

Pushing Out the Four Walls

MARGARET HAMPEL and
OKLAHOMA CITY TEACHERS

How do classroom teachers use the community to provide desirable learning experiences for children? What is their concept of an adequate environment for living and learning? Margaret Hampel, on the teacher-education staff, Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College in Stillwater, asked a group of Oklahoma City teachers to describe and interpret their experiences with children. These accounts follow with brief introductory comments by Miss Hampel.¹

AN AFTERNOON IN THE WOODS

Mrs. Romine looks upon experiences in the country as an important part of good learning environments for children in a city school. She has discovered the resources for making these frequent trips possible. Mrs. Romine has her own 8mm. camera and projector and a whole library of her own films (one is shown below) which are used in her groups as a record of these many experiences.

A BIG RED TRUCK parked in the schoolyard just as the bell rang for school to convene after lunch. Excitement ran high in the first grade room. The children had looked forward for weeks to this outing in the woods.

Each child had written a letter to his mother asking permission to go to the teacher's home in the woods, about ten miles from school. These letters were signed and returned to school.

The teacher's husband drove the truck and she rode in the back with the children. A boy and girl from the sixth grade went along to help. The truck had a high stake bed with seats arranged for all. Of course many of the children stood because it's such fun!

¹ Miss Hampel works regularly with Oklahoma City teachers in a cooperative in-service program carried on by the Board of Education, the University of Oklahoma, and Oklahoma A and M College.



The family Dalmatian met the children and gave a hearty welcome. They were off to the woods in trail formation—headed for the big swing. Each child understood that he must stay on the trails, stop when the signal was given, and keep both eyes and ears open.

Mr. Romine led the way through the woods, pointing out the familiar trees

and telling the names of any new ones they inquired about. It was fun measuring to see how many children it took to reach around the different trees.

After following the trail for a distance of about two blocks, they came to a clearing surrounded by tall trees which met overhead like a canopy. Here the children enjoyed swinging on grape vines, climbing trees, and filling their pockets with Nature's treasures. New discoveries were made on every hand—bird nests, squirrel homes, and other hidden joys. The Wahoo trees had their lanterns out showing the bright seeds. The children gathered black walnuts, hickory nuts, berries of the bittersweet, and acorns of various sizes.

Under the fallen leaves they noticed so many green, heart-shaped leaves growing. When they learned these were wild violets they asked, "Where are all the flowers?" Then the cry came, "May we come back in the Spring and gather violets?" "Of course!" the teacher promised.

The trail led by the winding brook, over rocks where moss and ferns peeped out, up hill, and down past the outdoor fireplace and picnic tables. Here the children stopped to toast and eat marshmallows.

They weren't too tired to play in the truck on the way back—and they arrived at school with pockets and hands overflowing just as school was being dismissed for the day.

This trip was the beginning of an interest in the outdoors which carried over into many aspects of learning. Leaves were pressed and spatter prints made. Seeds and bulbs were planted in window boxes. Reading charts, number lessons, art work, and many other interesting times developed and went on and on.

The children are now counting the days until Spring when the dogwood, redbud, and wild plum bloom and when they may again go to the woods to gather violets.—*Josephine Romine, Wilson School, Oklahoma City.*

PARENTS TAKE OVER

Miss Riordan discovered a channel for parent participation in bringing about good learning environments for children. Trips into the community are a part of the program and mothers get together and take full responsibility for these excursions. It helps to solve the problem of hazards which keeps many teachers from utilizing the community as a learning resource.

ALL OF MY CHILDREN had birthdays after school started in September. Two came the last week in September and the mothers asked me separately if they might have a birthday party in the room. I agreed that it would be nice and suggested that they get together and plan one party. They did. Then—

I thought since the party was so successful that if the birthday mothers each month would combine their parties, it might foster greater cooperation between mothers and give the children a richer social experience, also. It did. Then—

Since the first party was in the room, why not do something different next

time. A meeting of birthday mothers to discuss plans followed. We were thinking and talking about circus and zoo animals so I suggested the zoo. We went. The enthusiasm ran high and has been going ever since. The mothers have become acquainted, and I have never had as rich an experience with mothers as I have this year.

Our October mothers took us to Bell Water Gardens and had the birthday refreshments in the little park there. Our November mothers took us to Borden's Milk and Ice Cream Factory. We

went through the plant and had our party in the parlor.

All mothers are invited to each party, and more come each time. If we hadn't run out of birthdays I think we would soon have had one hundred percent attendance of mothers. We have combined our parties with our interest excursions or developed our interest around our excursions in some profitable way. And the mothers are on the lookout for some other interesting trips to take.—*Velma Riordan, Hawthorne School, Oklahoma City.*

"SOUP'S ON" IN THIS GROUP

Mrs. Swale believes that a good learning environment for six-year-olds provides a friendly atmosphere, an understanding teacher, a close cooperative relationship with parents and other groups in the school, and opportunities to get acquainted with neighborhood and school workers. She tells of an experience which came as the result of the children's plan to make and serve vegetable soup and to invite the other first grade and the adults who had helped with their enterprise.

THE FIRST GRADE decided to ask the other first grade in the school to visit and share the experiences they were having. A soup party was planned.

When the manager of our school cafeteria supplied us with information about how much of each ingredient it would take to serve sixty people, she was invited to the party. The school policeman received his invitation when he helped the shopping committee across the street to the neighborhood grocery store. As invitations were being written, the children decided it would be nice to invite our principal.

Money values and number concepts were used in buying material for the soup and in deciding how many and what vegetables each child should bring

from home. At this time we came to the conclusion that soup was a good thing to include in our noon day lunch since it had a variety of vitamins and had several food elements included in the seven basic foods.

Responsibility, cooperation, and initiative were developed as children suggested the "jobs" for different committees and decided on chairmen for them, and as each did his share, individually and as a group, to make the party a success. Concern for others was expressed when visitors were served first, given the prettiest napkins, and seated at tables.

As our visitors ate they enjoyed the wrapping paper table cloths and the plain napkins that were decorated by

the children with scenes from child activities. Of course, these and all the food were handled with clean hands.

A day or two before the party the children planned that while we were waiting we should have a program. They would sing songs previously composed, recite poems, and read individual and group charts. The only new number was an original hand puppet play, with characters being members of a family. And we sang "Happy Birthday" to Kenneth for his birthday.

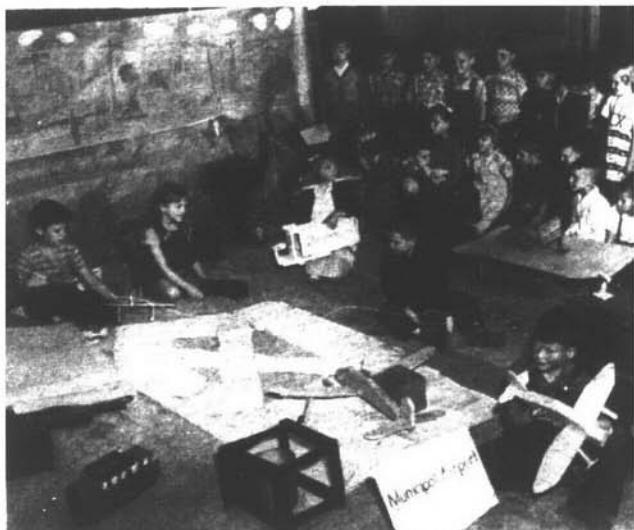
The next day we wrote "Thank You" notes to the cook for helping, and to Kenneth's mother for furnishing cookies for our party because it was his birthday. A feeling of adequacy permeated the room. Every child, through pleasant experiences, had learned fundamental facts and how to plan and carry out his plans. He looked forward confidently and happily to new experiences.—*Lillian Lee Swale, University Heights School, Oklahoma City.*

A TRIP TO THE AIRPORT

Mrs. Murnane believes that a good school environment needs to provide space and opportunity for children to play out the life around them and to recreate it through materials. Too often the informal play and work environment of the nursery school and kindergarten is left out of the children's later school life. School-rooms become bare and uninteresting instead of environments that stimulate continuous growth in exploration and insight.

A ZOOM AND A GLIDE were being re-enacted as children played with crude materials resembling planes. The children in this group were re-living what they observed at the city airport. The teacher called the group together to hold a planning conference and to ask if they would like to find out more in order to go farther with their work and play. Questions and ideas about a large airport on the floor came pouring out from the children. A trip to the city airport was planned, letters were written, committees were organized.

The weatherman and the chief of the



Courtesy Caroline Murnane, University Heights School, Oklahoma City, Okla.

control tower gave advice on the proposed trip. At school the same day the children blocked out plans for the ex-

tended study of air travel. They helped plan the rearrangement of the room to make space for a large airport.

A bustling airport had its beginning as Harry and Cecil built a DC-4. The plane needed a hangar, so Judy and Billy went to work on that. Then came other division of jobs for an entire airport.

This experience has contributed to all phases of work. Science played an important part in the study as the children kept weather charts recording daily temperatures and visibility and studied air and air movements. The study also gave them an accurate idea of measurement and proportion, as a great many

figures were involved. Letters were written to the men at the airport, thanking them for the kindness shown the class, and to the parents for taking us in their cars to the airport. Group and individual stories played a prominent part in the work. An account of the trip was made into booklet form.

At no time was this a "museum model." The children played in their airport. As a result of this work the children learned to play and work together, assume responsibility, develop leadership, work independently, and to cooperate.—Caroline Leonard Murphree, University Heights School, Oklahoma City.

THE PLAYGROUND EDUCATES

Mrs. Malone found learning opportunities in abundance on the playground when she came upon a group of boys having fun chasing the girls with grasshoppers.

JAMES AND BILL were so full of energy that they were always bubbling over in a fountain of activity.

It had been a hot, dry summer and the playground was teeming with grasshoppers. Nothing delighted these boys more than to chase the girls all over the schoolground with the threat of putting these horrible creatures down their backs.

The teacher, noticing all this, called the children around her and together they examined the grasshoppers. They discovered there was a great variety in the size of grasshoppers. They found that some had beautiful wings and others had no wings at all. They found that the grasshopper had very powerful legs and could push with considerable force. On closer examination they discovered that it had strong jaws

and could bite them hard enough to hurt if sufficiently provoked.

Of course many questions arose immediately: Why don't they all have wings? How can they bite so hard? Why does it have those funny things on its legs?

The teacher didn't know much about insects either, but she thought they might learn together. She suggested they find some books in the library that would answer their questions—and the search was begun. They found a wonderful book on grasshoppers that answered not only these questions, but many more.

In the search for this material many books with lovely, interesting pictures of other insects were discovered. The children's natural curiosity prompted questions about these pictures, and soon

a full-scale study of insects was underway. Specimens began to pour into the room, and of course such things as proper containers, food, and care became of vital interest. Insect cages had to be constructed and specimens identified before the proper food and care could be ascertained.

Trips were made to the school library, the city library, and the curriculum workshop library. Books at home and in the homes of friends were searched for any available information.

One child's father, who was a landscape artist and who had collected insects when he was a boy, became interested and gave the children the benefit of his knowledge. Even children in other rooms couldn't resist the urge to bring in specimens for identification. Grasshoppers were no longer horrible creatures, but objects of extreme interest to these children.

Bill and James no longer had time to tease the girls. They were far too busy hunting insects at noon and recess. James, who had been the despair of both parents and teachers, found he knew more about insects and where to find them than anyone in the room. For once he was the center of favorable attention—and how he enjoyed it!

No words can describe the thrill these children got when their own caterpillars began to spin a cocoon or to make a chrysalis. By this time they knew the difference between a caterpillar and a worm, between a cocoon and a chrysalis. They knew that a moth emerged from the former and a butterfly from the latter.

When Sue's Monarch caterpillar made a chrysalis, the children thought

it the most beautiful thing they had ever seen. They wondered how it could make such exquisite golden bands around the chrysalis. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds when it hatched and they saw it uncurl its proboscis and sip sweetened water from a spoon.

Although spiders were not real insects, they were studied along with the others and were found to be most interesting subjects. When one spider began to form an egg sac right before their very eyes, it certainly created a stir. The making of the web and the catching of food were also observed. Even the little girls forgot they were afraid of spiders when the first baby spiders were hatched.

Stories were written and told of experiences in collecting and observing the insects; facts learned about each one were recorded; many pictures were drawn; charts were made listing the friends and enemies among the insects common to the locality. The different kinds of insect homes were studied; film strips and sound films of insect life were used; collections of specimens were mounted, classified where possible, and used to start an interesting school museum.

The children became much more observant and more interested in their surroundings; they discovered the joy and satisfaction of research; they came to see beauty in the commonplace; fears were overcome; they began to find ways of satisfying their desire to learn the "why" of things.

As one mother expressed it, "Gayle certainly went to town on that bug business!"—*Kathryn Malone, Rockwood School, Oklahoma City.*

Copyright © 1948 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.