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"It's our *school"*

The First Street School

GEORGE DENNISON

THE FIRST STREET SCHOOL was founded in 1964 by Mabel Chrystie and is in session now on the lower east side (or East Village) handling twenty-three children, mostly under ten years of age. The school was conceived of more or less as an antidote to the dehumanization of the public school system. Where the latter is huge, impersonal, and bureaucratic, the First Street School is small and informal and is oriented entirely toward the personalities of the students, the teachers, and the parents. Administration is handled directly by the teachers, who in all respects are absolutely free agents. This arrangement not only produces a high teacher morale but has proven to be marvelously economical: the cost per pupil, in classes of seven and eight, compares favorably to that of the public schools with classes of thirty. The school's choice of facilities is also an important factor in economy of operation. At present we are leasing classrooms, a playroom, a gymnasium, an art room, and a woodworking shop at the Emanu-El Midtown YMHA on East Sixth Street. The Y itself had been lying idle during school hours. There are many such facilities in New York, and it is worth mentioning that nothing is needed to start a school but space, teachers, and students. Financing is a variable thing. First Street is very much in need of funds, but this is partly because one of the aims of the school was to bring quality education and experimental methods into an area which has seen very little of either. This means that almost all the children have been granted full-tuition scholarships. The school has survived so far on a loan made available by a private donor. We have been accredited by the New York City Board of Education and were granted a provisional charter by the New York State Board of Regents. Racially the school is integrated in exactly the way that the neighborhood is: about one third Negro, one third Puerto Rican, and one third "white." Some of the families are college-educated, though most are not. The children range from slow-normal to bright. Several of them came to us with learning problems. I would like to say a few words now about the philosophy of the school and its methods, and then describe the results we have achieved so far.

I

From the point of view of standard education, the First Street School is radical and experimental. There are no grades, no graded report cards, no competitive examinations. No child is compelled to study or answer questions when he does not want to. The children are free to consult each other, examine each other's work, leave the room, leave the school building itself, talk to each other and to the teachers at will. Several rules have been established by the students themselves meeting as a parliament (a parliament in which some very fine distinctions have been drawn by tots of six), and the parliamentary method is used frequently to decide upon outings and special activities. These are not common practices, even in private schools. Readers who are familiar with the writings of A. S. Neill, however, will have heard of of this in a more radical form than we are able to exemplify at First Street. And perhaps from their point of view we are running a relatively conventional school. The differences are not so much ideological, however, as immediate functions of personalities and of the exigencies of operating a day school in New York. But let me give an example here, since only an example from life is capable of introducing the kind of irony that really obtains.

We believe—with Neill and many others—that going to school should be entirely voluntary; and that young boys, from say nine through twelve, should have access to school as to a clubhouse, but should ideally spend their time roving about the city, observing, help-

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ing, annoying, adventuring—whatever they wish. Last year we had a group of five such boys. All five had been chronic truants and vandals in the public schools, and in varying degrees all five were on the route to Youth House. Now the ideological convictions of the teachers indicated that these boys should be given a great deal of freedom; and we felt compromised because we did not actually *want* them to go venturing, first because they would be fair game for truant officers, and second because we, in case of injury, would be fair game for lawsuits. But in fact the issue never came up. These chronic truants came to school devotedly and never once suggested a venturesome outing among themselves. After a few months we decided to risk our misgivings. The school had been donated bicycles. Each boy was given one, and each boy was given money for lunch: and then with a great deal of encouragement, they were turned loose. Rather, we tried to turn them loose. The fact is, they would not go. And we came to realize that for these particular boys—who had been characterized by the violence of the fearful—there was nothing in the city quite as attractive or as supportive as their own school. I do not say this to praise the school (it would be a foolish kind of praise, since school at best is only school) but to indicate the extreme needs and dependencies of these boys, not one of whom had developed the kind of independence normal to a boy of twelve. All the idealized hopes and practical misgivings of the what our *policy* was regarding freedom—we were teachers had been beside the point. It did not matter obliged to answer the needs of these particular boys. And as a result of doing just that, we have come to see that we do not exemplify policies at all. Some children are given great freedom (i.e. will accept it and use it), others are treated more strictly (i.e. demand the kind of firm guidance characteristic of very early childhood). Obviously there is a policy of sorts behind all this, an ideal of ego-growth and of supportive, broadly therapeutic responsibilities on the part of the teachers. But we have never spelled this policy out and see no need to. To the best of our ability we meet every child on his own terms. But conversely, the children must meet the teachers on *their terms.* There could be no reality of encounter if this were not the case. And in fact one of the familiar sights of the school is that of a six-year-old with his hands on his hips arguing heatedly with a teacher who towers over him. No child can be given more freedom than this—or can be given it only at the risk of entering an unreal environment in which teachers are not persons but are merely exemplifications of some desirable utopia. It follows, of course, that all but everything depends upon the choosing of the staff. But this is always the case. Ideals, in the abstract, count for very little. Much as we admire Neill—and I think we do not disagree with him on anything—we have made no effort to recruit teachers from his disciples, who all too often use his ideas as metaphoric expressions of their own needs. We have gone to great pains, however, to find teachers of ability, and of personal warmth and kindliness, bearing in mind always that the child's desire to learn is nothing less than his total attraction to the world and that therefore teachers who are vividly *in* the world in their own right are the best persons for the children to associate with. There are considerable differences, then, from classroom to classroom. One room will be relatively orderly, relatively quiet, another relatively noisy and messy. This is the way it should be. Given the general agreement that coercion is pointless, competitive learning a violation of nature, and bureaucratic manipulation the high road, or low road, to slavishness, there is no need to unify the techniques of the various teachers. And since the students, the teachers, and the parents are all in close contact and make their opinions known, there is no possibility of incompetence going unnoticed.

Flexible Groupings

The students are divided into three classes, and each class "belongs" to a particular teacher, though there are frequent re-groupings for special activities like dance instruction, music, gym, and so forth. Age, of course, is the chief criterion in the forming of classes, but other factors play a part. One little girl, for instance, a bright and boisterous Jewish-Italian girl of eight, wanted to spend time both with the younger children of five and six and with the children in the eight-to-ten year group. It was extremely beneficial for her to do this, since she was precocious and capable but also suffered many unresolved problems of early childhood. She behaved quite differently in the two groups, tending to be cooperative and affectionate among the younger children and disruptive among the older. She obviously needed both, and we ourselves could not have devised anything better than the arrangement she brought about simply by expressing her own desires. The self-corrective, health-seeking powers of the young are enormous, and wherever possible we have tried to follow the clues given us by the children. Vincente, a diminutive, panicky, intelligent Puerto Rican of nine, was torn between wanting to be an infant and wanting to be one of the boys. It was essential to him that he identify with the older boys, and so this was the group he "belonged" to, but we allowed him to join the younger children pretty much at will—again, with great benefit to himself, not only because of his association with the children (who were his true peers in an important way), but because of the relationship he established with their teacher, who was a woman, whereas the teacher of the boys was a man. In his home life Vincente was not only without a father but was alienated from his half-brothers and sisters because he was the child of a love-affair—for which reason, also, his mother alternately pampered and denied him.

What is true of all children is especially clear in cases of extreme need like Vincente's: a child makes no distinction between school and life, or between learning and himself. His own identity comes to him through all things, and therefore he seeks reality of encounter and cannot help but balk when his true needs are denied him. The child's inborn desire to learn is best

understood simply as his attraction to the world. He is at all times *in* the world and *of* it, and the regimen of a school is powerless to alter this huge fact. Many of the familiar crises of school children must be understood as attempts to create reality of encounter. I do not mean only encounter with persons, but with mental/sensual forms as well. The two difficulties most familiar in our schools today—"parroting" and rebelliousness—are nothing less than attempts to convert bureaucratic instruments, Teachers, into persons of flesh and blood, unstructured information into persuasive whole forms, and the artificial solitudes of an organized crowd into a social body of boys, girls, and adults. The child who "parrots," who gives the answer he knows is wanted, gives it because he esteems the wanting, not the answer. He is willing to deny his own yearning for clarity in order to put himself in harmony with what he takes to be the way of the world. Typically he wins advancement and pays for it by sensual and intellectual losses. The rebellious child seeks reality of encounter in a different way. He is in closer touch with his needs and is loyal to them as best he knows how, which most often means blindly. He will not attempt to digest what cannot be digested, and quite correctly takes the conflict of wills to be the major reality of the classroom. His behavior is such as to force this issue to a head. If he is organically more sound than the child who parrots, he pays for it by arrested growth and by the postponement or stultification of vital impulses of curiosity and emulation. He is starved for performance and is led down blind alleys of personal conflict.

Considerations of this kind have led us to seek reality of encounter and to base everything upon it.

But this is a relatively theoretical way of talking. What I would like to convey—though it is almost impossible—is the simplicity and downright homeliness of the real events: Vincente's wrinkled forehead straightening out as he comes to understand some vital little fact; the teachers laughing at the witticisms of the children; one child intently studying the behavior of another and thereby learning an entire process the teacher had been powerless to teach him. We are so flooded these days by the elaborate formulations of Experts that we have lost sight of the underlying simplicity of things, such as, for instance, that school is not *primarily* the relation of teachers and students, but of adults and children, and of course of children and children. The very phrase "natural powers" is enough to bring a skeptical look into (especially) sophisticated faces, though these same powers, once they are described in the jargon of academic psychology (they are presently the objects of vast inquiry) will be fully accepted by our sophisticates, who will now believe, however, that they have been invented by the Experts. This situation is so deadly and pervasive that I would like to digress here from the First Street School and give some examples.

The most prestigous writer on problems of learning is Jerome S. Bruner, director of the Center for Cognitive Studies at Harvard. When I read his *Process of Learning* I was impressed by the lucidity and calm of his presentation and by the obvious importance of the material he was concerned with. And yet as I read on I became uneasy, and by the time I had finished the book I found that I was suspicious of Bruner and in fact had developed a downright repugnance for his thought. How was it that in reporting so many experiments which indicated the harmfulness of coercion, competition, and arbitrary order—really a mountain of evidence—he could recommend nothing in case after case but "more research"? Nor did Bruner's thought strike me as being so very philosophical, after all, for it conveyed little sense of consulting experience (in contrast with Dewey's thought, and especially with Whitehead's) but rather of consulting experiments and research. Certainly these are kinds of experience—but they are something less than it, too. The usual trouble with such deliberately structured samples of the world is aptly described by John Holt in his review of Bruner's latest book (*New York Review of Books*, April 19, 1966). "When a movie of this experiment," Holt writes, "was shown at one of Bruner's colloquia at Harvard, nobody thought it worth mentioning that most of the time the child was not looking at the clay but at the face of his questioner, as if to read there the wanted answer." Bruner, like other researchers, tends to treat himself as an instrument of investigation. But the investigation and the subject can hardly be equated with the man and child of direct experience.

But *The Process of Learning* was presented explicitly as a report of the Woods Hole Conference, and so all of this was understandable, if not encouraging. Bruner had set out to collate the findings of many researchers and committees, and in fact his redaction was beautifully done.

In his book *On Knowing* Bruner ranges over wider fields, drawing on art and literature as well as science. Yet strangely (or not) he sounds like he is collating the efforts of researchers again, as if all those poets and artists had presented evidence or points of view. Bruner speaks pietistically of "the tragic sense of life" but one hardly feels that by "life" he means the lives of men. It is, rather, a literary/academic conception, not unlike Lionel Trilling's ideas of conduct and manners. Bruner, in short, is not a philosopher, and he is not a psychologist in the sense that is classical to the modern period. He is an Expert: enormously intelligent, extremely capable, unusually knowledgeable—yet flawed in the grain from top to bottom. I would like to suggest what this flaw consists of. My suspicion of Bruner is simply this: that where he is undoubtedly deeply concerned with his field, the nature of learning, he is not persuasively concerned with the experience of school in the lives of the young. His entire performance, for all the cogency of its central arguments, is in fact a deep obeisance before the bureaucracy that is stifling the vitality of this country. Let me quote Bruner's words here and make clear what I mean.

In his newest book, *Toward a Theory of Instruction*, Bruner describes the inborn motives of the will to learn,

and numbers among them "the deep-sensed commitment to the web of social reciprocity."

"The conduct of our educational system," he writes, "has been curiously blind to this interdependent nature of knowledge. We have 'teachers' and 'pupils', 'experts' and 'laymen'. But the community of learning is somehow overlooked."

This is a good example of Bruner's observations. Taken by themselves these remarks are humane and potentially liberating. But let us see what he means—how he himself understands them.

"What can most certainly be encouraged," he goes on, "—and what is now being developed in the better high schools—is something approximating the give and take of a seminar in which discussion is the vehicle of instruction. This is reciprocity."

Social Reciprocity

True, there is a kind of reciprocity here; and as a method it is far preferable to standard routines. But really, Bruner's application of the idea is an almost pathetic reduction of that high-sounding phrase, "deep-sensed commitment to the web of social reciprocity."

What does "social reciprocity" mean? It means that we are in this together; that every person's every motive and act partakes of the otherness that surrounds him; that I take you seriously, and vice versa; that your needs, wishes, and desires have a place in this world just as mine do; and so on. Now let us imagine those students in the high school seminar. And let us subtract from them, in imagination, the things which are in fact subtracted from them in life. They can neither choose nor refuse—not the time, the place, the instructor, or the subject. Nor is it a question of hours, days, and weeks, but of entire courses and years. Even the barest freedom of movement, simply to come and go during the discussion, will have been denied them; nor will their interests in each other, both comradely and sexual, be given their natural obtrusive or unobtrusive place. *In all the issues which are truly social and on which the simplest peerage of existence depends, the students will not have been consulted.* How much reciprocity is left over? The give and take of a discussion! The trouble with Bruner is not that he cannot conceive of these things, but that he can *only conceive* of them. They seem not to exist in his thought in the way that they exist in life, that is, as the very quick of life itself.

"This is reciprocity. But it requires recognition of one critically important matter: you cannot have both reciprocity and the demand that everybody learn the same thing or be 'completely' well rounded in the same way all the time. If reciprocally operative groups are to give support to learning by stimulating each person to join his efforts to a group, then we shall need tolerance for the specialized roles that develop—the critic, the innovator, the second helper, the cautionary. For it is from the cultivation of these interlocking roles that the participants get the sense of operating reciprocally in a group."

Bruner ends the paragraph by recommending diversity and flexibility. And certainly all of this is going in the right direction—if, indeed, it is. One hardly knows what to make of it. It is enlightened, humane, considered—and then again, it is downright dreadful stuff. I don't mean simply that it's jargon. It's obviously jargon, but that's not necessarily fatal. No—I think Bruner believes that this is what actually happens in a classroom: that *roles develop,* that the boys and girls *get the sense of operating reciprocally in a group.* God save us if that were actually what happened! *Role* is a concept. *Operating reciprocally* is a concept. Both are terribly abstract (and incorrect) even as concepts. They are not facts of experience except when Experts talk to each other. If an Expert can say of a boy, "he assumed a role," the boy will have experienced anything *but* a role. He will have been fired by some idea, some stroke of inspiration or response, or of understanding, or of conviction; his real desires will have leaped toward some real object or person. And when persons "operate reciprocally" they are not *getting the sense of it* at all, but are vividly engaged—*for real*—with each other and with each other's ideas, feelings, passions, etc. No influence is deadlier than that of the benign bureaucrat urging live young creatures to develop their roles and operate reciprocally in a group. It is the worst kind of invasion of the very energies which if simply left alone would accomplish the real thing, not the image of it, all by themselves.

Here, then, are some characteristics of the contemporary Expert. That his researches teach him the value of instinctual life, and that he explains its value to us in such a way that the instinctual life is made to count for nothing.

That his researches teach him the autonomy and the indwellingness of instincts, motives, patterned growth —and that he invades that autonomy by assuming the responsibility for the inculcation of these things.

That he cannot distinguish between facts of life and mere conceptions, and therefore treats abstractions as if they were perceptually given in the experience of the live creatures.

That his researches bring him, time and again, to the truisms known to every mother, and that he hasn't the modesty or the wit to admit it. (What vast researches Bruner cites to establish that babies poke around and look at things—"curiosity is a prototype of the intrinsic motive"; that the three year old girl wishes she could chop up her food as well as her five year old brother—"desire for competence and aspiration to emulate a model"; and that nine year old boys are quick to run errands, suggest expedients, and love to be praised for their real as opposed to unreal contributions—"deep-sensed commitment to the web of social reciprocity.")

Last but not least, our contemporary Expert, in spite of his addiction to experiment, can be depended upon to ignore such experiments as Neill's, which has gone on for forty years now and must have *some kind* of

pragmatic value; and Tolstoy's, which lasted three years and were observed by a master observer.

I hope I have made clear why I distrust Jerome Bruner and respond to his writing with repugnance. In fairness to myself as well as to Bruner, I must add that these brief remarks are not intended to measure the man or his work, which would certainly be presumptuous. Bruner covers a lot of ground and covers some of it extremely well: questions of curriculum structure, of the relatedness of knowledge, and so on.

I have tried to indicate what I take to be the flaw in the grain, and to explain why I am not personally hopeful that Bruner's contribution will lead to the liberation of young America's energies. His ideas will not be utilized, *they will be administered;* and the fault will be his own, for he has not addressed himself to teachers, parents, students, or philosophers, but exclusively, and right down the line, to administrators. *On the basis of what is known about learning at this very moment, vast, vast improvements in the lives of our young could be achieved immediately simply by applying available monies toward the alleviation of conditions already recognized as critical.* But the mandarins of the universities speak the language of the bureaucracy. Furthermore, they staff the foundations. They have claimed the money for themselves—and we are being treated to the sickening spectacle of "more research" in the teeth of an avalanche of remediable catastrophes.

Some Personal Improvements

I would like to give some examples of what I mean by *improvement,* and then later show that the methods involved are quite simple and the amounts of money very modest. The one really necessary thing is to pay attention to the *big* problems by which children are beset. You cannot bypass these central issues and expect to accomplish much simply by improving the internal structure of the curriculum. In his *Aims of Education* Whitehead raises the question of whether any subject can be considered difficult in itself. The most difficult process, he points out, is the one that children accomplish without instruction, namely learning to talk. In my own experience I have found it to be invariably true that if a child is having difficulty learning, it is because something is impeding the natural activity of his facilities. This something is frequently the teacher himself, the teacher's methods, the school itself; usually it is all these things plus emotional dilemmas originating outside the school. And yet it is not really difficult to alter these circumstances. At the First Street School we have done *no remedial teaching as such,* and yet some very striking improvements have occurred. And it is not as if we were a staff of extraordinarily dedicated teachers. We are not. I am sure that the same methods, in other hands, would yield results as good or better.

Here are some comments that were solicited from teachers and parents to be included in a fund-raising brochure.

A Twelve Year Old Girl

TEACHER: This child from a Spanish-speaking home entered the school generally doing first grade work. She spoke adequate "school English" but did not know the vocabulary for common household objects. Her school failure had given her a resentful conviction that she was "stupid." Actually she was quite intelligent. She used to settle all disputes with her fists, steal, and wantonly destroy property. When she transferred to a public school in the Bronx, after a year and a half, she could be trusted with large sums of money, showed respect for other people's possessions, and had stopped trying to beat everybody up. During the year and a half that she was with us, she progressed to advanced fourth grade work in all subjects. Her English vocabulary had increased a hundredfold and she was expressing a desire to go to college.

MOTHER: (Does not speak English): The teacher used to make her do things she didn't want to. She was scared and didn't do anything.

A Six Year Old Girl

TEACHER: She was silent and frightened when she came to school. She jumped when she was spoken to, ran to the teacher when approached by other children, and was unable to express any of her own wishes and choices. Now, six months later, she plays with other children, makes her opinions known, and talks animatedly. I think her progress has been the most spectacular I've ever seen in a child over a short period.

FATHER: She didn't talk much at home. Now she comes home with stories. I can't say how she's changed exactly, but she's changed in general.

A Six Year Old Boy

TEACHER: He is a well-informed child with no problems. He spends his time observing other children, playing with other children, constructing things in classroom and shop. Likes stories, asks questions, spends average amount of time on school work.

MOTHER: He seems to be enthusiastically learning, as he spends so much time at home with pencil in hand trying to write. He is gaining confidence in himself, and independence. I feel he's having a well-rounded life at school.

A Twelve Year Old Boy

TEACHER: He comes from a Spanish-speaking home. He came to school at the age of eleven—from the fourth grade in public school—and could read only twenty words in English, though he spoke it fairly well. He was so inured to failure that he seemed to have no conception of the experience of learning. It was as if he believed that other people simply knew things and he did not. The greatest discovery he made at school was that by talking, listening, looking, trying, and especially by failing and trying again, he could actually acquire new skills and knowledge. His personality changed a great deal—from a kind of stupid belligerence to amiability and even eagerness. At the end of

the first year he was still terribly behind his age level, but he no longer failed at the things he attempted. During the last two months he went through a year and a half in the graded reading.

An Eight Year Old Girl

TEACHER: When she came to school a year and a half ago she was a hyperactive child who would not rest or let others rest. She ran around the building, provoked the other children into fights, and cursed whoever came near her. She did little work at school, but would "sneak" books home to read. She stole both money and materials and lied habitually.

At this time, a year and a half later, she is usually a very responsible girl. She is one of the most outstanding contributors at school meetings and spends much of her time in a very constructive way. She is reading two to three years above her grade level and does original projects in science and art.

MOTHER: I feel that the school is beneficial to the type of child who doesn't do too well in public school. She was quite loud and boisterous (she still is), but she seems to have become more interested in things around her rather than herself. Sex was a big issue with her, and it isn't now. I think that if and when she has to go back to the public school, she'll fit in now. It used to be hard to wake her up in the morning. Now she's up and waiting.

The kinds of changes referred to in these comments—changes in learning, in performance, and in personality—were not brought about by particular methods of instruction (many different methods have been used) but by granting the children the consideration due them as persons, by giving them free access to each other, and by removing irrational, that is to say bureaucratic, demands, so that the day's activities could be modified by the energies and interests of the persons involved. In order to give a concrete notion of what this means, I would like to quote from the journal I kept while I was teaching at the school last year.

II

At regular times during the week, special instructors come to the school to conduct classes in music, dance, and singing. The following excerpt from my journal refers to one of these occasions.

Barney, the folk-singer, came today with his guitar and auto-harp. It was a marvelous session and the best demonstration possible of what the freedom in the school is really all about. He came at the end of the lunch period . . . and lunch itself was unusually pleasant today, the usual roaming around and shouting, everyone sitting where they liked and changing seats often, sometimes to sit by favorite teachers and sometimes to sit by friends and sometimes to sit alone. Ramon and Maxine are up on their feet every two minutes, doing dance steps—or Ramon expanding his chest and making like a wrestler, Maxine flaunting herself. But the children are forming real relations now and are having a strong effect on each other's behavior, e.g., if Maxine steals Betsy's cookies, Betsy, a nine-year-old Negro girl, will pout with such incredibly sustained, immobile dignity that sooner or later everything will come to a halt until her grievance is taken care of; if Maxine drinks Dodie's soda pop (Dodie, too, is nine years old and Negro) she can get away with it if she doesn't take too much: Dodie will stare at her with combined anger and fascination—but soon Dodie's lively spirit will flare up and she'll make more of a fuss than Maxine can handle; if Maxine takes something of Nora's (Nora is a twelve year old Puerto Rican) Nora will pull and push until Maxine is down on the floor, at which point Nora will bawl her out and kick her in the rear four or five times, moderating the force of her kick very nicely, not enough to hurt, but a jolt sufficient to drive home the rapid warnings and curses, usually shouted in Spanish.

The yelling was relatively softened today, and the thing that struck me most was the smiling faces of the young ones. All the six year olds were simply looking around with smiles of pleasure, and sometimes wandering back and forth, interested in everything and calmly smiling.

After most of the food was consumed, everyone became very noisy and active. Ramon began juggling with apples, and Maxine tried first to imitate him and then to interfere with him. The teachers were all just trying to relax, i.e., there was never any pressing reason to interfere with the growing pandemonium. Which is to say that no one was becoming hysterical or being injured. And all that noise, when you really listen to it, turns out to be a boiling mixture of very specific meanings and relations. Timmy steals Marilyn's lunchbox. Marilyn yells for it, but is also pleased. Timmy inveigles Ramon into helping him hide it—and the two boys rush from the room, followed by Marilyn. Now there is a great squabbling in the hall. Marilyn can't find it. Timmy comes skipping into the room, whizzes past me, flicks my hair with his hand, and with a beaming face shouts the one word, "Cooperation!" Maxine runs about among the boys, shouting and pushing—but her reign as sex queen has been ended by Marilyn, who didn't even try to end it—and Maxine gives up the boys for a while and goes to sit beside her friend Donna, the sweet-natured charmer of six. Then Maxine takes Donna out into the hall, and now almost all the children are in the hall or running from room to room, and the shouting has reached a tremendous pitch—at which point Barney arrives . . . and that great volume of energy, without losing its head of steam, modulates into a series of shouts—"Barney is here! Barney is here!"—and several of the kids, especially the young ones, come back into the room and cluster around him. The other kids are still howling in the hall. One of the teachers tells them it's time for singing, and comes into the room herself. Barney is greeting all the children and forming the chairs into a circle. The howling continues in the hall. Ramon runs into the room, runs out again. Marilyn runs in, gets interested and stays. Suddenly the howling is all over and everyone is sitting in a great circle, swinging their legs and chattering, some of them doubling up in the chairs and leaning against each other (the little girls, especially, and Nora, who mothers them with real affection). Barney asks several of the children which verses they would like to sing of the *Michael* song. Maxine has the verses on the tip of her tongue and immediately jumps

into the center of the circle and flaunting herself Twist style shouts out the verses so loud that no one can hear what Barney is saying. The corners of her lips are turned up and she keeps one eye cocked on Barney. So Barney is forced to concentrate on Maxine for a while. But several of the children join in on Barney's side: "Come on, Maxine! Hey Maxine! Shut up, Maxine!" And so the verses are parcelled out. Barney strums the guitar. The children are smiling and wiggling and swinging their legs against the chairs. Ramon jumps up and does a dance step and sits down again. Dodie is supposed to sing the first verse, but she is bashful—and while she sits there blushing, Maxine hollers out the verse and jumps into the center of the ring. Dodie's big smile turns into a frown. Now she refuses absolutely to sing the verse. But it's time for the chorus anyway and everyone knows the words and sings them with marvelous full-throated voices, retaining all the zest of their scampering and squabbling in the hallway. When Maxine is invited now to stand in the center and sing her own verse, she suddenly becomes bashful. But she leans against the desk and sings it and everyone listens. Then the thunderous chorus again—and the song goes straight through with the greatest animation and pleasure. When it's over, Maxine asks Barney to play *Glory, Glory Hallelujah,* adding, "It's a very sad song." "That's funny," says Barney, "the one I know is not sad." "Oh yes," says Maxine, and she begins to howl "Glooooooory, glooooooory hallelujah . . ." just as it might be howled at the Volunteers of America. Barney accompanies her and soon all the kids join in. Now Maxine has become inspired. She jumps into the center of the ring and cracks everybody up by her stylization. She puts her hand on her hip, looks utterly bored, and in the dry, abrupt voice of a stock clerk reading an inventory, speaks the words "Glory . . . glory . . ."—then jumping up and down like a maniac yells "Hallelujah!" Then abruptly bored again—"Glory . . . glory . . ."—and jumping wildly again, "Hallelujah!" The teachers, especially, are howling with laughter. When this is over, Jenny, who is ten, thoughtful and quiet, tells Barney she knows a song. Barney asks her what it is . . . and Dodie says she knows it too. Barney asks them to sing it together. But Dodie is sitting all the way across the room and is too bashful to walk through the center of the circle. So Ramon yells, "You have to bring her!"—and he goes over and pushes her chair across the room, Dodie grinning and blushing and enjoying the ride. So Barney plays and Jenney and Dodie, in timid voices, sing the song. Here again, everyone listens. Now comes a Catalan folk song with lots of hand gestures—the sea, the mountains, the sun, the bull, the wineskin—with a shouted chorus of *Olé!* Everyone makes the gestures and roars the *Olé!* with gusto. Becho, an eleven year old (Puerto Rican, instead of making the big circle to indicate *sun,* makes the gesture of a woman's curves and grins at Ramon. Donna has come running across the room and is sitting in my lap. Whenever *toro,* the bull, is named in the song and everyone makes horns, Donna, holding her fingers at her head, charges all the way across the circle and gores Barney very gently in the knee, then runs back smiling to sit in my lap until the word *toro* is shouted again. This song has a dancing rhythm and Maxine leaps into the center and makes up a kind of folk dance, hrowing her legs out and hopping. The next song is Spanish, a real dance song, and suddenly Ramon, Becho, and Nora are out in the center dancing a graceful approximation of the Hat Dance, their hands behind their backs and their bodies swaying with the music. Several of the children join them, and since the floor is crowded with dancers now, Barney swings into a lively Twist number and everyone changes to the Twist. Ramon and Timmy are both very good at it and they pair off and do some fancy steps. A couple of the teachers have joined the dancing. Even little Donna is doing the Twist, which she varies from time to time by putting her fingers at her head and charging into me. Betsy is carried out of her usual reserve and does a few fancy steps (leaving out all the simple ones). She goes around in a circle with one arm held high and loose. Dodie, too, is carried away. She executes a step and tries to end it with a full-extension split on the floor. She gets stuck in the split and stays there a few moments looking around with a long face. Then she gets up and tries it again. Everyone is dancing, Barney singing and strumming. Timmy and Ramon look happier than I have ever seen them, and Nora, who very frequently is joyous, looks joyous, twisting and whirling in her big Christmas boots. Only Alberto has been unable to participate. He leaves the room for extended intervals. A teacher goes with him and they play in the gym.

After the dancing, the older children gather around Barney and he gives each one a little lesson on the guitar, one or two chords, and a little lesson on the auto-harp. Ramon and Becho are especially interested, pay close attention and put themselves into it.

Now two of the teachers have opened the art room upstairs . . . and the drift-to-the-next-thing begins.

I should mention that I took Ramon aside at the end of the dancing and asked him if he knew some of the songs I had learned in Mexico. He was familiar with all of them, since they are regular features of the Puerto Rican culture in New York. I sang some of the verses from the songs and asked him to check me on the words. He was delighted by the fact that I knew them and could sing them in Spanish. His face was bright and exuberant—as always when I am able to put something in Spanish.

Readers who have worked with children under the institutionalized condiitons of the ordinary school will realize at once what inferences can be drawn from this description of the folk-singing. I would like to go the other way for a moment and use these little examples of behavior to clarify some of the principles we have been following. There are three things I would like to comment on, first, the effect of the children on each other; second, the orderly structures which emerge more or less spontaneously from what appears to be chaos; and third, the relation between unhampered movement and learning.

Maxine, who comes from a Jewish-Italian family (her mother's comments are quoted above) was brought to First Street because she was in trouble at the public school and was falling behind in her work. Some visitors who saw her when she arrived and then saw her again a year and a half later, were amazed at the change that had come over her, and naturally they asked us what we had done. To an important extent the question

should have been addressed to the other children, though their answers would have been infinitely complicated, since their treatment of Maxine varied subtly with the changes in her treatment of them. This interchange can be accomplished only by the forebearance of the teachers, not by their guidance, though this sort of thing is hard to state as a rule, since the teachers are by no means passive. Nor can "judicious forbearance" be defined without examples. When Maxine stole Dodie's soda pop, she was not immediately reprimanded by a teacher, but by Dodie, to whom the soda pop belonged and who had a right to be angry. Similarly, when Maxine took Nora's cookies, it was Nora who chastized her, not a teacher. No one interfered with Nora, even when she was kicking Maxine. Certainly it takes an experienced, or at least an observant, teacher to know where to draw the line so as to prevent injury. But this case was similar to almost every case that I have seen: the children themselves, even when angry, are subtly responsible toward each other with regard both to inflicting pain and to the justice of their own actions. They are more accepting of each other, and are more forgiving than adults can ever hope to be. They distinguish between the person and his actions more accurately and generously. They do not reject their antagonists out of hand, but exert a steadily civilizing influence upon each other, the more so since in the simplicity of their wants and pleasures there is always an evident rationality, a manifest relation of cause and effect. Maxine was basically a robust person, yet in certain ways she was fearful and resentful, and was therefore aggressive. She needed to know the true limits in all of her relationships—both with children and adults—and by acquiring this knowledge she obtained a security she could trust. This security would have been unobtainable if we had obscured those relationships by enforcing a uniform discipline "from above." Most important, Maxine would have been deprived of all that multiform give and take with her peers—the simple anger which is so much more instructive than teachers' homilies, and the forgiveness and acceptance which are so much brighter inducements to sociability than adult rewards for "good behavior."

It is worth mentioning, in connection with this question of the children's effect upon each other, that where few children will take it on trust that they *should* be interested in what their elders place before them, *every* child is affected by the interests shown by another child. By interests and by abilities. Ramon, who was a poor reader, was a good dancer. No one asked him to dance. He danced because he loved it. No one asked the bashful children to brave their embarrassment and try to dance. They were impressed by Ramon, and so they jumped up and tried to dance. Similarly, they listened when Jenny, whose memory was good, sang verses they themselves had not yet learned.

The Question of Order

All of this leads directly into the question of order—into what might be called the internal sources of order. (There are external sources, too, and we use them, though in a minimal way—there are no bells, no supervisors, no punishments, no threats.)

The day is alternately noisy and quiet. How do those quiet periods come about? The question is somewhat misleading, for the truth is that the noise is not chaos, it possesses the same elements that are observable during a period of calm when the children are bent over their books or are talking with their teachers. What seems like chaos is nothing but a multiplicity of actions, each one of which is highly rational and purposive. As much as the children enjoy these wild, sometimes merry, sometimes conflictive episodes, there is a built-in principle of transformation-into-calm. This principle is simply the fact that all creatures tend toward the completion of purposive actions, and progress from less-defined toward more defined situational structures. The noisy periods are not the opposites of the quiet ones, but are the background out of which the quiet ones emerge. When this cycle is given its natural place in the routine of the school, the children tend to bring the vividness of their noisy play into the quiet of the more simply structured "lessons" (these too are social exchanges). The calm is not the oppressive silence of the disciplined classroom, but the electric ease of organic order.

Which brings me to the third thing that I wanted to mention, the relation between unhampered movement and the process of learning. Those folk song sessions were so lively and enjoyable that I myself was unaware of them as teaching/learning episodes. I tended to be more impressed by the happiness I saw on the faces which had come to us looking so worried. It was not until the end of the year that I discovered how much the children had learned. We were all driving back from a picnic in the bus, and the children began to sing. They went through song after song, verse after verse, absolutely flawlessly. I was touched and surprised—and I was embarrassed, too, for when I tried to join them I discovered that they had learned far more than I, though I had been exposed to the very same songs.

III

I have been talking about the learning and behavioral advantages of freedom. I would like to give an example now—a game period in the gym with the ten to twelve year old boys—of the moral effect of non-intervention.

My presence in the gymnasium was not that of a supervisor, teacher, or coach. I held sweaters, stayed in the background, became nothing more than the authentication of the *place*, i.e., I could be relied upon to keep people out. This sounds like almost nothing, as indeed it was, but if one calls to mind the ordinary conditions of a boy's life in New York, not only at school, but on the streets, in the playgrounds, and at home, these little interludes of protected freedom will sound more like the rare occasions they really were. This will be all the more evident if it is borne in mind that four out of the six boys belonged to self-protective gangs, which tend to be as stifling as the organizations imposed by adults. Too, the non-intervention of an observant adult has a

powerful effect on children who are used to prohibitions and supervision. It is not merely that they feel free to do and express things otherwise inhibited, but that they sense, quite directly, that the moral reality has been shifted from the person of authority into the situation as a whole, of which they themselves are the most important parts. Let me make this clear by describing their behavior, since it may sound like a large claim. I would like to make clear, too, that non-intervention is a very active kind of collaboration.

The boys are playing dodgeball. One of them repeatedly breaks the rule about stepping over the center line. That is, he *sort of* observes the rule by anchoring one foot on the boundary line, but then when he throws the ball he allows the other foot to come a full stride into enemy territory. His opponents have been complaining and yelling, and now they lose patience. They know they are in the right, but they are afraid of being punched by the rule-breaker, who is also a bully. And so they appeal to me to arbitrate. "He keeps steppin' over the line!" This is quite true, and I nod. "Well it's against the rules, man!" Again I nod. "Well tell 'im to quit it, man!" I shake my head and shrug, conveying pretty clearly, "It's your affair, not mine." And so the boy who is angriest, the best player on the losing side, cries, "Shit, man, I quit!" and starts to walk off the court. The bully runs up to him with a raised fist and says, "You gonna quit, huh? Well I'm gonna break your ass." The other cringes, but stands his ground to the extent of saying, "I don't care, man." The bully is glaring at him, and he, mopingly, is staring at the bully. They are not only sizing each other up, but they are weighing the situation with great nicety and one can almost see the relevant wishes and fears in their faces. Both boys want to keep playing. The game was exciting —otherwise the argument would not have arisen. The rivalry was intense—otherwise the cheating would not have been so blatant, so much a deliberate insult. The bully knows very well that he cannot force the other boy to play. Even if his threats are successful, the boy will play half-heartedly, and the bully, who is a good thrower, is especially dependent on this boy, who is a good dodger. And so the bully sees his own pleasure in the game evaporating. He knows too that if he beats him up the whole game will be destroyed, partly because the excitement of competition really does depend on prior agreements and a fight would destroy the agreements, and partly because the loser's teammates, though they are not fond of him, will be forced to show their loyalty, not only to a teammate but to a fellow Puerto Rican, and they will certainly walk out. All of this is more or less visible on the quite intelligent face of the bully. And so after narrowing his eyes and sticking out his chin silently for a while, he punches him on the arm. The other boy mumbles, "Fuck you" and walks off the court. He hesitates a moment, and then leaves the gym. His teammates yell to him to come back, and then they curse him, and then they yell, "Throw the ball, man! We can beat you anyway!"—though they had been losing from the beginning. And so the game goes on, but it is woefully lacking in excitement. The bully's teammate, who is also his buddy, says nothing to him, but it is evident by his silence that his pleasure has been spoiled; and though the bully blusters and yells, as if the game were still at its peak, his face is wooden. The ball flies back and forth. The losing side is put out too quickly. The next round commences. The boy who walked out appears in the doorway and watches. One of his teammates yells, "Shit, man, come *on!*" He shakes his head and mumbles, "No, man." And then the bully's teammate yells, "Come on, Becho, he won't cheat no more!" And the bully, who is holding the ball, yells, "That's right, chicken! Come on, chicken!" and hurls the ball at him. The boy catches the ball and hurls it back. The bully catches it, and screaming, "Come on, chicken, come on chicken!" charges up to the line and hurls the ball at him. This time the boy dodges the ball—but he dodges onto the field of play, and immediately one of his teammates cups his hands at his mouth and yells at the bully, "Come on, chicken, quawk, quawk, quawk" and in a moment the game is in full swing and all three Puerto Ricans, who are masters of derision, are flaunting themselves as targets and are yelling in unison through their cupped hands, "Quawk, quawk, quawk, quawk." The bully is grinning. He charges up to the line again—not stepping over—and yells, "Buncha fuckin' chickens over there"—and hurls the ball. The boy who had walked out dodges the ball, puts his hand at his groin and yells, "Yeah, man . . . you want a worm!" Once again the game is merry, obscene, and intense. And this time there is no cheating. It is worth mentioning, too, that the boys left the gym as one gang, talking back and forth.

Now what was their sense of me, their teacher? I had refused to arbitrate their quarrel—and by this very act I had put myself into relation with everything that transpired. Everything, in effect, was sanctioned—the cheating, the walking away—everything. But then what was I collaborating with? It seems to me that the boys were aware, each one—not conceptually, but with immediate intuition—that I was collaborating with his own attempt to make a workable union of egocentric and social needs, a union which is not possible when either of the two kinds is slighted. Each boy was able to experience the *necessary relation* between his own excitement and the code of conduct which joined him to others in a social group, and his sensing of this introduced a moral element into his play, for at bottom this is what morality is: the necessity of the relation between conduct and individual fulfillment. It is the indwelling of the *all* in the *one*—in the end a biological demand. When this relation ceases to be a necessary one, "right action" is no longer demonstrably good—and we are in the familiar quandary of empty forms, bankrupt laws, etc. Games and play, not only among children but adults as well, could not be so lovely and exciting if they did not refer our standards of conduct backward toward their deeper biological and passional bases.

I would like to approach the question of classes and lessons by describing some of my exchanges with Ramon, the twelve-year-old who could not read.

Ramon had come to this country at the age of six, and

had spent six years in the public schools, but he did not know how to tell time, or when his birthday was, or the months of the year. I am not citing these deficiencies simply to blame the public schools, though there is no need to praise them, either. He was obviously suffering problems of his own. His sister, a year younger than he, was an intelligent, capable girl (she, too, attended our school) and his mother was a kindly person. If Ramon's capacities were not great, he was certainly of average intelligence. He was lively and sociable, and though he occasionally bullied the younger children, he was not violent but tended to be cooperative and even sweet-natured. But he was almost always involved in some bluff or other, and under the slightest pressure tended to lose contact with his surroundings. (I should say here that neither Ramon nor the other boys with learning problems were ever given tests at school. Report cards did not exist. We found ourselves, on the contrary, protecting the boys from each other. They had suffered so long under the invidious comparisons of the public schools—not to mention society at large—that each one invariably countered his own sense of humiliation by trying to humiliate someone else. Ramon's reading lessons were conducted in private, usually with a locked door—not to keep Ramon in, but to keep the others out, since he dared not expose the appalling extent of his needs in front of his friends, and of course he could learn nothing if he could not expose himself.)

The following exchange took place in a corner of the room, out of earshot of the other boys. This was one of our earliest conversations, and I am quoting it here only to give a more accurate idea of his situation.

I asked Ramon which was bigger, a state or a city, and he, in his hapless way (his voice combines assertiveness with anxious guessing) said, "A city!??" I said, "No, the states are bigger. There are several cities in every state. What state is New York City in?" "New York City?" "Yes. Where is it?" He pointed and said, "Uptown." A little later, speaking of Thanksgiving (he knew that the Pilgrims had crossed the ocean) I asked him where the Atlantic was, and I could tell by his voice—"The Atlantic??"—that he had never heard of it. I asked him if he ever went swimming at Coney Island and he said, "Sure, man," and then I told him that that was the Atlantic, the same that the Pilgrims had crossed. He seemed both amazed and pleased. We looked at a map, and he immediately put his finger on Puerto Rico. (Puerto Rico became the point of reference for questions of place. Months later, when he drew an impromptu map of the earth as it would look from the moon, the North American continent was oriented—and correctly oriented—by its relation to an out-size but accurately outlined Puerto Rico, which in addition to being the country of his childhood was the place where his father still lived.)

Looking at the picturebook of the Pilgrims, Ramon said, "God was born in the year one, right?" I said, "Right" and then I asked him what year this was. He said, "Nineteen sixty four"—but when I asked him how many years ago Christ had been born, he thought for a moment and said, "Way, way, way, way, WAY back." I said, "How many years?" and he said, "Three hundred! No? Two hundred? No?"

I made no effort to straighten out such conceptual confusions as this. We talked a great deal, getting acquainted. He told me how his uncle had been killed in a fight in Puerto Rico. He did not say "uncle" but "my brother" (it was his mother's brother). The sword he mentioned was probably a machete.

". . . an' then he (the other man) shoved the sword in him right here (pointing to his own chest) but my brother pulled up his heart, you know . . . you know? Like this, man. When you breathe, your heart goes up and down like this. Right? So when the sword came in him he pulled his heart up. Right? Oh man, it just missed his heart like this. An' then he pick up a big rock (his uncle did) an' smash him with it. . . ."

Ramon's uncle died three days later in the hospital. His opponent died shortly after the fight.

Ramon went on to tell me how his mother had had a vision a couple of months later. It was the middle of the night and she went into the kitchen to get a glass of water. She saw her dead brother sitting at the table smoking a cigarette. She fainted, and according to Ramon (he was quoting her) had had trouble with her eyes from that time on.

I had given Ramon a large notebook, and since I already knew that he enjoyed drawing and had some aptitude for it, I asked him to draw a picture of the kitchen. He drew the sink, the stove, the table, two doorways. There was a religious picture on the wall. A man was sitting at the table and the smoke from his cigarette curled upward to the ceiling. Apparently his mother had already filled a glass with water, for he drew the glass lying on the floor and sketched a little puddle beside the prostrate figure of a woman between the table and the sink. The reading lessons began with this picture.

He knew the alphabet and could write words if one spelled them for him. I asked him to label the figures in his drawing, and he did this readily, asking me in turn to spell the words. And then together we wrote three sentences beneath the picture, all taken from the story he had told me. I did not ask him to read them back to me, though in future lessons we frequently reviewed the pages of this notebook, which constituted the largest part of his reading that year. Its pages were filled according to what he volunteered in our frequent conversations: family events, the doings of his gang, sexual interests, anxieties, and so on. Occasionally I would give him a formal lesson, even—for five minutes at a time—a very strict one. My aim on these occasions was not to impart information but to put pressure on him so that his deeper difficulties would come to the surface: anger, shame, panic, abject confusion. He was able to discover then that I accepted his anger, that it was a legitimate expression and was not the end of the world; and I was able to work directly with his panic and shame, not of course by talking about them, but by accommodating them as parts of the on-going experience and by helping Ramon through them in such

a way that he himself might acquire the means to modify and shape these emotions which used always to destroy his meager accomplishments.

These lessons took place in the morning. They rarely lasted more than an hour. Occasionally they were quite brief, and sometimes they did not occur at all. The decision, in the end, was Ramon's, though I never hesitated to speak up in my own behalf. There were many reasons why, at particular times, I especially wanted the lessons to take place, and on these occasions I would urge him to join me. But since he knew very well that I would not force him, or hold it against him later if he refused, our exchanges sounded very much like two kids (or two adults, for that matter) arguing about what they want to do—arguments which, when they are paid attention to, turn out to be the medium through which we discover what our choices really are. It might be put this way: that through the conflict and exchange of tentative desires, the situation takes on reality and choosing becomes a significant event. Just as I took his desires seriously, he was obliged to cope with mine. The crucial thing, of course, was that my wishes, in things of this kind, were given no more importance than his and were not backed up by force.

There is not space here to give more details of the reading lessons with Ramon. The chief point—and it cannot be stressed too much—is that learning to read is not difficult. It can be stated axiomatically that whenever a child has trouble with reading, it is invariably a symtom of some deeper problem in his life. It is never "a reading problem." The reason for this lies simply in the fact that the written word is an extension of speech.

Certainly the ability to read is founded on the acquisition of certain skills, but these are such (Tolstoy points this out repeatedly) that one child can teach another and it need take no longer than six or eight weeks. True reading begins as soon as the child can read the words aloud with appropriate animation, which is nothing but the music of ordinary speech. At this point the child will have made a kinesthetic identification with the written words. Even when he reads them silently he will begin to experience the totality of eyes, throat, and ears, for though the sense data are visual he will to some extent be "saying" the words and "hearing" them. At this point there will be no doubt in his mind that the written words are a form of speech. He will find in the act of reading the same properties that he finds in other social acts: challenge, response, growth, gratification, etc. If one wanted to destroy this inherent organic integrity, one could do no better than adopt the techniques ordinarily used to teach reading: 1) proceed as if it were merely a skill, 2) create artificial separations between reading and speech. Let me return to Ramon for a moment and make clear what I mean.

At the age of seven, shortly after arriving in this country, Ramon was able to read Spanish. At the age of twelve he could read neither English nor Spanish. The social *life* of reading had been destroyed for him.

A boy who can read will say, with regard to the printed words, "This is talk, like all talk. The words are yours and mine. To see them is to hear them. To understand them is to possess them. To possess them is to use them. To use them is to belong ever more deeply to the life of the world." Ramon, staring at the printed page, his forehead lumpy, his lip thrust out resentfully — anger, neurotic stupidity, and shame written all over him— seemed to be saying, "This belongs to the school teachers, not to me. It is not speech, but a task. I am not meant to possess it, but to perform it and be graded. And anyway, it belongs to the Americans, who kick me around and don't want me getting deeper in their lives. Why should I let them see me fail? I'll quit at the very beginning." And—to make matters worse—at the same time that these thoughts were tormenting him, he remembered quite clearly reading the postcards from his father at the age of seven—a little fact he refused to divulge to me until I had thoroughly won his confidence. Our problem with Ramon, then, was to create a situation in which reading might once again assume its true nature as an extension of speech. I have tried to indicate how we went about it. Perhaps it is worth repeating that we used no books until the end of the year—at which time, in two months, Ramon went through a year and a half in the "graded readers." He was still woefully behind the other boys his age—but he no longer failed in everything he attempted; and in fact was no longer blankly terrified of failure.

I am afraid that I have given a sketchy and unbalanced picture of the school. While Ramon, for instance, was years behind in his work, other children were impressively ahead. Yet from class to class, certain things remain constant, and perhaps they can be glimpsed in the episodes I have described. They are chiefly these: honesty and directness in relationships; the absence of academic rivalry; the proprietary feeling of the children ("It's *our* school"); the abundance of individual attention; the importance given to ordinary conversation, which is always the primary way in which a child communicates and enlarges his sense of the world; the cheerfulness, the noise, the quiet.

There is much else that I would like to talk about—that the children do not "dress up" for school, but wear their play clothes, an important consideration in poor families, since it is no light matter to get paint on a dress-up dress, or tear it playing hide-and-seek—the children are a raggedy bunch, and are all the livelier and freer because of it; that the day does not begin with a bell, but with a sociable milling around, teachers and children talking of the night's events, a courteous and desirable way to launch another six-hour episode together. . . .

Rather than give more details of this kind, however, I would like to simply stress the fact that the rapid spurts in learning, and the great changes in personality and happiness were not dependent on teaching equipment, elaborate methods of instruction, or an imposing architectural facade. All that is needed is a little space, good teachers, and abundant consideration for the children. These don't cost much money. They don't require more research. They are available all over the city of New York.