

ttt



by ROBIN HADFIELD

Take a look in a typical second-grade room and you would probably see children working with blocks, spelling out words-cat, dog, cow, TTT.

TTT is not a word, but the children know what it means. To them it is a class where they can have fun and learn at the same time.

Triple T stands for Teaching Trainers of Teachers, a project under the auspices of the United States Office of Education. The program began in 1967 as the Tri-University Project in Education, involving three universities—New York University, University of Washington and the University of Nebraska.

In many elementary classrooms, an observer would see blackboards, bulletin boards and desks in neat rows.

But in the five classrooms at Elliott School in Lincoln that are practicums for the Triple T Project, the scene is entirely different. About 150 children are included in the program at Elliott.

There is no desk for the teacher. Traditional student desks have been replaced by learning centers. There is a workbench, an oven and such a variety of activity that to a casual observer the class might appear chaotic.

The difference between these practicum classrooms and regular classes is not only in physical arrangement of the room, but also in what and how things are happening in the room.

Triple T rooms are basically

arranged in centers, according to Patricia Kurtenbach, sixth grade teacher.

"We have reading, art, writing, math, and science centers most of the time, plus other areas that change. A workbench, drama area, listening center, and cooking center have all been put into operation at one time or another," said Kurtenbach.

"The physical arrangement of the room is not as important as what's happening inside the room," said Carol Hadfield, fifth grade teacher. "The arrangement does help though, because it provides more storage space, and lowers the noise level of the room," she said.

Desks are not completely outlawed. In the fifth grade, about eight students have desks. "With a desk, they have some place to be by themselves, to do their writing, or to store their materials. For some of them it's a kind of security," commented Hadfield.

One Triple T teacher remarked, "Because the children don't all have to be straight-jacketed into learning, I'm free to help and encourage a shy little girl, to go through the workbook with a poor reader, to touch a black child who would never be touched in a regular classroom."

The academics of the Triple T rooms are not completely different from regular classes, but the methods are. "We still teach the proverbial '3 R's' and we use regular math books," Kurtenbach said.

"Math is taught with the use

of blocks, counters, shapes, balances, clocks, scales, and measuring devices. Often the math seems like play, but it always has a purpose," said Hadfield.

Writing is also emphasized. Each student has a log where he writes down his daily activities, for his own record and for his teacher. Children are encouraged to dictate stories, which helps them create, since they are not concerned about spelling or punctuation at the present time.

Reading is taught in a rather unusual manner in the lower grades. "A child draws a picture and I encourage him to tell a story about it. Sometimes they recite into a tape recorder, then we type it up and give it to the student," said Booth.

"They seem to enjoy their stories, but usually get tired of having to find someone to read to them. Eventually, they ask one of the adults or a classmate to help him read," continued Booth.

Besides academic subjects, Triple T tries to teach other things.

Hadfield said, "We try to teach the students that they have a responsibility, in the classroom, and that it carries over to the community. They also learn to make responsible decisions and to get along with others."

With all the different activities going on at once in the room, the teacher needs help to supervise. Participants in the Triple T project are required to help in the practicum twice a week.



These include experienced school teachers, pre-doctoral students and college professors. Directors and other faculty members on campus also help out at Elliott.

Each teacher has an aide who is someone from the community, not educationally certified as a teacher, a person who might be able to speak to the children on their own level.

Elliott also has a supervisor to help out as an extra adult when needed—Frances Reinehr—formerly the fifth grade teacher.

"I help the teachers plan and show the rooms to visitors, and explain the project to visitors. I also serve on the Governing Board of Triple T, so I have a vote on everything that comes up concerning the whole program," said Reinehr.

Parents have a choice as to whether or not they want their child to be in a Triple T class. The teachers try to get the parents involved in the classroom, too. If the parents show no interest in school, neither will the child," she said.

An evaluation was made by the parents last year of the Triple T classrooms and their child's progress in the classes.

Throughout the evaluation, the parents thought that their child had a better attitude, was more willing to talk about and attend school, and seemed to have a better attitude toward the world around them and towards the other children.

Children in Triple T classrooms seem to like school more than they did before. When asked "What is TTT," Kathy said, "It's a real life class." And Mark, said, "In other classes the teacher cares about math, in this class, she cares about you."

Triple T also has classes other than those at Elliott. Nurseries are held at Pentzer Park in Lincoln, at the Human Development Lab on East Campus and at Sunside Storefront School on Omaha's near North Side. Also in Omaha, Sacred Heart Catholic School has converted to all open, Triple T-like classes. Participants of the project also take part in tutoring at the Winnebago Indian Reservation.

Triple T may not have the answers to the questions in modern education, but at least they are asking "Why not?" rather than "Why?"

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