

The Newark Community School

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OUR COMMUNITY is an all-Negro section of Newark called Lower Clinton Hill. Fifteen years ago it was an all white, middle-class neighborhood where most people owned their own homes. Today, almost all of the residents live in crowded apartments and are quite poor.

Our community is the same as most other Negro ghettos, but despite our problems we have reason to feel some optimism. During the past few years many of us have worked together in a local community organization, the Newark Community Union Project, and have spearheaded a movement to change the living conditions of people in our area.

The basic idea of our movement is that by working together and organizing others, people can build the power to make changes. Tenants who have spent long winters without heat and hot water, women who must sleep during the day because the rats control their homes at night, welfare mothers who have been abused by their caseworkers and exploited by local merchants, and teenagers who have had their creative capacities thwarted by an insensitive school system are beginning to feel that our neighborhood must and can be changed. Our activities include picketing, rent strikes, developing organizations of welfare clients, consumer boycotts, campaigns for municipal legislation, and active participation in—and challenge of—the local War on Poverty. We have thus far been able to bring about some changes in peoples' immediate living conditions and have involved hundreds of people in a long-range movement to change the fundamental nature of life in our community. Our ultimate goal is to control the institutions in our community—not to substitute a local elite for an alien one, but to provide a qualitative difference in the way these institutions are run.

To us, a ghetto is not a bad place to live because its residents are all Negro or because most of them are poor. What makes a ghetto despicable—and what keeps it that way—is that the people in it have no control over the decisions that affect their lives. Store owners, welfare officials, school administrators, police, landlords and city officials are usually unresponsive to the desires of ghetto people. In fact, most often they exercise their

power directly counter to the aspirations of the people in the ghetto. We see the creation of the Newark Community School as our first real venture into building the type of institutions we would like to see in our neighborhood.

The Newark Riot

Several months after the plans for our school began, our neighborhood was the scene of a five-day conflict which—depending on one's politics—can be labeled a riot or a rebellion. Actually, these terms are unimportant—especially to the people who participated in the rebellion. The rebels never read any of the press releases of the Office of Economic Opportunity, but in Newark, the rebellion was the first instance where “maximum feasible participation of the poor” was a reality.

In the wake of the rebellion has come a shake-up of the political equilibrium of the city. The right has moved to the right. The Negro center—middle class Negroes with no real program except that black men replace white men in government positions—has increased its militancy. The white center—the mayor's coalition of Negroes and Italians—is crumbling. The most encouraging development is that the black left is moving to the left.

This is the political context of our school. The Newark Community School will be one of the new institutions in our community that will strengthen and give direction to the growing movement on the left. Our school will become a focal point for a new group of community residents who have never been involved in political action before. We expect that other radical community groups will be part of the movement for education reform and many of our parents will become involved as individuals on a wide variety of issues such as slum housing, police brutality and the war in Vietnam.

Education in the Ghetto

The problems in ghetto education manifest themselves in two major areas: academic performance and classroom behavior. In the three elementary schools in our

area the average reading score in the sixth grade on the Stanford October Reading Test was 1.8 years below the national average. The average score on the Stanford Mathematics test—given in the seventh grade—was 2.0 years below the national average. Recently, 150 students at the junior high school in our area were suspended in one day by a principal who declared, "Something has to be done to shock these students into proper behavior."

Like many public-school educators we, too, are deeply concerned about the academic and behavior problems of ghetto youth. Unlike many public-school educators, however, we believe that the public-school system is primarily responsible for these problems.

Public education—for the middle-class child as well as the ghetto child—is largely irrelevant to the child's interests and contrary to his creative capacities. The middle-class child, however, has more incentive to adapt himself to an unstimulating school situation. Although school itself is not particularly satisfying, the middle-class child learns at an early age to postpone immediate gratification to earn future rewards. He enters school with well-developed prereading skills and usually achieves reading competence with relative ease. Thus, the initial school experience reinforces postponing gratification: the student didn't particularly care what Dick said to Jane but by learning how to read he won the approval of his teacher and parents.

Immediate Gratification

The ghetto child does not enter school with the same skills as the middle-class child. The exigencies of a large family and the small number of material rewards from his parents have made the pursuit of immediate gratification a logical life style. His initial experience with nonstimulating curriculum does not produce the same success that the middle-class child experiences. The work is harder for him and he is less willing to attack a difficult and boring lesson for the promise of future rewards. Some ghetto students refuse to accept the challenge and "turn off" at a surprisingly early age.



Others accept the challenge and fail: they also didn't care what Dick said to Jane but despite making some effort to learn they do not get the rewards and reinforcements of reading success. A third group manages to get through the obstacle course of immediate gratification and difficult work and is on its way to developing middle-class skills.

As the middle-class child grows older the unpleasantness of the school situation often becomes a stronger force than the rewards stemming from academic competence. At this point a more fundamental reward system comes into play. By fourth or fifth grade the middle-class child is conscious of some kind of relationship between academic success and his middle-class environment. Although this relationship is often explained by his parents in crude economic terms, it is doubtful that the child studies hard because he is afraid of jeopardizing his long-range financial situation. He is, however, capable of perceiving his parents in more generalized material terms: they are successful; they tell him that school is the key to his success. His desire to please his parents and his general feeling that his parents are able effectively to deal with the world give their arguments considerable force. Learning becomes even more removed from an intrinsically rewarding activity. It gets tied up in a complex set of expectations which the middle-class teacher and parent convey to the student, and which eventually becomes internalized in the "well-adjusted" student.

Models of Failure

As the ghetto child grows older he discovers that the arguments about the material benefits of a good education are, at best, quite tenuous. He has seen most of his friends, relatives and neighbors with varying degrees of education living in similar conditions. The Negro college graduate rarely moves back into the ghetto and, therefore, does not provide a role-model for the student who is struggling in the public school. The Negro high-school graduate, more often than not, still lives in a rundown building, still experiences police abuse and brutality, and still is unable to get a good job. The ghetto family often is lacking a father, and even in families where a father is present the success models projected by the schools and television make the child increasingly aware of his parents' "failure." Thus, the ghetto students who hardly tried at all and the students who tried and failed become further demoralized as they get older. As the sequential presentation of irrelevant material continues these students become hardened into a disloyal opposition. This large body of alienated students obviously affects the performance of all the others. Even the ghetto students who were more successful in the early stages find their numbers dwindling.

The teacher in the middle-class school starts out at a great advantage. His students have already developed many basic skills before coming to his class and are reinforced by strong pressures from home. A process of mutual reinforcement takes place. The teacher, while adhering to the basic curriculum, employs a few new twists in presenting the material. The students respond by enthusiastically participating in the lesson and learn-

ing the material presented. The teacher feels successful, becomes more confident and more open, and rewards the students for their success. These rewards, in the form of verbal praise and good grades, encourage the students to continue to participate in the learning process. A whole success syndrome is created.

In spite of the large numbers of teachers who are racially and culturally prejudiced, a large minority of teachers in ghetto schools start out with a genuine concern for the students and the ability to communicate with them in a nonschool atmosphere. These teachers in the ghetto schools have a terribly difficult task. They, too, try to make small innovations in teaching methods and curriculum, expecting the same enthusiasm that such improvements would receive in a middle-class school. Since they accept the basic conceptions of learning theory, curriculum and classroom discipline, however, they soon discover that their students are unresponsive and unappreciative. Their attempt to sell the status quo in the face of this student rejection produces a warfare situation between the teacher and his class. The students have little interest in the material presented, little reason to believe they will be successful someday, little reason to believe their new teacher will be different from the oppressors of previous years and little incentive to be cooperative members of a classroom group. Since the school has become associated with embarrassment and failure the only real pleasure remaining for the student is to take out his aggressions on the teacher.

"The Kids are Animals"

If the teacher is extremely competent at repressive discipline practices, he may be able to defeat the students in this war and force them to hide their aggressions behind a mask of compliance. It is the teacher who tries to avoid such repressive measures—while still trying to push the basic educational program of the school—that finds himself most victimized by the students. He is the "easy mark." As the students express their hostility to the school by verbally—and sometimes physically—attacking him, the well-meaning teacher often finds himself losing much of the sensitivity and concern he came in with. Rather than evaluating the situation and deciding the students' hostility is justified—perhaps the irrelevance and inhumanity of ghetto education creates "blackboard jungles"—the teacher usually decides that his original conceptions about the kids were romantic. Somewhat reluctantly, he finds himself feeling a certain amount of empathy with the teachers who complained all along that "the kids are animals."

This inability to accept the validity of the students' rebellion is not surprising. Many teachers are overwhelmed by the massive powers that stand in the way of educational reform—principals, school boards, city administrations—and feel threatened by arguments that link educational reform with challenging those in power. Also, despite the fact that the school administrators are most responsible for the educational policies in the ghetto, it is the teacher who experiences the hostility that these policies produce. After becoming involved in

a warfare situation with his class it is difficult for him to extricate himself from his emotional framework and develop a new analysis of what went wrong. Perhaps most importantly, the systematic discouragement and weeding out of innovators among the new faculty and the absence of experimental private schools in the ghetto provide the ambivalent teacher with no visible models to support his initial faith in his students.

Three Causes of Failure

We can isolate three major causes of the failure of public education in the ghetto:

1. The school is an alien institution in the lives of the students and parents of the ghetto.
2. Learning is based on the development of operational skills which are unrelated to the interests and experiences of the students.
3. Discipline is based on rules that are arbitrarily made and arbitrarily applied.

Our solution, which we plan to apply in the Newark Community School, involves developing alternative conceptions of the school as an institution, of the learning process itself, and of the means of developing a working relationship between students and faculty.

1. The school must be perceived as a community resource responsive to community influence. To accomplish this:

We will provide a real decision-making body to replace the traditional form of the P.T.A. The Community School Committee will consist of all parents, representatives of the students and community residents who have been active in religious, civic and civil-rights activities. One of the myths about ghetto life is that the parents are apathetic and unconcerned about the education of their children. Actually, the daily pressures of physical labor and managing large families make poor people more selective about their leisure time. Getting out of the house to attend a P.T.A. meeting at which nothing of substance is discussed and where no real power resides with the group is a middle-class luxury.

We plan to make the school into a year-round community center with extensive after-school recreational and educational activities for students and parents.

We plan to hire staff who are committed to sharing their expertise with people in the community, rather than using it to protect themselves from "nonprofessional" influence.

2. Learning will proceed from the students' most immediate interests. This principle is not merely a handy means of facilitating the teaching of skills; it is the essence of our approach to learning.

Many people feel that learning for immediate gratification is somehow a more primitive outlook than learning for extrinsic rewards. We believe that learning for its own sake is the far more sensitive and mature approach to education. In our school situation

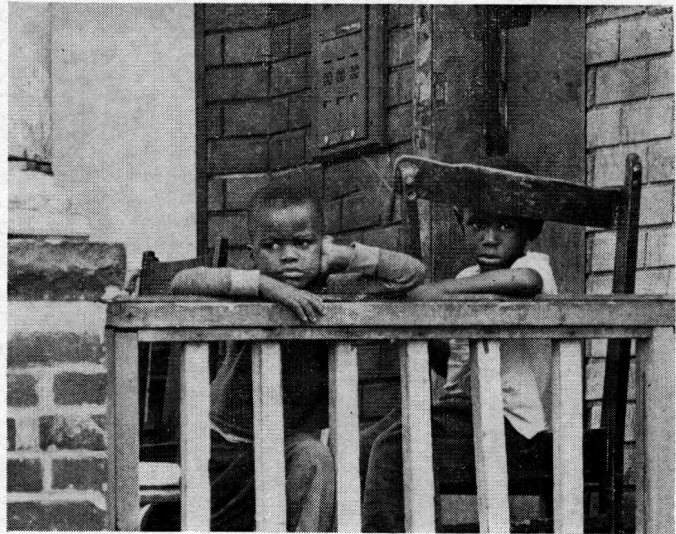
there will be little conflict between learning for immediate enjoyment and the development of formal academic skills. Especially in a ghetto situation, enjoyment is a prerequisite to competence.

There is, however, a conflict between the development of skills that liberate the student and skills that are arbitrarily imposed by the society. We plan to have courses in science, masonry, photography and film-making, to emphasize creative writing, conceptual mathematics and a "core" curriculum. (The core curriculum will not be a specific subject. It will encompass the totality of the students' reading preferences in social problems and literature.) In all of these pursuits the student will need to develop considerable skills in order to succeed. These skills are liberating in that they enhance the student's self-image as an intelligent being who can successfully manipulate his environment. Skills are tools to help him pursue his interests. Unfortunately, most of the skills emphasized in the public schools are alien to the students' interests. There is little intrinsic satisfaction in answering a whole battery of questions after reading a short story. Such practice supposedly helps develop skills in reading comprehension. Our experience has shown, however, that more often it inhibits the child's enjoyment of the story and may even have a detrimental effect on his ultimate development of test-taking skills. In our approach to learning, a child's excitement over a peripheral point in a story does not mean that he "missed" the main point. It merely means that the story, interacting with the child's interests, produced a different result than the teacher expected. We believe that the child's conclusions are valid and should be appreciated and rewarded.

Psyching Out Tests

We believe that many of our students will develop a growing feeling of self-confidence after studying exclusively for enjoyment. This feeling—which will emanate from increased academic competence and liberation from their previous failure-tainted public school experience—will make them more willing to compete in the world of alien middle-class skills. For example, we plan to give a course in test-taking which will be optional and entirely separate from our other curricula. Students who have had a reinforcing school experience can be approached as follows: "Most of you would like to go to college or get good jobs when you graduate from high school. A large part of 'making it' depends upon doing well on the tests that colleges and employers require. We don't believe that these tests prove much of anything. That's why we don't use them in the school. But if you want to learn how to 'psyche out' these tests and do well on them, we can help you."

We believe that the learning of alien skills should not be integrated into the daily program of the school. They should be consciously segregated from the real learning experience and should be identified as what they really are: odious but sometimes useful. We believe our school will do a better job of training



students to succeed in middle-class life than the public schools in our area are doing. We also believe that the type of life-experience our students will have will enable them to advance their economic situation without also adopting the dominant values of mainstream middle-class society.

Student Consent

3. The students must experience control over the decisions that affect their lives on a day-to-day basis.

Much of the discipline problem that exists in the public schools is a product of a mentality that makes rules without the consent of the students, assumes there is a natural conflict between the teacher and "them," and places a greater value on order than classroom democracy. We believe that many of the behavior problems arise from a situation where the teacher has absolute authority and the students have none. A student who is told where he must sit in the class, when he may get up and sharpen his pencil, what books are "good" and what books are "trash," and when he may go to the bathroom cannot help but develop resentment against the teacher. More importantly, a teacher who can arbitrarily set up simple rules for classroom procedures rarely stops there. The process of enforcing rules without involving those who must live under them reflects and contributes to an authoritarian classroom atmosphere and an impossible learning situation. School rules treat children as commodities rather than people. In the supposed interest of safety, order and the common good the student is subjected to a series of arbitrary commands throughout the day. These experiences stifle the child's spontaneous and creative capacities and produce the docile or rebellious stereotypes that exist in the ghetto schools.

There are several steps we plan to take to reverse this process:

- We will recruit teachers who reject the prevalent

definition of the teacher's role and who are committed to collective decision-making in the classroom.

- We will develop a mechanism, *with* the students, whereby students and faculty collectively determine rules, procedures and responsibilities in the school.
- And we will develop a grievance mechanism whereby students can bring complaints to the Community School Committee if problems arise in the classroom that cannot be resolved by the group.

What Our School Will Look Like

We plan to rent a loft or storefront and convert it into our school building. There are many available facilities in our area. During the summer, the staff, parents and students will spend time painting, decorating and remodeling our school. We will choose a building that does not need fundamental structural changes.

We plan to have three large rooms: two classrooms and an activities room. The classrooms will not be furnished with the straight rows of desks used in the public schools. There will be rugs on the floors, many easy chairs for students, movable boards that can be placed over armchairs when a writing surface is needed, a few small conference tables where students can do cooperative work and chairs arranged in conversational groupings. Each classroom will have a well-stocked library with books on a wide range of subjects and reading levels. The library will not be an activity. It will be an integral part of the classroom. The activities room will be furnished with large sturdy tables and benches that can be used for shop, art and science projects. Part of the activities room will be used for a darkroom and photography lab. We will also need several smaller rooms, for tutoring, individual counseling, study in small groups and an office.

For the first year we plan to begin with two grades, the sixth and the seventh, with thirty students in each grade. In the second year we plan to add an eighth grade and perhaps a fifth as well. Within four years we plan to operate a complete elementary school with eight grades and kindergarten.

We have chosen to work with fairly large classes despite their obvious limitations. If our school is successful, we do not want its achievements attributed to smaller class size. The public-school system has too long used the issue of class size as an excuse for most of its educational deficiencies. By utilizing the same class size as the elementary schools in our area we can better focus attention on the more substantive differences in our educational approach.

We are beginning with the sixth and seventh grades for several reasons:

1. One of the experimental goals of our school will be to show that students are capable of a great deal of behavioral and academic independence. These independent capacities are more developed in older elementary students than those in the early grades.
2. Many of the faculty we are considering for the

school have had experience with and prefer working with older elementary school children.

3. Many of the parents who are most actively organizing the school have children in those grades.

The Curriculum

Reading will not be taught as a separate subject. It will be a natural component of our core curriculum in history, literature and social problems. As students develop interests in particular subjects they will be encouraged to improve their reading skills to further those interests. Reading will center on "free-choice" books and books and magazines for specific areas of curriculum. Reading skills may be developed in an optional reading workshop with emphasis on an individualized approach.

Creative writing, like reading, will not be a separate course of instruction. Writing will be taught as a skill to improve the expression of thoughts and feelings.

Jointly with Herbert Kohl of the Teachers and Writers Collaborative at Teachers College, Columbia University, we are exploring methods of integrating creative writing into a core curriculum in the humanities and social sciences. Several principles elaborated in the Manifesto of the Hunting Writers and Teachers Conference may give some insight into the focus of our writing program:

- Teachers must learn to accept the language of children without imposing arbitrary standards of usage that frustrate the free flow of expression. Early emphasis on "correct" usage can make the act of writing no more than an anxious, crippling exercise for many children.
- No arbitrary limits should be placed on the range of experience and language used in the classroom. If children or teachers feel that words or references or ideas that are important to them must be censored—or are out of bounds—then the classroom itself can become a sterile place.
- The grading of written work should be eliminated. A child's writing should be considered an intimate revelation of his feelings and impressions, one to be respected.

There is a distinction, however, between grading and evaluation. We plan to work with students to analyze how their work is able to express their thoughts and in what ways their writing does not serve those ends. Standards of excellence must be set by the student himself. (Quarterly reports to the students and parents will evaluate the children's work in all areas at some length, without assigning grades. Since evaluation will be an ongoing process, there should be few surprises.)

Creating and Building will be a unique combination of activities and disciplines geared towards involving the students in roles as creators and builders.

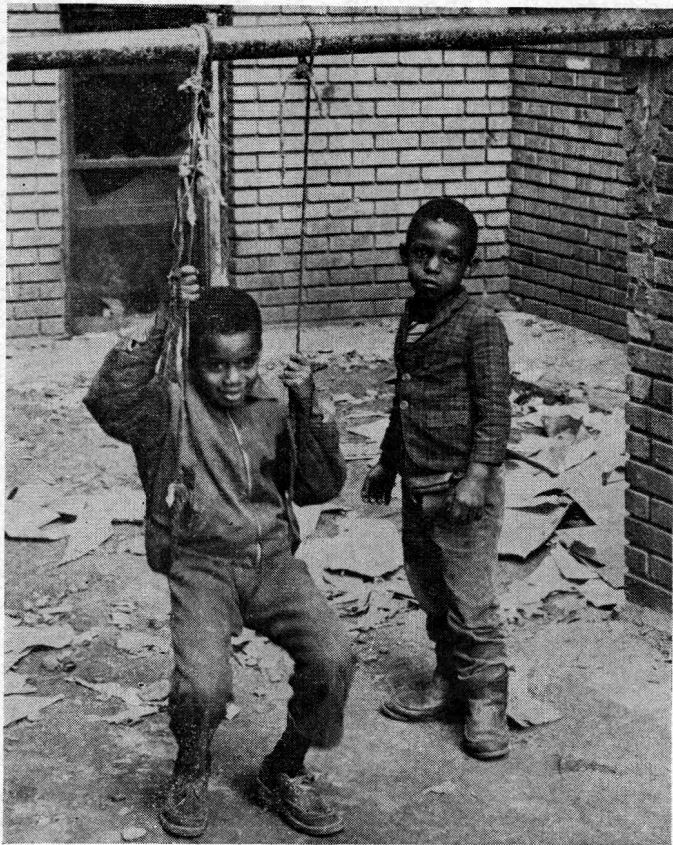
- *Film making*—We have arranged with an independent film maker in New York City to train one of our local community people in the skills of film making and film processing. The community person

will then become a volunteer staff person who will work with the students in a film-making course. We plan to purchase movie cameras so that the students will be able to make their own films.

● *Masonry*—A local resident who is a finished mason has agreed to work with interested students in masonry, blueprint reading, and elementary architecture. Students can continue their work in this area after they have gone on to high school. Unlike many skilled crafts, masonry has many opportunities for Negroes, and finished masons make over five dollars an hour in our area. Students will not have to take this course as a vocational training program, however, and many of the projects involved—such as designing and building model homes—will be of interest to many students who have no interest in becoming masons.

● *Poetry reading and writing*—A well-known woman poet is working with our school to arrange for her colleagues to spend time with our students exploring expression through poetry. A group of several poets will be running a poetry workshop with interested students.

● *Auto repair*—A local mechanic will work with our students on automobile repairing; the donation of several old cars has already been promised. This is another field in our area that is well paid and open to Negroes; in a nonvocational sense, the ability to fix one's own car is both economically useful and emotionally rewarding.



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● *Theater workshop*—We plan to have several fairly elaborate dramatic presentations during the year. Students who are particularly interested in the field will get experience in such activities as acting and play writing, as well as personal contacts with professionals.

● *Appliances repair*—We will have a course in repairing television sets, radios and other household appliances. Although this course could have vocational value, its primary purpose is to give students a greater sense of mastery over everyday living problems.

● *Book publishing*—Early in the year, we plan to have the students tape their impressions of the school, each other and their neighborhood. The tapes will be transcribed for a book that we might use as a school reader, with the students doing the editing, lay-out, illustrations and so on themselves. A local printer has agreed to work with the school on this.

History will be taught from the point of view of specific problems and trends rather than through a chronological presentation of events. A typical history unit will be:

The history of insurgent minorities

- The civil-rights and community-organization movement in Newark.
- The early Christians as a political movement in Rome.
- American slave revolts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
- The anticolonial movement in the twentieth century, with particular attention to Ghana, Puerto Rico and Vietnam.
- The Zionist movement and the founding of Israel.
- The civil-rights movement in the South.

We plan to begin with a subject the students are most familiar with and most interested in. Studying about many of their parents and the parents of their friends will encourage the students to see them as part of a long historical tradition of insurgents and rebels. Our approach to this subject will be analytical as well as descriptive. Why are some people in our neighborhood insurgents? Why are they a minority? Who are their allies? What are their goals? What are their chances of success? What groups and institutions stand in their way?

After studying a subject close to their personal experiences the students will be able to apply many of these analytical constructs to other subjects farther removed from these experiences. The unit will include readings in the S.N.C.C. *Freedom Primer*, discussions with Israeli students, discussions with Robert S. Browne and Tom Hayden, who have been to Vietnam, and talks with Puerto Rican activists who feel that their country is in a colonial relationship with the United States as well as with Puerto Rican students who oppose the separatist

movement. Civil-rights veterans of the South and local community leaders will also make important contributions. Films such as *Troublemakers*—an acclaimed documentary about the problems of civil-rights organizers in Newark—will be used. We expect to use films extensively—not the usual didactic “educational” films, but films that take full advantage of the medium in conveying a situation visually and in stimulating responses and feelings. Students will be encouraged to study particular aspects of problems in greater depth and will be able to spend school time involved in independent study.

Sex education will include familiarization with birth-control devices. Much of this program will be in the form of informal discussions between staff members and individual students. The key to the program will be the attitude of the staff on the subject. Many different views on sexual behavior are consistent with the broad goals of our school, but we feel that it is of great importance that our staff convey a healthy attitude towards the subject and help dispel the guilt and anxiety that many young people feel about sex. This may be therapeutic for the teachers too.

Mathematics—We are excited about the possibilities of introducing a genuinely mathematical course to replace the arithmetic computation and rote application of formulas that most of our students have associated with “math.” Our general approach and many of our specific curriculum ideas are drawn from the report, “Goals for School Mathematics,” which was a product of the Cambridge Conference on School Mathematics. Although some of our students will have competent arithmetic skills, we doubt that any of them will have been introduced to a conceptual approach to mathematics. Thus, we plan to start our students at the most elementary level in order to build a firm conceptual foundation for more difficult work.

Out-of-school Experiences—We believe there is a great deal of validity to many aspects of ghetto life and do not believe in giving our students “higher horizons” by teaching them contempt for their own community. We also realize there is much lacking in our children’s daily experiences and we plan to provide many opportunities for stimulating visits and trips.

Many of our trips will attempt to involve the students in acts of participation, rather than mere observation, and in discussions with people who are attempting to define their lives in creative and courageous ways. Some examples are: visits to the studio of a group called Black Choreographers in which the students could observe dancing, have discussions with Negro artists about their work, and learn elementary dance exercises and movements; discussions with African students who are studying in this country; trips to restaurants where the students would be able to visit the kitchen and see how the food is prepared; and visits to other schools that are experimenting with curriculum and approaches to classroom organization that the students might want to try in our school.

Not all of these experiences will be of interest to all of

the students, and most of them would be less valuable if an entire class of thirty attended. Also, some students may be more than superficially interested in a particular subject and want to repeat a trip several times. Many of our trips, therefore, will entail five or six students going somewhere with an interested parent or volunteer staff person rather than the touristlike extravaganzas that most school trips have been.

Staff

The full-time staff will include a head teacher, a teacher and a teacher-in-training; the latter will be a local resident who has not had any college experience. A considerable minority of the people in our community have developed middle-class skills — reading, arithmetical and verbal facility—but hold working-class jobs. Due to economic and racial factors they were never able to go ahead with their education. We believe that many of our neighbors can play an important role in the teaching process, and in a few years can be trained to be fully competent teachers. The effective performance of a non-college-educated local resident will be an inspiring example for many of our students. It is often the case that a college degree is used as an arbitrary weapon against poor people to prevent them from competing for more lucrative jobs. We also expect to have paid tutors and a volunteer secretary-receptionist. One of the teachers will act as an organizer-curriculum developer until the opening of school.

Our elementary school will go up to the eighth grade; our students will have to go to public high school upon graduation. The adjustment process—both academically and emotionally—may be somewhat difficult. We therefore intend to maintain a cooperative relationship with our students after they graduate. Our graduates can participate in the life of our school by serving as tutors in our tutoring program and by giving first-hand observations about how our school can better prepare its students for high school. The staff of our school can help our graduates by providing informal counseling services. Hopefully, the staff can help the students maintain a pragmatic approach that will allow them to transcend the frustrations of high school and make decisions that are in their best interests. This does not mean simply telling the students to “stay in school.” Despite the figures about increased life income for those who graduate from high school, staying in school is not necessarily the best decision for every student. For some students their immediate emotional situation and their long-range financial situation might best be served by dropping out for a while.

Our school will have 60 students the first year and will serve only 120 students when it expands to a fifth-through-eighth-grade upper elementary school. In the three elementary schools in our neighborhood alone there are over five thousand students. The Newark public school system is responsible for educating over seventy thousand students—over seventy percent of whom are black. Our orientation differs from A. S. Neill’s, when he declares that “my primary job is not the reformation of society but the bringing of happiness to some few children.” The Newark Community School

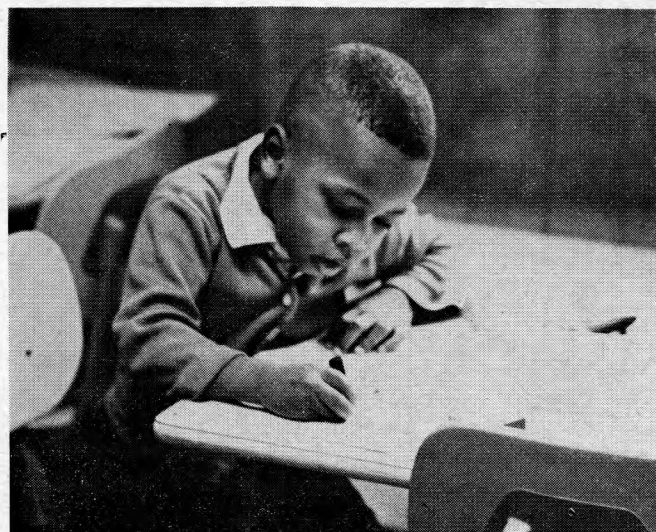
is a Movement school, and as such can measure only its *initial* success in terms of the happiness of its children. Our ultimate success must be measured in terms of building a movement to take over and change the public-school system in Newark.

Developing a Constituency

Our first job is to develop a constituency among the parents in our area. At present, although many parents are upset about their children's experiences in the public schools, they are not clear as to the causes of their children's failure and unhappiness or the program that would remedy the situation. The awesome consistency of the failure of black children in the public schools has mitigated the militancy of many parents. Some have little formal education and feel intimidated by school authorities. Others—and among them some of the most radical parents on issues of police brutality, housing and job discrimination—are strong advocates of more discipline and more homework. When demands are made to the Board of Education by ghetto parents they usually concern the material aspects of the educational process, e.g., more schools, more teachers and newer books—and rarely the content of the teaching or the effect of authoritarianism on the emotional and ethical development of the students.

Our experience has shown, however, that much of this conservatism among the parents is due to a belief that the only alternative to the ghetto school is an idealized hybrid of "those no-nonsense schools down South" and "those good schools out in the suburbs." Many parents are receptive to a radical analysis of the failure of the public-school system but find it difficult to translate this analysis into concrete political demands. Also, many of the parents feel ambivalent toward an educational theory that encourages their children to break out of traditional behavior patterns. They emotionally identify with their children's resentment of arbitrary authority and stifling subject matter—but also harbor feelings that a democratic learning situation is incompatible with material advancement. People in our neighborhood like tangible evidence. The Community School will be essential to organizing parents in our area by providing an observable model to substantiate our radical approach to education. The Community School hopefully will demonstrate that the historical fear and distrust between the ghetto parent and teacher is not inherent in the school situation but has been fostered by public-school administrations. We plan to show that an alliance between parents and teachers is the key to reforming the public school system.

We also plan to organize public-school teachers. We plan to encourage them to observe our programs. Our after-school programs will involve many public-school teachers. We intend to develop a publication describing the achievements and problems of our school that will also include contributions from public-school teachers and analyses of common problems. Our faculty plans to work with the Newark Teachers Union and Newark Teachers Association to develop maximum exposure and support for our ideas. We have already received several offers from faculty members at teachers colleges



in the area to discuss our program with their students, many of whom will be teaching in our area.

Radical Decentralization

This alliance of teachers and parents will then be in a position to push for local control of neighborhood schools. The specifics of such a strategy can be discussed in a separate article and will necessarily depend upon the political situation at the time we are ready to move on to such a demand. At this point, it is most important to note that *if school decentralization took place right now in Newark, the schools would differ little from what they are at present.* We believe that by providing an alternative model for the Movement in Newark we are laying the groundwork for radical decentralization in the future.

Over a year ago LIBERATION printed an exciting article describing an experimental private school in New York—the First Street School. Although the Newark Community School places a greater emphasis on community control and community organizing, its basic educational approach is in many ways similar. Many people ask me if I have visited the First Street School and I have to tell them that it doesn't exist any more. It was forced to close down for lack of funds.

Hopefully, the Newark Community School will not suffer a similar fate. LIBERATION readers, especially, must realize that the future of radical organizing efforts in the ghetto will depend upon financial support from the middle-class Left. Our school's budget for the first year is \$60,000. We are trying to develop a large group of permanent sponsors, so that we can devote our full energies to teaching and organizing. We are asking friends of the Community School to decide upon a weekly amount that they would like to contribute, with a minimum of a dollar a week. Payments can be made every thirteen weeks, every twenty-six weeks, or once a year. They are tax deductible. The school's temporary address is 212 Chadwick Avenue, Newark, New Jersey, telephone (201) 243-5366.