synthesizer
Music Processor

Commodore Business Machines

LOGO (P-up)

Table 1. Starter list of Commodore educational software, with appropriate grade levels. Compiled by Hands-On Computer Training.

53151. For more information about teacher training and the parent volunteer project, write Bonnie Nebel or Susan Copp at Hands-On Computer Training, 19975 W. Julius Heil Drive, New Berlin, WI 53151. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. 

If you are using Commodore computers for educational purposes (at home or in school) and would like to share your experiences through The Resource Center, write me a letter detailing the equipment you're using, the subject areas you're involved in, the grade level or age of your

students, software that has been effective and any other information you feel like including. Send letters to:

*Margaret Morabito
The Resource Center
c/o RUN Editorial
80 Pine St.
Peterborough, NH 03458*

You can also leave messages in my on-line mail boxes: CompuServe (70616,714); Delphi (MARGM); and QuantumLink (MARGM). The Resource Center now has its own on-line SIG in the Learning Center on QuantumLink.

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