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Students Use Computerized Curriculum

TOKYO students are using desk-top computers and programmed lessons in an experimental system educators hope will make learning more individualized and more fun.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Educational Research Centre developed the new learning system which combines commercial portable computers (30 centimeters wide, 20 centimeters high and six centimeters deep and weighing 1.7 kilograms) with 20 centimeter by 12.7 centimeter printed learning cards.

Operating on four small batteries the computer's screen displays eight lines of 40 characters each. Yet it has the memory and data processing capacity of personal computers priced at \$ 90-\$ 135.

Shigeomi Umemoto head of

the Educational Methods Research Section, led a team that devised the new system. It took them 10 years to classify the subject matter in textbooks used in elementary Junior high, and high schools and put it on cards. Next, they studied the most effective teaching methods for each subject. Finally, they wrote a programme and put it into the parent computer.

Students use the desk computers and the subject lesson cards in the classroom. When the student presses the start key, the screen displays a message "Let's study science today. Open the set of cards to page 5." The lesson, complete with diagrams and formulas is on the card. The student reads and studies the text. The next card presents a problem. The student solves

it and puts his answer into the desk computer. If the answer is correct, messages like "Congratulations" or "Wonderful" flash on the screen.

If the student makes a mistake the screen signals "Close but not correct" or "Let's try again." If the student misses the same problem three times the computer says, "Let's call the teacher". The computer has a stock of about 100 such messages.

The new learning system has four advantages. First, since the desk computer is used in conjunction with printed cards the programmes are relatively simple. Second, the system is easy to use since the teacher and students only have to press the number and return keys. Third, stu-

dents receive individual help from the teacher on points they do not understand and can proceed at their own pace. Fourth, desk-top computers are inexpensive compared with personal computers and take up little space.

Experimental instruction began in two schools in October a seventh-grade science class and an 11th-grade physics class. By next year students will be able to study Mathematics World History and English with the electronic learning system.

"Even children who dislike studying perk up when given a chance to use a desk computer. Since the teacher can easily monitor individual daily progress fewer students should fall behind," said Umemoto. (Courtesy Tokyo Shimbun).