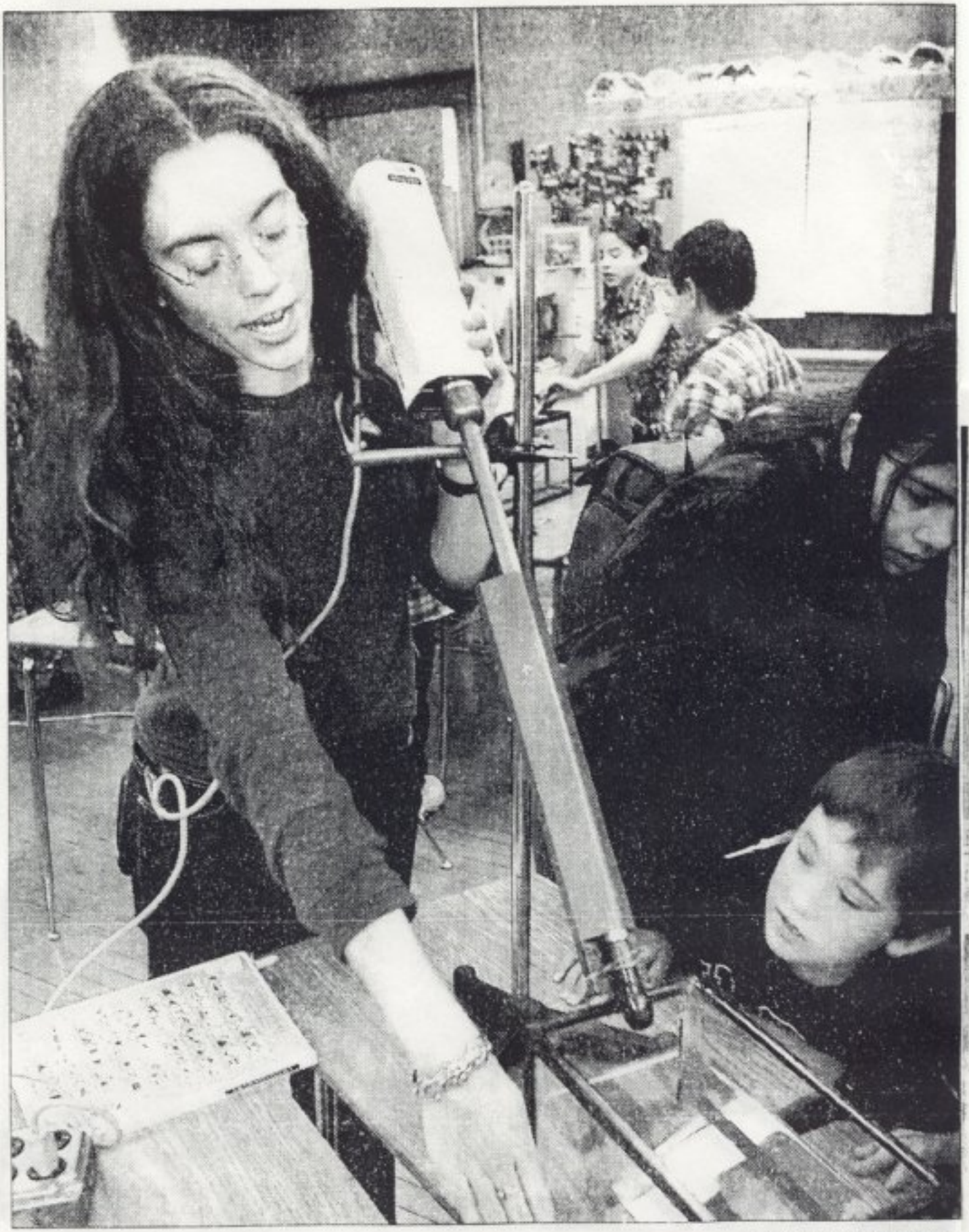
ENLIGHTENING EXPERIENCE



Staff photo by **DAVE ROBACK**

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Katie Peek of the Mount Holyoke College Society of Physics Students Outreach Program helps sixth-graders at the Magnet Middle School for the Arts aim a laser beam to hit a rubber frog in the water during a demonstration at the magnet school Friday.

Laser show proves point at Magnet Middle School

By NATALIA E. ARBULÚ

Staff writer

HOLYOKE – Moving a laser pointer quickly across a wall, Orin P.F. Hoffman explained to sixth-graders in Myriam Y. Ulloa-Skolnick's science class at Holyoke Magnet Middle School for the Arts that the laser lines they saw were actually a single point of light.

Hoffman, lab director at Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, then fulfilled his promise to transform light into art by shining a laser into a mirror attached to a speaker.

When music played from the speaker, the sound energy moved the mirror and created a laser show on the ceiling.

"What you are seeing is one point, but it is moving so fast that it makes a pattern," Hoffman said.

Hoffman and four students from the college's Society of Physics Students Outreach Program spent Friday at the magnet school teaching Ulloa-Skolnick's 95 students about light energy.

In another demonstration, Hoffman used the sound energy generated by student Nicholas R. Foley, 12, speaking into a microphone and converted it into electrical energy that moved across a laser beam.

"No way! You can really do that?" Nicholas said.

Through the relationship between the school and Mount Holyoke, Ulloa-Skolnick hopes to intensify the physics experience for next year's science students by bringing them to the college campus, she said.

The program's goal is to create a physics curriculum for elementary- and middle-school students.

Hoffman introduced students to laser and optic equipment which are expensive for schools to have.

"We are trying to bring these demonstrations to school and leave them as a continuing curriculum, so we are looking for support," Hoffman said.

Ulloa-Skolnick's classes had used flashlights and mirrors to learn about reflection before Hoffman's visit.

Nalany Garcia, 12, said Hoffman's demonstrations with lasers made it easier for her to understand how light moved.

"Before we did it with flash-

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lights and it didn't really work too well," she said.

For Nicholas, seeing his voice move the laser beam and learning about light patterns was an eye-opening experience.

"I thought that was cool because I didn't know that voice can travel through light," Nicholas said.

Helen L. Gibson, district specialist for the Partnerships Advancing the Learning of Math and Science, said the demonstrations give students a feeling of how physics can be interesting.

"Physics always gets a bad reputation of being boring or too hard. So maybe if they are exposed to it now, when they get to high school they will be interested in it," Gibson said.