

We're Enthusiastic about Visiting Day

GENEVIEVE E. HATHAWAY

Genevieve E. Hathaway, a teacher in the Redlands, California, public schools, gives an account of a cooperative teacher-supervisory venture in planning and carrying out a visiting day. The line drawings are by Harriet Barr, another teacher in the same system.

WHEN MAN BITES DOG, it's news! When teachers ask for a repeat on an institute—that's even bigger news!

In Redlands, California, October, 1949, when our superintendent and the supervisory staff asked the elementary teachers for a vote on the type of institute desired this year, visiting day received a unanimous vote. About a year ago we had a visiting day "thrust" upon us. Our scheduled institute speaker was taken ill and it was rather late in the year to engage another speaker. So from the supervisory staff came the suggestion, "Let's have a visiting day."

As a teacher, I'll have to confess that the suggestion left me cold. My thoughts were something like this: "Visiting Day—oh, dear! We'll see demonstration classes with nothing practical to take back to our own situations." Some of my colleagues were thinking along similar lines, I know, because we discussed the idea. What a surprise we were in for!

In our system we are fortunate in having an administrative staff that really plans and organizes. How well they do the job is shown by the fact that, on the whole, the teaching staff is unaware of the organizing. Because of space limitations, I can only give you an outline of the extensive and intensive planning.



The Elementary Supervision Staff made plans with the "Framework for Public Education in California" well in mind. This excellent statement has been developed by the California State Framework Committee, and while it is not by any means in its final form, it does clearly enunciate two basic principles: "Public education is the chief instrument of American democracy,"¹ and "Education in California is recog-

¹ *A Framework for Public Education in California* by The California Framework Committee, A Subcommittee of the California State Curriculum Commission, p. 5.

nized as an institution of all of the people and as the *principal means of accomplishing definite purposes.*"² Around these two principles our visiting day was planned. It is as important to offer effective teaching-learning situations for adults as for children; for teachers as for laymen. How to provide stimulating in-service education best suited to all our varied needs was the problem for the staff to solve.

To Serve Our Varied Needs

Where to visit? Plans had to be made as to school systems within driving distance of Redlands. Out of that number, systems had to be chosen which would offer a variety of techniques and activities to be observed. Study of the teachers' special interests provided the staff with a number of specific goals to keep in mind. The four basic interests were directed toward: children successfully interacting in a social studies work period; children working independently during reading time; children actively participating in a planning or evaluating time; and children developing integrative experience using music, art, and rhythms in the social studies. This specification helped not only the schools which cooperated in the visit but also those of us who visited.

After the staff made a list of desirable schools and objectives, they sent their suggestions to the superintendent's office. Letters from our superintendent, Nolan D. Pulliam, to the superintendents of twelve selected school systems paved the way for a further correspondence between the directors of elementary education in these systems. After the

first correspondence a special bulletin was prepared for the elementary teachers. Included in this bulletin were: an explanation of the purposes of the visiting day, a brief description of situations available for observation, an observation guide, arrangements for traveling, and a checklist for each teacher to check first and second choices of places he wished to visit. "*Sufficient freedom under guidance to initiate, pursue, and evaluate individual and group activities must be provided.*"³

In the midst of our planning we temporarily lost the services of our very capable elementary director due to illness. She left the plans in charge of her staff headed by Irma Middup, our art supervisor, and Edith McCollister, music supervisor. The proof of the democracy of our Redlands system lies in the fact that this change in leadership could take place so effectively.

Provision for Leadership

Detailed organization of the teachers' visitation was the problem to be solved next. At first it was thought the principals and supervisors might be leaders of the various groups on visiting day. However, the chance to give the teachers opportunities to lead was too good to be lost. "*The educational program should make provision for adult responsibilities and opportunities.*"⁴

"This is what we want the teachers to do with the pupils—let's give the teachers the same opportunity," ran the thoughts of the supervisors. The leaders were then called in to present their ideas and to discuss plans. The freedom afforded by this set-up made us feel it was really *our* visiting day.

² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

The school systems chosen by the teachers were Alhambra, San Diego, Pasadena, Long Beach, and the demonstration school at the University of California at Los Angeles. After the choice of schools was made, letters were sent to the superintendents who had given us permission to visit. To each of these five centers was sent the names of the teachers who were to visit, a copy of our observation guide, and a description of the type of situation the visitors hoped to see. The observation sheets used in our visit are well worth mention.

Thorough Pre-Planning

The most essential points of the guide call attention to democratic attitudes and practices, social characteristics of the group, observable economic needs, individual differences and how they are met, group activities, and room environment. A guide such as this is a very important aid to visitors and to those being visited. These same sheets have also been used by some of us as a guide for parents visiting in our own schools.

With the leaders and the hostess schools it was planned that each visit should be followed immediately by an evaluation period. Some felt this evaluation was a waste of time. Personally, I feel that this is due to the fact we had become so accustomed to evaluating our daily work individually. Perhaps we don't do enough "talking over" of common problems. I suspect we need more interchange of ideas. Each leader was given a list of teachers in his or her group. A list of suggestions for guiding the visitation and the evaluation



period was also made available to each group leader. About a week prior to the chosen date

each teacher received a memorandum naming the date, place, school, group leader, and the means of transportation. Everything was in readiness.

The Teachers' Reactions

As for the visiting day itself, the teachers' own words and reactions provide the most effective descriptions. From the San Diego group led by C. K. Currey came the following teacher comments: "I gained so much from watching a good teacher in action." "Visiting day in San Diego was very much worthwhile, partly because it was so well organized." "Returned with new ideas and new enthusiasm."

From the Pasadena group led by Marjorie Hines: "Thought my time was well spent." "A privilege I hope teachers will enjoy in future years." "Evaluation a bit unnecessary."

From the Long Beach group led by John Dunn: "It was a privilege to visit the class for spastics and see the wonderful work being done." (The foundation work for a class for spastics had already been laid in Redlands and that made it even more interesting. We now have in Redlands the only class for spastics in San Bernardino County and we are proud of it.) "In the rooms we visited at Long Beach we had an opportunity to see fine teaching. I think what interested us most was that the teachers had many problems similar to ours." "We are especially interested in the outstanding contributions made in

Long Beach by the workshop room where teachers can make supplementary classroom materials under expert direction." (Now we, too, are dreaming of having a similar workshop on a smaller scale.)

The University of California at Los Angeles group led by Clara Clem: "Very valuable in broadening our perspectives." From an administrator: "Teachers and administrators alike can get lots of new ideas. Visiting also helps to make us more satisfied with our own set-up."

Social Values, Too

None of the teachers had any expense on the trip because the school board paid for the transportation and lunches. Each group leader was responsible for submitting expense accounts for the teachers in his group. In some instances, lunches were arranged for by the schools visited. The trip itself and the lunches gave all of us social experiences with many more teachers than we ordinarily would have contacted. In addition to the observation in the schools, there were interesting side trips, both organized by the group and planned independently by individuals or small groups. In San Diego the teachers visited the zoo and the art gallery. Such experiences provided instructional as well as social values. Other social values were gained through the transportation arrangements. It was planned that in each car there would be teachers from several different schools. Many of these teachers see each other infrequently, and the chance to visit together informally and to compare notes was greatly appreciated.

What We Brought Home

The principle outcomes of this visiting day were:

- ✦ A feeling of satisfaction with our own system and teaching situation
- ✦ New ideas to enrich our own teaching and give zest to our lives
- ✦ A better perspective on teaching—a lifting of professional sights
- ✦ A feeling of satisfaction from the fact that we could actually use many of the techniques we observed
- ✦ A broader outlook on life as a visitor—"Seeing ourselves as others see us"
- ✦ A feeling of fellowship with teachers outside our own community
- ✦ A better concept of democracy through our group experience and leadership.

There were many secondary outcomes which have become evident in our own classrooms. These include room environment changes, changes in techniques, and use of arts and crafts. In the "Framework for Public Education in California" we find the following problem given as a challenge: "By what means may the public schools play a more effective role than previously in formulating the kind of pre-service and in-service education best suited to their professional needs?"⁵

The Redlands schools have met this challenge and have come through with flying colors. As a teacher I challenge *you*. Have *your* teachers ever asked for a repeat performance? When they do you will know some of the satisfaction that came to all of us as a result of a cooperative teacher-supervisory venture in planning and carrying out our visiting day.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

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