

# Mississippi fights illiteracy with classroom computers

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A prime weapon against illiteracy is the computer.

Far from being a rich child's toy, the machine is touching children in all reaches of society, freeing teachers for one-on-one attention to students and helping unlock the written word to many from illiterate backgrounds.

The state of Mississippi, with one of the highest rates of illiteracy in the nation, is putting computers into every school in the state in an effort to teach basic reading and writing skills to every child. The first computers will be in classrooms this fall, and all the state's elementary schools will be equipped within four years.

The state is using the "Writing to Read" program developed by a retired educator, John Henry Martin, and produced and marketed by IBM. The company says it has been put into at least 5,000 schools across

the country, helping an estimated one million school children.

In designing the program, which uses computers, audio cassettes, and typewriters, Martin sought to replicate the comfortable interaction of the one-room schoolhouse. His own experience as a young teacher and with his later research into how children learn convinced him that a less structured atmosphere, not bound off by age and set curriculum, encourages children to learn better, at their own pace.

Moving from one "work station" to the next, children first learn basic phonemes, or letter-sound combinations, through computers and earphones; familiar objects are illustrated and matched to written and oral words. Audio tapes at the next work station reinforce what they've learned at the computer, and the following one, the library station, famil-

iarizes them with written English. They then use this knowledge to write stories based on their own oral language at the writing/typing station. At the final station, children experiment with new combinations of letters and words to develop word-building skills, using many media — pencil, chalk, clay, rubber stamps, and so on. The aim is to expose children to all ways of writing.

"We don't know from one child to the next which child learns best by seeing, by hearing, by feeling, or by holding, and we want to engage everything in the child," Martin says.

Children are not intimidated by the computer, and because the program lets each one move ahead at his own speed, that child has no fear of failure. "The children know they are teaching themselves."

They learn to type even as they learn to recognize the letter symbols. Martin says that by avoiding the labor of forming letters by hand, children can concentrate on what they want to say.

He estimates that kindergartners have vocabularies of around 1,000 words when they start school. "To reduce them to a hundred words in a primer is to ask them to go back to eating pablum."

"There are a half million words in English — a magnificent intellectual achievement. But when you mess it up with all the peculiar spellings we use in English as a way of having children learn — to have them encode to write, then have them decode to read — you take the logic out of the system and you confuse things."

The children go straight to writing for meaning, spelling phonemically. Later they easily learn accepted spellings.

The program has been adapted for Spanish-speaking students — Voy a Leer Escribiendo, or VALE — and for functionally illiterate adults — Principle of Alphabet Literacy, or PALS.

Martin, former chairman of the National Panel on High School and Adolescent Education of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare and the U.S. Office of Education, developed the program on a personal computer while recovering from a heart attack in 1973. IBM agreed to produce and market the program, with Martin's stipulation to run field tests first, under direction of the Education Testing Service of Princeton, N.J.

# Hungarian officials announce new stance on failed 1956 revolt

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — Every time Budapest residents pass a kiosk or street stall these days, a new book or article about Imre Nagy and the failed revolt he led against Stalinism in 1956 seems to have hit the stands.

The outpouring of literature, accompanied by lapel pins, postcards and large photographs showing the bespectacled face of Nagy, represents a national catharsis over the short-lived revolt. It was crushed by Soviet tanks and rarely discussed in public for almost 33 years.

"It's as if more than 32 years of collective amnesia have suddenly lifted," a Western diplomat said on condition of anonymity. "Even the people who were on the side of putting down the revolt now suddenly remember where they were and what they did, and are speaking about it."

The ruling Communist Party, which under former General Secretary Janos Kadar executed Nagy and his associates in 1958, has rehabilitated Nagy in all but name.

The party praised him in a May 31 statement as a symbol of communist reform and a "significant figure" in Hungarian history. Ten days later, the supreme prosecutor applied for the legal rehabilitation of Nagy and nine of his associates, saying they were unjustly imprisoned, unfairly tried and illegally executed.

Nagy and his associates were bur-

ied in unmarked graves in a corner of a Budapest cemetery, but they will be reburied on June 16 in an elaborate, nationally televised ceremony.

Tens of thousands of Hungarians, including emigres returning for the occasion, are expected to jam Budapest's Heroes' Square for ceremonies.

In a move much joked about by Budapest's increasingly outspoken media, authorities have even removed a giant nearby statue of Soviet founder Vladimir I. Lenin, but insist this is only because it urgently needs repair.

Some Hungarians are tempted to see parallels between Nagy's reburial and the reburial early in October 1956 of former foreign minister Laszlo Rajk, executed in a Communist Party purge in 1949.

Then, as now, upheaval in Poland and a revision of Stalinist history in the Soviet Union helped unsettle Hungary.

The crowds at Rajk's funeral on Oct. 6, 1956, became the emotional force behind the uprising from Oct. 23 to Nov. 4.

Historian Ferenc Toekel, a member of the party's Central Committee and one of four people investigating the events of 1956 for the party, said in an interview that "history never repeats itself."

"It is simply unimaginable that in the foreseeable future we could expect an armed uprising," he said.

Emotions over 1956 clearly play a part in today's politics, however.

# Students find new interest in environment

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Environmental studies — trendy in the early 1970s but dropped by many colleges for lack of interest — have moved back into the academic mainstream.

New interest may have been triggered by concerns about the threats to the ozone layer and by incidents like the Valdez oil spill, colleges say, but the more likely reason is that the field is maturing.

"The typical environmental activist has been succeeded by the student with purely academic analytical skills," says Ortwin Renn, professor of environment, technology and society at Clark University in Worcester, Mass. Students today focus more on integration of technical and policy issues. "They are not advocates but people who understand science and the issues and can argue their cases effectively."

The most serious work is being done among his graduate students, many of them on sabbatical from environmental posts in agencies or private firms, returning to school for advanced scientific study.

"There is renewed interest in environmental issues, though it seems to be coming from our international studies students rather than our biology majors," says Steve Anderson, professor of biology at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, Calif. "Students are taking a more global view of the world situation, recognizing that the world's political and economic issues have definite environmental components."

Bowdoin College, Antioch University, and Hood College are among colleges reporting increased enrollments for environmental studies.

Bowdoin, at Brunswick, Me., says the number of environmental studies majors has quadrupled in the last three years. "Some of our most dedicated students come from areas of major pollution. For example, we have several eager students from Chesapeake Bay," says Edward Laine, director of its environmental studies program.

Mitchell Thomashaw, co-chair of Antioch's environmental studies at its New England Graduate School in Keene, N.H., also reports a dramatic increase in enrollment for its program.

civilian leader in 20 years, took power pledging to end killings, intimidation and other abuses of past military governments.

Wealth is concentrated with a military-backed business and landowning minority. The impoverished majority are mainly Mayan Indian peasants.

An Amnesty International spokesman said Cerezo was not apparently directly involved in the death squads, but his government failed to investigate the killings.

# World briefs

## Group says death squads still operating

LONDON (AP) — Guatemala's army and police continue to operate death, torture and abduction squads, despite the rise of the civilian government in 1986 that pledged to end political killings, Amnesty International said Wednesday.

The London-based human rights organization said it has reports of 222 people who have disappeared since President Vinicio Cerezo took office.

Cerezo, a centrist Christian Democrat and Guatemala's first

## Officials to consider Georgians' request

MOSCOW (AP) — Premier Nikolai I. Ryzhkov told Meshki Turks on Tuesday, after 10 days of ethnic violence, that a commission will consider their request to return to Soviet Georgia from four decades of exile in Uzbekistan.

The official news agency Tass said Ryzhkov toured a refugee camp outside Fergana where several thousand Meshki sought safety after 90 people were killed

and nearly 1,000 were injured in riots and attacks involving Turks and Uzbeks. Officials said most of the victims belonged to the ethnic Turkish minority.

Boris Mikhailov, an Interior Ministry spokesman, told reporters in Moscow that 748 houses had been burned, 28 buildings of "economic significance" set ablaze and 974 people injured. Mikhailov said 90 people had perished, including one policeman.

## Britain pledges to help stop rhino poaching

LONDON (AP) — Britain will do all it can to stop the poaching of Africa's endangered black rhinoceroses, Environment Minister Lord Caithness said Tuesday.

But he also called on individuals to help end the illegal trade in rhinoceros horns.

"We will certainly do at the government level what we can because this is a very serious question," Caithness said at the launch of an appeal fund for the charity Rhino Rescue. "A government

can only do a certain amount. People pressure, rather than government pressure, is the solution."

The black rhino is threatened because poachers can sell a single horn for as much as \$25,000. The horns are used as traditional medicines and aphrodisiacs in Asia and as ceremonial dagger handles in the Middle East.

Only about 4,000 black rhinos remain in Africa, compared with an estimated 65,000 in 1970.

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