Field Observation Report
Submitted by Betsy Price

Carolyn Martin
Many High School,
Many, Louisiana
http://www.sabine.k12.la.us/mhs1/
Number of Observation Days: 1

The visit to Carolyn's school was only for one day. Since I was in Baton Rouge and Many is
only a short 3-hour drive, I took the opportunity to visit. Carolyn was gracious enough to
accommodate me and did a lesson.

School Community
Many High School is situated in Many, Louisiana. It is in the northwest corner of the state,
about 60 miles from Shreveport. Baton Rouge is a three hour drive away. The main industry of
the area is chicken farms, timber, and tourism. Education is one of the highest paying
professions. There is a larger town 20 miles east, Natchitoches that is a popular tourist attraction.
The town is the oldest community in the interior of Louisiana and home of many old plantations.
The product the plantations raise is gift shops. The tourism trade also caters to hunters and
fisherpersons.

The school is integrated. About 50% of the school are Afro-American and Hispanic. The
community is around 64% minority. The Hispanic children are from migrant families who came
to work in the chicken farms.
Most of them have been in the
area for some time. The
community is lower
socioeconomic area, 36% of the
children live in poverty. A
majority of the students are on
free lunch.

The school is over 20 years old,
but has been recently
remodeled. It is well kept and
looks new. The rooms are large
and well lit. A new middle
school is under construction
adjacent to the high school.

Teacher
Carolyn has worked at the school for over 20 years. She was reared in a town close to Many.
She and her husband, also an education major, graduated from Louisiana State University (LSU)

and got teaching jobs. Her husband is now retired from being a principal and is the president of the school board.

Carolyn is a member of the National Biology Teachers Association. She is professionally active in her district and writes technology grants for herself and the district. She enjoys using computers and has been using the Biology Place for many years.

Students
Most of the students are bussed into the school and many have long bus rides everyday. Most of the students I talked with had computers at home or access to the Internet form other locations. The home computers had access to the Internet over the phone. Even though the students may have fast modems, the phone lines slow the connections down. Because there are long distances between homes, email is a popular way to communicate.

In the 4th and 8th grade, the state issues a criterion-referenced test called the LEAP 21. http://www.louisianaschools.net/DOE/asps/home.asp?I=TESTS Forty eight percent of the students at Many High School placed below basic on their science achievement tests. http://www.sabine.k12.la.us/ The statewide percentage is 50%. If you think that is sad, In Natchitoches Parish, the parish east of Many that has the tourist industry, has 61% of the students place below basic. Many has a high drop out rate for students in the 8th grade. For many, 8th grade is the highest level of education anyone in their family has achieved. The next time for students to drop out is when they turn 17. The state recently changed the dropout age from 16 to 17.

When I observed the students on the computers they seemed to be reading quite well. I asked Carolyn if they all read on level. She said that most of them did not. They are very good at faking reading.

There were 4 students in the A.P. biology class. They students in that class were taking all the college prep courses. They would be college bound. A few of the other students will go, but the majority will not. Most find work locally or don't work at all.

The students don't have many visitors come to the school. They were polite and curious why I was there. When I asked questions, they were shy but free with information. They were use to using computers in the school and enjoyed using Exploring Life.

Facilities
Carolyn's room is large. One side of the room is a traditional classroom with chairs and desks lined in rows. There is a small whiteboard behind her desk and a large green board running along the side of

2

the classroom. Directly behind the student's desks is a large sliding glass door that is the entrance to a greenhouse.   During the winter months the students do experiments with plants. During the spring and summer the temperatures are too hot and the greenhouse too sunny so they remove the plants.

In the other side of the classroom are octagon lab stations with water and gas hookups in the middle. Each station can accommodate four students.   There is a small lab prep area and storage behind the lab stations. The students wear coats and sweaters in the school because the air conditioning is turned down so low.

Computers
Carolyn wrote the grants for the computer equipment in her room. She has
- Color laser printer
- Ink jet printer
- Scanner
- Microscope with viewing television
- 20 Dell laptop 3800 inspiration wireless computers in a rolling cart
- LCD projector on a rolling cart
- Teacher computer on desk
- Channel One Television
- VCR
- Digital camera

Lesson
Carolyn had them do Chapter 7. First she showed them a PowerPoint presentation to introduce the main points of the chapter. This was one of Carolyn's first PowerPoint presentations and she made a couple mistakes but it was pretty good for a first go-round. Carolyn projected the image onto a pull down screen behind her desk. While she gave the overview, one of the students operated the projector.

The students then used the computers to do the first activity. The students each had a computer, even so, they still paired up to work together. Carolyn told them if they decided to pair up, today they could choose their own partner. The exception was the last period class that did not want to pair up. Most of the students used the computer alone.

The students had to leave their desks to get the computers out of the rolling cart. They were accustomed to moving around the classroom. There is some noise and confusion as they moved around. However, Carolyn was use to this and it didn't seem to bother the kids either.

Only a couple of the students had problems with using the computers. The kids seemed to know who would

have problems and who wouldn't. The more savvy kids kept an eye out for the ones who couldn't and would help them out.

Carolyn is testing labs for EL and chose to do the lab where the students collect bacteria and then design experiments. The students grow the bacteria and then try and determine by color, size and smell what they are. Carolyn had done this experiment in previous years. Each lab table had a cute name for their lab groups. The students were use to her doing this and had fun trying to get the table with the best name. (What the best name would be is a mystery to me, but they seemed to know right away.)

The students knew the routine of designing their own experiments. Carolyn did not give them a worksheet; they had to write down the steps themselves. Before they started she asked the kids to tell her what the steps were for an experiment. Most of the kids knew them. Some had help from group members. The students were allowed to find bacteria in the room or they could go out the back door that went into the back of the school. When some kids wanted to go into the hall, Carolyn went with them leaving the other students in the room alone.

Two of the laptops were new and would not show the bars on the self-test questions. Carolyn said that the laptops were new ones and that the systems support people had set them up according to the specifications. Carolyn had taken the two errant laptops to the systems people to determine what was wrong. He tried everything but could not fix it. This was the same problem that Patsey had with computers in her classroom. When I checked the plug-ins I found that the two laptops were using Flash 4. I downloaded Flash 6 and the newest versions of Netscape. Then they worked fine.

If I had not been there, Carolyn would have had to put the two computers aside or not have the students do the exercise. Carolyn had an introduction lecture, a computer activity and then the lab. She would have not had any time to determine what was wrong with the computers.

This is something to consider. The system tech is very knowledgeable about computers. If he had known more about what Exploring Life needed to run properly, he probably would have guessed immediately what the problem was like I did.   I don't know why just two computers had the problem and not all of them. Again we probably had some students downloading current versions and other students not. Also, it is quicker to load up plug-ins with a CD than it is to download them from the Internet. My guess is that he used a CD with an old version of everything.

Also, some of the students may not have reported their computer as not working properly. This may be the reason that students like to pair. If one computer doesn't work, the other will.

Questions to students

Q. Do you have a computer at home?
A. Yes ma'am.
Q. Can you get the Internet?
A. Yes ma'am
Q. How?
A. We get it over the phone line. I have a new computer with a Pentium 4 but the phone lines are slow. It takes a long time to get some web sites to download. Email is slow but I use it a lot.
Q. Do you have a computer at home?
A. No
Q. Do you have an email account?
A. Yes
Q. How often do you use it?
A. Every day.
Q. How do you get on the Internet?
A. My grandma has a computer. She picks me up from school every day. I use the computer there.

Systems technician

The district has a help web site for teachers. They can ask questions and share the answers with other teachers. They can submit work orders by completing the on-line application.
http://www.sabine.k12.la.us/syshelp/
The state has a web site that explains Louisiana's policy on computers.
http://www.louisianaschools.net/DOE/asps/home.asp?I=LCET Under professional development they explain about their program to increase technology used in science.   Below is the short description.

INTECH 2
INTECH 2 is a content-specific professional development program designed as a follow-up to Louisiana INTECH. In this training, participants take a closer look at how technology can support the science curriculum. Participants attend in teams of 3-4 educators, but can range in grade level and science specialty area. INTECH 2 Science, a three and one-half day experience, is focused on inquiry-based explorations in a student-centered environment and how technology can support this type of learning. Participants can expect to come away with (1) an understanding of the process of designing an inquiry lesson, (2) a model of how to implement inquiry-based learning in their classroom, (3) a simple way to take a learning experience through to publication on the web, and (4) an understanding of how one science concept spirals up in the K-12 curriculum. The training is based on the five critical components of Louisiana INTECH; therefore only individuals who have successfully completed a Louisiana INTECH course will be eligible to apply. For more information http://www.lcet.doe.state.la.us/laintech/intech2.htm

Q. Where does the system get the money for computers?
A. Most of them were purchased through grants - federal funds. Title I is were we get most of our funds. I don't know how else they fund them. Except for tobacco money. There is tobacco

money that is used for computers. We also have vocational money for computers in our technical school.

Parents did all the wiring. Many years back there was a program that came out of California that gave schools the plan for how to get the parents involved. The wiring isn't very pretty, (looked good to me) but they wired each room. It saved us a lot of money. We have had computers in each room since. It was fun. I was a student then.
Q. How many computers do you have?
A. In the system we have around 3,500 computers. We have 2 systems. The computers are hooked up to the two. The system decides which service is best for each computer. We have a lot more computers than their schools. The elementary has more than the high school.

Q. Will you be able to sustain the computers you have?
Yes ma'am. We could do it. We get 200 to 300 new computers every year. The biggest problem is when computers go out of warranty. Then we have to fix them. When they are under warranty, we get them fixed for free or at least the parts and service is cheaper. We end up rebuilding a lot of computers.

Maintenance is a problem. It is little things like screen savers. The kids like to download screen savers and they crash. But most of the problems kids create can be fixed. Except in the alternative school. There when the computers don't work the kids destroy them. They kick them when they get mad.
Q. What is the priority for fixing computers? When you go through the work orders how do you decide what to fix?
A. The requests come in on the request line. It puts a date on the work order. We decide what school has the most urgent request. The administration server that handles all the email will always get priority. Any computer that is connected to the central office is a priority. We are always behind.
Q. Do you have a formal technical training?
A. No, ma'am I am self-trained. I took tech courses while I was a student here. I helped wire the school along with the other students in my class. We were always doing projects for the school. We built computers for the school. We would build them from new and old parts. We also rebuilt old computers to get them running. I went to college part time in Natchitoches. I didn't take computer courses in the college. (I got the impression he didn't remember what he took to graduate.)
Q. Do you write grants for getting new computers?
A. No ma'am. The systems person does all that.
Q. When the teachers have to share computers do you manage them?
A. No ma'am. They (teachers) have to do that themselves.
Q. Who uses the most computers?
A. We have 30 or 40 distance learning classes. Most of them are extra classes that we don't have teachers for. Classes like fine art, language, physics. Calculus is not offered here. They have to take those courses on line. Most of the classes use blackboard. The students have an email address and a computer account.
Q. Do you attend any professional organizations?

A. Sometimes I go to meetings. We have a state organization that I go to. We also have a discussion group on the Internet. We can put problems we have and discuss them. We talk all the time.
CISC network http://www.qucis.queensu.ca/software_docs/qucisGuide/qucisGuide.html

Note:
I am still looking at all the organizations, formal and informal that he and other systems people attend.