

Accent on Family Living

ARLEEN COSGROVE and MARY I. HOWELL

As concepts of family living go through certain changes, today's schools must necessarily give more attention to the problems incurred. The Frances E. Willard School in Highland Park, Michigan has adjusted the curriculum to provoke the interest of elementary school boys and girls in the school babies and thereby through study to understand small-child behavior and themselves. The teachers Arleen Cosgrove, kindergarten, and Mary I. Howell, eighth grade, describe the two-way workability of this experience and the carry-over into the home.

"THE BABY-SITTERS are in the eighth grade; the babies they sit with, in the kindergarten. Why not get them together in school to study children—and at the same time to study themselves?" Such reasoning lies behind the experiences being provided older pupils in the Frances E. Willard School, Highland Park, Michigan, where they study child behavior at the kindergarten level.

The older-younger pupil relationship was established as an elementary-level expansion of the program of Home and Family Education already successfully functioning at the twelfth grade level in the city's secondary school. At this level, in addition to classroom work, part of the program includes laboratory nursery school observation, study, and experience for upper class pupils. During the senior year four full days are spent in the nursery, a requirement for all girls and an elective for all boys—and most boys elect it. Not only does understanding of small-child behavior



International News Photos

develop, but simultaneously a rather broad base is created for further understanding of *all* human behavior. High school students come to recognize many of their own developmental patterns through trying to recognize the patterns of small children. The elementary school work described here shows similar results in operation with eighth graders—kindergartners.

Pupil Interest Shows Needs

Several things, probably typical of most elementary schools, pointed to the eighth-grade-to-kindergarten interest. Through the years the upper-grade teachers noticed a habit older pupils have to drift back to the kindergarten whenever the opportunity offered. This was fostered by the practice of sending helpers to the kindergarten at recess and other times. It was likewise noted that eighth graders' autobiographies, especially under "earliest recollections," emphasized the important role of the kindergarten and kindergarten teacher.

Other indications of interest were the questions asked the kindergarten teacher about the behavior of certain children, and comments and inquiries about the teacher's attitude in various situations. Surveys revealed the fact that a large percentage of eighth grade pupils act as baby-sitters in the evenings and on week-ends.

These observations and facts gave adequate reason for adding some kind of study of child growth and development to the "home-and-family" part of the curriculum that already offered for girls, food buying, preparation and serving, and clothes making; and for boys, manual arts; and for both, home decoration and improvement.

Teachers Review the Situation

In planning for study of child growth and development the counselor in home and family living, the eighth grade homeroom teacher, the kindergarten teacher, and the principal worked together. They agreed that a desirable objective was to develop in older pupils a better understanding of young children and how they grow up, so as to

be able to deal with them more intelligently and effectively both in and out of school.

To accomplish this the experience and study for eighth graders would need to develop (1) an appreciation of the importance of the first years of life; (2) a knowledge of the types of behavior normally expected from a four-year-old or a five-year-old; (3) an awareness of the attitude or approach older persons should have when working with and guiding youngsters; and (4) greater ease in working with young children.

The organization and atmosphere of the school is well adapted to the changes necessary to give these needed experiences. Practices which favor informality; self-discipline characteristic of the pupil's maturity level; and cooperation—pupil-with-pupil and group-with-group—are a few of the school's characteristics which aided initiation of the program.

Further help is inherent in the core-curriculum type of eighth grade homeroom, already marked by a family atmosphere, an experimental attitude, a flexible time schedule for academic work, a well developed student government, and pupil-participation in purposeful planning.

The kindergarten itself also fits into the plan. Large, attractively decorated, and with good equipment, it offers an excellent place for one phase of the program to function—the eighth graders' observing and working with the little children.

Routine Tasks Lead to Study

Upper grade students were assigned in pairs. Dignity and responsibility were

heightened by having them sign in and sign out as per their schedule of duties. Three types of jobs were given: *house-keeping duties*, such as mixing paints, filling paste jars, caring for the rabbit's cage, mending doll clothes and curtains, repairing toys, etc.; *cot duty and cot care*, involving setting them up when needed, arranging blankets, etc.; and *observation of children*, both at play and at rest.

As the program gathered momentum, inquiries about child behavior suggested a question box. This, in turn, called for a weekly discussion period involving the class, their homeroom teacher, and the kindergarten teacher. The typical questions given below are illustrative of the fascination and insight shown by the eighth graders in the behavior of the kindergarten children.

- Lucille is afraid of the rabbit. How shall we help her get over this fear?
- Harry sucks his thumb during rest time. Should we say something to him about it? Why does he suck his thumb?
- Jane cries when you leave the rest room and seems afraid of other children. Why does she act this way?
- Tommy sits and watches when the other children dance. Why don't you make him dance too?
- What shall we do when children fight?
- How can we help the children relax during rest time?
- The little new boy cried and kicked when his mother left, and you didn't seem to notice it. Why?

During the discussion period another process was soon obvious to the teachers. As the eighth grade pupils analyzed the fears, temper tantrums, emotional

immaturities, nail-biting, thumb-sucking, restlessness, stubbornness, and other aspects of kindergartner's behavior, they also were analyzing themselves. Their study and discussion of little people's behavior gradually expanded to study and discussion of growing-up as well as grown-up people's behavior. As young life gained in meaning for them, all life gained in meaning. Thus, at the elementary school level was found the same pattern of "see-others-see-self" thinking that was described for twelfth graders earlier in this article. And not all of these eighth graders will get to be seniors!

Pupil Understanding Shared with Parents

At the end of a year's experience with the working relationship between eighth grade and kindergarten some evaluations can already be made. The older pupils have changed their attitudes toward smaller ones. They tend to be more understanding, calm, patient, and kind. They are more likely to allow and encourage little children to become independent in dressing and undressing; to encourage little children to put materials away when finished, instead of doing it for them; and to know when to give attention and when to ignore.

Evidence also indicates a carry-over into the home through increased understanding of younger brothers and sisters, as well as helping their parents to understand them better. For example, many pupils have taken books, magazines, or newspaper clippings home for parents to read.

Above all, they are coming to analyze and understand themselves.

Copyright © 1947 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.