

Teachers indicated that they believed themselves to be more understanding of all children.

In August, 1949, Pockrus reported the results of a questionnaire sent to each member of the Corpus Christi school staff.² Over five hundred teachers and principals (four-fifths of the total staff) answered the questionnaire. Eighty-six percent of those answering had completed three years of the program or were active in it in 1949. Eighty-four percent of those responding indicated that the experience in the program had been of value to them and worth the time involved. Seventy-eight percent of the total group stated that the direct study of children had helped them to become more understanding teachers.

The value placed on the program by

² Flora Fulbright Pockrus. "An Appraisal of the Child Study Program in the Corpus Christi Public Schools." Unpublished thesis, Texas College of Arts and Industries, Kingsville, 1949.

teachers was also evidenced by the fact that seventy-eight percent of those answering the questionnaire advised new teachers to participate in child study. Another interesting outcome of the survey was that ninety percent of the five hundred believed that throughout the system there was a better understanding of children. In other words, some of the fourteen percent who had never taken part in the program felt that this change had occurred in the system as a whole.

Probably the most significant evaluation of the child study program in Corpus Christi is to be seen in the continued participation. The sixth consecutive year of the program is coming to a close, and plans are being formulated for another workshop. Neither the administrators nor the teachers, however, would suggest a program such as this as the panacea for all school problems. It is one approach we have found successful.

Learning to Interpret Child Behavior

JOHN J. KURTZ

This description of the activities of a group of teachers during their first year of organized child study tells how they gained skill in interpreting child behavior. John J. Kurtz is associated with the Institute for Child Study, University of Maryland.

THE DIRECT STUDY of children is one of the more challenging programs for professional improvement in our schools today. Teachers have long been concerned about understanding children. But it is only recently that they

have had a chance to participate in systematic and continuous programs of child study. At present in more than a dozen states thousands of teachers meet regularly every two weeks in local study groups. Meetings usually are held after

school hours, and participation is essentially voluntary.

During the last decade a fairly systematic pattern for studying children has evolved comprising a basic three-year program. After this basic three-year experience teachers usually go on to work at such school problems as curriculum revision, how children learn, adequate cumulative records, reporting to parents, and many others. Many of these study groups have continued to work together for three, four, five, and more years.

Since the scope of this article must necessarily be limited, we will describe only some aspects of child study work carried on in the first year. To do this let us look in on a typical first-year group during one of its early sessions.

A Teacher Group Meets

Nine teachers and the principal of East Elementary School comprise our group. (Principals are often, though not always, members.) There is a chosen leader, but it is sometimes difficult to know who is taking this role because participation is on a peer basis. Meeting time is from 3:30 until about 5:30. Coffee is served as the group is seated around a large table in the school library. Each member has a bound notebook containing information she has been collecting about some child in whom she is particularly interested. Case records do not deal with "problem" children; these teachers are concerned with "average" children. The information is regarded as confidential and a rigid code of professional ethics governs its use. This record, gathered by teachers from school records, from home visits, and from observations of happenings in their daily work with children,

becomes the focal point for group discussion.

One Teacher's Record

By the time coffee is over, if not before, some member of the group volunteers to read her record. In our group it is Caroline Baily who takes her turn at reading. After naming the child she is studying (the true name is not used in the record), Miss Baily reads from her notebook.

September 10th

Becky is eleven and a half years old and is in the fifth grade. She is older than any of the other girls in the group. She is one of the larger girls physically, although two of the girls are taller than she. She is plump but well proportioned. Her hair is dark, parted in the middle, held back on each side with barrettes, and worn shoulder length. On occasion it is curled, but more often straight with the ends turning naturally. Her complexion is fair and healthy. She has a slight sprinkling of freckles across her nose. Her eyes are dark and shining. Her teeth are a little crowded and her mouth structure affects her speech to a degree. She has a high pitched voice with a slight nasal twang.

Becky has an older sister. Her father is deceased and her mother has married again. Becky therefore has a stepfather. Her name has not been changed. The family lives in an apartment. Their religion is Judaism.

When Miss Baily paused for a moment someone asked, "Exactly how old is Becky's sister?" Miss Baily didn't know. The leader asked if the group felt that such exact information was necessary. Several teachers made comments, among them, "It would make a difference if the sister is only slightly older or considerably older. If Becky's sister is, say sixteen, she would probably be

in late adolescence and would have different interests in keeping with her maturity." After some discussion the group agreed that they should record the exact ages of siblings if possible. Miss Baily made a note to get this information, and then continued reading.

September 12th

Becky entered kindergarten in a school in this city in February, 1942. After one year in kindergarten she entered a non-reading group for one semester. She went to 1A and 1B and transferred to another school when she moved in the fall of 1944. She spent a year in the 2A (being retained for one semester). Then the family moved again and she entered our 2B in December, 1945. She was retained in the 2B. She completed 3A and 3B in 1945-46 and was sent to summer school in 1946. She had been sent for strengthening, but she was under the impression that she was making up a grade. When she returned in September, 1946, she thought she was being placed in 4B. It was nearly the end of the semester before she and her family understood her placement. She came to me in February, 1947, in the 4B. The group was a 4B-5A combination. She was deeply concerned about her placement and sensitive to grouping.

At this point, one of the men asked Miss Baily what evidence there was that Becky was "deeply concerned about her placement and sensitive to grouping." Miss Baily explained that this was her opinion at the time, and decided to place the statement in parentheses in order to designate it as opinion. She then continued to read from her record.

September 14th

We were sharing our vacation experiences this morning. Becky was sparkling with enthusiasm, waving her hand eagerly. She started telling about her experiences at camp, recounting the daily schedule, little

things that were said, hikes they took, bus trips they went on, etc. It was quite a lengthy talk. Finally, LeeRoy, who was in charge, said, "Becky, you're telling too much. Someone else wants a turn." Becky replied, "But I only want to tell one thing more." There were notable groans from the class and Sam said, "Yeah—but you've already told so much. I think you ought to tell just one thing and give somebody else a chance." I said, "Becky, why don't you finish telling about the bus trip and save the others until another time. We'll have other opportunities to share vacation experiences." A familiar scowl appeared on her face. She drooped, but still looked defiant. She said, "That's all I want to tell" and sat down, resting her head on one hand. For a while she took no part in the discussion. Then she started adding to nearly everyone's contribution by saying, "That reminds me . . ." or "That was just like one time . . ."

Goddard, who is rather well liked, told briefly about his camping experience in Maine, then went on to tell how his family met him and they went to Canada. Becky interrupted to say, "I thought we were only supposed to tell about one thing. You're telling two." "But this is interesting," said Hansell. "What did you see in Canada?" Goddard told a little about the French and English signs and said he would tell more later. Becky scowled again and withdrew from the discussion.

One of the participants broke in to comment that Becky must be a very poor sport. Another teacher, who knew Becky, did not agree with this point of view. As an outgrowth of the ensuing discussion Miss Baily wrote in the margin of her record book, "Becky takes more than a proportionate share of time telling of experiences." All members of the group appeared to accept this as a better statement, for it was an objective description of one of Becky's typical ways of behaving. Then Miss Baily continued reading.

September 17th

The class was organized into three reading groups today. Becky was put in the middle group. When the books were given out, the children were looking at them—getting acquainted with them. Becky came up to me and said, "This is a fifth grade book, isn't it?" I replied, "Yes, it is, Becky. Doesn't it look interesting? All the stories have been selected to appeal to fifth grade boys and girls." She relaxed and said, "I didn't want any fourth grade book." She returned to her seat smiling and hugging the book.

September 20th

On the basis of the previous week's work, the class was divided into two spelling groups—one an independent study group, the other a supervised study group. Becky was put into the latter. As I worked with the group Becky was sulking. She kept her head down and doodled on her notebook. When I explained that in this group we would learn how to study and use new words so that we could attack them independently, she sat up quickly and said, "If anybody in this group gets Perfect on Friday, can they be put in the other group?" I suggested it might be wise to work in the group for a steady period to get the full benefit. Getting Perfect would mean real progress—but other things would have to be considered. She dropped her head and returned to her doodling.

September 21st

I was on playground duty today. Becky came over to me complaining that Judith wouldn't let anybody jump with her rope. I looked over at the group of about a dozen girls jumping rope. "The other girls are jumping, Becky." "Well, she won't let me jump," she said. I answered, "Since it is Judith's rope, we'll have to let her decide who shall be in the game." She went back to the group, watching them. Every once in a while she would comment on what was done wrong. The girls ignored her.

Later I questioned Judith about the incident. "Oh, everybody said Becky missed but she insisted that she didn't and wouldn't

take her turn turning. That isn't fair." I agreed.

September 22nd

Becky brought her news contribution to show me this morning before nine. This is a usual thing. She comes to me every morning to show or tell me something.

She had about six different pieces to share. During the news period she kept jumping up and giving her news ahead of everyone else. Finally Sharon said, "Becky, you've had your turn." "I know, but I brought a lot of news." Tony suggested, "Wait and see if someone else has that news. Maybe you can just add to theirs. If nobody gives it, then you can give it at the end." Becky sat down with the familiar scowl on her face.

Here a member of the group remarked that failing to share seemed to be characteristic of Becky, mentioning the vacation experience sharing incident, the news report period, and the rope turning episode. Aided by contributions from various members of the group, Miss Baily listed the following behavioral characteristics which seemed apparent from the record to date:

1. Becky takes more than a proportionate share of time in oral work.
2. Becky fails to take turns.
3. Becky scowls when rebuked by fellow students or teacher.
4. Becky asks questions about grade level and progress.
5. Becky frequently goes to teacher to show or tell something.

The Group Learns

How to Interpret Behavior

At this point the leader told of her experience in a leaders' meeting. The group leaders get together several times a year for the purpose of developing and clarifying ways of guiding their groups in building and interpreting case

records. Frequently they are helped in these meetings by a child study consultant. She told of how the leaders' group had examined a case record together, had pulled out certain behavior patterns, ways of behaving that recur in the record, and had further used all of the data in the record to bring out a number of possible explanations for the behavior in question.

Our group was ready for the challenge. Through combined thinking they suggested the following as possible reasons which might be back of Becky's "taking more than a proportionate share of time in oral work."

1. She may be trying to keep up with her older sister.
2. She may feel insecure at home and is trying particularly hard to win recognition in school.
3. She may feel that because she is older and larger than others in the class she should do more than others.
4. She may be trying to impress her classmates because she apparently was not successful in her group on the playground.
5. She may feel or have felt discrimination because of her religion, and is reacting in this manner.
6. She may feel inferior (retardation, home conditions, etc.) and is striving to make up for shortcomings in her life.
7. She may be trying to avoid another failure as she apparently has already been hurt in this way.

With this the session ended. One of the teachers was heard to remark to a fellow teacher, "You know, I find I am handling all my pupils differently since I have been in child study. I work more positively, and discipline problems are not what they were. I think we do

more, learn more, and have a happier time together."

At subsequent meetings other records will be discussed in similar fashion. These teachers will help each other to write comprehensive records objectively, and they will help each other to use data about children in learning to understand them. They will also help each other in applying scientific generalizations about human development and behavior in individual cases. The preliminary and partial analysis given above is tentative. As the record continues to build, and as teachers grow in their ability to relate general knowledge about human development and behavior to specific situations, some of the tentative explanations may be invalidated, some will be substantiated with further data, and others may be added. It is a process that provides clues for working with children, and goes a long way toward avoiding the snap judgment that Becky, for example, is a poor sport and should be made to see this.

It has been possible to give only snatches of what goes on at an early stage in teacher study groups. Other experiences will be shared by them before even the first year ends. Increasingly, with periodic help from specialists in the field of human development, teachers push further their understanding of children and youth.¹ Increasingly teachers come to see countless implications for the total school program in the light of the basic objective of guiding all children toward maximum development of their potentialities.

¹ See accompanying article by Hugh V. Perkins, "Teachers Grow in Understanding Children."

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