

Report on the NCTM Winnipeg Meeting

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Although all the sessions at the Winnipeg meeting were good and deserve mention, one session that many classroom mathematics teachers might be interested in dealt with the laboratory approach to teaching mathematics.

Dr. Jack Wilkinson from the University of Northern Iowa gave a brief description of "The Laboratory Method as a Teaching Strategy in Grades V to VIII." In his talk he stressed that there is no single teaching approach which can be successfully used in teaching mathematics and that the use of the laboratory approach is no exception.

In using this approach, Dr. Wilkinson set up a number of shoe boxes with instructions and materials necessary to carry out the instructions. In most cases the students had to record the results of their activity on a prepared record sheet or in their notes. For some labs the students worked individually, and for others they worked in pairs or in small groups.

Regarding the success of this approach, Dr. Wilkinson stressed that it should be used in conjunction with other teaching methods and techniques. From his own experience he found that students weak in mathematics tended to like the laboratory approach better than the lecture method, but that a few of the good students didn't seem to like it as well.

On the whole, the laboratory approach to mathematics as described by Dr. Wilkinson seemed to be an exciting experience well worth the effort used to produce the labs. Why not try to set up one or two shoe boxes (or other boxes) of materials and see if you like the approach?