AN OCCASIONAL PAPER

IN SCHOOL

Creating a Learning Community

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CREATING A LEARNING COMMUNITY
IN SCHOOL

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In the mind's eye. . .

IN SCHOOL

A Learning Centre — Challenges and Alternatives

My hope for the future, is that if the school system could help children look at everyday problems of behavior in a problem-solving way, then much of psychiatry and social work would disappear.

Maxwell Jones

CHILDREN WHO COME from economically and socially disadvantaged families meet with a sense of defeat early in life—an experience that often intensifies as they grow older. Their frustration begins in school and frequently shows up as aggressive and disruptive behavior.

Furthermore their learning styles are very often not suited to the typical teacher-led type of instruction. This pattern of failure culminates when they attempt to move into the middle-class, competitive world where advancement is dependent on achieving employable skills, many of which are acquired through formal education. Typically, they are forced to take jobs at the most marginal levels, or can find none at all.

The 1960s brought optimism and hope that something could be done to alleviate social and economic conditions and thus extend the American dream to those people who had previously not had a chance. During the summer of 1965, one of the first demonstration projects funded under the "War on Poverty" provided the means to temporarily change the structure of an elementary school so that children could have new opportunities for learning.[1] There was a national shortage of credentialed teachers and a high rate of unemployment especially among minority groups. Dr. James Hartley, the Dean of Extension of the University of California at Riverside sponsored a project that could simultaneously address these concerns.

Thirty two adults and youths (school drop-outs, parents, high school and college students) were trained and employed as assistant teachers to work in teams with eight credentialed teachers in a summer enrichment program for approximately 200 children (mostly Black and Latino), living in a distressed rural area.[2]

Background. The form this project was to take came largely from my discomfort with teacher training (beginning with my own) and the need to open up new avenues for innovation in education. From 1958-1964 I was conducting a thera-

peutic community project at the men's prison in Southern California. Concurrently I was involved in training a group of 18 prisoners to become "Program Development Assistants," in the social services. Dr. Hartley contacted me to see if I would be interested in designing and teaching some courses for teachers and administrators to help them better understand and deal with children who had behavior problems in school. The classes became quite popular and attracted a wide range of teachers from nursery school through community college. Teachers invited me to visit their classrooms and suggest ways they could improve learning.

I was impressed that, in time, teachers in these "human relations" classes went beyond looking for quick fix solutions for disruptive children and began to question some of their own teaching practices; they felt frustrated at not being able to try out new teaching and learning methods. Many were in schools that had large numbers of children with "action" oriented learning styles. The children were restless, impatient with traditional teaching methods, and many dropped out of school as soon as they could. Without formal education, many would be forced into menial jobs or living on welfare, perpetuating what then was referred to as the "cycle of poverty."

I had shared my concerns with Dr. Hartley, who was responsive. He had encouraged me to explore how my course work could be made more useful and, indeed, how university extension itself might play a more vital role in promoting experimentation with learning.

Referring to the opening quote by Maxwell Jones, what he had in mind was that if his notion of social learning could be applied in schools, children would learn more constructive ways of handling interpersonal relationships. He was especially excited about the possibilities of peer teaching. Max saw this procedure as one that could go beyond content itself and into more general learning—what he termed "social learning." He wrote:

> By communicating freely among themselves about social problems in relation to younger pupils, the olders [tutors] have the opportunity for free discussion about attitudes, prejudices, and so on. This constitutes a learning situation, with two-way communication, examination of attitudes, expression of feeling, and a growing awareness of new ways of looking at situations and handling them.[3]

As he visited my classes he became enthusiastic about the many possibilities for change that teachers were unaware of or lacked the skills to carry through. I remember how excited he became when a teacher would recount a "teachable moment" and Max would seize these opportunities to point out how children's lives are more open and less defensive so that they can learn how to observe events occurring around them, analyze situations and then try out alternatives. And they needn't be goaded into following career choices. He said to me one time:

> To become an engineer, a computer expert, a doctor or what have you, for example, and to be immersed in preparation for this specific goal is to deny the very process of becoming, which may lead anywhere and might even lead away from engineering, computers, or medicine altogether, as one develops an awareness of one's own individuality.[4]

So beyond an ameliorative process, he saw social learning as a means for the individual to be constantly alert to propitious moments when change could occur, a process of "recycling one's psyche" as he put it.

The sudden passage of federal anti-poverty legislation (P.L. 88-452) in early 1965 presented a rare opportunity to put together a project which would demonstrate many new ways to enrich education for economically and socially disadvantaged children and, at the same time, create rewarding jobs for youth and adults who were unemployed, underemployed, or otherwise disadvantaged themselves.

Aims of the Project. The project was to be both an experiment and a demonstration of how the assets of a typical elementary school could be enhanced through restructuring its methods of instruction and administration, along with addit-

tional resources. Obstructions to learning often arise from basic problems in communication. Teachers, more likely than not, come from middle-class backgrounds which in itself presents difficulties in understanding children from other cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. In addition, age differences between adult teachers and young children are not always conducive to understanding and communicating. And inherently there is the underlying matter of authority and its use (or abuse) in the teaching situation

In sum, we were looking for more effective ways to make education play a more vital part in the lives of these children.

STRUCTURE

The setting. The project location in Riverside County in Southern California comprised a 70 square mile area. Many of the Blacks who were living there had originally come from the South, having migrated to California during World War II. The area was a stopping off place for those seeking jobs in Los Angeles; some had returned there after the war, bought a small plot of land and built a little place for retirement. A few homes were substantial, but the majority were scarcely habitable, with 10 and 12 people living in three rooms. Early mornings, buckets in hand, children walked to the railroad tracks to "fetch water" from the large storage tank; a great many of the homes did not have running water, indoor plumbing, electricity, or telephones. In contrast, on the other side of the tracks there were some very substantial homes where affluent Caucasian ranchers lived. And a few children from these homes attended the same school.

The school district consisted of one elementary school, with another under construction. Children were bussed in, some had to ride for an hour each way. There had been so many disturbances on the buses that the younger children had to be segregated from the older ones on separate rides. One of the bus drivers had been assaulted only a few months before the project began.

The basic plan for the project called for eight teaching teams composed of a teacher and four assistant teachers for approximately 24 children, thus accommodating about 200. The community had unaccountably turned down a Head Start program, so we wanted to include a fair number of pre-schoolers. The school was to be un-graded in the sense that, except for the pre-schoolers, children would work in eight "clusters" of their own choosing regardless of age. Each cluster would have a teaching team.

Every day the teams met before the children arrived at 9:00. Students remained at school until noon unless the team made other plans for activities off campus. In the afternoon teams planned their own activities. Some members made home visits; there were field trips and tutoring. At 3:00, all the staff gathered for a daily seminar which lasted until 5.

The staff. In addition to the project director there was a project administrator and a resident principal. An additional three people were in curricula procurement and clerical positions. There were eight certificated teachers, 32 assistant teachers, and a training and evaluation team of four. The staff for the project totaled 47.

The project director, Dr. James Hartley, had an extensive background in education administration and had attended group dynamics workshops at the National Training Laboratory, Bethel, Maine.

For day-to-day operations, there were two administrators at the project site. One, the project administrator, was an experienced elementary school principal. The other, the resident principal, was the regular vice principal of the site school. Her role was that of a coordinator or learning consultant who knew the children and their families and supported the teaching teams, offering advice and encouragement.

The eight teachers (three males; one Black, one Latino; two from the project school) were selected from 48 applicants.

A few homes were substantial, but the majority were scarcely habitable, with 10 and 12 people living in three rooms.

The assistant teachers represented four groups. There were parents (seven female), college and high school students, and school dropouts (school leavers). All the parents were from the community, as were many of the others. We urged those who did not live there to reside in the community for the summer. The resident principal helped find families who would offer board and room.

To assist in training and evaluation, we assembled a Change and Development Team, consisting of two recent parolees from a California prison, who had participated in a therapeutic community project, and a graduate student who had worked with Maxwell Jones while he was at Oregon State hospital; I acted as the coordinator and consultant. Six weeks before the project began, the Change and Development Team had come to the project site for exploratory studies and staff training.

There were also a number of outside consultants. Some were professional educators, and others (Maxwell Jones and Professor Peggy Lippitt from the University of Michigan, Anita Gamson, counselor, from a National Mental Health Institute project, and Dr. Eva Schindler-Rainman from U.C.L.A.'s School of Education), had specialties which we needed. Four were fourth-grade *students* who were experienced in peer teaching and group discussion.

Two of the fourth-grade consultants and their teacher, Mary Beem

THE PROJECT BEGINS

On June 28th four yellow school buses went to pick up those children who might be waiting. Every family in the district had received a notice that a summer school would be held for those who were interested in attending. The staff gathered early in the cafeteria for coffee and then retreated to their rooms, anxiously awaiting the arrival of the children. There was a good deal of apprehension: how many children would come? The physical appearance of the staff had changed. During the previous week, while they were planning their programs, they had dressed casually in Bermuda shorts, slacks and so on. Although no one specified a dress code, on day one they came tastefully dressed, making a striking appearance as they waited outside the school for the children.

At 9:00, the first bus arrived. Many of the staff went out to greet the 40 children, aged 4-12, who tumbled off. The pre-schoolers were taken to a separate building; the rest visited the other rooms, looking up their former classrooms, curious to see what changes had occurred. The other buses arrived shortly and soon there were 175 children moving from room to room.

The children were told that they could visit any of the rooms during the first week until they found one they liked; by Friday they were to settle on one where they would remain for the remaining five weeks—the only limitation was to avoid over-crowding in any one class. By the end of the week the children had ended up where they were comfortable and very few reassignments were necessary.

Teams chose to divide their children into sub-groups with an assistant teacher having five or six students who worked together on a project. They could also work individually, but remained with the small group for meetings, field trips, and so on. The children got to know the assistant teachers and spontaneously formed the group they wanted to be with by choice. In one team, no one chose the parent, a grandmother who was the Baptist minister's wife, She was well known in the community from teaching Sunday school and other church activities. Children saw her as "strict" and prone to giving moralistic advice. Without any children to

"teach," she attended to housekeeping in the room and assisted the teacher with administrative duties. She attended the group meetings and became highly involved in the daily total staff seminar. Her moralistic attitudes were opened to question and after a while she seemed to withdraw from participation. Over time, she began to look at some of her attitudes and tried to offer assistance to the other teachers in her team. Little by little some of the children began to draw her into their projects and before the project ended, she had acquired a small group of her own. The children had shown a great deal of patience with her, yet they did not hesitate to confront her when they thought she was infringing on their activities out of her own considerations.

Activities varied a great deal from classroom to classroom, according to the plans made by each team.

Although team-teaching was an accepted practice in many schools and some had volunteer help from time to time, we wanted the children to have a greater variety of adults to relate to. This conviction stemmed from two considerations. One held that these particular children needed people that they could easily communicate with, either due to similarity of backgrounds or who were closer to their own age than an adult teacher. Secondly we wanted to see how, what Maxwell Jones called "functional leadership," "emerges in response to a particular situation."[5] Max had been concerned from early on about the abuse of leadership and its authoritarian aspect in blunting growth and change. His work in a variety of settings had convinced him of the importance of "multiple leadership," whereby individuals working in concert could evolve a fluid structure which recognized the strengths of any one individual at a given time. One person might show leadership in one situation, another at a different time. An adult teacher working with a team would be able to create a climate wherein each member could come forth with ideas to benefit the children. Likewise, the children would shift into such roles as they progressed in learning. This more democratic type of structure would emerge in contrast to the more authoritarian kind where the teacher dominated learning.

Examples from two of the teams gives some idea of how this process worked in a variety of activities.

The Pre-School Team. The teacher was a petite

Latina who had a rich and varied teaching background. She'd taught in Mexico and Spain and in economically distressed areas in this country. Although she was not from the community, she chose to live there with one of the families for

the summer. In contrast, the Caucasian college student was well over six feet tall, had been president of the student body at the University of California the previous year; he'd resigned to

protest administrative decisions over infringement of civil rights. The drop-out was a Latina girl from the neighborhood, who was very quiet and shy. The high school student was a combination of Black, French, and Jewish, whose father was the school's custodian. The parent was a Black father of six who was unemployed and seeking work.

The team members in planning their program had decided that they wanted the children to have an opportunity to build their own learning environment, so they had emptied the room of all the books, toys, and equipment accumulated from the previous school year, leaving only the big oval rug. Looking in on the bare room, a former kindergartner remarked: "Miss C. [the regular teacher] will sure be upset when she sees what you've done to her room!"

The team's teacher later wrote: "There I was, sitting securely on the rug, in our otherwise vacant room, thinking that as a 'hotshot' teacher I would sail through the summer doing new and exciting things. Then the "rug-pulling" began. It was started by B. (the college student) and was quickly picked up by the others. 'I was being too authoritarian. I was being too teacherish.' This hurt and frustrated me. What could I be if I couldn't be a teacher?"[6]

The team gradually added materials to the room as they were needed for the projects which the children initiated. They took the children to visit the school district's curriculum center and went shopping for other toys and supplies as they were needed for their projects. Then they went to the county library to get books. But they made much of their own paraphernalia from materials the children brought to school from home.

As it turned out, many of the children had led rather insular lives in terms of not having explored very much outside the community. Sixteen of the 24, for example, had never been in a supermarket or "dime store." The team arranged a field trip to a shopping mall in Riverside and gave each child 25 cents to spend. Most of them had never seen an escalator and were frightened by it. The assistant teachers, each with six children, took them one at a time on the escalator. Seeing the frustration in everyone concerned, shoppers volunteered to take some of the children by the hand up the escalator.

Some children returned from this field trip with their quarter still tightly grasped.

'I was being too authoritarian. I was being too teacherish. What could I be if I couldn't be a teacher?'

Team Five began the first day with a group meeting and put names of the four assistant teachers in a basket; children drew out the name of one of these new teachers until each had a group of about six children. Some traded names. The teacher was Caucasian who had taught in an economically distressed area. The college student, also Caucasian, was now a post-graduate student in psychology, having changed from the physical sciences. The drop-out was a quiet, Black male from the community, currently on probation by the local court. He was allowed to

participate in the project during the week but had to return to jail to spend the weekends. The

parent was a soft spoken, Black grandmother with white hair. Coming from the South, she had experienced a lifetime of hardship and had bought a little plot of land in the valley where she spent her remaining days raising goats. She lived in a small house with her granddaughter.

The college student in this team of 25 children, aged between eight and 11 years devised a method of learning more about the children's daily experiences and how they could be of use in the program.

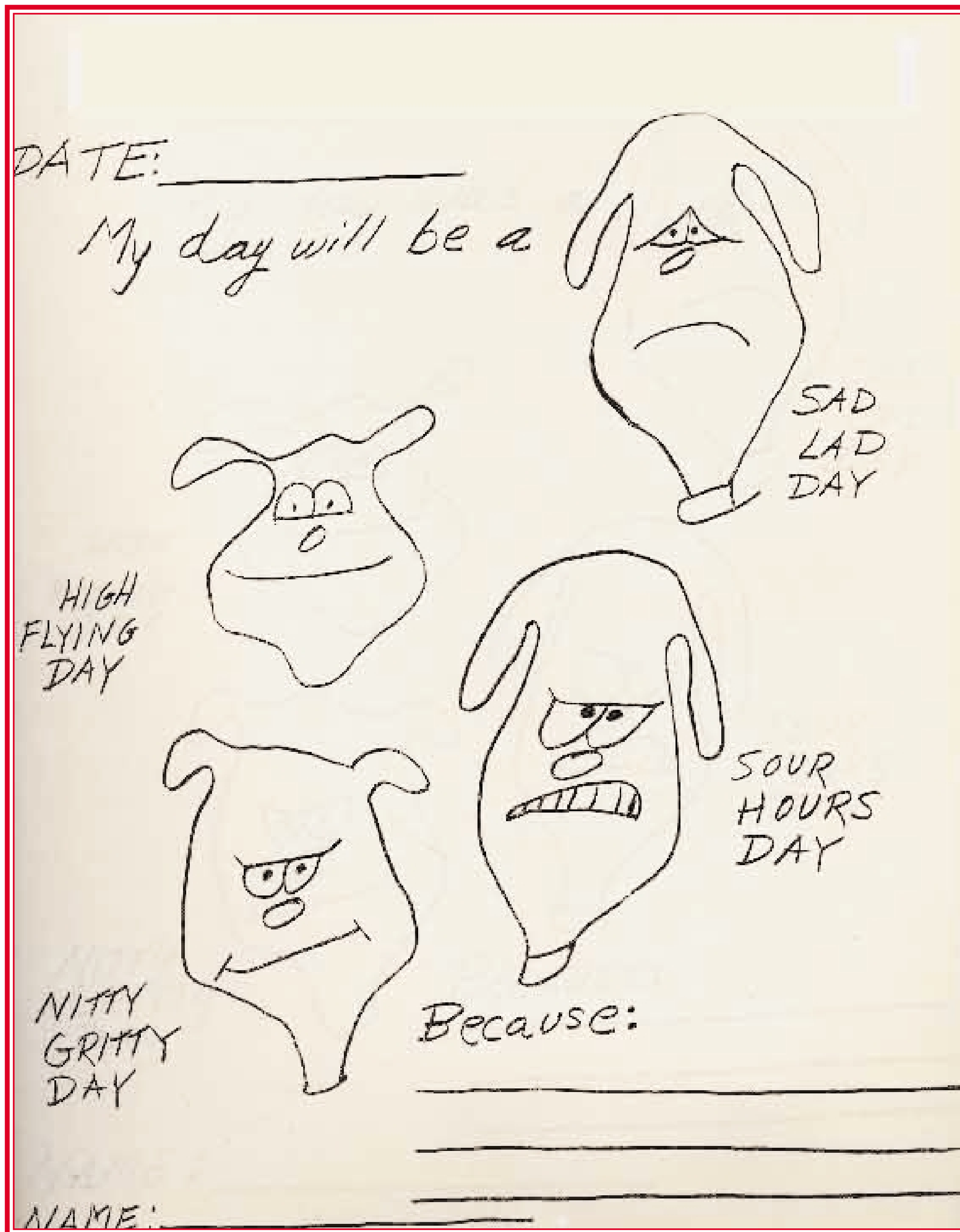
> As an adult, I have found that it is of great personal value to set expectations or consider the bases that need to be covered during the day and then at the end of the day to look back upon these expectations by observing, in retrospect, the activities that either helped or blocked my effective completion of my set expecteds. It was my intention to introduce this same principle to the children. . . . Rationale: (1) To motivate the children to focus on what their day would be like. (2) To set the children up as being partly responsible for their day at school. (3) To have them look back at their own success or failure concerning their completion of their morning expecteds. (4) To further our personal understanding of the individual children and their special needs. (5) To assess any different influence that each of the four different teaching assistants would have on the children within their respective cluster groups. (6) To be something that the children would enjoy doing. (7) To enrich the aspect of personal learning for the children in the school situation.[7]

Each morning, he gave the class members a sheet with four cartoon characters of dogs' faces representing a range of emotional states that the children would be likely to come to school with. On the first day of school, posters of the characters were displayed and what they represented. "We discussed a 'Nitty Gritty Day' as being a day to study and work and really get down to business, when a 'High Flying Day' would be happy-go-lucky, carefree, and less work or more of doing the things you really enjoy." He asked them to choose one to color that would depict their anticipations ("High Flying Day" to "Sad Lad Day"). Then he asked them for a few words on their choice. At the end of the day, he repeated the procedure asking them how the day turned out, to check the outcomes of their predictions. They used colored crayons, paint, chalk, pencil, glue, paste, and some made cut-outs of their choices.

> One of the of the most honest expressions was given by a boy when one day he walked into class and *cut* the "sour hour dog" with a pair of scissors; by doing this he registered honest feelings of deep hatred and anger when he first came to school. I gained deep insight into his personal problems concerning his home life after talking to him about why he cut the sour hour dog and threw the evaluation down on the desk. . . . It served as an intermediatory or as an opening point of discussion to talk to the boy about his personal problems that may never have come out within the school environment otherwise.[8]

From their responses, the college student was able to learn more about the children's expectations based on their home conditions and relationships they were developing within the class. He hoped that the children would learn how they might affect their own destinies by having some control over their feelings and the conditions around them. He wrote:

> It was difficult for the children to consider themselves as being partially responsible for their success or failure in relation to their day at school. Some could be attributed to their past experience with school as just being something that is there. Also, they have things provided for them to a great degree and don't have to assume any real responsibility in their regular school planning.[9]



Project Highlights

1. The Change and Development Team.

ONE UNIQUE ASPECT OF this project was the "Change and Development Team" (C&D Team) composed of two young men just paroled from a California prison, a university post-graduate student in sociology and myself. The team had had special training in peer teaching, observing teaching situations, and research methodology.[10]

The C&D Team was to observe the various activities of the project, report what they saw to the teaching teams, and to conduct whatever evaluation was possible. The project director made the analogy of the team to a thermostat which collects data to regulate a heating and cooling system. He summarized his views of the Team: "I consider this the most interesting part of the program. There is something that comes from being outside the group that helps one see what's going on inside it; and, in turn, the objective information helps the group know what it might do better in the future."[11]

The idea of the C&D Team was experimental and there was little relative experience from which to draw at that time. In addition to its task of making observations and evaluation, we believed that, due to their backgrounds and training, the two parolees might be able to see things in the classroom from a different perspective than the teachers and would become "linkers" between the slower achievers or culturally different children, the teachers, and the community. The fact that recently they had spent time in prison was also an advantage since the children at the school were not isolated from criminal activities; indeed, many of their neighbors, relatives, and older siblings had been or were currently involved in the criminal justice system, some in jail or prison.

The C&D Team served three distinct but overlapping functions in the project. It began with (1) selection of the assistant teachers and moved on to (2) their training. During the remainder of the project, the Team concerned itself with (3) reporting their observations to the eight teams and to the total staff in the daily seminars.

The activities of the C&D Team fell into two phases: first in the pre-project preparation stage, and then in the project itself.

a. Pre-project Activities. The two parolees and I started preparations at the site six weeks before the project began. They were released from prison on a Saturday and reported for work on Monday. There was some apprehension on the part of the administrators as to whether or not the parolees would be accepted by the community. Apprehensions were quickly dispelled when one of them convinced the community's Baptist minister to let him live with his family for the summer. The minister brought the parolee to church the following Sunday and presented him to the congregation as part of his "family." The other parolee took lodgings with a Black family who were respected in the community. As there were no other staff working full-time on the project and certain deadlines had to be met, the Team assumed many duties that were not originally intended or foreseen and

which later caused some confusion for the staff.

One parolee, for instance, recruited the eight drop-out teaching assistants, which meant he had to interview some of the prospects who were currently in jail; others he had to locate in the community by tracking down drop outs from the past school year. The other parolee sought out prospective high school students who lived in the community. As there were no college students in the community, I located college students, some of whom had taken courses of mine.

Once the assistant teachers had been selected the two parolees then became their trainers, meeting with them one evening each week. I attended these meetings as an observer. I met with the eight teachers and the administrators weekly, and the parolees observed these meetings. For one month, the staff met separately: that is, the drop-outs met as a group, the parents, the teachers, and so on.

The recruitment and training by the C&D Team members established strong alliances with the teachers and assistant teachers which lasted throughout the project.

As we didn't know to what degree peer teaching would work, or indeed, would actually be used in the project, we decided that the two parolee members would experiment with this method during the remaining six weeks of the regular school year. Not only would we gain experience with some of the same children who might be involved in the project, but we might discover some clues as to the role of the assistant teachers insofar as peer teaching was concerned. Although they had studied about peer teaching and had read references during their training, they had only practiced this method with other prisoners; the parolees had no direct experience with children in peer teaching roles, nor did the regular teachers at the project school site. Six of the other teachers who were hired for the summer project had had some experience with peer teaching.

And so for the remaining six weeks while school was in session, we did a pilot project of peer teaching and discussion groups in two of the classrooms as I will discuss in more detail later.

b. The Project. The graduate student arrived in June, got a room with a family in the area, and the team prepared for its first task: coordinating administration of achievement tests in what was to be a control school and at the project site. The C&D Team attempted to administer the tests during the last week of school, but too many of the children at both schools refused to take the tests so that testing could not be valid. Testing was, however, redone in both schools by the assistant teachers during the first week of the project.

As the teaching began, each member of the C&D Team worked with two teaching teams, visited them as regularly as they saw fit and gave them systematic observations of what they observed in the classroom. The team also prepared and administered brief questionnaires throughout the summer to get as much information as possible about the staff's view of the program. Some of this information was tabulated and reported immediately to the total group and the teaching teams.

One of the needs of the staff was additional training. Often they looked to the C&D Team members to meet these needs. This request put a strain on the team as they didn't have all that much expertise themselves; furthermore, this involvement lessened the chances that they could be objective. Despite their inexperience in teaching, they were skilled at leading a variety of discussion groups; they could communicate easily with the children and assistant teachers, so they were called upon constantly both for these skills and for emotional support.

It was also difficult for the two parolees to move from the pre-project phase into the project itself. They had obtained considerable satisfaction working directly with the children and had developed quite an enthusiastic following. It was hard for them now to take on a new, more distant, role and to allow the others to make their own errors and learn from them.

In the afternoon seminar it was also awkward for me sometimes as I had had considerable experience leading large groups. Everyone knew this, so I was frequently called on for help both to lead the group and for direction relating to classroom problems, which sometimes interfered with my being objective. The seminar was tape recorded and the graduate student kept a running account of the meeting, indexing content that we could use later for evaluation of the meeting. He also had had experience in large groups in Maxwell Jones' therapeutic community program in Oregon and he, too, was called on to help.

As the seminar progressed it was quickly recognized that the varied backgrounds of the teachers and the assistant teachers sometimes

led to conflicts. Most of the teachers came from middle-class backgrounds, all of course had a higher education, thus were accustomed to using and valuing verbal and intellectual communication. The majority of the assistant teachers (and the two parolees from the C&D Team), in contrast, had action-oriented learning and lifestyles. They focused on getting things done and were often impatient with discussion. But they were more open in displaying their emotions ("spilling their guts" as some said) while the teachers and administrators, by and large, were more reserved.

Some of the staff (especially the teachers) were initially threatened by the C&D Team's cumbersome title (so were we!): they thought it implied that they must change and that the team members would decide in what ways. Eventually they ignored the titles and often called on individual team members for assistance.[12]

2. Staff Sensitivity Training: the Weekend Retreat.

Maxwell Jones envisioned a daily meeting of all the staff as the cornerstone of the learning community we hoped to establish.

Although the staff had been meeting one evening each week for a month in separate corresponding groups (teachers, high school students, etc.), they had not as yet met together. As Max Jones advised, we envisioned a daily meeting of all the staff as the cornerstone of the learning community we hoped to establish. Max had visited my university classes for several years, as well as classrooms where peer teaching and discussion groups were being used. He assisted us in the early training phases of the project. For human relations training, we called upon the assistance of experts at the Western Behavioral Sciences Institute in La Jolla where Dr. Carl Rogers was in residence. We were fortunate enough to get the Institute's Dr. Betty Berzon and her staff as trainers; they were eager to assist us.[13]

The project called for an intensive residential workshop for the entire staff to be held over a weekend at a seaside motel, some distance from the community. We believed that being away from their families and associates would maximize conditions in which the staff could become acquainted with one another and facilitate the formation of a learning community.

The workshop, Betty Berzon wrote, was

> [A] means of enabling people who are working together to better understand themselves and each other, and to better deal with the interpersonal problems that often prevent free and open communication. . . The Human Relations Training group offers its members the opportunity to see themselves as others see them; to discover that their feelings, perplexities, insecurities are shared by others; and through this experience, and to develop mutual feelings of warmth and support."[14]

The format for the weekend workshop consisted of forming five training groups of approximately 10 people. Team membership had been established so now the teaching teams were to begin to learn to work together.

The workshop commenced on Friday evening with a two-hour session where the newly formed teaching teams met together for the first time. They resumed their meeting in the morning. Following lunch on Saturday, the whole group met for the first time. In the evening and on Sunday morning, the teaching groups re-assembled and then again the total group reconvened. Following each session, members were asked to write briefly about one incident that particularly struck them in the meeting.

The trainers and other facilitators met together following each session to pool their experiences.

After the Friday night session one of the

high school students invited the others to her room for a party. Some had brought records and there was dancing and laughter. The motel manager's wife interceded and stopped the party. She took some of the Caucasian girls aside and criticized them for mixing with "those kind of people." So it was the racial intermingling rather than the noise of the party that had upset her.

The incident, however, had great benefit: it quickly formed a group cohesion not only among the young people, but within the project as well. The issue of racial discrimination was out in the open and also it was now clear that individual behavior affected the project itself; the group could see the necessity of sticking together.

Two of the trainers made these observations about the weekend retreat.

> In each group, certain characteristics which affected open communication had been spotlighted and challenged: the 'professionalism' of the teachers, the stern morality and over-protectiveness of the mothers, the defensive arrogance of the drop-outs, the intellectualism of the college students, the brashness of the high school students, the aloofness of the administrative staff. And racial prejudice was one of the earliest—and in some ways the most manageable—problem in every group.
>
> By the fifth and last session, a strong sense of kinship had grown up not only among the members of each group, but seemed to have spread across group boundaries and diffused throughout the Project.[15]

By Sunday, movement from self-orientation to group-orientation was evident..

> [People] came to see each other as real and vulnerable. They were able to seek and to provide support across social, educational, and age boundaries. They were able to relate as equals to those they had seen as superiors or inferiors; mothers as well as the younger people found the teachers to be real, vulnerable, and needing them for support. When they left on Sunday, they seemed to care a great deal about each other and about the total group.[16]

3. Daily Staff Seminars.

Once the staff accepted that the project provided a fundamentally different approach to learning, how to proceed? We needed a way to modify the social structure of the school and develop new expectations of the staff and children. We leaned heavily on democratic participation as put forth by the National Training Laboratory and by Maxwell Jones from his work with therapeutic communities in hospitals.[17] There seemed to be an analogy between the status of patients and that of students in the hierarchical nature of the two institutions. Max wrote about the need for:

> [A] change in the usual status of patients. In collaboration with the staff, they now become participants in the therapy of themselves and other patients and in other aspects of the over-all hospital work—in contrast to their relatively passive, recipient role in conventional treatment regimes.[18]

As I said, we had consulted with him during the project's formulation. He believed his concept of "social learning" had a direct bearing on what we were trying to achieve in the project.

> [B]y listening to the group discussion, every member was comparing his or her attitudes, values, or beliefs with everyone else's, and in the process modifying his or her original position by incorporating divergent views of others when these were sufficiently persuasive. . . .a motivated and interested group member was inevitably modifying his or her "mental set" as the group process proceeded. The tendency was for the group to coalesce in some form of consensus. Thus, the cul-

> ture of the group was in a constant state of flux, mainly as a result of the daily community meetings.[19]

To accomplish our multifarious goals, Maxwell Jones suggested that we establish a “learning community,” which in some respects would resemble his therapeutic community. Specifically, he urged us to inaugurate a daily meeting of all the 47 administrative and teaching staff and the three clerical workers. Here in face-to-face communication everyone could voice his or her concerns, and share experiences and ideas. The seminar also was seen as a wrap-up for the day’s activities.

And so, each afternoon, from 3 to 5:00, the entire staff met in the school cafeteria. Many had just returned from making home visits with the children, from field trips, or from team meetings. We arranged chairs in a large circle. We opened doors to provide ventilation, and the hot desert wind sometimes blew through the room with the noise of military aircraft from the nearby Air Force base.

The staff did not seat themselves in any pre-arranged manner with the exceptions of the project administrator, the resident principal, and two members of the C&D Team who tried to remain in nearly the same positions each afternoon. This gave the group some form or “pivot points” in the meeting and was useful later for studying the flow of communication from various sections of the room. **[links to In Prison and In the Navy, by Dennie Briggs]**

We chose the word “seminar” rather than “group meeting,” to describe a place where learning through examining daily issues could occur. We didn’t want it to resemble a therapy group, although understanding and resolving conflicts might bring about some reduction of tension and lead to change. Nor did we want it to resemble a teachers’ meeting where unilateral decisions are made and handed down by the principal.

Some of the staff, in turn, called their meetings with the children “seminars” and the term was widely used throughout the project.

a. Form and Structure of the Seminar. From reading the notes taken by the C&D Team and listening to the tapes, we tried to understand the workings of this large group. We categorized the content and interaction of the meetings according to who originated and received communication and by “themes.” **[Link: In Prison/Navy]**

(*1*) *Attendance*. The entire staff was expected to attend the daily seminar and, for the most part, did. When members were not there, their absence was mentioned and on some occasions, someone would go to find them if they were on campus. One of the assistant teachers asked if he might bring one of his students to visit the seminar as the children were curious about what the “grown ups” talked about in their meeting. Two of the mothers objected, fearing that the child might report home what was said, and out of context, statements might jeopardize their position in the community. The final decision, however, was left to the college student who decided not to include the student. One of the teachers brought her teenage son and daughter to attend a meeting, warning them that they might be asked to leave. They were not. We considered such choices to be an important part of the project’s overall aim of creating a democratic structure within which such decisions could be made.

As news about the project filtered out, we were besieged with requests to visit it, and many visitors after looking in at the various projects, wanted to attend the seminar. At first, the group was reluctant to have outside visitors attend—they’d rejected the request of a college professor and his research assistant. But as the seminars developed, the participants became so involved they scarcely noticed visitors, except if they spoke, or if they were identified as VIPs. The consensus was that it would suffice if the administrators approved a visitor’s attendance with the

We chose the word “seminar” rather than “group meeting,” to describe a place where learning through examining daily issues could occur.

understanding that he or she might be asked to leave the meeting. The Superintendent of School's office was located on the grounds. Unbeknown to us, his secretary listened in to the meetings on the intercom system. We learned of this "intrusion" only when she told the resident principal that following what she had learned from the seminar, she had decided to confront a neighbor whom she hadn't spoken to for years following a dispute, and now they were speaking once more!

(2). The Seminar begins with silence. Meetings had no fixed agenda or designated leader. They opened with silence after the normal social conversations had ceased. Silences averaged seven minutes. The longest silence occurred the day that the superintendent of the school district visited. He came to express his concern about the untidiness of the school grounds and some defacement of equipment that had been called to his attention. A school district consultant also attended this meeting and returned the next day to open the meeting by expressing his discomfort with the previous meeting. He thought the superintendent's remarks were unwarranted and came back as he wanted the group to know how he felt and to support what the community was doing.

Although silence was disturbing to some of the staff, for the main part it was relaxing and a thoughtful time. For some it undoubtedly was akin to prayer.

(3). The Assistant Teachers open the Seminar. Three-fourths of the meetings were opened by the assistant teachers, often by the parents. The teachers and the administrators were more reluctant to open the meeting as they didn't want to set its tone. The drop out assistant teachers were reluctant to open the meeting as they didn't want to make a blunder.

(4). The "Leaderless" Meeting. Although there was no designated leader the project director often attended and the two principals came regularly. Most of the opening remarks, in contrast to a typical teachers' meeting, were directed towards the group (86%); on only one occasion, to the project director.

(5). Topics. We were able to identify 121 themes ranging from goals and philosophies to leadership, and to the presence of visitors, team teaching practices and racial tensions in the community. It was indeed a time when the staff could think together and continually try to arrive at some kind of consensus upon which to base their daily activities.

(6). Developing Norms and Standards. Expectations inevitably emerged from the meeting, one being that decisions were not usually made there; rather, the staff members had to make their own, following the discussions. The seminar became the place where administrative issues, staff behavior, roles, and problem solving took place.

On the first day of school, to cite an example, some fights broke out among the children. There was no principal's office to send them to. Some of the male drop-out assistant teachers and two college students got boxing gloves and had the children express their aggressions in sport. In the seminar, this "solution" was addressed. At first it met with approval. Some of the mothers, however, were outraged; physical fighting, they maintained, in any form was not the way for children to learn to handle their conflicts. And the group found that it certainly was not appropriate here. As the meeting went on, the wider matter of conflict resolution began to appear and the teams now saw the need for regularly scheduled group meetings within the team to learn from such incidents. On a larger scale, fighting and disruptions on the buses were nonexistent during the course of the project; the older children now often used the time to tutor the younger ones, where during the school year,

as I said previously, the older children had to be bussed separately as they were bullying the younger ones and one had physically attacked a driver.

Early in the project's existence, the administrator became anxious when she saw young children with soda bottles which sometimes were left around. On her own, she gathered them up and disposed of them. At the seminar she was criticized both by the teachers and assistant teachers as having interceded in their affairs when they were trying to let the children learn to discipline themselves. As she voiced her concern about the safety of the children and the image of the project in the community, the assistant teachers were quick to point out that *they* themselves were from the community and that *she* was the outsider. They suggested that perhaps it was the project's image (as well as her reputation) in the eyes of the important visitors that she was really concerned about. The group then focused on the administrator's role and attempted to assist her in examining and controlling her own anxiety, reassuring her that they were aware of these kinds of matters and were trying to instill controls by the children in their attempts to foster social learning.

Near the school was an irrigation canal. During the school year, it had been out of bounds for the children, which of course, made it all the more tempting. Beyond were several acres of cantaloupe and watermelons. As the fruit began to ripen, children began to take melons. Initially, the farmer had offered a few and the children interpreted his gesture as an invitation to raid his fields. Melons, ripe and green, began to appear on the grounds and children took them home on buses. As the situation seemed to get out of hand, there were demands that the "administration" take action and put the area off-limits. But the issue was a marvelous learning opportunity that showed a wide array of conflicting values, including that of self-control and respect for other's property; the free-loading of melons stopped abruptly with no further word.

In summary, the seminar was the focal point of the project. It was mainly centered on here-and-now matters concerning relationships, attitudes, and values among the staff, between staff and the children, among the children, and between the project and the community. With no fixed agenda and no designated leader, the seminar was unstructured with open communication as the goal. It served as an additional educational means for discovering new approaches to learning. It became a reference point for staff to examine their own behavior. In essence, the seminar held the project together structurally while at the same time allowed participants great flexibility in their exploration. Leadership emerged spontaneously: "[T]he leader role is one which is rarely taken continuously by one individual," UCLA's Professor Robert Tannenbaum wrote, "even under specific conditions with the same person. Instead, it is one that is taken at one time or another by each individual."[20]

Parent Teaching Assistant with activity group

School Drop Out Teaching Assistant With Peer Teaching Session

4. Peer Teaching and Relationships.[21]

WE BEGAN THE project with the premise that by limiting teaching experiences to educators and classrooms, potentially valuable learning situations are missed or are taken lightly. "In our society today, the major responsibility for helping children to acquire the skills, attitudes and values necessary to function successfully as adults has been placed in the hands of parents and educators," Professors Peggy and Ronald Lippitt who pioneered peer teaching in classrooms, said.

> This model of few adults and teachers working with and being responsible for such a complex learning program presents serious difficulties. . . We may not be making the best use of one potential which our youth possess. Many young people have a great natural ability to communicate easily with others especially those who are culturally and socially different from themselves.[22]

With the right kind of backing by adults, we'd seen that children effortlessly were able to get closer to younger children in terms of passing on content and experience which they themselves had recently gained. They also could be effective in helping younger children achieve socialization skills. We were influenced strongly by the experiences of the Lippitts and their "cross-age" teaching project at the University of Michigan. Ms. Lippitt wrote, "It has been our experience that children, with proper training and support from adults are able to function effectively in the roles of helpers and teachers of younger children. They find this type of experience meaningful, productive, and a source of much learning."[23] We were fortunate to have Ms. Lippitt as a consultant to the project.

a. How it Worked. The study groups that each of the two parolees conducted before the project began consisted of six fifth-grade volunteers as tutors. The first-grade teacher recommended 12 children whom she thought could use individual help with the "basics": reading, spelling, and arithmetic. The parolees met with their six tutors for 30 minutes each day to plan for the summer project. They introduced the idea of teaching younger children and offered them the possibility of getting some experience during the month in the first-grade classroom.

Both the first- and sixth-grade teachers at the school had been selected to work in the summer project. The 12 fifth-graders immediately became excited about the possibility and began to discuss ways of teaching and subjects they thought the first-graders needed help with. They began teaching on a one-to-one basis.

Each day the tutors would go to the first-grade classroom, take their student by the hand and find a place on the school grounds where they wouldn't be too easily distracted. They used the auditorium-cum-cafeteria, the library, corridors, and, weather permitting, the lawns, under trees and behind buildings. When it wasn't occupied, they used the principal's waiting room.

The two parolees made themselves available by dropping in on the teaching sessions and making notes of matters to bring up in the post-teaching sessions with the tutors. The first-grade teacher advised the tutors on the progress and difficulties the students were having and showed them some teaching methods. When a tutor was to be absent, he or she arranged with another tutor to double up with the student so their learning wouldn't be interrupted.

In the early sessions, the tutors frequently mimicked their own teachers, selecting teaching aids such as textbooks, flash cards, and so on. As they became more confident, they began to think up "lessons" for the children and often began their teaching sessions going over homework they had assigned.

Problems soon arose when some of the students became discouraged by the difficulty of the homework assignments. As the community was a close-knit one, this information was soon passed on to the tutors, who let up.

The tutors resorted to methods they had observed from their own teachers and tried a variety of methods to motivate their students, including reprimands and rewards. Then they began to look at their teaching methods in the post-teaching meetings. One went to the principal to inquire if there were any films for "grown-up teachers" on how to teach. Fortunately, there were none available so they were on their own to experiment!

The parolees (neither of whom had completed high school prior to being incarcerated) wrote up their daily observations, went over them with the two teachers, and made summaries of their experiences. One reported:

> In only two weeks Robin has shown considerable improvement in herself by learning to be more patient with her student. She is interacting better with adults and with me as she now has questions about her child that she needs help with. She is also having serious problems in her home life that are interfering with school.

Peggy Lippitt visited the pre-project phase for two days. She attended teaching sessions and the post-teaching seminar conducted by the parolees. She advised us to keep as many chronological years distance between the tutors and tutees as possible as it would give both levels greater encouragement, and for the tutors, more experience from which to teach. Using her observations as a point of departure, she held a meeting for one school district's teachers. We arranged for Maxwell Jones' next visit to coincide with hers in order to have his ideas of social learning fused with her approach to peer teaching. Having been a primary school teacher herself at one time, she focused on the amount of strain the teacher is constantly under in a classroom with so many children.

Professor Lippitt cited some of her observations of the parolees at work. She believed that, having been high school drop-outs, they understood difficulties the children were having with learning. Their action-oriented learning styles corresponded with that of many of the children. So when they stressed the importance of academic achievement and had come up with plausible solutions, it meant more to the children than suggestions from a teacher.

She urged caution, however, believing that because the parolees lacked teacher training, they'd been given too much leeway, both as to choice of content and methods of teaching; she thought that the teachers ought to give them more direction.

b. The Project. All the teaching teams adopted peer teaching almost from the first day, although the enthusiasm and methods varied a great deal. The zeal and conviction of the parolees and the cadre of children with whom they had worked during the month of May had a contagious effect across the project's 200 children. Most of the 12 children who were tutors in the parolees' pilot project came to the summer school and with the expectation that this form of teaching would continue. They had assured their tutees that they could also participate in teaching. Many of the former tutees wanted to become teachers for the pre-schoolers.

In some classrooms, the experienced tutors sought out students they already knew to continue their teaching. In other rooms, the teacher and assistant teachers made a diagnostic profile of each child and then planned remedial instruction accordingly.

The tutors often began by using familiar teaching methods, and then as they gained experience, added their own individualized modifications. One high school assistant teacher who now had experience teaching nine 11-year-old children recounted:

> Linda was perhaps the most effective cross-age teacher in our classroom. However, she was not very effective with her students when she first started teaching. The only thing her student, Jeanne, really liked to do was to color and do art work. Linda tried teaching her by using the coloring. This method proved very successful. She then expanded her teaching methods to include role playing. Her methods allowed Jeanne to become the teacher. Jeanne's response to this was very encouraging. Linda would purposefully make mistakes when Jeanne was using the word flash cards with her. In this way, Jeanne would have to correct her and tell her the right answers.

Not all of the children experienced such success in their teaching efforts, however; some became very discouraged. At first they experienced many of the frustrations that teachers do trying to gain the attention of students while sustaining motivation to learn. Some couldn't get the children to sit still and listen, so they resorted to physical restraint—a few hit or pinched a child in desperation. But soon they devised other ways. One 10-year-old, who was quite a slow learner himself, was given a seven-year-old to help. After a few weeks, however, it became known that he was not giving answers to his student—a device some of the other tutors also used. In the post-teaching seminar he admitted his frustration and fear that his student was learning faster than he was. So he was trying to increase distance by withholding information.

High School Assistant Teacher meets with her study group.

c. Seminars for the Tutors. Regularly scheduled post-teaching seminars with the older children were absolutely vital in order to give them support, help them with their interpersonal relations, and improve their teaching methods. They came across many of the same difficulties as teachers do and often resorted to similar ways of dealing with difficult learning situations. As the project progressed, the tutors became more relaxed and experimented with less authoritarian ways of dealing with restlessness, distractions, and so on.

5. Classroom Discussion Groups.

There was too little time for as much training in group discussions prior to the project as we had planned. Nevertheless, we did have some staff who had related experience, so most of the training occurred on-the-job. Everyone had learned certain basics from the weekly evening meetings and from the weekend sensitivity training workshop. All but one of the college students had been involved in various encounter groups, an asset for the teams, but some teachers were at a disadvantage; only three of the eight had prior experience in leading the open kind of discussion groups we had in mind.

Some of the teams met with their children for 15 minutes at the beginning of each day; others for 30 minutes. But they found that after physical activity with others it seemed easier for the children to concentrate as a group and they often had fresh experiences to discuss. Even the youngest children showed interest and eagerly discussed their perceptions, actions, and so on at the meetings which concluded the school session each day.

At the beginning of the project, the preschoolers met in two groups while the children learned how to sit still, listen, and focus on topics.

> I had not expected to get anywhere with this age level in the group meeting," their teacher reported. "I was pleased with the progress that did occur. During the second week, we had them all in a circle, on chairs, and listening or talking. Some children were verbalizing their problems with aggressive children or attention-demanding children. This does not mean it was an instant success. We were still having problems at the end of six weeks, working our 'rebels' into a thinking unit.[23]

In the early sessions children customarily raised their hands when they wanted to speak, attempting to get acknowledgement from the adults, especially the teacher. They soon learned to initiate or enter into discussions without the need for formal recognition. Leadership and content of the discussion varied according to the skills and needs of the adults.

The discussion groups served three immedi-

ate purposes for the teams:

a. Planning and sharing in decision-making. As the teams began to function, the children became involved in initiating projects and activities. At times their plans were not realistic (too ambitious in terms of time or equipment needed) or conflicted with one another. The meetings became an important place where children and staff learned to plan activities that they could realistically carry out.

b. Clarification of reality and distortions. The perceptual worlds of children based on fantasy and make believe often collided with reality. Initially, the children experienced difficulty in accurately reporting behavior, especially if it was seen as "wrong." Consequently they were intent on punishing "offenders." As the staff introduced the ideas of help, change, and support, the groups were encouraged to re-define their thinking especially on moralistic matters.

c. Cooperative learning. As the groups matured, they increasingly were able to deal with behavior, both that which occurred in the project and in the community. By the end of the summer, some of the groups were beginning to deal with very complex human relations. The matter of values, for example, was a frequent theme, and due to the rich diversity of the backgrounds of the staff, many of the staff along with the children were beginning to question their own entrenched values such as single standards and ranking behavior as good or bad. They began to recognize and value diversity. Their more narrow perspectives were seen as blocking discussion in both the adult seminar and in the children's groups thus hindering the search for alternatives.

6. Linking School with Community.

One of the most important and successful aspects of the project was the high degree to which it was accepted by the community. To recap: the community was not well organized; it was scattered over a 70 square mile area. And it was almost totally segregated except for the school. Seventy-five percent of the families were on welfare of one type or another, some through three generations. There was a somewhat active citizens' group, which had been successful in getting a few improvements such as electricity, propane, and water for some of the people but little else as far as creature comforts were concerned.

The community was suspicious of outsiders. Acceptance of the project was due to people's trust in the school administrators and the hiring of its residents to work on it. The enthusiasm of the children having contact with the two parolees during the month of May also had lessened suspicion.

'It was so important to me to experience the human element of learning and education where books had filled my past.'

Home Visits. From noon until 3:00 each day assistant teachers could visit the homes of the children in addition to taking them on field trips. Some visited the families on a weekly basis; others less frequently; and some not at all. They usually rode on the bus with the children and often had lunch in their homes, which allowed the assistant teachers to learn more about the family and community.

> During the time I stayed with the Reverend's family,[wrote one of the college students] I visited all the families of the seven children in my "group" several times—two Black, four Mexican-American, and one Caucasian.[He described one home visit]: This first Friday I ate lunch with the family, setting a weekly pattern which is continuing until such time as I leave the Valley. The R. home is frequented by many children from the neighborhood. The front room was crowded with kids who were sitting around a record player listening to the latest

> records in both Spanish and English. I witnessed for the first time the case of over-crowded living conditions—10 people living in their six room house. The R. family next door has 18 people in their seven-room house.[25]

Aside from the benefits of home visitation for the project, the effects on the assistant teachers was impressive. One Caucasian college student wrote;

> Living among these people for eight weeks restored my faith in America and its people. The pride and the yearning for success is more encouraging than anything I have ever known. The hospitality and friendliness of people struggling for mere survival is invigorating. It was so important to me to experience the human element of learning and education where books had filled my past.

Outcome

THE PROJECT BROUGHT into focus once more how stymied children can become early in life and how few opportunities there are in the traditional school to meet their needs. They feel terribly inadequate at taking pencil and paper tests. They frequently fear looking bad in strange and new situations and so don't venture very far into what is not familiar to them.

This formation of discouragement was already very evident among the children and some of the youth in the project. We saw the project primarily as one in which they could have enjoyable learning experiences, begin to overcome some of the blocks to learning, and develop necessary coping skills to enable them to continue to learn be it in school or outside.

• Attendance was rather spectacular considering that enrollment was voluntary. Only one child left the project and that was because the family moved to another area too far for him to commute. Each week new children appeared on the buses. At another school in the county, there was a drop out rate of 29 percent for the summer. During the last week of school, an older boy, as spokesman for the other children, requested a meeting with the project director. The children wanted to know if the project could be extended a few weeks as they were not going to have time to finish some of their projects. They also wanted to know if the school day could be extended and would be willing to come an extra hour earlier in spite of many children having to ride on the bus for an hour each way.

• The resident principal confirmed that there were fewer behavior problems among the children than in the regular school year. No child was referred to the principal because the team could not handle the behavior. When fights did occur they were handled in the classroom's daily discussion groups.

• There were even a few significant improvements in some of the basics. We had planned to give standardized tests before and at the end of the project, but most of the children were so frustrated, they couldn't complete them. For those who did, however, scores on language and reading skills went up on the post-testing for the younger children, but not in math.

• There were also notable changes in the staff. From physical symptoms to self esteem, the staff reported a change for the better. One parent, for instance, who had seen himself as a failure was gratified to hear that when the regular school year commenced, children whom he had taught were disappointed that he wasn't back as their "teacher." Another parent said that she had come to the valley to die and now felt that she had 30 years added to her life—to work with children. Her granddaughter brought her to school each day on her motor scooter; they had no electricity or water in their little house. Another mother who had been on a restricted diet claimed she felt better than ever now and

was able to eat anything.

• One of the drop-outs who had to return to jail on weekends, started discussion groups among fellow prisoners. Although the judge was impressed with the prisoner's performance in the project, he did not release him from serving his full sentence.[26]

• Many of the high school students went on to higher education, some with the intention of becoming teachers. One Caucasian decided he would become a college professor at a university where racially disadvantaged students were a large part of the population.

• The college students when contacted during the following school year voiced discontent with their courses and instruction; the experiences they'd had in the project were not valued by their instructors—a rather sad commentary on universities, which ought to offer stimulating and exciting learning experiences. One college student later became an assistant superintendent of schools in a large district and introduced some of the practices he'd learned in the project.

• Most of the teachers instituted peer teaching and discussion groups in their schools when they returned. I continued to teach university extension courses both on the campus (one just for the parent group from the project) and one at a school district from which one of the teachers had come. The success of the project led that district to request a similar one for the following summer in a primarily Latino neighborhood. Many of the assistant teachers were employed as trainers and consultants for this second project.[27]

• Comments from visitors to the project gave some indication of how the project was viewed. Primary and secondary teachers, Principals, counselors, university deans, professors and one chancellor, psychologists, sociologists, parole agents, and government officials—more than 200 in all—visited the project.

The visitors were asked to fill out a questionnaire that asked (1) What two things stood out most? (2) What two things would strengthen the program? (3) Would you be interested in working in this project? (4) What predictions would you make for the children? (5) What predictions would you make for the teachers? One half of the visitors responded; of these two-thirds made positive comments about the project. Those who returned to visit the project noticed positive changes in individual children and saw developments in how the teams handled situations. The negative comments centered about lack of structure, poor control of the children, "untidiness," and lack of sufficient direction from the adult teachers. It was interesting to note that most of the "negative" comments came from university students, many of whom were in teacher training and saw elements of the project in opposition to what they were learning.

Comments from the questionnaires:

• Needs more clearly defined role of certificated teacher-advisor and trainer of assistant teachers (13)

• Program needs defined academic program—emphasis on basic skills. (17)

• Too much freedom. Need for organization and control. (16)

• More structure would enhance program. (26)

• Student's attitude toward self and school will improve due to the project. (48)

• Teachers will have deeper understanding and acceptance of students. (60)

• Students will make significant academic gains. (12)

• Attended classroom group meetings. (52)

• Want to adapt parts of the project to own situation. (19)

• Human relations elements highly significant. (36)

• Would like to work in the project. (49)

One of the consultants, Dr. Eva Shindler-Rainman, an education professor from UCLA, noted problems with the assistant teachers who were school drop-outs:

> [T]he relationship of the adults to the drop-outs and that of the drop-outs to the others on the teaching team. There was much baiting by each of the other. There also seemed some lack of comfort on the part of the rest of the teaching team toward the drop-outs.

> Certain righteous middle class, puritan inherited guide lines got in the way of *real* communication. For instance a drop-out was asked by others, really baited by others, to apologize to a fellow drop-out for something. Is apologizing the only way to handle such a situation? The drop-out made it clear that in his milieu you don't apologize, but "you finish what you start." Accustomed ways of doing, thinking, and behaving became *the* way to act instead of being seen as one way among several alternative methods to proceed. And here then was one of the "hang-ups" noted by this consultant.[28]

• While Mrs. Lippitt, another consultant, stressed the need for more training for the assistant teachers, and more direction by the adult teachers, she was optimistic about the future of assistant teachers in the classroom:

> If it proves feasible to train non-professionals for helping in elementary schools under professional guidance it will be one way of meeting the need for more teachers, more individual attention for children, different approaches to learning for different types of children, and a way for the non-professional to make a meaningful contribution to society in a service oriented activity. Automation will never do away with the need for people trained to help other people.[29]

• One high school student, kept a journal and submitted his account of his involvement in the project. The account gives a rather vivid description of how the project affected one of the young people. He began with his expectations as the project began:

> 1. A lot of times I felt kind of pushed, like people were saying do it or if you don't do it at least feel guilty. Especially in school where I resented teachers pushing a lot of facts down my throat. So I always put teachers down. I had been pretty bored at school and bitter about things.
>
> 2. I didn't get along too well with people because I didn't talk to them and when I did say something it was too sarcastic or something.
>
> 3. I wanted to be independent.
>
> 4. One thing the project was supposed to do was, you know, change you.
>
> 5. I had all these ideals about what school should be like.
>
> 6. My father was showing me things I should read; I was pretty excited about it all.[his father, a sociologist, was director of a residential group treatment center, where the student had lived and grown up].

'In school I resented teachers pushing a lot of facts down my throat. So I always put teachers down.'

He then recounted his observations about the project and his participation in it:

> • Val Verde was a pretty good set up the way I saw it.
>
> • I felt kind of happy about the project because the people were pretty neat and, you know, they were all nice to me and interested. So I went to this meeting the first week with the high school students and I got along with people

> pretty well.
>
> • I started having problems with people—I didn't want to be in the high school group and they tried to "group me" but I didn't say too much. I felt pretty lousy about things I wasn't sure of myself and I was pretty down.
>
> • I was pretty discouraged about the way things were going in the classroom and I started being depressed and gloomy with a long face and the whole bit. I felt lost, like what am I doing here? I was confused, you know? A lot of things that I thought I would have responded to in the classroom turned out—I changed my mind or the kids changed my mind.
>
> • I'm not sure yet but I think I might have changed a little there. I mean I didn't escape, I withdrew, but what I mean is, I used to go up to my room at home and read and that was kid of escape, but I didn't want to read anymore, I wanted to talk. [talked with two high school girls]. I guess when we talked I was helped the most. I still don't talk very much but still more than usual.

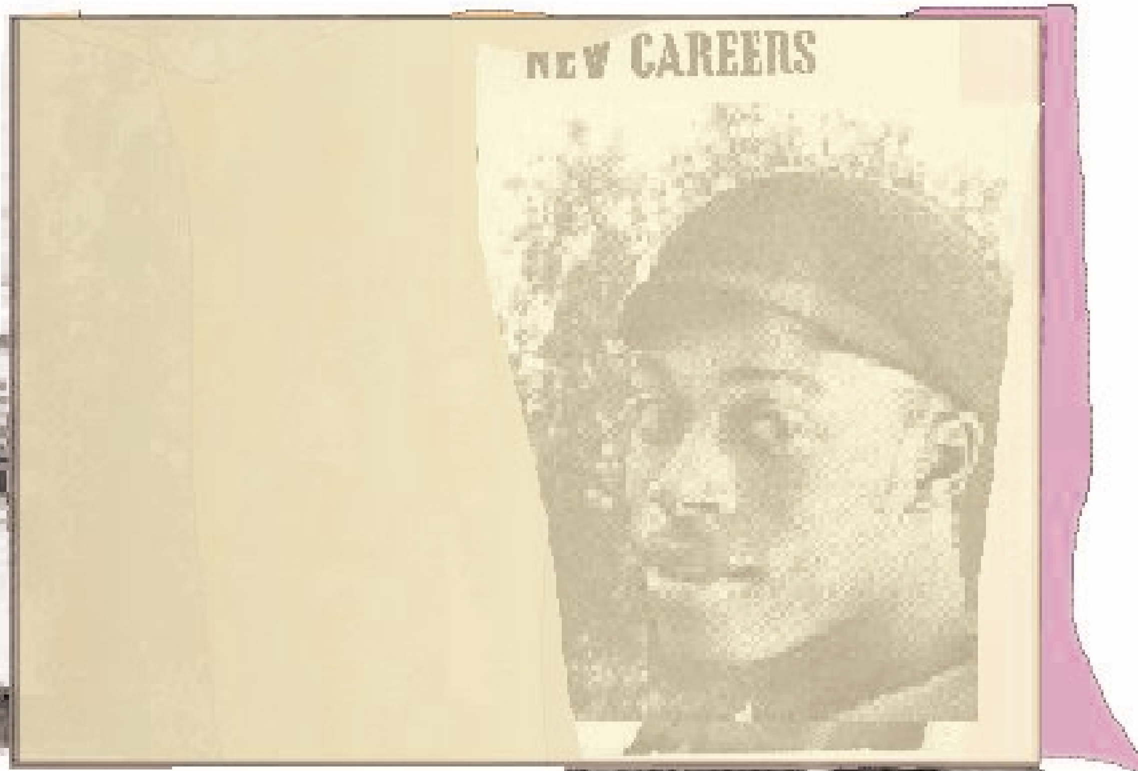
He listed his "afterthoughts and new expectations":

> • At the end I thought I learned a lot about me and I was kind of sorry to leave and I had a lot of revolutionary ideas on how to get kids interested and motivated and I saw the project as my stepping stone to teaching success and enjoyment. So now that I have to go back to high school, I don't know whether to be bitter or not.
>
> • I don't think my thoughts changed, only certain actions. What I was talking about was this secret desire I always had to talk to somebody. When I finally felt lousy enough about things I found out that I could talk to people.
>
> • My ideals were reinforced you might say.

He closed his submission with a prose-poem:

> Did anybody ever tell you something like the world was made of snow crystals? I mean, somebody says something like that you start saying, "listen pal, you're screwed, the world ain't made out of snow crystals!" Well, you know, i used to say that too. but when the guy says the world is made of snow crystals, maybe he doesn't *mean* the world the world is made of snow crystals. Even if you never stuck your head in the sand and found snow crystals, so what? What is this guy really trying to say—that he likes snow crystals and *wishes* the world was made out of them or what? See you gotta try to understand.

Note: This student went on to university and became a professor of English and creative writing at a college largely populated by disadvantaged Black students.



"We may not be making the best use of one potential which our youth possess. Many young people have a great natural ability to communicate easily with others especially those who are culturally and socially different from themselves." Peggy Lippitt

"The idea of a functional role, as an older relating to younger pupils under supervision by the adult teacher, followed by a review session, fits in with therapeutic community principles." Maxwell Jones

Roles for Paraprofessionals in the Classroom

FROM THE EXPERIENCES IN this project, a number of exemplary roles for auxiliary teaching staff emerged. In view of the recurrent staffing, teaching and communication challenges in the public schools they are timely, even though this project occurred three decades ago.

Although the project was specifically designed for economically and educationally disadvantaged children, in the long run the ideas with which we experimented need not be exclusively so.

Communication problems are likely to occur in all schools; there aren't enough teachers to reduce classroom size significantly—even if we could be certain that fewer students per teacher would improve learning. Violence and disruption continue in our schools.

And I believe that many of the special considerations, such as recognizing different learning styles and learning through projects, that we've seen necessary to improve learning for action-oriented children and youth may not be so special after all. Some are sound and applicable across the board. So much improvement is needed to be done in formal education that we need all the experimentation that anyone is brave enough to attempt.

During the course of the project, certain roles became more clearly defined among the assistant teachers; the tasks they undertook seemed to contribute a great deal to children's learning and development.

Generally the assistant teacher or aide's role in the classroom is to perform the more dull, routine, or uninteresting tasks so that the more rewarding functions such as involvement with the children, can be carried out by the teacher. It is currently believed that the fewer the number of children in the classroom, the more attention they will get from the teacher and that learning thus will be accelerated. One of the goals of this project was to demonstrate that the assistant teachers could and should have a greater dimension.

Each teaching team had a high degree of freedom to experiment with both teaching approaches and content. Each of the 32 assistant teachers had to work out a way to function since there was little relevant experience from which to draw upon. Each one had to find a way to relate to the variety of adults and children in the project and in the community. And they had to learn how to work in a setting with a minimum of privacy and voice their feelings and effects of their behavior in the open.

• **The younger teaching assistants (high school students and school drop outs).** Six of the eight were from the community so were well known by the children. The high school students began by imitating teachers they had known and other adults in their relationships with the children. Later, influenced by the college students and the drop outs, they started to question some of their values and practices then began to experiment with less conventional ways. Personally they were struggling for emancipation from their families and testing out ways to

function on their own. On the whole they gave the children an attainable mimesis closer to their own age.

The drop outs were a rebellious lot with endless amounts of energy, Their restlessness, directness, and short attention spans frequently led them into difficulties with the other staff.All came from the community. As the project unfolded, we saw that they were quite authoritarian in their dealings with the children and had limited means to cope with their interpersonal tensions. They provided a rich learning source both for the children and the rest of the staff. At the beginning of the project most of them did not see themselves as "teachers." Their learning styles were more like those of the children and the drop outs saw their primary role as that of a friend. Three broke their identification with the others and identified with their teams. They became highly involved in teaching their small groups in the three Rs. Two of the boys got some children involved in mechanical tasks; one dismantled a car engine.

It was difficult for them to attend meetings; they maintained that there was too much "teacher talk" and not enough action. They wanted to get to the point and have easy, ready-made solutions to problems. They became impatient and restless when issues were not quickly solved and appealed to the administration to step in and resolve impasses.

During the summer, they made efforts to change and were often frustrated and easily discouraged. The remainder of the staff was not experienced in handling this kind of behavior in an equalitarian structure and often scolded and moralized about their attitudes and behavior. Some showed a considerable amount of understanding and changed rather remarkably. None dropped out of the project.

• **The college students**. Seven of the students had been involved in planning the project. They'd been teaching assistants in university extension classes I had taught for teachers so had some notion of their problems and viewpoints. Most had been actively involved in social change and protest movements on the campus. All were at important transitions in their own intellectual, social, and emotional lives.

At first, the college students were seen as a threat by the teachers, especially as they voiced their views that the teachers were too authoritarian and not very creative in their approach to teaching. The parent teacher assistants expected a great deal from the college students and looked to them for ideas and support, often minimizing their own abilities. Furthermore, the students had difficulties in their relationships with one another as a group.

As the project moved on, the college students began to feel that they didn't actually know a great deal about teaching or about children. They began to question their own education even more than previously. They felt they were being called upon for too much by their team members. As they became more involved in the community by residing there and visiting the children's homes, they gained more than the intellectual understanding they had of discrimination and poverty. They served a very essential role in "linking" the project with the community.

• **The parent assistant teachers**. We had been impressed with the work of psychologist Dr. Margaret Rioch at the National Institute of Mental Health, as I referred to earlier. She had trained eight mothers as "mental health counselors," some to work in schools.[30] She reasoned that women who had raised children successfully and managed households had a great deal of knowledge which could be put to use in helping others. When we asked her to become a consultant to the project, she referred us to one of her counselors, Anita Gamson, who came and gave us some seminars. We became convinced of the merits of including parents in our teams. They were a humble and open group.

Early in their training, they expressed their fears about finding a way to assist in the project and were concerned about their feelings of inadequacy. They anticipated difficulties with the children and were worried whether or not the children would like them. They wanted direction in how to handle aggressive children and in teaching methods.

During the summer they showed their sense of responsibility for the children on matters of physical safety, moral issues, and with the reactions of the children's parents (their neighbors) to the project. In the seminar, they felt it was they who should open it and keep it going. They wanted advice on the right ways to work with the children. As the summer ended, they were less anxious about having clear-cut solutions and had developed more patience to let things work out as a matter of course.

The following exemplary roles are suggested from what we learned from this project.[31]

EXEMPLARY ROLES FOR ASSISTANT TEACHERS

I Listener: Listens to children read stories they select one-on-one or in pairs or small groups. Encourages children to make up stories of their own. Reads and tells stories. Listens to children recount home and school experiences and help them learn from these events.

II Trouble Shooter: Works with the teacher to help understand aggressive and active children. Helps these children with self-control and learn to divert their energy into more constructive behavior. Helps other children understand the behavior of over-active ones.

III Friend and Companion: Becomes sensitive to children's feelings and identifies unusual changes in behavior. Works individually and in small groups with children who have temporary or chronic crises at home. Becomes a stable older person with whom the child can feel comfortable.

IV Supporter: Offers support individually or in small groups to children who became easily hurt or discouraged. Helps plan activities in which they can succeed; encourages them to try new things in school and at home. Makes home visits when necessary.

V Inspirer: Provides opportunities for children to learn from situations around them. Encourages children to explore. Takes them in small groups to visit events in the community and holds planning and discussion groups relating to observations.

VI Linker: Interprets school activities to families and friends. Brings familial and neighborhood information to the school to aid in understanding. Meets with community organizations providing a link with the school.

VII Teacher: Helps children plan peer teaching and observes their sessions; conducts post-teaching seminars. Meets with tutees to discuss their learning experiences. Offers tutorial assistance to children.

TEACHING TEAM MODEL

Primary School (Graded or Non-Graded Classrooms)
For Economically and Educationally Disadvantaged Children
(20 to 50 children)

ASSISTANT TEACHER (School Drop-Out)

- Relates as a friend;
- Helps plan and carry out action-oriented activities, e.g., constructing objects from wood and metal;
- Develops community relations;
- Takes small groups of children on field trips and makes home visits.

CERTIFIED TEACHER

- Trains and supervises assistant teachers (1 to 6 children);
- Teaches more complex curriculum material;
- Evaluates effectiveness of total program;
- Coordinates planning of new programs and approaches to learning;
- Conducts daily total class discussion groups.

ASSISTANT TEACHER (College & High School Students)

- Instructs children in content areas in small groups (2-6);
- Individual tutoring;
- Systematic observation and research;
- Home visits.

ASSISTANT TEACHER (Parents)

- Conducts activity groups;
- Individual tutoring;
- Conducts small discussion groups in human relations;
- Makes home visits and takes children on field trips;
- liaison with community groups.

DAILY SCHEDULE

8:30-9:00 Team Planning and preparation.
9-12:00 Class activities.
12:00-2:30 Home visits; staff training; team meetings; field trips.
2:30-4:30 Total school staff seminar.

TUTORS (Older Children)

- Work with individual children on content learning or projects;
- Work with small groups (2-4) in skill development or projects.

ASSISTANT TEACHERS

(Typical Tasks)

- Listener
- Trouble Shooter
- Friend, Companion
- Suporter
- Inspirer
- Linker
- Teacher

Afterthoughts

IN THIS PROJECT WE REALIZED THAT many of our goals were reached and in the short time of six weeks. We saw that a typical primary school had tremendous latent resources that can be mobilized to increase learning for children for whom school does not offer the opportunities it does for the more privileged.

We witnessed how youth and young adults could work in teams to enrich the learning opportunities for the children. And how the children themselves could contribute to learning for others. When attendance was not required, they wanted to come to school and remain for longer hours. We saw confirmation of the notion that the staff of the project could broaden their views and change their behavior in their relationships with children as they gained new skills to facilitate learning.

Maxwell Jones has said that social learning is a concept which is undefinable yet he has spelled out its components and shown how it works. Incorporation of new values so that they become integrated with one's own is a key ingredient. Look back to the matter of the children stealing the farmer's melons and the discussion of respect for another's rights which followed. With no further word, no setting of rules, no threats of punishment for infractions, the stealing ceased. The children understood and changed their behavior accordingly.

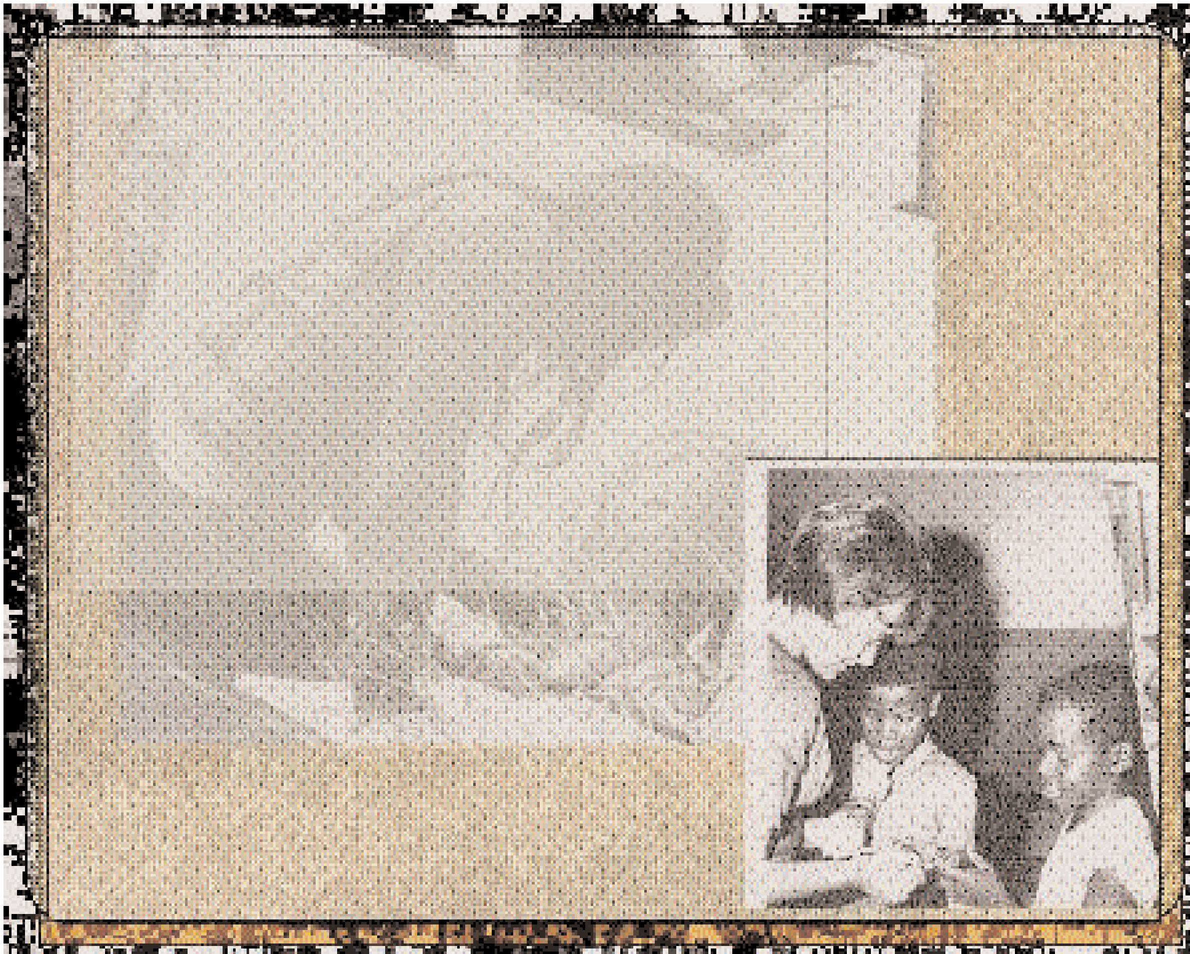
But there needed to be a mediating structure, a forum, where such issues could safely be brought up and discussed. Remember the fight between two children which resulted in the "boxing glove" solution? The clash was put into a traditional competitive sporting event by well-intentioned adults: the boys fought it out before spectators. Parent teachers were outraged and the effects of this answer were examined in the staff seminar where alternatives for resolving conflict were suggested; the brawl became an opportunity for change.

To say that impediments to learning stem from difficulties in communication is rather facile unless one is prepared also to look at the many facets in forming relationships, the intricate art and delicate skills—the fragility— of relating to one another. When given free choice, none of the children picked the minister's wife, a grandmother, for their teacher; she had to find another role for herself. Later when she had changed her attitudes and behavior, children came to her. The incident gave the grandmother much food for thought, to begin to see herself as others saw her and live with the consequences.

Building this kind of social matrix inevitably leads to uncertainty as a new practice of leadership emerges whereby making decisions falls back to each individual and tolerance for ambiguity is increased. An everyday topic such as who, not in the project, could attend the daily meeting, became an issue to be decided on one's own accord. Where early in the project's culture, some feared that potentially destructive material might be "leaked out" into the community by a visitor, that soon became a non-issue. The group, furthermore, delegated decisions regarding visitation to the "management"; they had become so intent on their own involvement they simply couldn't be bothered by trivial issues. That decision also displayed the amount of trust the administrators had earned.

If pollsters have it right when they report that scarcely one-third of the public believes that the present generation will make this a better place to live, then we may well get what we expect.

The flip side is that through children we can find ways to enlarge learning. They are curious, energetic, and enchanted by beauty and mystery. They need a befitting learning environment. This project was such a beginning.



Merits:

• The 200 children, ages four through 12, who volunteered for this project were looking for an exciting time to spend half of their summer vacation; they entered into the spirit of the endeavor wholeheartedly; they participated and contributed each in her or his own way.

• The 32 assistant teachers were courageous and open to learning how they could assist children in learning and at the same time grow and develop personally.

• The eight teachers risked exposing themselves and their professional competence through daily inspection by their teams and by the community in order to learn new ways of teaching and learning

• The project director, Dr. James Hartley, was courageous and far-sighted in his decision to invite the participants to conduct the undertaking under his auspices. The project administrator and the resident principal plunged into the enterprise with enthusiasm and support. The consultants inspired all of us. J. Douglas Grant was behind many of the innovations and the inspiration for the concept of new careers for disadvantaged people.

• Elizabeth Beresford assisted with editorial advice; Craig Fees provided the place for this document.

• Photos courtesy of University of California Extension, Riverside.

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2. Dennie Briggs, *New Careers for Non-Professionals in Education*. Final Report. (Riverside: University of California Extension, 1965). 271pp.
3. Maxwell Jones. *Beyond the Therapeutic Community: Social Learning and Social Psychiatry*. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1968), 102.
4. Dennie Briggs. *The Therapeutic Community: Dialogues With Maxwell Jones*. (San Francisco: University of California, Special Collections, 1991), 158-159. Copy on file at PETT Archives. *La Comunitá Terapeutica: Conversazioni con Maxwell Jones*. (Rome; Centro italiano di solidarietá, 1986).
5. *Supra* #3 xv, 35-36.
6. Maria Gomez.,*supra*, #2. "From the Rug Up." 167-172.
7. *Supra*, #2. Joseph Denhart, "A Daily Classroom Evaluation. " 197-198
8. *Ibid*., 203-204
9. *Ibid*., 202.
10. This team was trained as part of a two-year project funded by National Institute for Mental Health, "Training Offenders for Crime and Delinquency Work." J. Douglas and Joan Grant (co-directors). 1963. Project #OM-01616. Sacramento, California: Institute for the Study of Crime and Delinquency. The project trained 18 confined felons to assist social services agencies to study their effectiveness and introduce changes. The Change and Development Team undertook this project as part of their field work placement. *cf*. J. Douglas Grant. "The Offender as a Correctional Manpower Resource." In Riessman, Frank and H. Poppe, eds, *Up From Poverty: New Career Ladders for Non-Professionals*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). "The Psychologist as an Agent for Scientific Approaches to Social Change." in Abt, L. and Riess, T., eds, *Progress in Clinical Psychology*. (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1966). Dennie Briggs and Kenneth Jackson. "New Careers for Delinquents in Education: An Alternative to Confinement." *American J. Corrections*. (May, 1966)). Dennie Briggs, "New Careers for Offenders." in Fabry, J, ed, *The Meaning of the Moment: Logotherapy in Action*. (New York: Aronson, 1979).
11. *Supra*, #2, 62.
12. The term "Change Agent" as used here, originated with Ronald Lippitt and his colleagues. *cf*. Ronald Lippitt, J. Watson, and B. Westley. *The Dynamics of Planned Change*. (New York: Harcourt-Brace, 1958). A Change Agent, in his terms, was a professional person (psychiatrist, counselor, educator, etc.) who acted to bring about change either in clients or in systems.
13. At that time, the director, Richard Farson was pioneering projects in group dynamics and offering a wide array of training to business and educational organizations. The late Carl Rogers had joined the Institute and was actively engaged in working with school personnel. Betty Berzon was engrossed in pilot studies on leaderless groups.
14. *Supra*, #2. Betty Berzon and Toni Volcani. "Weekend Workshop and Sensitivity Training." 44.
15. *Ibid*., 54.
16. *Ibid*., 61.
17. *Supra # 3*
18. Maxwell Jones. "Therapeutic Communities in Retrospect," *Journal of Contemplative Psychotherapy. 4* (1987). 35-48.
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23. *Ibid.*
24. *Supra* #6
25. Ley Yeager, "And More Cool Aid," Supra #2.
26. Dennie Briggs,"Why Crime Prevention Programs Aren't 'Pork'." *San Francisco Examiner*. (December 14,1994).
27. Conducted in 1966 at the Ontario, California School District under sub-contract with New York's Bank Street College of Education funded by the U.S. Office of Education to the University of California Extension, Riverside.
28. "An Adventure in Stating, Relating, and Baiting," *Supra,* # 2, 232.
29. Peggy Lipppit, "Report,". *Ibid.*, 236.
30. Margaret Rioch *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry.* Maya Pines, "Training Housewives as Psychotherapists," Harpers, (March, 1963).
31. In the 1960s in the U.S, people who did not have professional qualifications but worked in agencies along with professionals were first called "nonprofessionals." The term was later changed to "paraprofessionals," or "auxiliaries." A further development included the term "new careerist" which covered a wide range of fields and included a career ladder whereby with proper education and experience they could become professionals. See reference # 10.