

# CURRICULA

A QUADRANT PUBLICATION

FEB / MAR ISSUE PAGE 1

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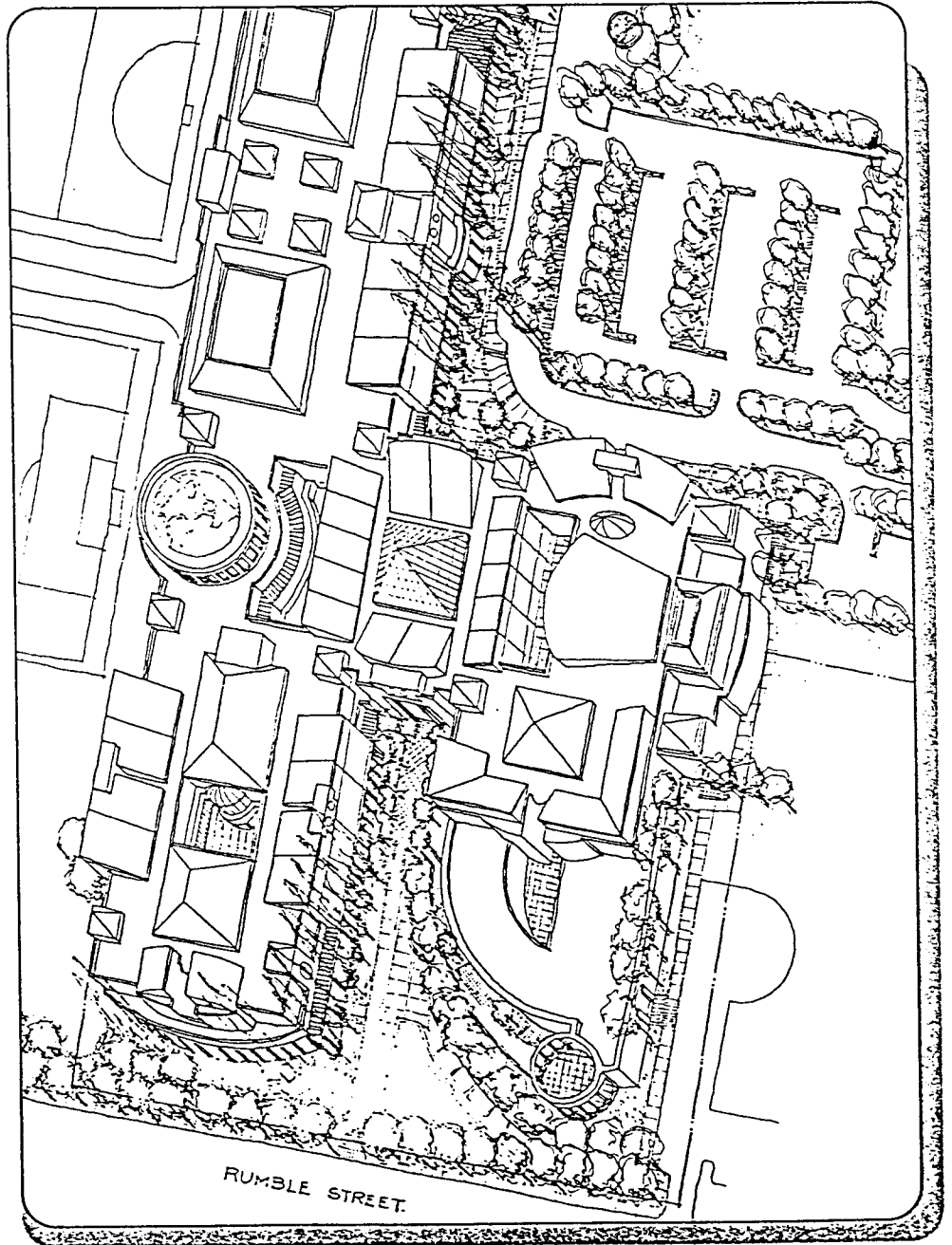
## DESIGN YOUR OWN SCHOOL PROJECT

While designing their own schools, students use a wide range of social studies skills and improve their ability to work independently. The assignment introduces a six step process that can be applied to many independent projects. Use this project at almost any grade or skill level.

*The Design Your Own School Project is appropriate for the following curriculum areas:*

- Social Studies
- Language Arts,
- History
- Drafting and Art.

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# DESIGN YOUR

## GOALS

- ① *To foster independence and self-reliance*
- ② *To promote thinking and problem-solving skills*
- ③ *To provide students with a frame work for completing projects*
- ④ *To encourage creativity and originality*

### KNOWLEDGE GOALS:

Students will learn

- about the range of activities that take place in a school.
- about the people who use a school.
- that models and maps are graphic representations of things in the real world.
- that schools have changed historically.
- that schools have an impact on the neighbourhood and on the environment.
- that schools serve a broad community.
- that government regulates education.
- that education is shaped by economics, culture, geography and other factors.

### SKILLS:

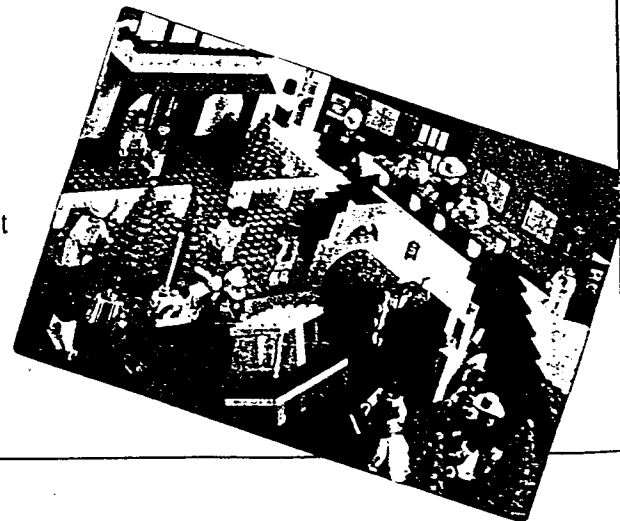
Students will learn and use a variety of skills, including:

- organization
- planning
- research
- interviewing
- letter writing
- analysis
- drawing
- mapping
- charting
- reading

### ATTITUDES:

The project is designed to

- give students a sense of their own ability to work independently.
- help students view school as "a village for learners".
- help students to look critically at the world they live in, thinking about how they can change and improve it.



# OWN SCHOOL

## ABOUT THE PROJECT:

**T**he Design Your Own School Project offers valuable learning experiences for students at every level. It gives students an opportunity to apply skills and thought processes learned in social studies to the most immediate world around them: school.

Students in kindergarten, grade 1 and grade 2 can use the project as an opportunity to explore their school. The school is an important part of the child's community, perhaps the most important feature of the world outside the home. The project introduces a variety of social studies skills, including basic research skills. While designing their schools, students move step by step through the process that they will eventually need to complete projects independently. The final project presentation may be a model or map of a school or perhaps just one classroom in a school.

At the junior level (grades 3-5), students can begin to think critically about change and improvement. Through research, students will discover that schools have not always had their current form, but have changed historically. By observing and recording use of different parts of your school they may discover what areas are well used and which need change and improvement. The final presentation might be a team effort, with small groups focusing on different areas of the school (library, gym, playground, lunch room, classrooms and so on.)

At the intermediate level (grade 6-8), students can adopt a global perspective on schools, considering the impact schools have on the environment, the interaction between the school

and the broader community and how special needs communities can be accommodated in the new design. In addition to the research methods used at earlier levels, they may want to use interviews and letter writing to get information from different parts of the community. At this level, each student or group should incorporate many attributes of a school into the final presentation.

In addition to the elements that younger students think about, students in the senior grades (9-13) may choose to consider structural elements, site selection, incorporation of new technologies, the role of government, integration of arts and sciences, finances and the very theory and practice of education itself. There is a veritable myriad of concerns that planners, architects, builders and educators must think about in designing schools for the future. Your students have a wealth of issues and information from which to form interesting and innovative projects.



**NOTE:** Primary students told us that the public address system is one of the most important features of a school.



**NOTE:** Intermediate students had some creative suggestions for school design: a swimming pool in every classroom and pop in the drinking fountains.



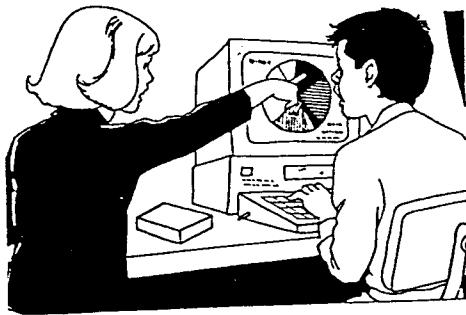
# DESIGN YOUR



**NOTE:** Each student can design a school. Small groups can work on a school design. Or the class can divide the school into parts and one student or a small group can design each module.



**NOTE:** Sample issues: classroom size, number of classrooms, playground use, environmental concerns, access to school by people with disabilities, incorporation of new technologies, need for special use areas (labs, theatres, libraries, etc.), crowding, night and off-hour use, storage, site for a new school, light, heating, plumbing, etc.



## STEP 1 - BRAINSTORM

**I**ntroduce the project with a brainstorming session. Start by inviting the class to dream about what a school could be. Let imaginations run wild thinking about the possibilities. Gently direct students' attention to the school building and design. For example, if students suggest having recess all day, ask how we could encourage that by the way we build the school. A good answer might be by putting playgrounds in every classroom.

Change the focus of the brainstorming session. Ask students what a school is. What is its purpose? What is it intended to do? Why do people go to school? What are the different kinds of schools and why are there so many? If students were going to design and build a new school what would it be like? What do students think are important features of schools? What do they like about the school building as it exists now? What do they think should be different?

Let students brainstorm. Be sure that someone keeps a record of the issues and ideas raised.

After the initial storm of ideas has subsided, go over the ideas and issues raised. Divide them into categories. Some ideas need further study and more information. Others can be incorporated into the final design later. You may want to display the notes from the brainstorming session on the classroom wall for students to refer to later.

## STEP 2 - PLAN


**A**t this stage, students can go through the process of preparing the project and plan what to do at each stage. They can think about how much time each step will take. Start with the end: let students know what form final presentations can take. Show students blueprints, dioramas, models and so on. Teachers at some grade levels may wish to have the whole class use the same final presentation method, if so let them know what that method will be. Next review the steps they must go through to get from the brainstorming stage to evaluation. Students in junior, intermediate and senior grades should be told when the project is due. For students in the junior and intermediate grades, be clear about how much in class time they will have to work on it and how much time they should devote to it outside of class.




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## PLANNING SCHEDULE

STAGE	GOAL	TIME
<i>Planning Research</i>	Set up a schedule	20 minutes
	Set research questions	30 minutes
	Go to library, get books	30 minutes
	Read books, take notes	20 minutes x 3 days
	Do playground observations	20 minutes x 2 days
<i>Analysis</i>	Organize book notes	15 minutes
	Organize observations	30 minutes
	Decide on features of final presentation	30 minutes
<i>Final Presentation</i>	Gather materials	15 minutes
	Rough version	30 minutes
	Assess rough version	15 minutes
	Final version	45 minutes
	Proof and finishing touches	15 minutes
<i>Evaluation</i>	Review project	15 minutes
	Write evaluation	10 minutes
<b>TOTAL TIME:</b>	<b>6 HOURS AND 30 MINUTES OR 1/2 HOUR PER DAY FOR 2 WEEKS (WITH A HALF HOUR EXTRA JUST IN CASE.)</b>	

 NOTE: Making a schedule is an excellent way of planning. Work with students in the primary grades to make a schedule. Hand out a master schedule for slightly older students to fill in. Show sample schedules to older students and let them make their own.

 NOTE: Encourage students to do a little bit on their project each day, rather than trying to do it all at once. Depending on the age and grade, somewhere between 10 and 40 minutes a day of concentrated work is a good session. In two to three weeks at that rate, students should be able to produce excellent results. (Some research methods may delay the process, waiting for answers to letters for example.)

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## STEP 3 - RESEARCH

**R**esearch has two steps: first students must decide on what to research and how, second, they must carry out the research. Rather than having each student research the entire project, you might want to divide the research up among the class members. Individual students or small groups can research different areas and then share the results with the class.

Through class discussion, help students set research goals that are appropriate to skill and grade level and fit in with your curriculum. Then help students figure out what research methods to use to find the information.

At the primary level the research questions may be quite simple. Who are the people in my school? What do they do? What are the rooms in my school? What are they used for? What is in the playground?

Find the answers through observation and exploration. Send small groups to explore different parts of the school. (An adult or older student can accompany them and record their findings.) One group can count water fountains, another can count bathrooms, several groups can list all the rooms on different halls, one group can go to the office to get a list of staff and so on.

Students in junior grades can start to think about change. How have schools changed historically? What changes can we make in this design to make our school better?

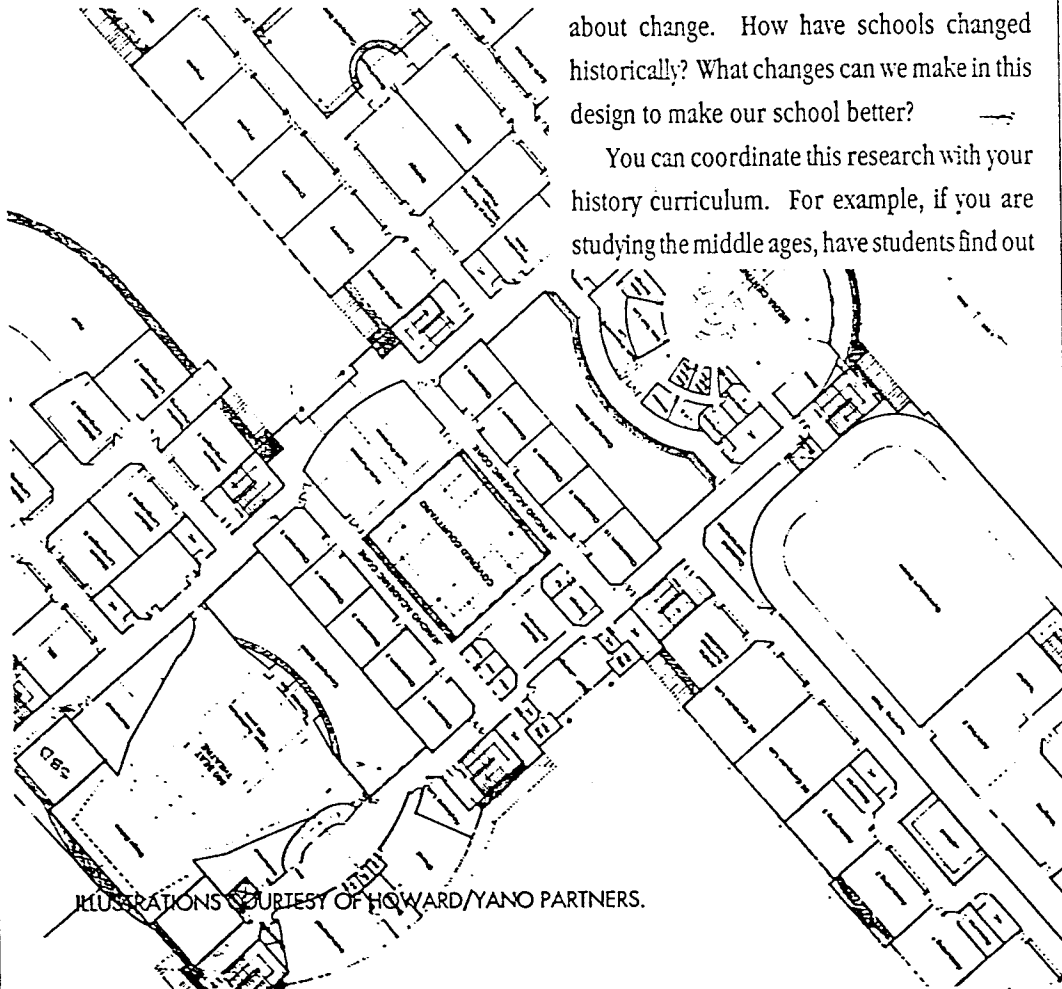
You can coordinate this research with your history curriculum. For example, if you are studying the middle ages, have students find out

how children were educated then. If you are looking at the exploration of Canada by Europeans, have students find out what kinds of schools the explorers attended and what the first schools in Canada were like. The information is available in the library.

To find out how to design a better school, junior students need to know how well the current school design is working. Students will use a variety of active research methods, including observation and interview. For example, they may want to learn more about the use of the playground. Teams of students can be assigned to record how many students use each piece of equipment, how many use the fields and so on. They could also make note of potential safety problems. Other students could interview a cross section of students, staff and other concerned people about the playground, asking what they like and don't like and what changes they might like to see. Other areas of the school can be studied using similar methods: the halls, locker areas and bathrooms, libraries, labs, gyms, entrance ways and so on.

In the intermediate and senior grades, students may want to find out more about other schools. They may want to look at your school in a broader context: its relationship to the neighbourhood and its environmental impact. The students may also want to think about how schools serve special interest and special needs communities. Students will use a variety of research methods.

The library will offer some books on schools around the world. Students may want to visit other local schools for comparison purposes.



ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY OF HOWARD/YANO PARTNERS.

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and to interview friends and neighbours who attend other schools about the advantages and disadvantages of their schools.

Through observation and interviews, students can find out more about the impact of the school on its environment. Some questions that students might want to answer by observation and interview: How much garbage does the school produce? What methods are used to reduce school garbage output? How is energy used in the school? What energy saving methods are in effect? What efforts are being made to make the school and school property environmentally friendly and wildlife friendly? Are there problems in the school's relationship with its neighbourhood? Do students disturb home owners by cutting across lawns or through backyards? Do the school's neighbours object to on street parking by school staff and visitors? How do students and neighbourhood merchants get along?

Another topic for consideration is how the school serves special interest and special needs groups. As part of the community, a school has many groups to serve including girl guides, people with disabilities, adults who want to extend their education, daycare centres, and ethnic and cultural groups who want to preserve their heritage. Students can find out which groups currently use the school and when (the school secretary is a great source of information). They may also want to find out what other groups exist in the community, who might want to use a newly designed school in the future. The yellow pages and community directories are good sources for this kind of

information. Students can contact these groups by writing letters. One effective way to get information is to send a letter along with a questionnaire to be filled out and returned. Some groups may be able to provide pamphlets and guidelines on how to make a building accessible to the blind and to people in wheelchairs.

Students in the senior grades might want to contact trustees and school board officials to find out how they make decisions about school design.

## STEP 4 - ANALYZE

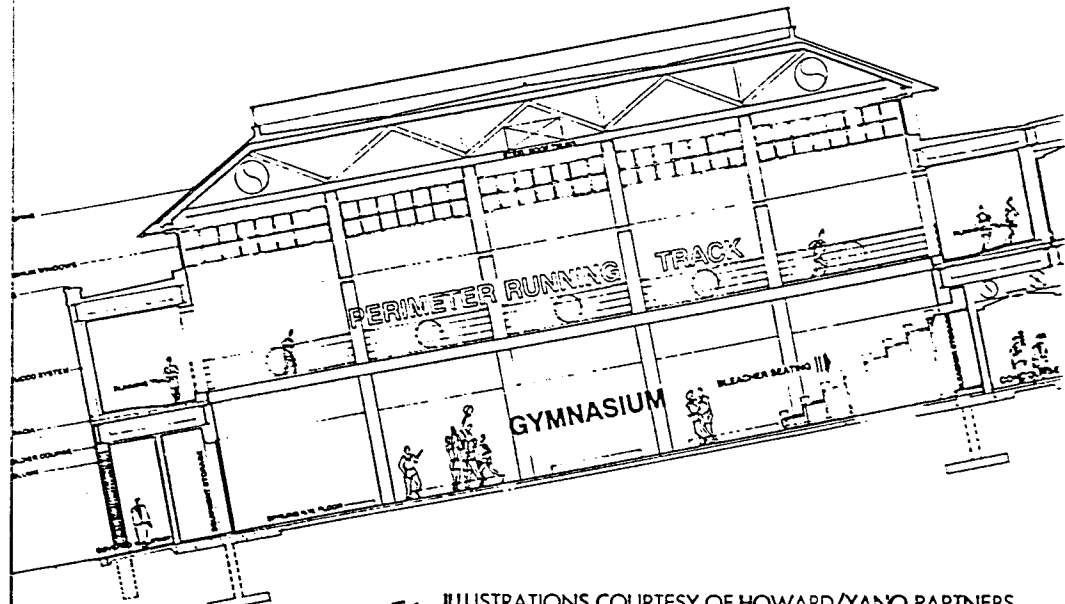
**A**fter the research data has been collected, it is time to figure out what it means. Data must be organized and analyzed. At this stage, students will review all the information they have in order to make decisions about the features they will put into their school designs.

Some organization can be done in class after students have presented their research reports.

Encourage students to start by reviewing all their notes and putting all the bits of information about one topic together. Some types of information can be put into a graph or chart.

Once the material is organized, students should take time to think about it and make decisions about what features to put into their final design. Groups of students working together should set aside time at this stage for discussion. Students can focus their thought processes by asking themselves questions like: what must go into every school? what things about school work now? what do I want to change? what new features do I want to add?

At the end of this stage, students can make a list of the features they want to put into their new design.



SECTION F-F: ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY OF HOWARD/YANO PARTNERS.

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**STEP 5 - PRESENTATION** / Students can present their ideas in many ways including, a Diorama, Blue Print, Model, or Picture.

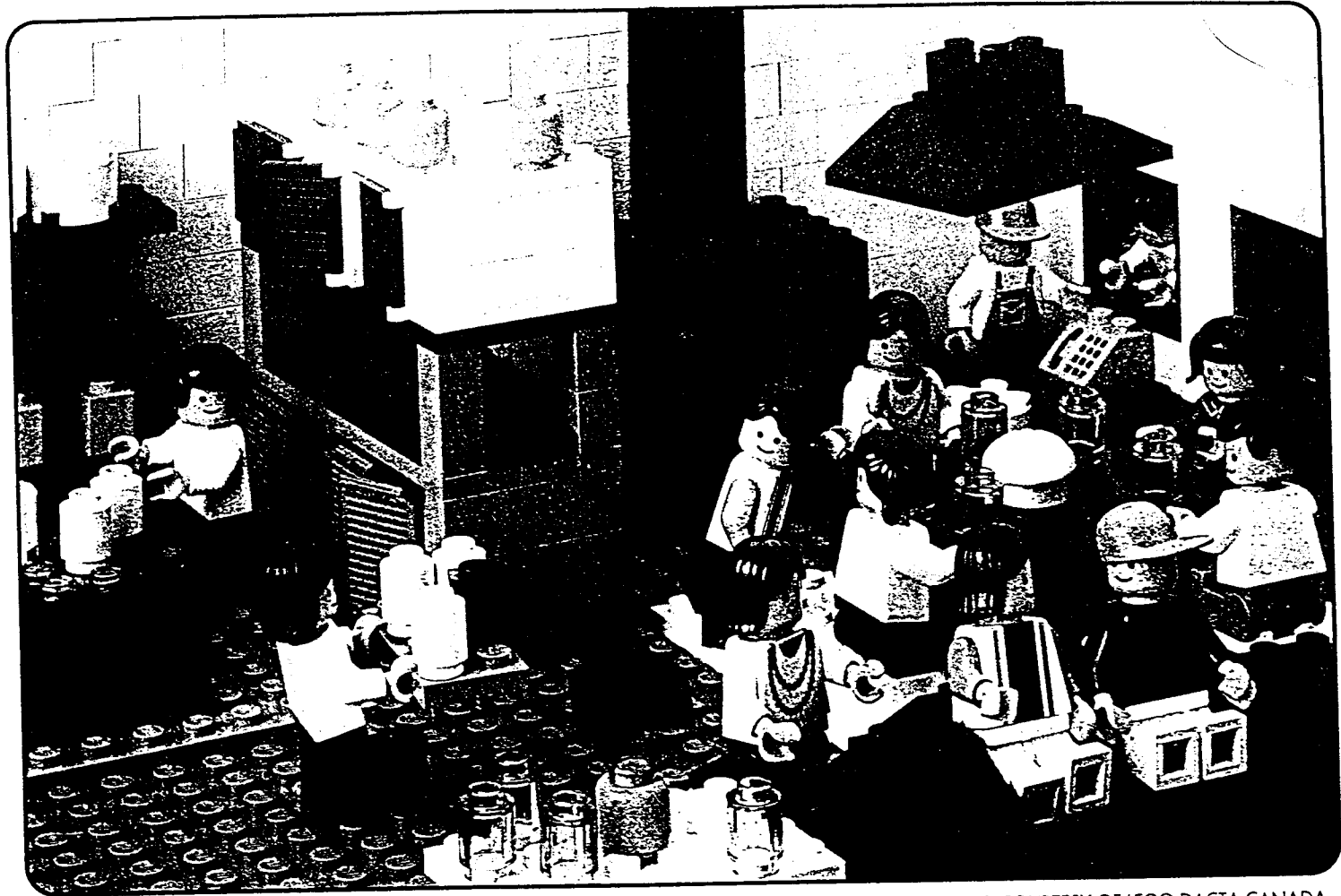


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## STEP 6 - EVALUATION

**A**llowing students to participate in the evaluation process promotes independence and self-reliance. Students learn about the teacher's thought process in evaluating work and their ability to meet the teacher's expectations will improve. If you have time, have a private evaluation session with each student or group to discuss the project.

Have students focus their evaluation on three things: how good is the final result, how would they change the process next time to get a better

result and was the project a valuable experience for them?

Your evaluation should be based on the original goals. Evaluate how well students worked independently. Did they apply social studies skills and problem solving methods? Were they original and creative in their approach to the project? Did they acquire new ideas about schools? Your evaluation may also include comments on effort, timeliness, presentation and research. Help students to recognize what they did well and how they can improve their next effort.

*Jill Golick is author of "Government in Action" (Gage 1990), and "Junior Thinklab" (SRA) and has written scripts for many children's television programs.*

**LET US KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!**  
Please forward your ideas, suggestions, and comments concerning CURRICULA.

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