

Joseph Featherstone

SCHOOLS
WHERE
CHILDREN
LEARN



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Preface

All these essays represent ongoing journalistic work; I've had to cut some repetitive material, and make some changes here and there; but mostly I've left them substantially the same as they first appeared. The Talent Corps is now a community college; the street academy program in Harlem is a more diffuse and, in some respects, less interesting operation; and there are now a handful, instead of two, Roxbury community schools. Time has thus outdistanced some of these pieces, although I hope they are still of general interest.

I owe a great debt to Gilbert Harrison, the editor of *The New Republic*, who, among other things, indulges my obsessions. Also to David and Frances Hawkins, Tony

Kallet, Maurice Kogan, Marjorie Martus, and Rosemary Williams, for help, advice, and example. My wife, Helen, is the real teacher.

Introduction

These pieces on schools, learning, and teaching have appeared in *The New Republic* over the last three years. As I reread them, it seems to me that many share an implicit theme: the necessity for establishing standards. By standards, I don't mean crudely mechanical check-lists or standardized national tests but rather a common conviction about what it means to do a good job. The most impressive achievement of the English primary schools is the feeling on the part of teachers that they are participating in a common enterprise, working out, from classroom experience, what may one day be articulated as a sound philosophy of education. A healthy profession possesses a certain

number of such guiding ideas; the absence of them in our schools is a symptom of professional malaise.

Only two of these essays touch directly on the pathological professionalism of our educators. One is a report on a California bill that is now law in that state; the other a sketch of the remarkable Talent Corps. Both are concerned with small possibilities for opening up new pathways into the profession and shifting training to actual classroom experience. Credentials are only a small first step, however. Were I rewriting these pieces, I would insist that the bureaucratic sickness of the education profession is only an extreme instance of a more general disease afflicting other professions as well, notably medicine and law. The cure is the same for all: to replace the unresponsive hierarchies that now exist mainly to serve entrenched interests with new, humane professions that really serve their clients, particularly poor clients. It is too early to tell what will become of the movement for community control of schools and other institutions, but its fate is also bound up with the possibilities of a new professionalism.

These are the issues I would write about today. While writing most of these articles, though, I was concerned with more narrow, perhaps equally important questions—questions that will no doubt persist under any social order: what are good settings for learning? what kinds of things should be learned in early years of school? are there working examples of good schools on any mass scale?

There are dangers in writing within such a narrow compass: the danger of becoming remote from our everyday sense of the workings of ordinary schools, the weakness of ignoring most of the disparate social and personal chemistries that make for a promising learning environment, the risk of talking about one style of teaching as though it were the only effective way to teach. I'm especially anxious

to avoid leaving readers with the impression that one can single out a few elements of a good school—children's writing, the physical layout of an infant school classroom—and turn them into a formula to impose on teachers and children in other schools. There is, we will have to learn, no technical solution, no single lever to pull and cause good schools to come into being. Realizing this, we can then work slowly toward a vision of the kind of learning we wish to promote. That, among other things, is a matter of choosing what we value.

Certainly it would be sentimental to speak of improving values, attitudes, and approaches of teachers without also acknowledging that much that is wrong with our schools stems from fundamental defects in American life. There is more than one kind of sentimentality, though, and radical appeals for fundamental change have a way of turning easy substitutes for thought, work, and action. I believe that in some places, at certain levels, the educational system is ripe for change. For example, it seems to me that the elementary schools are fertile ground for new doctrines; the graduate schools, by contrast, continue to harden their formidable cake of custom, inertia, and smug self-interest.

The pity of the present moment in American education is that the air is filled with a kind of sociological determinism about schools; when breathed, it inspires the most profound fatalism. "Schools reflect social forces," the experts sigh. "The margins for maneuvering are very slight, perhaps nonexistent. We need more research." In some ways, this gloom is a refreshing departure from the traditional American notion that schools alone can remedy the damage done to children and their families by an unjust and racist society. That was always silly. The lessons slum schools teach their students are never going to be as vivid as the lessons they learn from existence in the slums. This

will remain so even after our ghetto schools end their present intolerable aloofness from the communities around them.

However, the work of good British primary schools suggests that change is possible within the limits of a social order that is nearly as unsatisfactory as our own. All schooling, the boys of Barbiana, Italy have written, is a "war against the poor," and English schools are no exception, particularly those at the secondary level and in slum and immigrant areas. There is nothing in England's placid political life to compare with the ferment in America over race, equality, and issues like community control. Nonetheless, visitors to scattered industrial and immigrant areas of Britain have noted large numbers of primary schools doing an exemplary job with the children of the poor and the working classes. England remains, like America, a caste-ridden capitalist nation; the millenium is far away. Yet, a comparable change in our schools would mean a great deal for the quality of our children's lives.

PART ONE

THE PRIMARY SCHOOL REVOLUTION IN BRITAIN

Commentary

One point enthusiasts who visit England are apt to neglect is the limits of what has been accomplished in England so far. After some thirty years of reform, British teachers are still underpaid, classrooms are more crowded than ours, and school buildings are smelly, antique monstrosities. In some areas the prospects for stable reform have been wiped out by appalling turnovers in staff. There are plenty of wretched schools in England; good English schools tend to cluster in a few local authorities where reform has taken solid roots, becoming itself something of an orthodoxy. As I note in Chapter 1, judged by the vague but discernible standards of a governmental study (the Plowden Report)

entitled *Children and Their Primary Schools*,* only about a third of the country's primary schools are good, and the change is most widespread in the infant schools; in general, reform faces more obstacles the higher up the educational ladder you go. English secondary schools may be in even worse shape than our high schools.

So much for the limits of reform, which are real enough. Certain prerequisites should also be kept in mind. One ought to be of special interest to Americans now that early childhood and preschool programs are coming in for so much attention. This is the traditional conviction of British infant school teachers that young children have distinct educational needs. English teachers are inclined to relate their teaching to theories of child development stressing individual learning and learning in what David Hawkins has called the concrete mode—messing around with stuff. As is indicated in Chapter 1, the characteristic innovations of the primary school revolution first appeared in nursery schools influenced by followers of Montessori, Susan Isaacs, Dewey, and Piaget. This profound influence of preschool traditions on practices in later grades is just the opposite of what has happened in this country where good preschools have often been bullied into becoming prep schools for inflexible first-grade classes. Another prerequisite is the autonomy granted principals and teachers within the decentralized British educational system. This relative independence affects the quality of all relationships within the system. (It also makes English schools too remote from parents, a point which many good English principals concede.) Americans need to learn about the work of a class of people, the national and local inspectorates and advisory groups, whose main function is to help people do a better job—their precise role is

*The Plowden Committee, *Children and Their Primary Schools*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1967.

hard to describe. The archetype of the class are the HMIs, the government inspectors. Lillian Weber, Rosemary Williams, and Lore Rasmussen are all attempting variants of this advisory role in the United States: it will be important if they can develop people with the necessary tact and skills—experienced in informal teaching and able to assist teachers without bossing them around.

It would be helpful, too, if Americans—and especially the social scientists and academics dominating our discussions of schools—understood something of the relationship between theory and practice in the English reform. As I explain, developmental theory, particularly the work of Piaget, the Swiss psychologist, provides theoretical justification for some of the methods of the infant schools, notably in mathematics. Part II of the Plowden Report, *The Growth of the Child*, shows this theoretical influence at work in its impressive arguments for the proposition that each child develops at a separate pace and that this ought to be reflected in patterns of teaching. Behind the new view of what constitutes a proper primary school curriculum (see Part V of the Plowden Report, the heart of the document) there is a definite theory of teaching. It lays a special stress on:

... individual discovery, on first-hand experience and on opportunities for creative work. It insists that knowledge does not fall in neatly separate compartments and that work and play are not opposite, but complementary.

Yet, while a body of intertwined psychological theory and pedagogical practice is slowly emerging in England, we should note another point the report emphasizes: principals and teachers of schools most successful in practice are sometimes unable to formulate their aims clearly and convincingly. Theory does matter, but it can only be of practi-

cal use when it has a living relationship with teachers and children functioning in real classrooms. Without this connection to the realm of practice, theories become dead and sterile. Piaget is fortunate in that much of the British teachers' practical work intersects with his theoretical concerns. He has fared better than John Dewey, whose ideas often fell on stony pedagogical soil.

The existence of a body of good work is in itself important in spreading further good work. One way an inexperienced teacher can gain the necessary confidence in children's learning abilities and her own ability to teach informally is by operating for a time in a good informal setting under the guidance of an experienced teacher. That is how teachers ought to get their training. The satisfaction of successfully turning a classroom into a good learning environment gives teachers new confidence in their own judgments. Teachers I've spoken to report that the quality and variety of the children's work over a period of time confirmed their instinctive feeling that there ought to be other standards besides conventional achievement and IQ tests. England's is a test-ridden educational system, and it is therefore doubly interesting to see the way in which a solid body of excellent work in areas like math, writing, movement, and art is confirming principals and teachers in their reluctance to let crude quantitative test scores determine decisions concerning the education of young children (however much they may continue to determine the fate of older English children).

Specific qualitative concerns—such as what makes a school good—are lacking in most of our discussions of education, as are specific accounts of children's learning. Partly this reflects the grandiose mentality of school managers and reformers who are seldom interested in pedagogy anyway; partly it reflects the influence of quantitative social sci-

ence. James Coleman's report "Equality of Educational Opportunity" marked an impressive advance in knowledge, but it seems to me characteristic of a prevailing cast of thought that Mr. Coleman and his colleagues were not particularly interested in doing qualitative studies of schools that succeeded—for instance, ghetto schools whose black pupils were scoring unexpectedly well on the tests. With due respect to quantitative research—there is, after all, so much more we need to know about the schools—I think it unlikely that we will find out how good schools succeed by continuing to submit relatively crude and undigested data to increasingly refined statistical manipulation.

The English themselves are only beginning to think in any analytic way about good schools. The Plowden Report at one point cites 109 superb schools and then more or less drops the subject. But why are those schools so good? And why aren't there more? David Hawkins has noted that you often visit infant schools in England where the standard materials and basic organization are all there, but where the teacher is merely coping, managing the room well enough without particularly responding to individual children. Frequently such classrooms are better than our formal classrooms—the children may be actively involved with materials, after all—but they are different from settings in which the teacher is watching the children closely and knows when to intervene, change the pace, ask a question, or make a suggestion for the greatest pedagogical advantage. It would be a great help if such differences could be described in terms accessible to working teachers; like learning, teaching is still pretty largely a mysterious business, and our ideas about the difference between effective and ineffectual teaching are hazy at best. A concern for these distinctions is, it seems to me, one of the features of a healthy reform movement.

CHAPTER 1

INFANT SCHOOLS

"The Integrated Day"

My wife and I had been told about good things happening in British classrooms, but we were scarcely prepared for what we found; in recent decades there has been a profound and sweeping revolution in English primary education, involving new ways of thinking about how young children learn, classroom organization, the curriculum, and the role of the teacher. We saw schools in some good local educational authorities—Bristol, Nottingham, Leicestershire, Oxfordshire—and a few serving immigrant areas in cities like London.

In what follows, I'm going to be as specific as I can

about how classes work, how the room is laid out, what sort of things are in it, how the teacher and the children spend the day, and, in some detail, how a child learns to read, as an example of the kind of learning that goes on. I know that American teachers, particularly good ones, are rightly suspicious of most talk on education, because so little of what they hear relates to actual classroom practice. I hope I can be concrete enough. The relevance of these British classrooms to American education is a difficult question which I'll leave for later.

Primary schools in Britain divide into "infant" and "junior" schools. The infant schools in England take the children from the age of five to seven, and in some authorities, eight. It is in the infant schools that people learn to read and write and to work with numbers. Junior schools take children from seven or eight to eleven, and in some places twelve; they then go on to secondary school. Infant and junior schools sometimes occupy the same building, and some authorities—Oxfordshire, for example—have a policy of putting them together in one unit, like an American elementary school.

It is important to understand that what goes on in good infant schools is much the same. The approach is similar, though the quality of teaching and children's work varies greatly.

Westfield Infant School, for example, is a one-story structure, like any of a thousand American buildings, on a working-class housing estate in Leicestershire. If you arrive early, you find a number of children already inside, reading, writing, painting, playing music, tending to pets. Teachers sift in slowly and begin working with students. Apart from a religious assembly (required by law), it's hard to say just when school actually begins because there is very little organized activity for a whole class. The puzzled visitor sees

some small group work in mathematics ("maths") or reading, but mostly children are on their own, moving about and talking quite freely. The teacher sometimes sits at her desk, and the children flock to her for consultations, but more often she moves about the room, advising on projects, listening to children read, asking questions, giving words, talking, sometimes prodding.

The hallways, which are about the size of those in American schools, are filled with busy children, displays of paintings and graphs, a grocery store where children use play money and learn to count, easels, tables for collections of shells and plants, workbenches on which to pound and hammer nails and boards, big wooden boxes full of building blocks.

Classrooms open out onto the playground, which is also much in use. A contingent of children is kneeling on the grass, clocking the speed of a tortoise, which they want to graph against the speeds of other pets, and of people. Nearby are five-year-olds, finishing an intricate, tall tower of blocks, triumphantly counting as they add the last one, "twenty three, twenty four." A solitary boy is mixing powders for paint; on a large piece of paper attached to an easel, with very big strokes, he makes an ominous, stylized building that seems largely to consist of black shutters framing deep red windows. "It's the hospital where my brother is," he explains and pulls the visitor over to the class-library corner where a picture book discusses hospitals. He can't read it yet (he's five) but says he is trying. And he is; he can make out a number of words, some pretty hard, on different pages, and it is clear that he has been *studying* the book, because he wants badly to know about hospitals. At another end of the hall there is a quieter library nook for the whole school. Here two small boys are reading aloud; the better reader is, with indifferent grace,

correcting the grateful slower boy as he stumbles over words.

The rooms are fairly noisy—more noisy than many American teachers or principals would allow—because children can talk freely. Sometimes the teacher has to ask for quiet. With as many as forty in some classes, rooms are crowded and accidents happen. Paint spills, a tub overflows, there are recriminations. Usually the children mop up and work resumes.

The visitor is dazed by the amount and variety and fluency of free writing produced: stories, free-verse poems with intricate images, precise accounts of experiments in "maths" and, finally, looking over a tiny little girl's shoulder, he finds: "Today we had visitors from America. . ."

After a time, you overcome your confusion at the sheer variety of it all, and you begin making more definite observations. The physical layout of the classrooms is markedly different. American teachers are coming to appreciate the importance of a flexible room, but even in good elementary schools in the United States this usually means having movable, rather than fixed, desks. In the Westfield School there are no individual desks and no assigned places. Around the room (which is about the size of one you would find in an average American school) there are different tables for different activities: art, water and sand play, number work. The number tables have all kinds of number lines—strips of paper with numbers marked on them in sequence; on these children learn to count and reason mathematically. There are beads, buttons, and odd things to count; weights and balances; dry and liquid measures; and a rich variety of apparatus for learning basic mathematical concepts, some of it home-made, some ready-made. The best of the commercial materials are familiar: Cuisenaire rods, the Dienes multibase material, Stern rods, and

attribute or logical blocks. This sort of thing is stressed much more than formal arithmetic.

Every class has a library alcove, separated off by a room divider that also serves as a display shelf for books. Some library corners have a patch of carpet and an old easy chair. Every room has a "Wendy House," a play corner with dolls and furniture for playing house. Often there is a dress-up corner, too, with different kinds of cast-off adult clothes. The small children love the Wendy houses and dress-up corners, but you see older ones using them as well. Some classes have puppet theaters for putting on improvised plays with homemade puppets—although many make do with the legs of one table turned upside down on top of another for a makeshift stage. Often, small children perform dance dramas involving a lot of motion and a minimum of words.

Gradually it becomes clear how the day proceeds in one of these rooms. In many infant and some junior schools the choice of the day's routine is left completely up to the teacher; the teacher, in turn, leaves options open to the children. Classes for young children are reaching a point in many schools where there is no real difference between one subject in the curriculum and another, or even between work and play. A school day run on these lines is called, variously, the "free day," the "integrated curriculum," or the "integrated day." The term scarcely matters.

In a school that operates on the integrated day, the teacher usually starts the morning by listing the different activities available. A good deal of material is needed, according to the teachers, but the best of it is often homemade; in any case, it isn't necessary to have thirty or forty sets of everything, because most activities are for a limited number of people. "Six Children Can Play in the Wendy House," says a sign in one classroom. The ground rules are

that they must clean up when they finish and they mustn't bother others.

A child might spend the day on his first choice, or he might not. Many teachers confess they get nervous if everybody doesn't do some reading and writing every day; others are committed in principle to letting children choose freely. In practice, many teachers give work when they think it's needed. In this, as in any other way of doing things, teachers tailor their styles to their own temperaments and to those of the children. But the extent to which children really have a choice and really work purposefully is astonishing.

How they learn reading offers an example of the kind of individual learning and teaching going on in these classrooms, even in quite large ones. (The mathematics work shows this even better, but that will be described later.) Reading is not particularly emphasized, and my purpose in singling it out is purely illustrative, though the contrast between English classes and most American ones, where reading is a formidable matter, is vivid and depressing.

At first it is hard to say just how they do learn to read since there are no separate subjects. A part of the answer slowly becomes clear, and it surprises American visitors used to thinking of the teacher as the generating force of education: children learn from each other. They hang around the library corners long before they can read, handling the books, looking at pictures, trying to find words they do know, listening and watching as the teacher hears other children's reading. It is common to see nonreaders studying people as they read, and then imitating them, monkey doing what monkey sees. Nobody makes fun of their grave parodies, and for good reasons.

A very small number of schools in two or three authorities have adopted what they call "family" or "vertical"

grouping, which further promotes the idea of children teaching children. In these schools, each class is a cross section of the whole school's population, all ages mixed together. This seems particularly successful in the early school years, when newcomers are easily absorbed, and older children help teach the young ones to clean up and take first steps in reading. The older children, too, benefit from classroom environment where they can occasionally be babyish; they also learn a good deal from the role of teacher they adopt. Family grouping needs smaller classes, teachers say, because it requires close supervision to make sure small children don't get overshadowed and big ones are still challenged. Teachers using family grouping swear by the flexibility it provides.

A range of reading schemes is used: sight reading, phonics, and so forth, whatever seems to work with a child. (Only about five percent of British schools use the Initial Teaching Alphabet—an improved alphabet, not a method of reading—that has proved successful with poor readers and adults both in England and in this country; principals of good schools we visited thought that ITA was unnecessary with a truly flexible reading program, but that in a rigid scheme it gave the slow reader another chance, and thus a break.) Increasingly in the better infant schools, there are no textbooks and no class readers, just books, in profusion. Instead of spending their scanty book money on forty sets of everything, schools have purchased different sets of reading series, as well as a great many single books, at all levels of difficulty. Teachers arrange their classroom libraries so they can direct students of different abilities to appropriate books, but in most classes a child can tackle anything he wants. As a check, cautious teachers ask them to go on their own through a graded reading series—which one doesn't matter.

However a child picks up reading, it will involve learning to write at the same time, and some write before they can read; there is an attempt to break down the mental barrier between the spoken, the written, and the printed word. When a child starts school, he gets a large, unlined notebook; this is his book for free writing, and he can put what he wants in it. On his own, he may draw a picture in it with crayon or pencil, discuss the picture with the teacher, and dictate a caption to her, which she then writes down for him: "This is my Dad." He copies the caption, writing just underneath. In this way he learns to memorize the look and sound of his dictated words and phrases until he reaches a point where, with help, he can write sentences. Often his notebook serves as his own first reading book.

He also gets a smaller notebook, his private dictionary, in which he enters words as he learns them. "I got a new word," a five-year-old brags to the visitor. Children are always running to the teacher for words as they find they have more and more to write. Good teachers don't give in without a struggle: the children have to guess the first letter and sound the word out before they get it. Thus they pick up phonetic skills informally, although some teachers do use sight cards and some formal phonics work. Gradually as a child amasses a reading and writing vocabulary, he reaches a fluent stage and you see six-year-olds writing stories, free-verse poems, accounts of things done in class, for an audience that includes other children as well as the teacher.

As a rule, teachers don't pay much attention to accuracy or neatness until a child is well on in his writing. They introduce grammar and spelling after a time, but not as separate subjects or ends in themselves. They are simply ways to say what you want more efficiently. Under these methods, where the children choose the content of their

writing, more attention is paid to content than externals such as punctuation, spelling, and grammar. In good schools these are presented as what they are: living ways to get a meaning across, to be understood. Even unimaginative teachers, who quibble with children about other work, can learn to respect the content of the free writing books and take it seriously. This emphasis on self-chosen content has produced a flowering of young children's literature in schools working with many kinds of teachers and children. There is growing recognition that different people flourish on different kinds of writing; storytellers and poets are not necessarily the same as those who can do elegant and graceful writing about mathematics. Impressive examples of free writing and poetry similar to what we saw are contained in the West Riding Education Committee's anthology, *The Excitement of Writing*.^{*} Samples of "maths" writing are included in the Schools Council's *Mathematics in the Primary Schools*, a wonderfully instructive book on many accounts.^{**} Books made and illustrated by the children are coming to be a regular part of the curriculum in some schools.

Informal Schools

Of course children spend their time doing things other than reading, and the teachers in the schools we saw would be annoyed at the manner in which I've singled out one academic subject. The very best often argue that art is the key. The head of Sea Mills School in Bristol believes firmly that if the art is good, all else follows. All else does follow, richly, at Sea Mills, where the infants sat us down and

^{*} See pp. 49-50 for some excerpts from this book.

^{**}Schools Council's Council Curriculum bulletin no. 1, *Mathematics in the Primary Schools*, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966.

performed a concert of skillful poetry and songs they had made up.

But my purpose was to show not reading methods but the changed role of the teacher. Formal classroom teaching—the instructor standing up front, talking to the group, or even the first-grade room divided up into reading groups which the teacher listens to separately as she tries desperately to keep order—has disappeared because it imposes a single pattern of learning on a whole group of children (thus forcing the schools to "track," or to group classes by ability), because it ignores the extent to which children teach each other, and because in many workaday schools other methods are proving to be better. Ordinary, formally trained teachers take to the new role when they can see with their own eyes that the result is not chaos.

These methods mean more work for the teacher, not less. In informal conditions, it is essential for the teacher to keep detailed and accurate accounts of what a child is learning, even though at any given moment she might not know what he's up to. Children help by keeping their own records: in some schools they have private shelves where they store writing books, accounts of experiments and work in "maths," lists of the books they've read, and dates when they checked in with the teacher to read aloud. If American parents could see some of the detailed folders of each child's work, including samples of his art work, they would feel, quite rightly, that a report card is a swindle.

When the class seldom meets as a unit, when children work independently, discipline is less of a problem. It does not disappear as a problem, but it becomes less paramount. The purposeful self-discipline of these children is, we were told, just as surprising to middle-aged Englishmen as it is to Americans. It is a recent development, and by no means the product of luck; much hard work and thought go into

the arrangement of these classrooms and their materials. When they work at it, teachers find they can make time during the day for children who need it. "I can give all my attention to a child for five minutes, and that's worth more to him than being part of a sea of faces all day," said a teacher in an East London school overlooking the docks. Other teachers say they can watch children as they work and ask them questions; there is a better chance of finding out what children really understand.

What we saw is no statistical sample. The practices of the good schools we visited in different kinds of communities are not standard, but there are reasons for thinking they are no longer strikingly exceptional. For the most part, these schools are staffed by ordinary teachers from the same sort of background as American teachers; they are not isolated experiments run by cranks or geniuses. The Plowden Committee's massive, and to American eyes, radical report in 1967 indicated that about one-third of England's 23,000 primary schools had been deeply influenced by the new ideas and methods, that another third were stirring under their impact, and that the remaining third were still teaching along the formal lines of British schools in the thirties, and of American schools today.

The change is most widespread and impressive in the infant schools, and becomes more scattered on the junior level. Yet junior schools in some authorities are playing stunning variations on the free themes developed by the infant schools, and these I shall discuss later; but, in general, change in the junior schools is slower, more diffident and complex.

Many formal schools—English and American—are probably doing a more effective job, in conventional terms, than these schools. It doesn't do to dogmatize. For example, by and large, in terms of measurable achievement on conven-

tional tests, children in traditional, formal classes in England do slightly better than children from the freer classes. In one survey cited in the Plowden Report the difference is greatest in mechanical arithmetic, the least in reading. These are facts, but there are reasons for discounting them apart from evidence that the differences disappear in later school years. Formal schools teach children to take conventional tests; that is their function, and it would be surprising if all their efforts didn't produce some results. In view of the lack of test training in the freer schools, the students' results seem to me surprisingly high. The mathematics taught in the informal schools (mathematical relationships in which process of thought counts for more than arithmetical skill) and the English (free writing, rather than grammar and so on) put their students at a disadvantage on achievement tests, whose authors would probably be the first to admit this. England and America badly need new kinds of tests. My own strong impression is that in areas easy to define and probably not hard to test—ability to write, for example, or understanding of the math they were doing—the children in the good schools I saw, including slum schools, were far ahead of students in good formal schools in the United States.

The external motions teachers go through in the schools matter less than what the teachers are and what they think. An organizational change—the free day, for example, or simply rearranging classroom space—is unlikely to make much difference unless teachers are really prepared to act on the belief that in a rich environment young children can learn a great deal by themselves and that most often their own choices reflect their needs. When you see schools where teachers are acting on these assumptions, it is easy to share the Plowden Report's enthusiasm for informal, individual learning in the early years. The infant schools are a

historical accident—nobody years ago gave much thought to why children should begin school at five—but British teachers are now realizing their advantages. With kindergarten and the first few years of school fused, children have an extended time in which to learn to read and write and work with numbers. This is especially effective if the pattern of learning is largely individual, if the teacher is important but doesn't stand in the way or try to take over the whole job. Many of the difficulties that plague formal first-grade classes disappear; children aren't kept back from learning, nor are they branded as problems if they take their time.

"Maths"

The Plowden Committee is in a sense the official voice of the primary school revolution in Britain. Its report is, in addition, a complicated document in social history, and to try and draw one single lesson from it would be a mistake. Some of its surveys are of universal interest—one careful study suggests convincingly what common sense has often suggested before, that parents' attitudes play a larger role in a child's life than anything the school does on its own. Some of its chapters are items of political controversy: its excellent proposals for nursery schools and aid to poor areas, for example, have little immediate hope of being pushed through. Some are of purely British interest—the earnest and troubled discussion of compulsory religious education, for example. But an American may be pardoned if one aspect of the report fixes his attention: the extent to which this official document is a radical, if stately, hymn of praise to informal classrooms.

Until fairly recently, heads of many schools could point to a chart in their office showing what each class was

doing every minute of the week, and the number of minutes spent on each subject (English, for example, being divided up into periods for spelling, grammar, exercises, composition, recitation, reading, handwriting). It is obvious, as the Plowden Report tartly points out, "that this arrangement was not suited to what was known of the nature of children, of the classification of subject matter, or the art of teaching." Since procedures always affect substance, it is hard to believe that the learning in such classrooms was very much different from that epitomized in a nineteenth-century "Simple Catechism of the History of England Adapted to the Capacities of Young Children," which went like this:

Q: Which was the next king?

A: John, the brother of Richard, succeeded.

Q: What sort of king was he?

A: A very wicked, deceitful, cruel king.

How did change come about? In the first place, a tradition has developed over the last fifty years that gives heads of British schools great freedom in matters of scheduling and curriculum, and teachers a fair amount of say about what goes on in the classroom. By itself this freedom did not produce much change, it is important to note, but it was a prerequisite for reform. Also British schools traditionally have felt relatively free from public and parental opinion. This independence is not a prerequisite to reform, since parents seem to approve the new methods when they understand them; but it is true that people in British schools are not running scared, like their American counterparts who often see public opinion not as a source of policy but as a shadowy, yet massive, veto on all innovation.

Plainly, the infant schools, being distinct institutions, have been able to create separate, more experimental, tradi-

tions than schools higher up the educational ladder. They benefited by having to face five-year-olds, for very small children are insistently individual and difficult to herd around. This, and the fact that nursery and infant teachers were often trained together in the same institutions, meant that British teachers were inclined as a practical matter to relate their teaching to basic theories of child development. The characteristic innovations of the primary school revolution were first worked out by a number of infant schools much influenced by practices in progressive nursery schools, whose teachers, in turn, had been absorbing the ideas of thinkers like Montessori, Susan Isaacs, Dewey, and Piaget.

Another element in the reform was a changed emphasis in the work of government inspectors, Her Majesty's Inspectors. As long as the inspectors acted as educational policemen, making the schools toe the mark, their effect over the years was to dampen innovation. But as their role took on more and more of an advisory character they became important agents for disseminating new ideas. There is a moral here: external rules enforced from without not only have little positive effect on schools but tend to make their practices rigidify through fear. Where government and local inspectors have ceased inspecting and taken up advising, the results have been excellent. Some of the lively authorities, such as Leicestershire, have set up distinct advisory offices with no administrative responsibilities except to spread ideas and train teachers in new methods.

The shadow of IQ and achievement tests lay heavy on British schools until recently, and reform has been linked to a partial lifting of that shadow. The pressure has eased most in the few authorities that have successfully abolished the "eleven-plus" examination which used to separate English children at the age of eleven into goats and sheep: a small number of goats went to a "grammar school" that

prepared them for a university, while the large number of sheep were sent to a "secondary modern school" that frequently prepared them for nothing. A few secondary moderns are very good indeed, but all too many are simply custodial institutions, like American slum high schools, with the difference that they speak to students in the very English accents of Charles Dickens's Mr. Dombey: "I am far from being friendly to what is called by persons of leveling sentiments, general education. But it is necessary that the inferior classes should continue to be taught to know their position and to conduct themselves properly. So far, I approve of schools." Grammar schools, on the other hand, have traditionally been obsessed with the highly competitive tests for university placement, and therefore, like many crack American high schools, their patterns of instruction are very brittle. ("This is a rat race and I am a rat," as a friend of mine who went to Philadelphia's Central High School put it.) Most British educators are ready now to admit that the eleven-plus was fearfully wasteful of talent and that a test at that age is not a sound prediction of a child's future—except that it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy with children defined as stupid coming to act stupid. But while the eleven-plus is disappearing, no one is sure what is to replace it.

Authorities are setting up comprehensive high schools, but it is far from certain that Britain will succeed in altering its wasteful, meritocratic patterns of secondary and university education. All this, of course, has a profound if indirect influence on further prospects for change in the primary schools. It is worth emphasizing that the authorities that are establishing alternatives to a system dominated by IQ and achievement tests are also those where reform has moved farthest, even into the junior schools. The moral for reformers on both sides of the Atlantic is, again, ob-

vious. But the problem of tests is a reminder that, dimly, the ultimate fate of the primary school revolution is related to Britain's "long revolution" toward a more equal society; in this limited sense, its aims parallel some of the contradictory social goals of that ambiguous movement in American history known as progressive education.

As in America, there has been a great deal of curriculum reform in England, and this has played a large part in the change. Projects sponsored by the Nuffield Foundation and the Schools Council (a large body composed of representatives of universities and educational organizations, with a guaranteed majority of teachers) are extremely significant, particularly in mathematics, a subject that has undergone dramatic transformation in the last six or seven years. How math is taught illustrates the fusion of classroom practice with new ideas on child development that is characteristic of the new primary school revolution, and I want to go into this important matter in some detail.

Developmental psychology—the study of the growth of intellect and the order in which various abilities flower—has a strong influence on the British schools, but the influence is of a special sort. The same theorists, Baldwin, Isaacs, Bruner, and especially the Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, are read in America (along with the dominant American behaviorist school), but to less practical effect. As a rule, theorists have less impact on schools than most people suppose—schools, like girls, are seldom ruined by books—and when they do have an impact, it is usually because their theories confirm successful or popular practices. This is generally the case in Britain today, except that the work of the developmental psychologists, and Piaget in particular, has proved so fruitful and suggestive in the area of mathematics that their assumptions are beginning to pervade

classrooms and shape the direction of educational innovation.

Among their more important assumptions are that a great majority of primary school children can't just be told things, that they learn basic mathematical concepts much more slowly than adults realize, and that the patterns of abstract thought used in mathematics ought to be built up from layer after layer of direct experience—seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling. According to Piaget, each of us needs to forge, through direct experience, a mental scheme of the world, with a hierarchy of meanings; a learner has to organize material and his own behavior, adapting and being adapted in the process. He learns by his own activity. In a lifetime's work with young children, including his own, Piaget has advanced the idea that children learn to think in stages, and that in the early stages they learn mainly from the testimony of their senses, and not so much through words. At first, small children think intuitively and even magically; at another stage they can deal practically with concrete experiences; and still later they can think abstractly and make use of mathematical abstractions. In a series of classic experiments, Piaget offered persuasive evidence that ideas which seem obvious to an adult are by no means obvious to a small child. Certain mathematical principles are difficult to grasp, except through repeated experience. Take the principle of invariance of number, for example: if you rearrange five pebbles there are still five. It seems hard for children to grasp that. Or reversibility: if you reverse a process—take two beads from eight, then return them—you arrive at the same state of affairs from which you began. Of the principle of conservation: if you put a given amount of water in a flat saucer and pour the contents of the saucer into a tall glass, many children will say that the

amount of liquid has changed, and it takes both time and experience for them to see that the amount is the same. All this has practical consequences for teaching mathematics: it is of little use to a boy if he can do sums in a workbook but still fails to understand reversal or conservation.

How does a child learn conservation? Much learning involves what often looks to an adult like mere play or mindless repetition. A teacher can quicken learning and direct it along more methodical lines by providing suitable experiences and discussion, but children need time and often learn most efficiently on their own. Conversation is important, and part of the teacher's role with small children is to provide words and phrases when needed. Children are encouraged to talk in the good British primary schools, because, among other reasons, it seems that they make better intellectual progress when they can speak freely about what they're doing and when the teacher is ready from time to time with questions and appropriate terms.

Piaget himself has spelled out a fairly exact sequence of development, from intuitive thinking to being able to reason concretely to the use of abstractions. He has assigned these stages to definite chronological ages. Some teachers question any scheme that pretends to be able to predict what a six- or a seven-year-old can learn, just as some critics have argued that Piaget pays too little attention to the social context of learning—the child's feelings, the expectations of the teacher, and more important, those of the parents. And yet the experience of teachers with mathematics has led to a growing respect for Piaget's general outline of the stages of a child's development. Whether or not his theories are ultimately accepted as true, he and other developmental theorists have pushed British schools in directions that are pedagogically sound, toward an understanding that abstract concepts and words are hard for chil-

dren, that children learn best from their own activity, and that they need time in which to grow.

Hence the belief of the good infant schools that what adults call play is a principal means of learning in childhood, a belief that seems more plausible when you consider how much children learn without formal instruction in the years before they come to school. Hence the sand and water tables, the variety of number apparatus, the clay, the wood, the geometric shapes to arrange, the weights and balances, the Wendy House, and the dress-up clothes (to explore adult roles, as well as the materials that make up the world). Hence, too, the conviction that a classroom should offer myriads of activities to choose from, that allowing children to repeat activities is often good, and that language and experience should link together in conversations among children and with the teacher.

The Schools Council's admirable *Mathematics in the Primary Schools* has a handy checklist of the areas of mathematical knowledge of an ordinary seven-year-old by the time he leaves a good infant school. The list is accurate, and I'm going to restate some of the main categories and describe some of the classroom activities related to each. Remember that in many schools there is no timetable and no division of the curriculum into separate subjects, so "maths" will be going on in the classroom at the same time as painting or reading or writing—much writing, in fact, consists of accounts of things done in math.

An ordinary seven-year-old knows:

1. Sorting and classifying things into sets (a set is any defined group of objects); comparing the sizes of two sets, the number of objects in each; the use of terms for expressing inequalities, more than, smaller than, and so on. As soon as they come to school, children begin sorting out all manner of things around the classroom, from buttons to

pieces of material to building blocks. Sorting out merchandise in the play store is one way to learn about sets, as is laying the dinner table in the Wendy House, making sure to get the right number of forks and knives. On their own, small children sort endlessly, like monks at their beads, "four of these, and five of these."

2. Counting; conservation of number; the composition of numbers up to 20—how a number like 7 can be made up of smaller numbers added together (4 plus 3); knowing the numbers up to 20 well enough to see that 14 and 6 are 20 without having to count on fingers. Just as children in these classes learn to write by writing, not by filling in blanks in workbooks, they learn counting by counting. They roam around the classroom making inventories of other children, windows, shoes, chairs, always writing the numbers down. As in reading, they get unfamiliar numbers from each other or the teacher. "Twenty-seven is on the calendar," a boy advises a perplexed little girl who has just finished a count of some milk bottles. They weigh things on scales and balances endlessly: "How many bolts balance nine beans?" Here again the play shop is useful.

3. Knowing the number line—all the numbers in order up to 100; understanding place value in number notation—the fact that each of the 4s in 444 has a value that depends on its place. Many classes have actual number lines, home-made strips of paper a few inches wide and 100 inches long, with the numbers written one per inch in sequence from one to 100, and with the 10s marked prominently with colored magic marker. Along with the big one come number strips of different sizes from one to 10 inches in length; these are used with the big number line to find answers to various problems—addition, subtraction, multiplication. Just by playing with the number line, children can begin to see patterns: if you add 10 to 7 and then keep

going, you begin to sense regularities, 17, 27, 37, and so on.

4. Measurement; rulers and other measuring instruments, including units of money; conservation of measures, liquid and dry (a quart is a quart, whatever the shape of its container); knowledge of the relationship between one unit and another—inches to feet, for example. They invent their own units—their hands, their feet. Children measure the classroom, the playground and everything within. They measure each other, making graphs of heights. They play games guessing the measurement of something and then finding out who guessed best and writing an account to explain why.

5. Simple fraction. The children learn these by dividing up all kinds of real things into halves, quarters, and three-quarters.

6. Aspects of addition, multiplication, and division as these arise from real situations in the classroom. The idea is to have all the first steps performed on real materials, not as abstract exercises. Before a child tackles two times seven, he handles two sets of seven things, and seven sets of two things, using different kinds of objects.

7. Shape and size, including some simple proportions—such as four times as heavy as, twice as tall as, nearly as old as. Children play with shapes, making and copying patterns. Cardboard boxes are cut out, flattened and then rebuilt, the children slowly acquiring a sense of what a cube is; here, work with shapes touches on solid geometry. At one school in Bristol, children noticed that the wooden floor of the assembly hall consisted of squares about a foot on a side, and on a teacher's suggestion, with the help of some fifty-foot lengths of rope, they worked out a game. Following the squares on the floor, pairs of children made polygons with their rope; some were simply large rec-

tangles, most were intricate, with many sides. Then each child would find the area of his polygon by counting (hop-ping from square to square) the number of squares inside the perimeter. If each child in a pair got a different answer, they recounted. As soon as they were satisfied of the area, the children would begin setting themselves problems to do: for instance, given the fixed length of rope, could you make a figure that had an area of only twenty five squares? Or, after making a shape you liked, how could you modify it to increase the area two squares? The teacher walked around the hall, asking further questions, helping out the children who still had trouble with the basic area of their first figure, and posing new kinds of problems: you might be asked to describe your shape in words alone, without using physical gestures.

An American visitor is impressed not so much by the amount learned—though that is staggering—as by its fundamental nature. What the children know, they know for sure; they have time in which to establish an understanding of extremely basic things that are seldom even taught in American classrooms. First-grade teachers in the United States are sometimes astonished when they discover that many of the children successfully solving workbook sums have no appreciation of, say, the conservation of number; too many children in American schools are taught to memorize multiplication tables without ever having had a chance to understand what multiplication means, and what number relationships are involved.

The approach is mathematical—learning to think—rather than arithmetical, mechanical computation. Rote learning and memorizing have been abandoned by good British primary schools, partly because they bore children and teachers, but more because they are poor ways to learn. It is assumed as a matter of course that each child

will proceed at a different pace, doing different things. The idea of readiness is seldom used as a justification for holding a child back—a sure sign that Piaget's influence has been creative, rather than restrictive, since his theories could easily be misused. The results in measurable or in less tangible terms are striking. By giving children an opportunity to explore and experiment—play if you will—and by putting teachers in a position where they can watch children and talk to them about what puzzles or intrigues them, good British schools are producing classes where mathematics is a pleasure, and where, each year, there are fewer and fewer mathematical illiterates.

Mathematics illustrates the fusion of developmental psychology with actual classroom practice, but it is also becoming in itself an important catalyst for schools making the change from formal to informal methods of learning. This is in some part owing to the efforts of the Nuffield Foundation and the Schools Council. Their curriculum materials for primary schools are not textbooks or set courses but rather practical handbooks of suggestions for teachers in which a large amount of space is given over to actual samples and pictures of children's work. (The Nuffield math books are dedicated to Piaget.) In sharp contrast to America, where many of the good curriculum projects are the work of university people, Britain has taken enormous pains to enlist ordinary primary school teachers in the process of creating and spreading new ideas and materials.

Teaching Children to Think

Discontented people in Britain sometimes make polemical use of an imaginary land called America, where everything is democratic and efficient. My purpose is not to

create another, equally useless myth for the comfort of disheartened American educators. There is nothing utopian about the good British schools I am describing. Teachers are, by American standards, underpaid (salaries start at \$30 a week). The turnover in staff is rapid, and schools receive pittance for buying equipment and books. Teaching is often a flat business and always a tough one. It is of immense practical significance that in the flat, tough world of overworked teachers and daily routines, substantial numbers of British primary teachers are organizing their classrooms in a way that really does promote individual learning, that allows children to develop at their own pace in the early years of school.

As examples of this kind of approach, I've described how children learn to read and write, and the careful way in which they are introduced to mathematics. These methods are not guaranteed to make bad teachers, or people who dislike children, into good teachers. But they are more suited than formal methods to the nature of small children and to the kinds of subjects that should be taught in primary school; and they encourage many ordinary teachers, who find that they are happier using them and less likely to spend all their time worrying about discipline. Such methods assume that children can respond to courteous treatment by adults, and that to a great extent they can be trained to take the initiative in learning—if choices are real, and if a rich variety of material is offered them. As the Plowden Report concedes, these assumptions are not true for all children (some will probably always benefit more from formal teaching) or for every child all of the time. But the Report is itself testimony to a growing conviction in Britain that these assumptions can provide a workable basis for an entire nation's schools.

Are they a workable basis for American schools? The

task of creating American schools along these lines will be formidable, to say the very least. This isn't the place to rehearse the institutional and cultural obstacles to change in American education, but I want to anticipate some of the most serious questions that may be raised about the kinds of schools I've talked about. In reform, as in anything else, there must be priorities, and the first priority is simply to see clearly.

Some Americans acknowledge that good British schools are doing better work than good American schools, but they are reluctant to admit that this is because, among other things, children are given freedom to choose from among selected activities in the classroom and to move around the room talking to each other. If they are teachers, they may react to such a proposition with contempt, because they know how hard it is to maintain classroom discipline. Where the class is taught as a unit, and every child is supposed to pay attention as the teacher talks, discipline can be a serious matter; it is even more so when the class splits into groups for reading aloud, as any first-grade teacher knows. Quick children get restless; slow children dread the ordeal, and act accordingly. Any teacher who can keep order under the circumstances has a certain amount of talent, however wasted. Tony Kallet, a perceptive American who worked as an advisor in Leicestershire, has written of the difficulties in maintaining control of the class in the good, but very formal, American school in which he apprenticed. Some children managed quite well, he recalls, but others, especially the "problem children," found the discipline too much, too little was permitted them, and "their problems were, in part, being created, rather than mitigated by control." After working with English classes, he saw matters in a different light, but, for all the time he was in an American classroom, "it did truly seem that ev-

ery single control imposed was necessary if anything was to be accomplished," a view with which many American teachers will sympathize.

Watching children in British classes working diligently on their own prompts another question: are British children fundamentally different from Americans, and are there critical differences in national character? No doubt there are differences; and yet middle-aged English visitors to the informal schools often react with the same disbelief as American visitors; they find it hard to credit British children with so much initiative and so much responsibility. Also, formal schools in Britain have many discipline problems. American teachers working on their own—and how lonely they seem—have succeeded with approaches similar to those of good British primary schools. Herbert Kohl ran a sixth-grade class in Harlem along fairly free lines and his book, *36 Children*, includes extraordinarily powerful samples of the children's free writing. A British teacher from one of the good local authorities came to a large American city to teach a demonstration class of eight- to eleven-year-olds in a slum school. Before leaving England, he was assured—by Americans—that he would find American children as different from British as day is from night. Yet, the American children reacted exactly as English children to a classroom thoughtfully laid out to permit choices. At first they couldn't believe he meant what he said. After a timid start, they began rushing around the room, trying to sample everything fast, as though time were going to run out on them. Then they "settled remarkably quickly to study in more depth and to explore their environment with interest and enthusiasm." The teacher noticed that for the first two weeks no one did any written English or math, and when he asked them why, they said they hated those subjects. Eventually, he got more and more of the class interested in

free writing, but he never could get them interested in mathematics. The schools had permanently soured them on math.

Another argument one hears against this kind of education is that it won't prepare children for life. The answer the Plowden Report makes to this seems to me sensible: the best preparation for life is to live fully as a child. Sometimes this fear takes the reasonable form of a parent's question: will these informal methods handicap a child if he moves on to a school run on formal lines? It is a real question in Britain as children move from good infant schools to old-fashioned junior schools, or from informal primary school to rigid secondary school. I went to a parents' meeting at one superb infant school; the parents were completely won over by the methods of the school, but they were nonetheless apprehensive of what could become of their children in a new situation. The head of the school said that the children did in fact do well in the formal junior school, which was true. There was only one repeated complaint about them: they were not very good at sitting still for long periods of time. In general, an ability to write and to understand mathematics—to say nothing of an ability to work on their own—stand children in good stead, whatever school they later attend. Heads of good schools insist that children are more adaptable than most parents imagine—and one indication that the problem of switching from one school to another is not crucial is that most principals in good local authorities agree with the Plowden Report's recommendation for another year of the informal methods of infant school: with an extra year, most of them think, they could lick their remaining reading problems, and the transition will be even easier.

Another pressing question Americans ask is, oddly enough, historical. It is said that these kinds of classes were

tried in the progressive era of American education, and found wanting. This is one of those historical lessons we cling to, and, since nothing is as treacherous as our sense of recent history, it bears looking into. Progressive education, like the progressive movements in thought and politics, was woven from many different, often contradictory threads. It evolved against a background of the great shift in the function of American secondary schools, a change from elite preparatory institutions to mass terminal institutions; just as in the 1950s, when our present picture of progressive education was firmly etched in the popular mind, many high schools were turning into mass college preparatory institutions. The radical attempt to give secondary education to the whole American population was an important aspect of progressive education, just as the reaction against it was appropriate to an era when nearly half the students in secondary school would go on to college.

As a movement, progressive education reflected a new concern for science brought to bear on society. In the schools this meant educational psychology, tests, and the cult of research. Another element was a concern with social reform: John Dewey's vain hope that the schools could in some way become centers for the continuous reconstruction of society. A distinct, if sometimes related strand, was an emphasis on individual growth and development. This last, in particular, was reflected in the practices of a number of American private schools in the 1920s and 1930s. Good and bad, these schools tended to see children through ideological lenses: they were followers of Freud, at least to the extent that they thought repression wicked, and some idealized children as participants in the artist's historic struggle against bourgeois society. The best of the "child-centered" private schools based much of their teaching on the idea that children come to understand the world

through active play; they tried to get students to take part in the running of the school; they broke down barriers dividing one subject from another, often making the surrounding community and its life part of the school curriculum. These seem today the sounder aspects of their work. The ideological emphasis on liberating the child now appears less useful. In some progressive schools, the energies of staff and children were wasted in testing the limits of permissible behavior, a procedure that was almost forced on the children by an abdication of adult authority. It is not strange that this abdication did not always lead to more freedom: in practice, freeing children from adult authority can mean exposing them to the tyranny of their peers; eliminating "external" rules can mean setting up subtle and unacknowledged rules that are just as ruthless and, even worse, vague and arbitrary.

There isn't much evidence that the classroom practices of the progressive private schools which stressed individual growth ever spread far and wide. The emphasis on cooperation and adjustment to the group was shared by the public school, but it took a different turn: preaching adjustment and "Americanization," the public schools were playing one of their traditional roles—taming objectionable outsiders, shaping them to fit into society, making sure that immigrants and lower class people made the minimum of trouble. The public school wing of the progressive movement in education was thus deeply conservative; obsessed with reform of school administration, putting the operations of the schools more in line with the principles of scientific management espoused by Frederick Taylor and his disciples. (It says much about a misunderstood period that the idea of a school managed as a business was more powerful than the idea of the school as a model civic community, though of course social science, civics, and other

shattered fragments of John Dewey's dream did enter the curriculum for better or worse.)

With certain notable exceptions, what we call progressive education was seldom tried in American public schools. In practice, progressive education in public schools meant secondary education for all, and, perhaps, more educational opportunity; more courses, especially in high school, of the life-adjustment variety; more time given to extracurricular activities; more grouping by ability; more emphasis on testing; some "project work" that was no doubt a welcome relief from the textbooks; some more or less important changes in the textbooks themselves; professionalization; new degrees and credentials for educators; and reform in the management of the schools, often based on inappropriate models from the world of business.

What wisps of the vision of education as individual growth trailed into the public schools were largely rhetorical. In their famous study of "Middletown" (Muncie, Indiana) in 1925, Robert and Helen Lynd described the classroom: "Immoveable seats in orderly rows fix the sphere of activity to each child. For all from the timid six-year-old . . . to the . . . high school senior . . . the general routine is much the same." When they returned to Middletown ten years later, "progressive education" had arrived. There was talk of growth, personality development, and creative self-expression: ". . . the aim of education should be to enable every child to become a useful citizen, to develop his individual powers to the fullest extent of which he is capable, while at the same time engaged in useful and lifelike activities." Along with the new rhetoric, the Lynds noted, went increased stress on administration. There was no basic change in methods of teaching or classroom organization. Their report can stand as a paradigm of what progressive education amounted to in most American schools. Educa-

tion that treats people as individuals had become a cliché without ever being reality.

There are parallels here with the primary school revolution in Britain. It, too, is distantly tied to the changing role of the secondary schools, and certainly much of its rhetoric is reminiscent of our progressive-education movement. British schools certainly share the concern with individual development of the good American progressive schools. And yet the differences in the two movements are profound. Although the British schools stress cooperation, and children are encouraged to teach each other, there is no abdication of adult authority and no belief that this would be desirable. The role of the teacher as active catalyst and stage manager is central. The idea of giving children choices is a considered judgment as to how they best learn. The teaching of mathematics, as described, illustrates how intent these schools are on teaching children to think; they have no particular ideological interest in turning children into social saviours or artistic rebels against bourgeois conventions, or whatever. It is this deep pedagogical seriousness, the attention paid to learning in the classroom, that makes the British primary school revolution so different from American progressive education, which was all too often unconcerned with pedagogy.

This pedagogical focus and what it means can be seen in the way informal British schools are solving the problem of grouping children into classes according to abilities—what the British call "streaming," and what we call "tracking." In both countries it is customary for larger schools to track students so that there are A, B, C, and sometimes D or E classes in a supposed order of ability and intelligence. (And within a class there are slow, average, and fast reading groups.) On the whole, teachers in Britain and America favor the practice, and it is easy to see why. When you deal

with the class as a unit, when learning is done by groups, it is less grueling if the group is of roughly similar abilities, and, within limits of conventional instruction, tracking does enable children to go at something closer to their own pace. Tracking, or streaming, is a heated subject in Britain, as it is in America. The spread of informal methods of teaching is calling its utility into question, and many of the schools run on freer lines are abandoning the practice. The Plowden Report, which favors "unstreaming," cites a survey of tested differences between formal and informal schools. It suggests that in terms of measurable achievement, children in tracked schools do slightly but not much better than children in informal schools where tracking has been abandoned. There are, as I have mentioned, grounds for discounting this finding: formal schools train children to take achievement tests, whereas informal ones teach more important things, and we have evidence that the differences in test scores wane as the children grow older.

In England, as in America, there are many reasons why a practical alternative to tracking would be desirable. Tracking in a primary school brands certain children as stupid at an early age, with profound and unhappy effects. "I'll never forget the look on the faces of the boys in the lower stream," an East London junior school head told me. His school has successfully abolished the practice, but he is unable to forget the look: "I still see it when my boys in the lower streams of secondary modern school come back to visit." Tracking has an abiding effect on teachers, too: it tempts them to think that a single pattern of instruction can be applied to a whole class, and it increases the odds that they will deal with their children in terms of abstract categories, IQ, racial stereotype, or whatever. In England, as in America, the upper tracks of a school tend to be middle class, which makes the school even more an instrument for

reinforcing social inequity. In America, tracking is commonly a means of maintaining racial segregation within a supposedly integrated school.

After watching British classes, another defect of tracking occurs to you: it ignores the extent to which children learn from each other, slow children learning from the quick, and the bright ones, in turn, learning from the role of teacher they must adopt with the slow. This is most evident in the small number of schools that use family, or vertical, grouping where there is not only no grouping by ability, but no grouping by age, and every class is a mixed bag of older and younger children.

Yet it makes little sense to condemn tracking unless teachers can be shown alternatives to formal classroom teaching. This is where the pedagogical bite of the primary school revolution is so impressive. When a British school stops tracking today, it is not simply returning to the past; it is shifting to a different definition of the roles of teacher and student, and setting up a new kind of classroom in which students are trained to work independently. With the blessing of the Plowden Report, fewer and fewer infant schools track, and it is more and more common for junior schools to abandon tracking in the first two years, and in some cases in the third. How far this trend will go depends on the impact the primary school revolution makes on the secondary schools. One survey in the Plowden Report shows that teachers who used to be overwhelmingly in favor of streaming as a general policy for primary schools are coming to approve of unstreaming. The reason, clearly, is that they are beginning to see workable alternatives.

Tracking is regarded as a necessary evil in America, as are IQ and standardized achievement tests, formal class teaching, specified curriculum materials, set hours for set subjects, fixed ages for entering school, being promoted,

and so on. Of course, teachers and administrators realize that children's intellectual and emotional growth varies just as widely as their physical growth, yet they seldom feel able to act on their understanding, to treat each child differently. The good British schools raise serious doubts as to whether these evils are in fact necessary. In America, as in England, there is a growing, and on the whole healthy, skepticism about education. People are questioning the standard methods, and they are becoming realistic about the limited extent to which any school can be expected to pick up the marbles for the rest of society. (One interpretation of the Coleman Report would be that it calls into question all our standard techniques of education, in slums as well as suburbs.) No approach to teaching will solve America's historical and social problems, but, as far as education can make a difference, the work of the British schools in many different kinds of communities suggests practical, working models of individual learning. For those who believe that what American education needs is not more of the same, it suggests alternatives.

The forces that might help bring about similar changes in American schools are few. To some extent the best of the American curriculum projects—such as the Educational Development Center—are pushing schools in the right direction. Good, open-ended materials are often in themselves a kind of retraining course for willing teachers, helping them become more confident about trying informal methods. Curriculum materials are by no means being abandoned in the British schools, but they are making different use of them. Curriculum materials must give teachers and students freedom to use them in a variety of ways; the best materials are often simply handbooks and guides to new approaches, rather than set lessons. Good materials become even more important in the later years of school. Geoffrey

Caston, of the Schools Council, worries that the successful methods of the infant schools, where, of course, the curriculum is largely generated by the students' own activities, will prove less successful when widely applied to older children by teachers of varying abilities. This may or may not be true. I saw junior schools where the free methods of the infant schools were being triumphantly vindicated, but I saw others that were very sleepy and could have used the stimulation of good materials. It is unlikely that curriculum projects can make much difference in America until they find a way of engaging ordinary teachers in creating materials. Americans should profit from the British understanding that the valuable and enduring part of curriculum reform is the process of creation and thought; unless you let teachers in on that, the stuff is likely to be dead. The American curriculum projects and some school systems might help set up equivalents to the advisory centers in good British authorities, teams of teachers and others whose only task is to work in the field with classroom teachers, spreading new ideas. Jerrold Zacharias once proposed display centers that would act as supermarkets for teachers interested in new ideas and techniques. (One role of the advisors in England is to take over classes for teachers so they can attend courses and displays.)

Certainly, useful work could be done developing new kinds of tests in the United States. The IQ and standard achievement tests are not the bogies they are made out to be—I suspect that schools use tests as an excuse to keep from having to try out anything new—but the likelihood of change would be increased if their grip on the minds of school administrators and parents could be loosened. Tests that reflect an ability to express oneself in writing or to reason mathematically would be a help: the problem is to persuade Americans to consider the relevance of standards

other than the ones now used. Clearly new tests alone won't solve that. Techniques, particularly when devised by outsiders, are never going to be enough.

It is within the schools that change has to come. Yet the prospects are dim. American private schools that once promoted progressive education are now largely formal in their methods; many are test-ridden, catering to parents who want solid evidence that a second-grade performance will lead to Harvard. They invite John Holt's gibe, "A conservative is someone who worships a dead radical." There are American communities in which principals and teachers are confident of their relationship with parents, and in such places, schools could begin to work along individual lines. Good suburban schools, able to withstand the possibility of slightly lower achievement test scores, also exist, but they seem to be getting rarer. Some of the better Headstart programs may influence the schools to make the first few years of learning more flexible, and perhaps some cities where education has reached a crisis point can be prodded into setting up some freer demonstration classes.

A new class of schools in the United States likely to be interested in informal learning are the community schools which are beginning to appear in a few cities. Yet they have the burden of working out another, perhaps more important, educational problem: how to get parents to participate in the life of the school. This is hard enough, without trying simultaneously to change traditional patterns of classroom teaching. Parents in community schools, like parents everywhere when they face schools, lack convincing models of how things could be different, and they are rightly suspicious of theories and experiments.

This is the point: we lack actual classrooms that people can see, that teachers can work in, functioning schools that demonstrate to the public and to educators the

kind of learning I have described. These must be institutions that develop and grow over time, not just demonstration classes. (New York City has tried out every good idea in educational history—once.) To make any impact, such schools will have to be very different from the private experiments of the 1920s and 1930s, with their ideological confusions and their indifference to public education. The temptation is to say America needs many such schools, and we do. But a tiny number of infant schools pioneered the changes in Britain. Careful work on a small scale is the way to start a reform worth having, whatever our grandiose educational reformers might say. In the end, you always return to a teacher in a classroom full of children. That is the proper locus of a revolution in the primary schools.

cept the real and legitimate authority of a teacher as an adult responsible for making a nurturing environment in which children and their talents can grow. Freeing children is part of the point; encouraging them to make significant choices is desirable, because often the choices reflect their needs, and, in any case, that is how they learn to develop initiative and think for themselves. By itself, however, freedom is an empty and cold educational aim. When we have many more good schools, and when our educational philosophy is more firmly grounded in actual practice, we will understand what a limited goal it was.

CHAPTER 3

VARIETIES OF GOOD PRACTICE...

A Philosophy Struggling to Be Heard

Frances Pockman Hawkins is a gifted teacher who spent every Thursday one spring semester with six deaf nursery school children in a Colorado public school. Although she was working within a classroom committed to a special program, bristling with designs and elaborate theoretical purposes, the authorities were wise enough to give Mrs. Hawkins a pretty free rein during her short visits. (They must have wondered about all the things she kept trucking into the school: equipment for making bubbles, tire pumps, plastic tubes, a hamster, food coloring, water trays, balances, and hundreds of other items to stock an informal classroom.)

Fortunately, she kept a daily notebook, a series of notes, photographs, and reflections on each class session—how it went, what children spent their time doing, what Mrs. Hawkins did, as well as what she refrained from doing, and what was in her mind as she taught.* Each entry starts off with a list of new equipment introduced—there's an appendix on all the stuff, with useful notes—and then a narrative of the day's teaching follows.

Almost every attempt to describe what goes on in a good classroom fails, and every reader will come to items in her log where he feels he is not being told enough, or is being told too much. Nonetheless, Mrs. Hawkins is a shrewd observer, and her individual sketches of the children are delightful. She is keen to distill an occasional abstract principle from her experiences, and passages in these notes have the muffled, murky, and complex quality that nearly always marks the efforts of good teachers to pin down their art in words and general terms. The brilliance poises on the edge of portentousness, and only her massive common sense and her instinct for detail keeps her upright. The reader is standing on a heaving deck that is likely to pitch him from soap bubbles and giggles to very different levels of discourse: "Attention is a close cousin of love and one does not speak of training someone to love, but rather of providing the right setting."

What emerges is an original and fascinating sketch of what one experienced teacher is thinking about as she teaches. Mrs. Hawkins has illuminating things to say about her deaf charges, but this is really about teaching all children, rich or poor, wounded or whole. This work has one particular virtue that few books about informal teaching possess: it really concentrates on what an adult has to con-

*Frances Pockman Hawkins, *The Logic of Action: From a Teacher's Notebook*, Mountain View Center for Environmental Education, University of Colorado, 1969.

tribute to children's learning. While Mrs. Hawkins believes as passionately as anyone in environments where children are free to pursue their own learning independently, Mrs. Hawkins does not believe that such environments come about by accident. A teacher has the responsibility for choosing the materials, managing the stage. As the children learn, as they choose, the teacher still has further decisions to make: when to step in, when to keep quiet, what kind of help to give. It is an elusive process.

At first, for example, she sees that her children, perhaps because they are deaf, cling to routine more than most four-year-olds she has met; they remind her of older children, trained by the schools to rely less and less on their own experiences. So she deliberately interrupts the expected routine, to wean them from the ordinary and get them used to novelties:

Whatever I did was immediately copied, and, as one must when this happens, I had to change what I started as quickly as possible, providing more than one way to copy, thus sanctioning and inviting variety. . . . When a group of fives produces replica upon replica of one paper ornament, it is time to watch for and dignify, perhaps hanging from a mobile, one child's "mistake"—one hard to copy and thus conducive to the production of still more mistakes.

The purpose of the enterprise is to help a child "regain and develop this capacity to probe and test, to summon his sleeping resources of imagery, control, and understanding—in short, to learn, and not to memorize." One avenue to a classroom where this is likely to happen is the teacher's own interests. If the teacher herself is exploring the material and not just watching it being used, the odds of engaging a child's mind increase. There are, as Mrs. Hawkins demonstrates, innumerable things that adults and four-year-olds can explore together. She enjoyed watching water bub-

bles in the plastic tubes "falling upward," and argues convincingly that this shared interest is more valuable to the children than any amount of mere adult praise for their inventions. Her account suggests some of the richness inherent in good, open-ended science materials.

She is always conscious of herself as stage manager and catalyst. Sometimes the role is straightforward and simple, as when Patty takes up the attribute blocks to get away from the crowd and work on her own: "I protected her right to work there alone." Other times, as in planning to introduce new materials, there are many things to consider. Two long soundings from Mrs. Hawkins's flow of thought will have to suffice. Here she is thinking about artificial food coloring:

The materials here are still inherently new to most children and esthetically vivid. It has been my experience that there is more enjoyment and exploration if the introduction of food color is "structured." On this particular morning . . . I made another judgment. A time for quieter activity with the teacher involved was needed. Had the early part of morning followed another kind of pattern, I might have cancelled these plans. On a Monday morning, for example, after a cold and confining weekend, I have found children so deeply in need of self-direction in familiar paths, with adults far in the background, that I have to put away "structured" plans. Guidance at such times courts trouble. . . .

And here she is thinking about setting up balances:

I wanted to introduce them, not head-on, but tangentially and in sequence with enough sure-fire old stuff so that the children would not rush all at once to the balances just because they were new. Such structuring has at least two justifications: it allows a child sufficient time to use a new piece of equipment without having at once to share or wait turns. Materials such as this yardstick-cum-weights-on-upright are more likely to "speak" to a child when there is time for continued experimen-

tation. In addition . . . [this] approach provides a teacher the luxury of observation. . . .

In time, most of the children follow their separate paths to the realization that not all things have to be demonstrated. Some, perhaps, knew this all along but were not used to acting on it in practice. Mrs. Hawkins's role is built up from thousands of small concerns: making sure to take pains in presenting the delicate acetate gels-colored sheets to look through, so the children learn to treat them with proper care; remembering to start cleaning up early enough so the children have time to unwind. Some who read her notes may say that all this simply reflects the fact that Mrs. Hawkins is a remarkable person. That goes without saying. Yet many of the concerns she touches are to some degree those of all good teachers of all children of all ages. The ability comes naturally to some, and by experience to others; each teacher would describe how he works in a different way. These notes don't pretend to tell teachers what to teach, although they are full of suggestions. In their tentative, unfinished way, they present a series of working illustrations of principles in practice. Through them a philosophy of education is struggling to be heard, although in the absence of many more such classrooms and first-hand teachers' accounts, we will never be able to articulate it realistically, without dogma or cant.

Harlem Sixth Grade

Herbert Kohl's simple narrative of his experiences with a sixth-grade class in Harlem describes what happens as one teacher and his children respond to each other, and he gathers his nerve to alter his way of teaching.* It is the top

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th' well an' see, I can't get down on my knees, an'—got down on his knees. an' you never heard such a prayer come out'a nobody in your life as come out'a that man. An' I's standin' there about t'faint a'standin' there so long. I'd been run all day and starved t'death anyhow; an' I'uz just glad when he got done. He prayed a good prayer though. He just prayed a real good'n. He comes in about the time I got dinner ready, and he comes in an' eats.

The main point of students' writing is not the finished work, the poem or whatever, but how the experience helps students. With *Foxfire*, what clearly counts is the experience of putting it all together. Reading *Foxfire*, you sense that some students in Rabun Gap with their tape recorders and cameras are really learning something.

Street Academies: 1968

Street academies are schools run by the New York Urban League, manned by teachers and streetworkers, operating out of the abandoned storefronts that litter Harlem like empty shells on a beach. They have had considerable success in reaching dropouts (others call them pushouts) from city high schools. In two years they sent something like 140 Harlem and Lower East Side students in New York to various colleges, and more than that are now preparing for college in street academies and in two private schools linked to the program. The number of storefronts constantly changes, as does their function; in past years the tendency was to begin with a lot and then, through the course of a year, to shake down to a manageable number. Some are engaged in job training and setting youths up in local business, some in street work and recreation; there's one for young dope addicts; about ten offer formal academic instruction.

The formal program is a ladder with three rungs, the lowest being the street academy proper, a storefront serving anywhere from ten to thirty students. An academy has three teachers (with college degrees) and three streetworkers. Of the 120 workers in the New York City program, I observed in the summer of 1968, about 70 were black, mostly from Harlem; a growing number are alumni of the academies. Streetworkers usually live in the neighborhood where they work; a few maintain apartments for homeless kids. Each academy has its own atmosphere, but what is taught is roughly the same: a mixture of basic, often remedial reading and math, and subjects like African and black history, sometimes Arabic or Swahili, and sociology which usually means discussing life in Harlem.

After anywhere from six weeks to a year in a street academy, half the students graduate to the second rung of the ladder, another storefront called the Academy of Transition, which offers some systematic preparation. Then, after achieving eighth- or ninth-grade levels of performance, students are recommended for the third stage, one of two college preparatory schools, Newark Prep and Harlem Prep. (So far about nine in ten of the students in the Academy of Transition have gone on.)

A visitor's notes: streetworker watching a student squinting at a book. It turns out the boy never had his eyes examined. A few days later I notice he is wearing glasses. "Reading problem, shit," was all the worker said. Another tells of a student who always falls asleep in class; when he is examined a doctor discovers a small piece of paper stuck in his left ear. For years, nobody had noticed that he was half-deaf.

An intense young teacher, black, is delivering an impassioned lecture on slavery. Part of his text is drawn from Stanley Elkins's study; he describes the Middle Passage,

Prep is widening its admissions nets, too.) Dropouts and truants from Benjamin Franklin will be farmed out to ten street academies, where streetworkers and teachers will prepare them to return to the "Prep Wing." The program is now negotiating on such key matters as the selection of teachers. There are plans for starting programs in other high schools.

At the start, the bulk of the money to finance the academies has come from the Ford Foundation (\$700,000) with some funds coming from the Neighborhood Youth Corps and the city. Mr. Oostdyk has persuaded a number of companies—including IBM, the First National City Bank, Celanese, and others—each to sponsor an academy in the Franklin complex. (A large academy costs about \$50,000 a year to run.) In a series of complicated moves, he has tied the academies to a city program of neighborhood "satellites," smaller storefronts for streetwork and recreation.

The street academy staff is ambitious (though already spread too thin), and the new arrangements will make financing less chancy. But there are grounds for concern. The street academies have succeeded because they have worked from the streets up. First they established contact with students through streetworkers and teachers, then adapted the institutions to fit what grew out of this relationship. They were truly decentralized units—small and with a fair amount of autonomy for teachers and workers. This enabled them to assemble radically different sorts of people. Such an approach stands in direct contrast to the kind of grandiose institutional engineering the foundations like to sponsor in the name of "fundamental change." It runs counter to the ethos of both schools and large corporations.

The price of involvement with public schools and corporations may, in the end, be too high. There will certainly

be troubles involved in keeping the present assortment of people. Already one academy has been closed because its director was thought too extreme, and the Five Percenter Academy is being allowed to languish. The program needs to be as various as the streets, and yet it is hard to envision militant streetworkers toeing a line chalked by the city schools, just as it is hard to believe that many corporate officials would be pleased by the tone of some of the discussions I heard.

The more the program ties in with the schools, the more it will have to reconsider its narrow aims. It is one thing to run street academies aiming to persuade gifted dropouts to go to college; it is quite another to set up an elite program in one part of a dispirited, mutinous city high school. The street academies will have to begin thinking of other challenges besides college to offer the mass of angry black youth in the cities.

Two Community Schools: Boston, 1968

The New School for Children in Boston occupies a cheerful, cluttered building across the street from a public school that looks like the prison ship in *Great Expectations*; it has ninety children, kindergarten through the fifth grade. The Community School has, at the moment, settled its forty nine children—kindergarten through second grade—in a cramped maze of small rooms in the basement of St. Ann's Episcopal Church. Both are examples of a new kind of school—independent private schools set up by parents in the ghetto. Both began in 1967 and are showing a tenacious ability to endure in the face of steep odds. Each is a variation on a theme, community schooling, and each is thus a separate, uncompleted essay in definition of elusive words like *community* and *participation*.

They have common roots, for at the outset there was only one group of Roxbury people interested in starting an independent school. Mostly black, but with some whites, it formed in a mood of desperation after Louise Day Hicks's sweep of the 1965 Boston school-board election. Some were associated in one way or another with the tutorial program run out of St. Ann's. Most were parents who had come to distrust the public schools, and although they disagreed on many points, they were united in wanting a school that could be depended upon not to cripple their kids; that was the minimum. Some wanted the feeling of being able to shape at least part of their children's future; a few had a specific interest in seeing their children placed in informal classes, where they could work at their own level and in their own time.

The division into two groups reflected a faint division along class and neighborhood lines. What became the Community School group had markedly more "certifiable poor"—people whose income falls below official poverty levels—most of them clustered in the framehouse apartments around St. Ann's. What became the New School group had more people whose incomes are middling, more whites, more people from the general Roxbury area. The Community School operates without tuition; the New School charges \$250 a year, granting scholarships to its needy children.

One point of contention between the groups was the degree to which a good school in the ghetto needs outside help. Obviously outside money was needed; but to what extent could a school go it alone? The New School enthusiasts wanted a crack school for their children, and they were eager, or at least willing, to enlist the support of schools of education in the Boston area and educational experts of one kind or another, as well as the energies of various prominent Roxbury figures. This bent was reinforced by

the principal, Mrs. Bernice Miller, a former Chicago school principal who believed that the New School would have to go beyond its own circle to draw on a wide base of support if it was to flourish as a model enterprise. The Community School people, on the other hand, were interested in having a good school, but they wanted the school to be *theirs*: they were suspicious of the amount of outside involvement in the New School. They were also wary of administrators and decided to call their principal simply the head teacher. (The first head teacher was Mrs. Doreen Wilkinson, a lovely black lady with a good deal of sympathy for the parents' outlook.) Both schools have tried to set up a network of Friends of the School for raising money in fairly small sums in Boston and the suburbs. So far they seem to have made this precarious financing work, but as each plans to add a grade a year, budgets will grow and fund-raising will become tougher.

There is no rivalry between the two schools; they are simply not the same. The New School has come to identify with Roxbury as a whole. Its wider base of support and its ability to appeal to many different interests have made it a community venture in a broad, almost political sense—the sense that Roxbury Negroes use when, prematurely and not always accurately, they speak of themselves as a black community. It has become one of the symbols of Roxbury's aspirations and draws on the support of people sympathetic to those aspirations—progressive educators, liberal suburbanites, as well as private schools like Shady Hill. Classes are informal, the atmosphere is lively and warm. (Kids come and sit on a visitor's lap.) There's a tendency toward the faddishness you see in the rare, self-consciously experimental suburban school, but so far it has been checked by the extraordinary quality of two former Boston school teachers who took the first and second grades.

The Community School defines its community differ-

ently. The center of it is the parents, most of whom live near St. Ann's. (The school has a loan to renovate part of a nearby house, which in time it will move to.) There are a few outsiders on its board; the school is largely a neighborhood affair. Here, too, classes are informal, although maneuvering in tiny basement rooms puts a strain on teachers and children. There are three teachers and two assistant teachers, ladies from the neighborhood. (At the New School parents work in the office and in a variety of other ways, but they don't teach.)

I could not argue, in the language of the social scientists dominating our educational discourse, that these two schools are models or even hypotheses. What they prove is still being worked out, assuming that the wild tangle of variables we call a school can ever be said to have proved anything. They testify to a fierce desire on the part of ordinary people to develop workable alternatives to public education. They show that ghetto parents will approve of informal classes quite unlike anything they had when they were in school. (One lady, however, said she liked the informal classes because they reminded her of the one-room schoolhouse she attended as a girl in rural Alabama.) Community schools seem to be spreading, despite the absence of any workable means of financing them. They may represent a Children's Crusade, or they may, after all, only be telling everybody a simple lesson about educational reform: don't wait to work out theories of what community participation means; certainly don't wait for guarantees about money. Begin a school, do good work on a small, manageable scale, and perhaps reality will catch up to you. If there are enough such enterprises, learned men will be set to devising ways that their existence can be made to square with common sense, public finance, and all that. In the meantime, they exist, they teach live children; that's miracle enough to stagger the experts.

Career Ladders for Poor People

The Talent Corps—"A College for Human Services"—was started by a handful of reformist middle-class ladies with the idea of training poor women for jobs as assistants to professionals in what are called the human services: schools, hospitals, and other social agencies in New York City. Not a terribly radical idea, you would say. Yet as it evolves into a two-year institution of higher learning, the Talent Corps is cutting more and more against the grain of our educational order.

The Talent Corps is a refinement of some ideas that have been in the air since the early sixties, when America began to rediscover poverty and a number of theorists—I suppose the first was the sociologist Frank Riessman—proposed creating new careers for the poor by setting up permanent jobs in various understaffed human services areas of the economy, jobs that would include career ladders, on-the-job training allowing able poor people to rise to professional positions. Thus, the theory ran, we would provide decent work for many and improve services while reducing the level of warfare between professionals and the poor neighborhoods they supposedly serve.

The new-careers theorists subsequently have managed to touch on various absurdities in the organization of American life. They note the massive shortages of hands in the service sectors of the economy. They say, with justice, that present vocational programs are a costly disaster, equipping people for obsolete jobs—like the unhappy students I saw in a Boston high school, sitting on the asphalt studying agriculture. The proponents of new careers raise questions about our entire system of licensing and credentialing professionals. It makes little sense to demand four years of an academic high-school program and a lengthy,

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