

Marine Biology (and for Credit) Brings Out the Best in Students

John Dewey High School in Coney Island has become the first in the city to offer Regents credit to students studying marine biology.

About 180 students in six classes at Dewey are enrolled in a marine biology course as a substitute for the standard biology curriculum.

Unlike other city high schools that offer oceanographic study to especially gifted students, the enrollment at Dewey features a wide selection of students.

According to Harold Silverstein, one of the instructors, "the nature of the course, the cooperation of school officials and the stimulating work have students learning above their assumed level."

Part of the class requirement is an experiment performed over the school year, and students meet frequently with their instructors to discuss the projects. Last year, in the first year of instruction of marine biology at Dewey, students won first, second and third prizes for their projects in a citywide science fair.

Variety of Experiments

Some of the experiments being performed this year include the building of a refrigerator tank in which organisms may be maintained at different temperatures; the study of the effect of detergents on sponges, and the observation of the effect of oxygen on luminescent bacteria taken out of the water.

Last year one student dropped 50 drift bottles, each containing a postcard, in the waters around Brooklyn. More than 30 postcards were returned by finders, one from Florida.

Idle play? Hardly.

"One fact we determined

from this study is that there is very little current flow from Jamaica Bay to the ocean," Mr. Silverstein said. "The conclusion from this fact is that the dumping of organic wastes into the bay will destroy it."

Each student also is required to work at the New York Aquarium in Coney Island during the year. Most perform behind-the-scenes tasks, but all have a one-to-one relationship with a member of the Aquarium staff.

Jobs at the Aquarium

Students now working at the Aquarium are engaged in feeding the whales and sharks, cleaning tanks, escorting visitors and manning an information booth in the lobby.

One of the course's students, 15-year-old Lois Levine, became so proficient in marine study that she now is employed during the summer at the Aquarium, where she demonstrates the responses of dolphins for visitors, Mr. Silverstein said.

The students do most of their specimen-collecting at Brooklyn beaches, but for three days earlier this semester the youngsters went out to sea on a vessel provided by the City University.

In addition to the marine biology course, offered during the school year, Dewey also gives a class in field ecology during the summer. Last year 120 students, meeting five days a week for six weeks, explored local beaches, learning about the quality of the soil and water and the organisms they found.

Students taking the field ecology course, about 50 per cent of whom also enroll in the marine biology class, are given elective credit.