

Research is highlight of new class



Sylvia Hertrich shows Alesa Smith her model of a shaft mine.

Munching on carmel apples is a pleasant pastime — but can it be academically enriching?

Students in Sandy Elementary School's new research class would say "yes." They learned about energy by baking the confections in a solar oven.

"Research class" is the term used by parents and teachers, but the kids have their own name for the program: "SERC." It stands for Sandy Elementary Research Class.

Independent thought is what the class is all about. The program was begun this fall as an attempt to challenge scholastically gifted students in grades four through eight. Lorna Roehm directs the program, assisted by Leslie Eagle.

The two women emphasize that they aren't teaching as much as directing the students toward self-teaching. The emphasis in both the intermediate and upper-grades programs is on research skills. "We want the students to find out how to find out the answers to their questions," said Ms. Roehm.

The students will eventually design their own projects and formulate their own questions. "But I chose the first topic to explore," Mrs. Roehm said. "Once the students have acquired the skills and tools of research, they can pursue individual subjects in their own areas of interests."

Ms. Roehm selected energy as the intermediate grades' first research topic — "hence, the solar oven." The

intermediate program involves 20 students.

The upper grades' program has so far centered in the library, where 16 students have been exploring the research resources under librarian Cal Conley's guidance.

Conley and Ms. Roehm have devised exercises which require the students to dig up obscure facts by using a wide variety of reference books, including an almanac, atlas, the Guinness Book of

class, where they will be exposed to in-depth research methods — "the kind students normally don't learn until college or upper high school," said Ms. Roehm. They will also learn how to write bibliographies and footnotes.

"We want the students to learn how to find the information they're after, how to organize it and how to report it," she explained.

On the elementary level, the instructors provide the SERC students

does not limit students to digging into their books in isolation. Ms. Roehm is scheduling resource people from the community and beyond to enrich the class.

She will also take students as individuals or in small groups to outside facilities which lie within their areas of interest. "One outing I scheduled for everyone in the program was the Oct. 4 trip to the Trojan nuclear plant, to coincide with our study of energy," Ms. Roehm said.

Other possible outings include the Primate Center, Mt. Hood Community College's health fields departments, and the Kendall Planetarium for budding astronomers.

"When you have students whose special interests range from war history to genetics, it is impossible to know all their subjects yourself," Ms. Roehm said. "That's why I have to rely on outside resource persons."

This is Ms. Roehm's first year with Sandy Elementary. She previously taught in the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry's "suitcase program," in which "mini-labs" were taken into area schools to provide teaching enrichment. She earned a master's degree in education from Portland State University.

Sandy students were selected for the new program on the basis of teacher referral and scores from the Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test administered last spring. "The program ideally is not based on the student's

achievement but on his or her potential," emphasized Ms. Roehm.

The intermediate students discussed their feelings about the SERC program during class one day this week, and the reaction was almost unanimously

countered that there is pressure to perform in traditional classes too — "plus homework, and we don't have any of that in SERC."

But the students' response was best summed up by sixth-grader Alesa



Lorna Roehm

World Records, a thesaurus, the Book of Authors, Bartlett's Quotations, and the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature

The seventh and eighth graders spend one period a day in the research

with math, science and language arts instruction, besides helping them acquire research skills such as use of the library. "Basically, we expose them to the scientific method," Ms. Roehm said.

The emphasis on individual projects



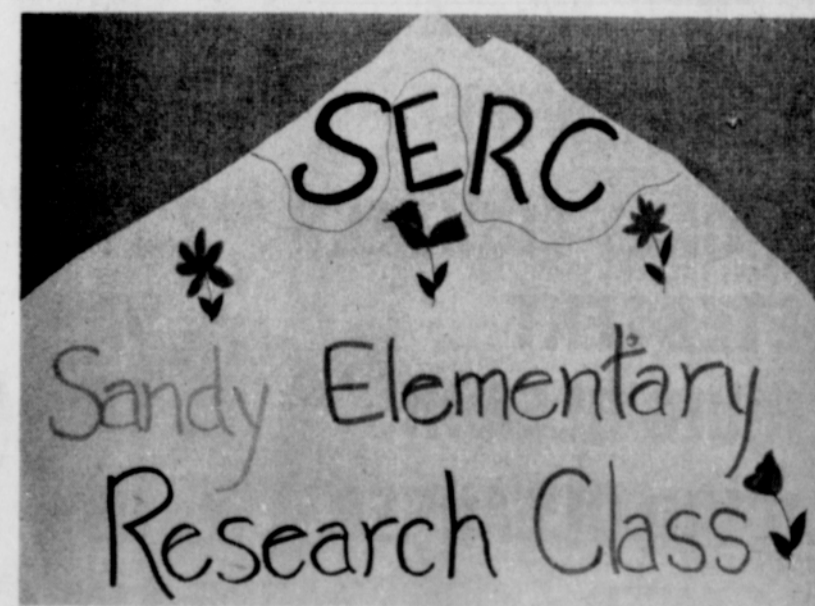
Jack Harris studies model of carbon atom.

positive. One student said he like the research class although he felt there was pressure to perform, and a classmate

Smith, who said, "I'm glad SERC was started. It's better than just sitting in class getting bored when you have your work done."



Shari MacDonald, Charisse Flatt and Meleta Hooley enjoy solar-baked carmel apples.



Story, photos by Kaye Barton