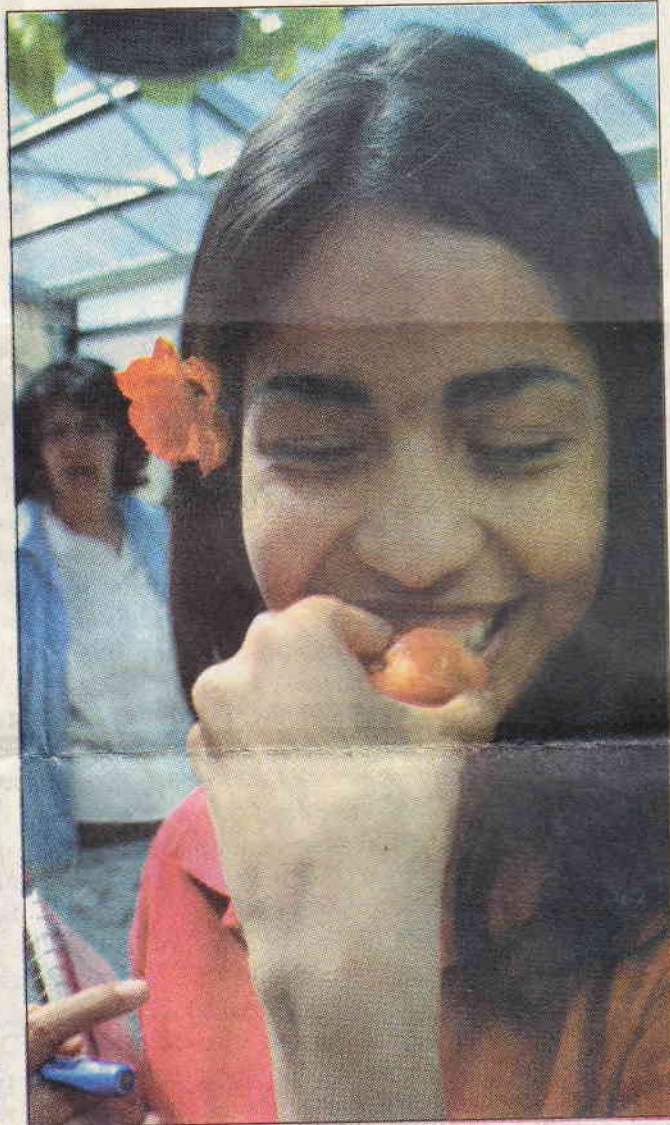


GARDENING GURUS



Don Pace/Optic photo

Jolene Martinez looks over the bean plants sprouting in the greenhouse. Martinez and her classmates will keep a close watch on plants growing in the greenhouse.



Audrey Vaisa gets a taste of a freshly picked tomato in the greenhouse at Memorial Middle School. Vaisa said the vegetables taste so good she'd like to start her very own garden at home.

Students work in school's greenhouse

By **Don Pace**
Las Vegas Optic

The greenhouse at Memorial Middle School is beginning to show signs of life as students dig into rich soil, plant seeds and get excited about seeing their labor produce tomatoes, corn and other vegetables and plant life.

Peter Skelton, an assistant professor from New Mexico State University, heads a program that he says is transforming the campus into a research station where students can engage in a variety of teaching and learning activities that include experiments, research proj-

ects, insect collection, plant identification and a host of other activities that go along with the life sciences.

"This is really the brainchild of Paul Gutierrez, dean of the college of agriculture and home economics at New Mexico State, and Superintendent Pete Campos. They deserve a lot of credit for some really forward thinking about education," Skelton said.

Skelton said the greenhouse project is a partnership between the two schools that allows students to participate in hands-on, applied learning activities that let them to become more familiar with the sci-

entific research process. He said he didn't know of any other project like it at any school in the United States.

"The primary objective is to provide additional context to learning that occurs in the classroom by using science as the platform," he said. "For example, we worked on some modules in mathematics and social studies. In mathematics, we measured the growth of corn over time and introduced some statistical terms. With the social studies class, we looked at agriculture by

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Gardening

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prehistoric peoples and looked at some of the cropping patterns they would have employed and then went out to the greenhouse where the students identified various seeds and plants."

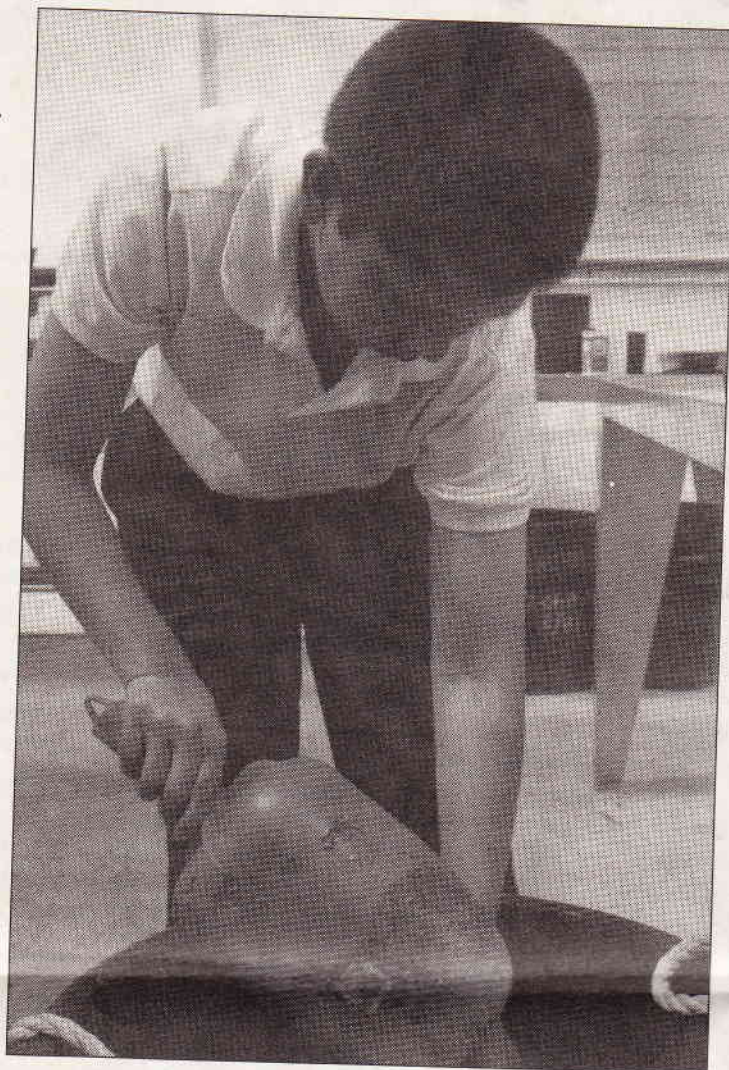
Students in Roberta Montañó's and Carla Boyle's seventh-grade inclusion classroom are beginning to understand the life forces that come together that produce food.

Cassius Simpson said, "In my project, I'm trying to find out whether tap water, spring water or distilled water works best in germinating seeds."

"Mine is the effects of temperature on the growth of corn. I have experiments in the greenhouse, one in the science lab and one outside," Jamie Allen explained.

Out in the greenhouse Jaime Arellano was taking notes as he was studying the effects of sunlight and plant growth. "I'm going to see what will happen to a plant if it has only four hours of sunlight a day."

Audrey Vaisa was savor-



Jaime Arellano scoops rich soil into planters where he will plant a variety of seeds like corn, tomatoes and beans. Arellano is also conducting an experiment on the effect of sunlight and plant growth.

ing the taste of a tomato plucked right off the vine. She said she would like to start her very own garden

at home.

Montañó said the greenhouse is a good learning environment for

the students.

"It's a lot of fun — as they explore their own thoughts and ideas, open their minds and have fun working on a project like this. It's great. When the plants really start growing and they start taking measurements and collecting data, it will be a lot more fun for them, especially when they start tasting the fruits of their labor."

Skelton said after spring break all of the science classes would plant vegetables. "We're going to fill the greenhouse with a vegetable garden because we're anticipating sending each student home with a tomato and a green chile plant."

Skelton said the greenhouse fits in well with what the future of the center will eventually look like. There will be an outdoor classroom with a nature trail that leads through a variety of ecosystems and demonstration gardens as well as a science lab.

He said the greenhouse would still be used for developing materials for teaching purposes.

"Really the importance of all of this when we integrate it will be what I like to think of as a learning landscape," Skelton said.

Don Pace/Optic photo