

sources are enormous. In Montana, and in Connecticut, I have had opportunities to see these resources in action. As educators we are just beginning to sense how rich and varied these resources are. We must make working teams of educators and lay citizens. We must enlist the cooperation of all. We must ourselves be humble and realize schools are only part of the community resources for education. We must learn how to study a community and its needs, taking inventory of both its problems and its resources for solutions.

When schools and teachers become an integral part of a total community effort in education, teachers will not be as lonely as they now are. It will not be as easy to charge them with Communism, nor will they be as vulnerable to

pressure groups seeking this or that advantage. But most important of all, a total mobilization of the community will for the first time give education a new power, a new dynamic.

If the present crisis does not move us to develop a really dynamic education, no military victory (important as such a victory is) can save freedom. If the present crisis dramatizes the plight of freedom so teachers and other citizens will be moved to stop their reliance on mere knowledge, if it moves them to teach freedom and democracy with zeal and compelling power, and to take steps to make every community in the totality of its functioning an educational enterprise, we stand a chance to save freedom for ourselves and a chance to commend it to oppressed humanity.

Second Graders Find Security and Acceptance

LUCY KISSELL and MAYME A. SWEET

Lucy Kissell and Mayme A. Sweet, of the Denver, Colorado, Public Schools, tell how books prepared by teachers helped children gain a new sense of security and acceptance in home, school and community.

CONCERNED ABOUT THE STEREOTYPES of family life which are described in many primary textbooks, two second-grade teachers determined to write their own books. The stories, they decided, would be about the children in their classrooms and the houses in which these children lived. Not only would the books be descriptive of home life in the community, but they would

give to children the status and approval that personal recognition and acceptance can give.

Roof-tops and *Top-knots* are the titles of their books. They belong to the second graders in the Wyatt school in a very real way. Here are three of the stories selected from the books about the houses of Mary Ann, Anna, and Rosalie:

¶ Mary Ann can see the trains and the mountains. The switch engines go and come and come and go in the front of her house. The mountains stand tall and still and they are always there.

Across the tracks are big buildings. Some hold things that come into Denver on the trains. Others keep things that are going out of Denver on the trains.

Between Mary Ann's house and the railroad tracks is a big place where tall weeds grow. This is a good place to play hide and seek. Kids have fun on Blake Street.

* * * *

¶ Cars bizz bizz past Anna's house. She lives on a busy street. Big trucks go past all day, all night. They take all kinds of things away from Denver. They bring all kinds of things into Denver. And nobody stops to watch them. Everybody is hurrying too much to see.

Anna can't see the mountains so well because there are stores across the street that keep them out of sight. On the corner is a grocery store where Anna can run to get a loaf of bread, some butter or a quart of milk for her mother.

* * * *

¶ Down the street in a red brick house lives Rosalie. Her house is right out on the street, too. She has a yard at one side with a fence in front. Her house is right next to the house next door. The walls touch. You can't walk between them. Not even a kitten could get through. In some cities there are blocks and blocks of houses with no space between them and no front yards. My, my, Denver kids are lucky!

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HOW THE STORIES WERE WRITTEN

Equipped with pencil, notebook, crayons and sketchbook, Lucy Kissell and Marion Butterfield traveled to the Wyatt district for six successive Sundays to make their recordings of life in the community. Prior to the excursions, they had listed the addresses of the children and had planned which homes they would write up each week.

As they sat on the curbstone of one block or another doing their work, the teachers were soon surrounded by the children, the neighborhood dogs, and interested people in the block. Everyone wanted to know what the teachers were doing. Miss Kissell explained that the sketches and stories were to be the reading stories for the second graders. Little did these bystanders realize the hours of work that would have to go into the stories before they would be suitable for use with the youngsters in class instruction.

HOW THE STORIES WERE PRESENTED

Finally when the stories and illustrations were finished, they were assembled in a large 12 x 18 loose-leaf book. Enough mimeographed copies of the stories were made so that each child might have a complete set. But they were introduced to the class one at a time.

The first day everyone read Mary Ann's story. Help was given with the difficult words. After the words were discussed and their meanings understood, Mary Ann was given the opportunity of being the first one to read the story about her house to the class. Then others who wished to could read Mary Ann's story.

Children's Reactions to the Stories

Great feelings of satisfaction and pride were expressed as each child recognized the picture of his house and neighborhood which had been so sympathetically and artistically drawn. Never had Danny's home seemed so wonderful to him. The brown and grey fence across from Danny's house, irregular though it was, pleased him. It made his neighborhood seem cozy. He knew the trees were there, but some-

how they had never before looked so beautiful.

Similar reactions were observed in all the children as they smiled to themselves, or as they left their desks to point out some feature of their pictures to their neighbors, or as they read the stories silently to themselves.

In no time at all each child could read his own story. Even Floy, whom Miss Kissell usually had to help with every word, had persevered. The children commented on Floy's reading, "She



Courtesy, Marian Butterfield

Down the street in a red brick house lives Rosalie.

read it good. Didn't she, Miss Kissell?" Floy, like the other children, was interested in the story about her house. She enjoyed reading what was familiar to her. She seemed to like the part about all the noises that could be heard down her street. "That's the way it really was," she observed.

OBJECTIVES IN WRITING THE STORIES

The writing of the books centered around three quite separate and distinct objectives:

- To give status to each child by recognizing and accepting uniqueness of each person and home.
- To include certain implications toward social learnings which children might be helped to discover as they discussed the stories.
- To encourage children to read through providing them with stories about experiences which were familiar to them.

Stories Give Children Status

The first objective, that of giving status to each child in the group, has been described in part in the preceding paragraphs.

Another approach to this objective was made through the effort to describe home and family situations as they actually occur. For example, when the baby spills his milk, his mother may smile; but she does not always act that way, though some of the stories which the children read in their primers seem to indicate that she does. More frequently she is annoyed; sometimes she is irritated; and sometimes she even scolds and punishes.

The story about Floy says, "When you sit under the trees you can hear

lots of things up and down the street. Trains whistle. Babies cry when they get hurt. Mothers get tired and scold them. Kids yell and scream and chase each other up and down the street. Sometimes all those sounds might be there and you would not hear them, if you were busy thinking about something else." The expression, "Mothers get tired and scold them," was inserted to admit and recognize a phase of human behavior. Through discussion children were helped to understand that mothers get cross and scold for the same reasons that children cry, some reasons being quite extraneous to the situation itself.

When these situations are talked about, children come to understand that parents do not scold just to be mean. Generally speaking, something has happened which has caused them to be tired or worried and that causes



Courtesy, Marian Butterfield

Freddie Coronado likes to play cowboy after school.

them to scold. Such concepts, it is hoped, may help the child to a better understanding of himself and his parents and thus serve to strengthen family relationships. Unless these concepts are developed, any variant from perfection or from a middle-class picture of what family life should be causes feelings of guilt and of shame which in many cases may lead to feelings of insecurity and inferiority.

Stories Contribute to Social Understanding

The second objective, the development of social understandings, was sought in two ways: first, by writing stories for children to read which would describe the varied roles people play, the differences in people's way of living as well as the differences in people themselves; and second, by discussing these concepts with the children. The discussion is, of course, the crux of the understanding. It should be directed in such a manner that it will assist the child in recognition of what he thinks, how he has come to hold a certain opinion, whether other people share his feeling and whether his thinking has been sound and reasonable.

In the sketches in *Top-knots*, effort was made to single out attributes of the child that concerned him personally and attributes that concerned his relation to the group as a whole. It was hoped that through sketches of each child in the class, the children might be helped to see that many personalities, many talents and many opinions feed into the make-up of the group as a whole; that in any group no one person is more important than any other but that each has his contribution to make and

to make in his own way; and that the group must learn to recognize and appreciate it for what it is.

It was hoped also that the children would understand that a contribution need not be what a person does but rather what he is. Thus, the quiet person lends balance to a group, the curious person widens the group's perception, the talkative extends the group's contacts, the careful person lends depth to the quality of group production, and so forth.

Children Select a Student Councilman

It was also felt important to show that certain qualities are suited to certain jobs, so that when a selection had to be made the person most suitable for the job might be selected. This would do away with the habit of selecting pretty little girls in the group for everything simply because they happen to be pretty little girls.

The story about Elmer Marsh illustrates this:

¶ Elmer Marsh goes to Student Council. We said he should go because he remembers things and can tell them. Elmer told us that he could do this because he thought real hard when someone was talking and then he said it over to himself.

This story grew out of the experience of selecting a representative for Student Council. When a representative had to be chosen the first thing to do was to find out what the group knew about the Student Council, who was in it, how these people were selected, what the council did as a governing body in the school and how the second graders could best become an active part of it. Having found satisfactory answers to

these questions through a series of interviews, the class proceeded to choose its representative.

First essential offered for a representative was "sitting up straight," that being the standard which had been used in previous situations in which someone was to be chosen for a job. Now any second grader when confronted with the reasonableness of this criterion could see that it might not be entirely sound. More realistic criteria had to be found.

Attention was directed to the information which had been gathered about the functions of a Student Council. From a study of this information and a clearer statement of its meaning the class stated without any difficulty two bases for selection: first, someone who can listen well enough to what happens at a council meeting to be able to report it back to the class; second, someone who will be able to talk in Student Council and tell council members what our class wants them to know.

With these two qualifications in mind, the class selected two children who seemed to be equally well-fitted for the job, one as representative, the other as alternate. Elmer was one of those selected.

STORIES ENCOURAGE READING

The third objective was that of providing reading material with familiar content which would encourage better and more extensive reading. The degree of success in attaining this objective was reflected in the attitudes which children expressed toward the stories.

First, the child about whom the material was written was in most cases the first to learn any unfamiliar words

that occurred in the story. Second, little groups of children would get together to read the stories and talk about the pictures. They especially enjoyed reading the stories aloud. Their voice inflections and expression made their simple stories seem like literary gems. Third, as the stories became familiar to the children they would quote passages whenever occasions arose which reminded them of the stories. For example, when the class made "get well" cards for Mary Ann, someone said, "Jesse can take them to her because 'Jesse lives down the street just a little farther than Mary Ann.'" The quotation he used is the opening sentence of the story about Jesse's house.

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Our evaluation of the project was based on the question, "What, if any, change was noted in the social structure of the group?"

Problems of group living did not magically disappear. There were, however, some changes that can be recognized and recorded:

- The quality of group thinking improved.
- Ability of the children to share experiences with others increased.
- Children's perceptions became sharper. They drew inferences beyond the obvious. For example, when Cleo looked into the mirror and said, "I look different to myself than I do to you," he realized that the way he felt about himself was different from the ways others felt about him.
- The group became more interactive. Children were less concerned about themselves and more conscious of others.

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