

'The Little Red Schoolhouse'

Alaskan Style Field Test Project

By DARCY LEWIS

PART I.

Remember those bygone days when the first snap, crackle and pop of cold, crisp air invaded the warm, lazy haze of never-long-enough summertime?

Summertime, when school, its books, its teachers, its constant homework and its ubiquitous schoolbell were temporarily suspended. For much too soon, the clang, clang, clanging of the cacophonous bell would commence its call to learning.

It didn't matter whether we went to one of the large, sophisticated "city schools" or the usually painted "notice-me-barn red and one-roomed" schoolhouses that were located in the rural free delivery area routes called the "grass roots of

America" according to Western civilization.

When the schoolbell belched its resounding sound in one town, it was heard round the world!

Progress can be beautiful and it will be exquisite in essence for this rapidly approaching new school year in the state of Alaska.

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'The Little Red Schoolhouse' ...

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On the day following Labor Day, a unique and brilliantly constructed educational program will be initiated into rural free delivery area routes ala Alaskan style, for the young Eskimos, Indians and Aleuts are the "grass roots of Alaska" and the education that will be afforded them when their schoolbell rings will feed them the plant food necessary to grow into the melting-pot trees that nourish the heritage of America.

This innovation in comprehensive education is being conducted by the University of Alaska's Rural School Project

in cooperation with the Alaska State Dept. of Education, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Alaska Federation of Natives and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

Seventeen Alaska village teachers representing BIA and state-operated schools will be teaching approximately 200 Eskimo, Indian and Aleut primary grade youngsters.

The field testing teachers and sites have been carefully selected and intensively researched. The teachers, from all over the states, are experienced Alaskan teachers who have been undergoing fully oriented training programs to better handle this important FIRST!

The author of "THE ALASKAN READERS," which is the blanket title for this new format of educational material, is Virginia W. Jones, Asst. Prof. of Education at the State University of N. Y. in Oswego.

The coordinator is Dr. Robert B. Rath of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory in Portland, Oregon and the illustrator of these books is Mr. James M. Henry, Jr., a teacher at the Alaskan village of Ekwok (pronounced EEK-wock).

"THE ALASKAN READERS" have been produced in limited numbers at the Laboratory headquarters; limited because for this year, they are to be a "revision after trial" endeavor and since this is a FIELD TEST program, only a limited number of Alaskan schools will be involved.

As a result of this system, their effectiveness will be measured and needed revisions can then be made.

After the initial "testing period," the "READERS" will be available for more general use in Alaskan schools.

In order for young people to know just what school is all about, they must be able to ask questions and be answered properly to evoke the curiosity of knowledge and provoke its means of attainment.

Since a common denominator of learning is the art of communication, we have needed to get to the "nitty gritty" of their pulse beat; their environment of familiarity.

Conditioned reflex is the primary basis from which we absorb the learnings in life and to expose the American methodology system of schooling to these little and culturally different Eskimo, Indian and Aleut children would be as uncomfortable and difficult as our being confronted with their natal culture.

We have, in the lower '48, all known and loved Mickey, the mouse...we romped with Rover, the dog and mimicked Donald, the duck.

We would be assinine in our ignorance if our cherished States' educators confronted us with Tutu, the caribou (pronounced Too-Too), Sisoaq, the Beluga whale (pronounced Sis-Sawk...and silently questioning who is Ahlouahnak, the official "TUNDRA TIMES" newsboy (pronounced Ah-Roo-Ah-Knock)?

These names were not the stuff our dreams were made of, but they are the stuff that the young and impressionable natives play with, speak about and live with.

And so with this understanding of the problem, the Alaskan Rural School Project will set forth this next week of opening classes in the grass roots area-ready, willing and very able

to teach on a "meeting ground" level and they will do just that... teach the young children!

The Western culturally-oriented methodology will be replaced by the ingenious "ALASKAN READERS" and the native children will be taught that the reason it is important to speak and read and write in English is because to achieve, one must learn to succeed in knowing how to achieve, and comprehensive education is "the staff of life" in accomplishing this.

Mickey, Rover and Donald will be replaced by Tutu, Sisoaq and Ahlouahnak.

To enable students to progress at their own pace, 12 separate readers and workbooks have been developed for use in primary grades. Drawings and stories for the series will be based on the Alaskan way of life as they know it!

The first three levels of "THE ALASKAN READERS" are completed and the fourth level will be ready by Christmas. Can there be any better Christmas present than this method of reaching out to the hearts and minds of these young native children?

These books will be used to approach the language barrier (many natives and their young ones DO NOT SPEAK ENGLISH) between the educator and the student with total concentration on hearing, speaking, reading and writing.

We have all asked ourselves "what can we do to decrease and eventually eliminate the American problem of "school dropouts"?

I believe that there would be a tremendous improvement in this situation if all educators and students could find their individual common denominator of "conditioned reflex" environmental familiarities.

This "NECESSARY FOR UNDERSTANDING THROUGH THE ART OF COMMUNICATION" should receive top priority if we are to have a functioning world.

I want to express my admiration for the University of Alaska's Rural School Project, its researchers, its entire staff and all and any persons instrumental with its being!

I am pleased to learn that "THE ALASKAN READERS" has been born! Perhaps, it will de-cleavage-ize the generation gap! It may even create new and never-heard-of-before talents and resources!

At any rate, it makes me proud to be living here during its birth!

NEXT WEEK: at one of the field sites.. "THE ALASKAN READERS" in action..THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSEALASKAN STYLE.