

A Logo Concept Card

by Robert Berkman - Clime News Columnist

Robert teaches mathematics and science at Berkeley Carroll Street School in Brooklyn, New York.

In one of the cartoons found in the book "School is Hell", Matt Groening (better known as the creator of "The Simpsons") portrays a teacher welcoming an eager group of students to the first day of school, offering them the choice of getting their education the quick way, or spread out over a dozen years. The class erupts in a chorus of "quick way!!" to which the teacher responds with the following lessons:

- Learning has nothing to do with life.
- Learning is passive. It must always be tedious.
- Your concerns count for nothing.
- What is important is what we say is important.
- Everyone knows you won't do anything unless you are bribed, tricked, or forced.
- Nothing is worth doing for its own sake.
- Learn to be bored. We're bored. So you should be too.
- If you live in a daze you'll be less unhappy.

With the lesson completed the teacher asks, "Any questions?" The students respond, "That's it? That's our education? We can go now?" "Of course not," the teacher replies, "we have some time to kill. Have to keep you tiny monsters off the street till you're 18, you know. Open books to page 1, and we'll begin."

So the question is what will we do while were "wasting time?" One thing I like to do is something I call a *concept card*.

Can you think of some virblets of your own? What is a virblet? Can you write a Logo program that will test words for "virbletness"?

A model of a concept card

All of these are virblets.

Yellow

Jazz

Pizza

School

Soccer

None of these are virblets.

Blue

Swing

Math

Library

Hockey

Which of these are Virblets?

Baseball

Red

Food

Lunch

Cheese

The idea here is that children will discover the concept of a virblet not by having it "spoon fed" to them by a teacher, but by discovering it for themselves. Of course, it may be necessary for the teacher to point out those features which will lead students to the discovery. Concept cards are an example of what is called a critical thinking activity, in that it stimulates visual and perceptual discrimination, attribute searching, and logical thinking.

Concept cards are an interesting and exciting way to get students to think, but there's something distinctly "low tech" about them. While sitting around one night, I wondered to myself what would happen if I made a "dynamic" concept card to teach my 5th grade students about acute, obtuse, and right angles. To do so, I wrote procedures that

See Card...p. 14