

THE ESSENTIAL nature of the crisis through which we are living is neither military, nor political, nor economic, but moral.—Edward Hallett Carr.

Teachers Enthusiastic Over 'Little Red School House' Plan, Note Favorable Trends

By RALPH R. GOMPERTZ
(Editor's note: This is the second in a series of four articles dealing with an educational program being tried at Walteria elementary school. A number of classes have been set up containing first, second, and third grade students or fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students for the purpose of instruction. The usual grade distinctions have been eliminated (except for official records). The underlying principle of the program, popularly referred to as "the little red school house plan," is that children, as individuals, learn more from each other because of their differences. The plan, which may have far-reaching effects, was developed by Walter Rehvoild, director of instruction for the Torrance Unified School District.)

In theory many ideas sound perfect. Such, for instance, appears to be the case with "the little red school house plan," whose fundamental principles were discussed at length in an article last week.

But how has this plan worked out in actual practice at Walteria elementary school? What do the teachers think of it who have had to work with it since the beginning of the semester?

In order to find the answer to this question, we interviewed the seven Walteria teachers who are teaching these special inter-age classes; we also talked to Alfred Artuso, Walteria school principal; A. N. Posner, assistant superintendent, educational services; and Dr. J. H. Hull, superintendent of schools and secretary to the board of education.

The reactions were surprising. Surprising Agreement

Although teachers were interviewed individually, they showed surprising and significant agreement regarding the following major tendencies:

1. More attention could be paid to the individual needs of students.
2. Pupils appear to be learning more and better.
3. Children are gaining noticeably in social growth — they have a deeper sense of loyalty and responsibility and they are learning to share with each other.
4. Teaching a mixed class is neither easier nor harder than teaching a traditional class.
5. The mixed class is more challenging and stimulating to a teacher and keeps the teacher from getting into a rut.
6. There is a friendlier classroom spirit and students are less contentious.
7. Classroom and instruction are more flexible.

Here is what the individual educators had to say:

Frank Taylor has taught two years in Torrance and three years in Hawthorne. He is teaching one of the classes combining fourth, fifth, and sixth grade.

"I am most impressed with the children's friendly competitive attitude," Taylor stated enthusiastically.

Everyone Learns

Taylor emphasized that the older students are in no way held back in learning even though they are in a mixed group and may be called upon to help some of the younger students. He pointed out that they learn in two ways: 1) By reviewing the facts when they are called upon to help the younger students and 2) by the admiration which the younger ones have for them, creating in them a desire to learn new facts to retain that admiration and to keep the younger ones from catching up with them.

"I haven't found this classroom to require more work than

an ordinary classroom," Taylor said. "However, my method of preparation has changed—before I prepared for the class, now I prepare for the individual."

Aware that the first thing parents desire to know is whether their youngster is getting a good foundation in the three R's, Taylor stated with assurance: "If anything, this arrangement gives us a superior chance to work with the 3 R's. I never have seen a roomful of academic work as eagerly as this room—it's like feeding fish!"

Doesn't Like Label

Commenting on the "little red school house" tag by which this arrangement is commonly identified, Taylor said: "In a sense I wouldn't label this plan 'the little red school house plan'. Instruction in the old-fashioned little red school house was much more rigid, and individual differences weren't considered."

Mrs. Florence Porter has taught five years in Torrance and eight years in Los Angeles. She has a 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade combination classroom now.

"I feel that the greatest benefit of the plan is that each child can progress according to his ability rather than his grade—I think that the children can learn more and that they can be given more individual attention," Mrs. Porter stated.

Mrs. Elinor Courtney, who has taught in this district two years, is teaching a 4th, 5th, and 6th grade combination classroom.

"This type of classroom offers students a larger range of experiences to learn from" she explained.

Roderick McDaniel, whose three out of four years of teaching have been spent in the Torrance Unified School District, pointed out two factors which impressed him most about the multi-age plan:

"The children feel more at ease—there are not nearly the number of squabbles that you have in a regular class."

"The younger ones get a lot of attention from the older ones and the older ones gain satisfaction from always being referred to," he explained.

Sponge - Effect

The other outstanding development which he has noticed is

the "sponge effect" of learning, McDaniel pointed out.

"The young ones pick up a tremendous amount just by listening," he said.

One of the great values of teaching such a class is that it makes the teacher strikingly aware of the extraordinary differences in a classroom, McDaniel said. That difference also exists (Turn to Page 7)

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When They Share, They Care ...

"When people share, people care!"

This is a perfect summary of the purpose of an educational advisory council such as the TEAC in this city and similar councils in other cities, Dr. J. H. Hull stated this week.

The phrase was submitted to him by the Community Coordinating Council in Stephenson, Michigan. The council is the equivalent of the local TEAC.

Dr. Hull received the statement as a result of a follow-up study to his doctoral dissertation. Title of the dissertation made eight years ago was "Lay Advisory Committees to Boards of Education."

The follow-up study is intended to find out what has happened to the advisory committees since the time of the original dissertation.

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