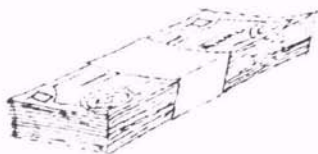


# Webster School



**W**EBSTER Elementary School, in Magna, Utah, is situated about 15 miles from the center of Salt Lake City, right next to the mountains. It is unique because it has a "community" in operation within the school.

Boys and girls are managing a bookstore, a bank, a variety store, and other shops. The managers have assistants, clerks, bookkeepers, and even auditors. All managers and employees are paid their wages in "Websterville" money—merits, centimerits, etc.

Fourth, fifth, and sixth graders are going to Law School during recesses. They see films on court procedure and law, and listen to the teacher, a former policeman, explain how courts operate. These boys and girls want to pass the bar exams and become lawyers. They plan to earn Websterville money by defending other children who are arraigned for fighting, chewing gum, or breaking class laws and school rules.

In addition to these examples, dozens of other projects are going on at Webster.

## The Webster Project

Webster is an old school in Granite School District. Located about 12 miles from the district office, Webster seemed to have been forgotten when the 1971-72 school year began. The old gray building resembled a

prison more than a place of learning. Trees, shrubs, and flowers were nonexistent. Even the playground equipment was bleak and dreary.

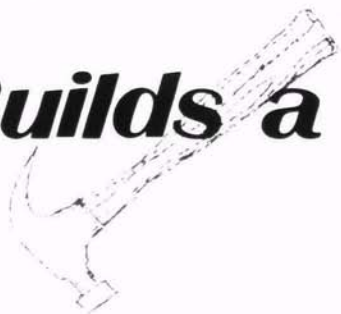
A change began in September 1971 when Webster received a grant of \$24,000 from Title I funds. Written by the new principal, Ronald J. Hermansen, the project was designed specifically to help the fourth, fifth, and sixth graders from families with low income and/or educational deficiencies.

Low income homes are not difficult to find in the Webster vicinity. Many children come from homes which receive welfare help, and more than 100 of the 450 children receive free lunch.

Out of the 52 elementary schools in the district, the children at Webster ranked 51st (tied with another school) in reading and mathematics achievement in 1970-71. Many parents were not interested in their children's progress, and they gave the pupils little encouragement at home. In fact, in some cases, the homes seemed to be teaching values opposite to those of the school.

Before the project got under way, children were constantly fighting. They pushed and shoved in the classrooms and halls as well as on the playground. Some would stay after school five or ten minutes to avoid being beaten up on the way home. In addition to fighting by individuals, gangs were often lined up for battle as soon as they left the school grounds.

# Builds a Community



JUNE E. BERRY\*

## Objectives of the Project

The objectives of the project were to help boys and girls to have

- An improved self-image
- More success experiences
- Greater achievement in basic skills
- Better attitude and more belongingness at school.

Fortunately, the teachers in the Webster School were exceptionally well qualified and dedicated to helping children. Some drove 20 to 30 miles each day to work at Webster. Although plenty of problems and frustrations arose at first, the faculty members were very cooperative and hard working. After the project began, they put in hundreds of hours beyond those required of other teachers.

## Real-Life Curriculum in the School

One of the tools used in the project is the Life Internship Model (LIM) of curriculum developed by Asahel D. Woodruff. His model emphasizes real-life experiences, intrinsic motivation, and individual interests. He has said the school should be like a "foyer into the community," not a place for dispensing isolated facts which may never be used in life. We should prepare "livers" in schools, not factmongers.

The Life Internship Model has three instructional vehicles—Carrier Projects, Units,

and Ventures. Carrier Projects are projects such as a classroom bank or an aquarium. These are supported by Units which the children go through if they need to in order to complete the project.

Ventures are used for an introduction to a subject. For example, a child may want to know about volcanoes. He decides how much he wants to find out and how he will do it. As a result of completing a Venture, one child may decide to make a miniature volcano. Making a volcano would be a Carrier Project and the Carrier Project would have several units to support it, such as papier-mâché or clay modeling, layers of rock (igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary), and ammonium dichromate (to simulate lava). Some of the popular Ventures at Webster are Cartoons, Guns, Deer, Puppets, Birds, and Clothing of Other Lands.

In order to give children more real-life experiences, the number of field trips has been increased. One boy who chose a Venture on guns went to the sheriff's office to learn about guns from him. Fourteen children interested in banking took a field trip to a nearby bank. These field trips differ from traditional ones because only those who have a need or an interest in the subject are involved.

Since the real thing cannot always be

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## For teachers and others who care...



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available, films and filmstrips, tapes and records, and other media are used extensively. These media are used with small groups or individuals who are interested in the topics, not the whole class.

## "Websterville" for Real-Life Experiences

The 10 teachers involved in the project decided that one way children could learn about "living" was by having their own community in the school. Under the direction of the teachers, boys and girls have built a community in the halls on the top floor of the building. The stores and businesses are constructed with real two by fours with paneling to cover the frames—not with cardboard and poster paint as most classroom banks or stores are.

By May 1972, the project included a bank building, a variety store, a bookstore, a photo shop, a post office, a newspaper, a radio station, and drugstore.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the beauty shop, the mint, the police force, and Law School were operating out of various classrooms.

The bank issued paper money called Golden Merits, and the mint produced coins called centimerits (CM's). One hundred centimerits are equal to one Golden Merit. Both teachers and students participated in choosing the name for the money as well as for the community (Websterville).

## Behavior Modification with Websterville Money

Behavior modification fits into the project naturally. The seven classroom teachers, special education teachers, principal, media coordinator, and custodian receive Websterville money every week. They are free to use their quota in any way they wish. They pay children for working in the stores, for working in the media center, for not fighting, and

<sup>1</sup> The drugstore was called a Remedy Shop for obvious reasons. Each teacher has a prescription pad and can write out prescriptions for one or more centimerits worth of goods. This device saves teachers from carrying so many heavy coins all day long.

for any behavior they want a particular child to continue.

Children use their money for buying goods or services in the community and for privileges in the classroom. For example, one teacher sells 10 minutes of free time for 50 CM's. Another sells special bathroom privileges for 25 CM's. Most of the teachers reward liberally for math and reading accomplishments. The school newspaper costs 25 centimerits for each issue, and stamped envelopes are one centimerit each. At the end of the school year, sixth graders cash in their merits at the rate of five merits for one real U.S. dollar. Fourth and fifth graders can leave their money in the bank and earn interest on it all summer.

Websterville operates from 2:15 to 3 p.m. daily. During this time the children open their businesses, and other children can buy what they want. Most teachers permit four or five students out of class at one time into the halls to "shop." The post office sometimes operates overtime in order to keep ahead of the great volume of mail.

### Concepts Learned in the Community

As the children operate their community, buying and selling all kinds of goods and services, they are learning many concepts usually "covered" in traditional textbooks.



As children buy and sell their goods and services, they are learning in a lifelike setting.

The difference is that in Websterville they learn them in a lifelike setting.

Some learnings in connection with the newspaper are reading, writing, spelling, proofreading, interviewing, advertising, and mathematics. In the bank there is emphasis on addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, and percentages. Most of the boys and girls have real-life experiences with deposit slips, savings accounts, and checking accounts because they use these bank services every day. Those who borrow money become involved in loans and interest. A few have invested their money in businesses such as the Beauty Shop and the Box Company.

Addition, subtraction, and percentage are emphasized in the stores. Managers learn about profit and loss, advertising, and merchandising. The clerks learn about selling and bookkeeping.

The beauty shop helps children with cleanliness, grooming, and style. The girls and boys study nail care, shoe shining, and hair care by actually doing them rather than reading about them in health books.

Children who run the post office have experiences with reading, writing, alphabetizing, and weights and measures. All the children in the program benefit by writing letters. Even those who cannot write their own letters may have their friends write for them.



Websterville businesses are constructed with wooden frames covered by paneling.

## Growth in Nonacademic Areas

In addition to the knowledge gained in the content fields, there is an obvious improvement in other areas. Some of these have to do with self-concepts, work habits, and careers.

*Self-Concept.* Since the boys and girls choose whether they want to be a store clerk or bank teller or postman, they are able to do work they *want* to do and thus are more satisfied than they would be trying to read a traditional textbook. In general, most of the children have been successful in the jobs they chose. The money they earn also adds to their feelings of success and happiness. This seems to develop more positive self-concepts.

Although it is too early to have statistical data, the teachers and principals feel that attitudes are being changed in many of the children. Some children who had created serious behavior problems have become model citizens when given responsibility and success in their work.

*Work Habits.* Those who work in the shops are learning the need for good work habits. They discover that if they do unsatisfactory work, there are dozens of others who are anxious to have their jobs—whether it is as bank president or shoeshine boy. The teachers feel that the boys and girls are more responsible and seem to be developing initiative. All of these traits were noticeably



Real-life experiences foster growth in self-concept and eagerness to learn.

lacking in many students before the project began.

*Career Education.* A benefit not incorporated in the original objectives is the information about careers which children are exposed to. First, in the construction of the buildings, the boys and girls who worked on them learned a little about carpentry. Now, in the stores, they learn about salesmanship, managerial work, and bookkeeping. Career experiences are found in all the other shops and in the post office and newspaper.

When field trips are taken in the town of Magna, the children have the opportunity of hearing about occupations from the businessmen themselves. Those who visited the bank saw all types of jobs there. The ones who visited the drugstore and variety stores received firsthand information and insight into merchandising and selling. The children ask more important and pointed questions than in traditional field trips because they *need to know* the answers.

Why has the project been successful so far? The teachers feel that the activities are relevant to life needs and the children can recognize the relevancy. As a result they seem to be interested in learning. The motivation is built into the projects and activities.

Another reason for Webster's success is that activities and experiences are individualized. In other words, the child works on projects geared to his abilities and interests. He can visit the bank or watch the filmstrip when he needs to. There may be a few others who are ready when he is, but very often he does it alone.

The third ingredient for success is the emphasis on nonverbal experiences. Since many of the children are considerably below grade level in reading, tapes, films, and filmstrips help them to gain the concepts that children in more affluent neighborhoods acquire through reading. Even though it takes more time and money, the child makes contact with the real thing or a good representation of it and he really acquires the concept.

Although there are still many problems to be solved in the Webster Project, the results thus far are encouraging. □

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