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wher (NY: FREE PRESS, 1998).

GRADUATING TO KINDERGARTEN

I left Other Ways in the spring of 1971 and stayed at home during the 1971–72 academic year, writing and spending time with our three children, all of whom were under five. Judy went to weaving school and took time to learn something she cared about. I wrote *Reading, How To* and articles and reviews, got involved in Berkeley city politics, national educational politics, and—since our children were about to hit the public schools—parent politics. In a year Tonia, our oldest, would be in kindergarten. The year after that Erica would enter the system, followed in two years by Josh. Judy and I faced our children's education in the public schools with apprehension, even though we knew some good teachers in the Berkeley public school system and were willing to be aggressive in getting our children placed with them.

At that time I met Cynthia Brown, who had a doctorate in the history of education and had been active in the civil rights movement in her native Kentucky. She and I and a number of other parents, educators, and community activists in Berkeley, some of whom had taught with me at Other Ways, constantly met to discuss educational issues. Cynthia had seen Paulo Freire's work in Brazil at first hand. She introduced us to the specific educational techniques and strategies he and his students used.

Two themes that we kept coming back to were the need for teachers who were skilled in open and informal education and the need for more people of color to receive teaching credentials. These are abiding problems and ones I am still working on. We got to know a number of people who had B.A.'s but not teaching credentials and yet were working with children. A number of them worked with the Centro Infantil, a Latino child-care program that is now part of the Oakland school district. Two were teachers at the Samuel Napier Institute, the Black Panther Party school. Several others worked in Head Start, or at the Berkeley Parks and

Recreation Department. Some had only thought about working with children but didn't want to go to a traditional teacher-education institution.

I had seen many young people who had come into teaching because of the passion for service generated by the civil rights and antiwar movements. Many of these young teachers, equipped with credentials from traditional institutions, suffered from a lack of experience with the everyday practice of teaching in an informal environment that was also intellectually challenging. Their professors were hostile to the ways in which they wanted to teach, and most often the master teachers the students were supposed to learn from were the very models of the authoritarian teaching that young teachers rejected. However, their enthusiasm and desire to free children of the restraints of arbitrary authority and rigid learning were not enough to fill up a school day with learning experiences useful to children. Their training and their desires were at cross-purposes; many of them quit in frustration or moved into other fields where they could work with people and feel useful and be effective.

Teacher education commensurate with the demands of a caring, culturally sensitive, diverse, responsive, and content-rich classroom simply did not exist then, and does not exist now. When young people with a passion to teach and a commitment to the education of poor children come to me and ask where they should get their teacher education, there are few places to recommend. I suggest they go to school to get their degrees but do their real learning by finding schools and teachers they admire and by reading widely. I also suggest they find other ways to work with children before they teach—in volunteer programs, on the playgrounds, in arts programs. The main thing is to find a way to have positive and personal experiences with children who are similar to those you will teach. Too often teacher educators are out of touch with schools and remote from communities and children. One of the major problems of restructuring schools is that most institutions that credential new teachers are more concerned with self-preservation than with the lives of children and the support of bold and innovative teachers. This is true as much for institutions that embrace the rhetoric of school change without the soul of it as for those that simply act as if every attempt to change the schools will fade away and business as usual, failure as usual, is the nature of the job. If teacher-education institutions are premised

on the idea that not every student can learn one can be confident that many children will not learn.

In 1972, Cynthia and I fantasized about creating a teacher-education institution from scratch, using our resources and experience and taking advantage of the many wonderful teachers in Bay Area public school systems who exemplified the kind of teaching and learning that we wanted for our own children and other people's. Cynthia discovered that a new, stricter teacher-education law was about to take effect in California; the old law would expire in three years. She had met a state administrator who was a closet progressive and who had told her that under the old law it was possible for a nonacademic institution, such as a tax-exempt nonprofit corporation, to be treated as an elementary education credentialing program if it met certain conditions. They were these: some college must provide credit for the classes the nonprofit gave; the instructors must hold the proper number of Ph.D.s and M.A.s; there must be a certain number of books on education available; the county must be willing to provide student-teaching certificates; and individual principals must be willing to make formal arrangements for student-teaching in their schools.

Between us, Cynthia and I were able to amass all the requisite credentials, books, permits, and requests. In the fall of 1973 we set up the Center for Open Learning and Teaching and declared ourselves a teacher-education institution. It took a full year to get the needed approvals so that we could submit records of all of our students as a group to the State Department of Education. The first twelve people who joined us understood that, for all our bravado, they might come away with nothing more than what they had learned in our classes and classrooms. The credential was, until the last moment that year, a gamble.

From a perspective of over twenty years I have to say that the fifty people Cynthia and I worked with over the three years during which the Center was able to function constituted one of the finest groups of educators I have ever had the privilege to work with. We found these people in the most unexpected ways. Some were friends of friends or had attended a talk I had given or had dropped into Other Ways. Some discovered us through the network of progressive private schools that existed in Berkeley at the time. A few came through political groups—such as Berkeley Citizens Action, which at

the time controlled the Berkeley City Council. And a few simply walked in and said they had heard of us and had forgotten how but were passionate about teaching and would not teach against their conscience. They wanted to set up their own schools or change the existing schools—anything that would help children acquire skills without humiliating them or teaching them to forget their cultural backgrounds and social and community responsibilities.

The fifty ranged in age from about twenty-four to thirty-five. Many are still wonderful teachers or school administrators; some are artists or businesspeople. They all, in their hearts and in their lives, are fine, caring people who make it impossible ever to feel alone or abandoned in the struggle to make a sensible, peaceful world for our children.

During the first year of the program, I taught our credential students and pretty much stayed out of the schools. Cynthia organized and supervised the student teaching. My classes ranged from the theory and practice of teaching reading to curriculum making, the specifics of organizing open classrooms that didn't depend upon coercion, and the philosophy of progressive education. I also wrote and, when I could steal a weekend or a school vacation, met with teachers throughout the country in support of their alternative schools and attempts to create open education.

One of my major concerns was to organize opposition to conservative educators and politicians who were mobilizing what they called a basic-skills movement. I felt that people in the open education movement and other educational progressives were too passive in facing this assault on the idea that every child can learn. During the sixties and seventies much energy was focused on feelings, values, and social responsibility. All of these are essential—but so are skills: the ability to read, write, calculate, and compute. It seemed foolish to concede skills issues to conservative politics and to people who advocated obedience, overly structured learning, and mechanical performance, when skills have everything to do with the development of intelligence and sensibility, and, for young people, of an awareness that the life of the mind is an abiding source of power and joy.

Since the seventies and continuing to this day I have been engaged in confronting the basic-skills conservatives with another way of looking at basic skills. As I see it, there are at least six basic skills,

which encompass all the trivial mechanical skills that people want obedient and passive children to acquire. This way of looking at skills respects the intelligence and moral sensibility of the young. These skills are:

- *The ability to use language well and thoughtfully.* This skill implies developing speech that is sensitive to the weight and meaning of words; acquiring the habit of reading intelligently and critically; learning to write coherently; knowing and saying what one means; and attending to the meaning of other people's words.
- *The ability to think through a problem and experiment with solutions.* This skill implies learning how to observe, question, listen, and experiment. It also implies that modes of thinking should be taught explicitly in school and not just implied through different school subjects.
- *The ability to understand scientific and technological ideas and to use tools.* This implies learning to use numbers, computers, and hammers, and having opportunities to apply language and thinking skills to scientific, technical, and mechanical problems.
- *The ability to use the imagination* and participate in and appreciate different forms of personal and group expression. This implies that serious attention be given to the arts from historical, performance, and technical perspectives.
- *The ability to understand how people function in groups* and to apply that knowledge to group problems in one's own life.
- *The ability to go about learning something yourself,* and the skills and confidence to be a learner all your life. This involves both learning how to deal with new situations, and developing new skills and interests throughout your life.

Most people who preach basic skills aren't serious about children becoming educated and sensitive citizens of a democracy. To be a citizen in a democracy means to be dangerous to anyone who wants to exert unquestioned authority and marginalize unpopular ideas or silence voices of protest. Teaching basic skills can be either liberating or pacifying, depending upon how you understand those skills. At the Center for Open Learning and Teaching in 1974, we saw basic skills as liberating.

During the first year of the Center's existence a student, Ray Nitta, invited me out to dinner and told me that he was troubled about my classes. They were too academic; he couldn't get a feel for how the kind of teaching I was talking about actually worked. And he said, in passing, that the students in our program would be better served if I were actually in the classroom as a master teacher, demonstrating what we could then discuss in classes at night.

I remembered my dream of teaching kindergarten while I was still teaching sixth grade at P.S. 103/79 ten years before; it took me three seconds to agree with Ray.

Fortunately, during my years at Other Ways I had made many friends within the Berkeley Unified School District. The day after my conversation with Ray, I approached Frank Fisher, the principal of our local elementary school. It was a five-block walk from our house; my oldest child, Tonia, was going to be in kindergarten there; and I had a number of friends on the staff. Frank had a reputation as a fighter for children; though he was a mild-mannered man he was ferocious in defense of his school and students. When I told him I'd like to teach a kindergarten class for two years he said he'd come up with something. Money would have been a problem, but I could afford to live off money from my books for two years; I was willing to invest that time in learning how to teach kindergarten and get our students at the Center credentialed.

Frank suggested that, with the agreement of the regular teacher, I informally take over one of his combined kindergarten–first grade classes. The teacher would be freed to do staff support and curriculum development work at the school, the staffing pattern wouldn't change, and I wouldn't be violating union rules or replacing a teacher. In fact, I wouldn't officially be hired at all; my formal status at the school would be that of a full-time volunteer, even though I would usually be alone with the children in the classroom. There were no legal or insurance problems, because I had a valid elementary school credential; still, the situation was obviously sensitive. However, during my two years at Hillside Elementary School I was treated like staff by all the other teachers and, to my knowledge, no one from the superintendent on down ever raised an objection to the arrangement. Maybe the school district's administrators were happy to get me out of their hair. During those years I wasn't about to cause trouble

for anybody. Teaching kindergarten and first grade was the hardest teaching job I have ever had, and one of the most magical.

Frank insisted on several conditions. First, I would have to stay full-time for two years; second, I would have to come when other teachers came, leave when they left, share what I was doing with the rest of the staff, explain the arrangement to all of the parents and let them opt out if they cared to, and occasionally participate in staff meetings. I was not to travel around giving speeches or doing workshops, leaving the children and the class hanging. Otherwise, I could develop the curriculum as I chose, take Center students for their practice teaching, and structure the classroom any way I felt appropriate.

I agreed and began to plan for September. I would continue my Center for Open Learning and Teaching classes in the evenings, take student teachers from the Center into my classroom, and spend the day teaching five- and six-year-olds. Once in a while people asked me if such obsessive work on schools and schooling involved too much time and energy. My only reply was that my father and grandfather had worked at least fourteen hours a day and they didn't particularly like what they were doing. I was fortunate to use my time doing what I loved to do.

Hillside Elementary School, in the Berkeley hills, with views of the bay on two sides, had been built for the children of the wealthy and was spacious and gracious. The room I was assigned was ideal. It was large and light, with movable tables and chairs and a full set of enormous wooden blocks. There were bookcases and ample shelf space and a coat closet large enough for a workshop or a small science lab. Of the room's two doors, one led to the rest of the school and the other directly onto a small playground, which we shared with a wonderful preschool program. My daughter Erica was in the program; she loved it, and the teachers had become friends of ours. The whole environment would have been ideal for Other Ways; it was what young children deserved. I had more to work with as a teacher than ever before in my career.

Space, time, and content were three dimensions I could begin to plan. The fourth, personal dimension, which emerges from direct contact with the children and shapes the tone and quality of life in the classroom, is impossible to preplan. It differs from year to year

and class to class. All the other planning is subject to modification, according to how life in the classroom unfolds. This is a powerful argument for overplanning and developing many options you may never use rather than for either functioning solely on intuition and sympathy or, at the other extreme, setting a rigid learning program to follow no matter who the children are or what the skills they bring to the class happen to be.

The first two planning dimensions I worried about were space and time. I wanted the children to have as much choice as possible, so I decided to create learning centers where they could participate in both independent and guided learning. I also wanted time for children to work independently and in small groups. And, crucially, I wanted time for us to be together as a class and to create a sense of community. I find completely individualized education counter to sensitive and sophisticated learning. It impoverishes the mind, depriving children of the opportunity to listen to each other and to adults, to plan large-scale projects together, or to learn to speak well in defense of their ideas and feelings. In order to put together individual, small-group, and community learning, and (given that I was teaching five- and six-year-olds) provide time for play, I drew up a tentative daily schedule.

The time structure was simple. I knew students came in at different times in the morning. This was during the desegregation of the Berkeley schools; half the students lived in the neighborhood and walked to school, while the other half came on buses from the valley in west Berkeley where the African American community is located. The children arrived over about half an hour; I wanted to use that time to get to know individual kids and to get the children started on their round of learning. Consequently we began the morning with children coming into the class, finding some learning center, and easing themselves into a project. Some children went to play with blocks, others to the science center, where they could play with magnets, pulleys, flashlights, bells and buzzers, and others to the math center–cum–pizza parlor, where they could play at running a business. There was also a dress-up corner, with costumes and puppets, where fantasy ruled. In the middle of the room was the reading-literacy-bookmaking-writing center. It had books, rubber stamps, stencils, simple equipment with which the children could make and

bind their own books, two typewriters (this was before computers in the classroom), pens, pencils, and erasers. I chose to have my chair in this center, from where I could survey the whole room and also sit and read with children. During this first half-hour or so the children could come to me and read as well as play and explore on their own.

This was followed by a time together, which I kept open to use as things developed over the year but which every child was required to attend and participate in. At the beginning of the year I made it story time. Then would be time for individual and small-group reading, writing, and theater projects that I knew from experience would evolve over the year. After that time I wanted the children to come together again to work on a class project and then again form small learning groups. Fortunately, Judy reminded me that these were five- and six-year-olds and that in my zeal to teach them I had left out snack time, yard time, and in general time to be children. I abandoned that second learning period and shifted story time to the end of the morning, using our first time together for projects and discussion as well as for an occasional story.

The afternoon was different, and easier. Only the first graders would stay all day, so there would be no more than fifteen children. I wanted to concentrate on reading and math and on fun projects in theater and dance, as well as to experiment with filmmaking. I'd never made films before, but Fred Perry, a former Other Ways student and by now a friend, had gotten me interested. Figuring that the afternoon didn't need as much structure as the morning, I planned to spend time with individual children and small groups; we'd follow up, on more complex levels, some of the things we'd begun with the whole class in the morning. Apart from that, I'd let the afternoon develop and concentrate on the substance and content of the morning.

Then there was content: I wanted the children to be learning *about* something, not just acquiring skills. I divided the school year into six-week learning units, the length of a practice teaching experience for our student teachers at the Center. That way the student teachers would experience a full curriculum cycle, and my little ones would be able to cover at least six different areas over the course of a year. I planned, among other things, science units on light, water, and sound, and a unit on African culture that illustrated the complex-

ity of life on that vast continent, with excursions into traditional Ashanti culture, Muslim culture in northern Africa, and modern Tanzania.

As school approached I found myself ready in all ways but one for the arrival of the children. I had decorated the classroom, leaving plenty of room to display students' work; had gathered books and material for the unit on Africa I wanted to open with; had even chosen an Anansi the Spider story as the introduction. I set up the learning centers and discussed my plans with the student teachers I would work with. I held a few parent meetings, at which I explained my plans, the structure of the classroom, and my ideas about how children learned.

I had dealt wth everything—except for my fear of the children. What would happen if all of them started laughing the moment I opened my mouth? What would happen if they started running around? Never, in my whole teaching career, had I felt that I was facing such potential for chaos. I couldn't sleep for nights before the first day of school. Tonia was six and Erica was five; they had friends over all the time, so I knew what some five- and six-year-olds did at home. But twenty-nine of them, and just me, in a room together?

The teacher who had loaned me her class was going to be around for a few weeks, but the teaching was mine. She and Frank had given me the freedom to plan the room and set the curriculum in exchange for my taking the responsibility to work directly with the children. They stood aside to see if I could indeed do it.

Day one was easier than I'd feared, but not so easy. The children came into the room, wandered around for a while, and then sat down on the rug in the center and looked to me to tell them what was going to happen. I began to talk about behavior and structure—to lecture, despite myself, about discipline and order, revealing my own insecurity. Some of the children started fidgeting. Others got up and began walking away from the circle or started chatting with each other. A few of the boys began to edge toward the blocks, while two others took toy cars out of their pockets and began racing them across the room.

I was clearly too abstract, too worried, and too remote from the children. My instincts told me that the best thing to do at that moment was to read a story, and I had ready my copy of *Anansi the Spider,* an illustrated book about the West African and West Indian

trickster figure who uses his mind to outwit stronger animals. I had planned to get to the book in exactly four days, providing prior background material about West African traditional culture and how these tales worked as sources of strength and cultural survival in the West Indies throughout the slave era.

However, my overplanned curriculum had to yield to the immediate need for a compelling story. I grabbed *Anansi* and read it as dramatically as I could. It worked; everyone was drawn back into the circle of learning through the story. In fact, Tamara asked me to read the story a second time, and I did. Then Carl wanted a third reading. Instead, I asked whether anyone remembered enough of the tale to tell it in her or his own words. Paul tried and did a delightful rendering of Anansi's wickedness, throwing in some new adventures made up on the spot.

I then asked the children to draw pictures of Anansi. The result of my first few weeks of work was instantly reorganized and the children jumped in, drawing and painting; some of the first-graders made their own little Anansi books.

In about half an hour the children were fully absorbed in what they were doing; my role was to wander from group to group and child to child, answering questions and helping with spelling or erasures. I ended up teaching the two kids who were bored by the whole thing how to play checkers.

It was a delightful surprise. I found myself plunged into a complex learning environment with none of the preliminaries. That was the virtue of overplanning and carefully setting the environment. I knew where things were, had resources to fall back on, and didn't have to resort to discipline or mechanisms of control as long as there were interesting things for my students to do.

The challenge of the second day was what to do with the events of the first day, how to use what I'd learned from the children to tease complex learning out of the group. Anansi had been a hit, and everything else had gone smoothly, so I decided to move from Anansi to the Ashanti the next day and also, first thing in the morning, introduce the centers and have a walk about the room. However, as soon as Leon and Kwame, the two boys I had begun to teach checkers, arrived the next morning they set up a game and gathered an instant crowd. Some of the children already knew how to play and wanted to be champions. Others wanted to learn how to play. About

half the class, those uninterested in checkers, went straight to places in the room that had obviously intrigued them and began to play or read. It was clear that the children had thought about the environment overnight and had made decisions of their own about where they wanted to be within it. The first hour of the day passed quickly and I let the children work unsupervised. It was a great relief to me to witness their voluntary engagement with the learning opportunities presented by the space. It seemed that all my planning had paid off.

Of course, there were a few disagreements, but I found them easy to manage. At least eight children wanted to play checkers and there were only two boards. However, we had an art center and a small workshop where I stored wood and plastic scraps, so it was easy to direct the children to make their own boards and pieces. Before the end of the hour we had at least six new—and, I thought, beautiful—checkers sets.

Then came story time. I put up a map of Africa and was about to give a short talk on the Ashanti, illustrated with gold weights and pictures I had gathered. But the kids wanted to hear the Spider story again. Martin raised his hand and asked for it and I hesitated, at which point Leo and Malcolm began chanting, "Anansi, Anansi," and soon most of the children joined in. I noticed some of the shyer children mouthing the words while looking down, giving covert support to the mini-revolt. It was a delight to hear the call for a story, so I read *Anansi* again and again. The third time I rebelled and asked the class if anyone remembered the story. Sage and Cheri volunteered that they did, and we got two new versions of the story, which I wish I'd transcribed. I do remember thinking that these elaborated tales had an energy and magic missing from the book, and that I had forgotten, in my rush to teach content, how much young children love (and need) to hear a favorite story repeated and to let it sink in and become part of their knowledge of the world.

As they retold the Anansi story, the children filled in and invented details. Cheri added a conversation between the Spider and his mother about being sure to clean up his room before going out to do tricks; Sage described Anansi's argument with his brother. The ease with which invention and memory mixed became characteristic of our storytelling time throughout the two years I spent at Hillside; now I try to recreate that ease and flow of the imagination in my work with college students and prospective teachers.

Over the next few weeks I did get to Ashanti culture; the children made fabric with Ashanti symbols, listened to a friend from Ghana describe contemporary Ashanti life, and put on a play of one of the Anansi stories. With the help of Elombe Wagner, my first student teacher, we made an animated movie of the same story. Elombe, who knew a lot about traditional and contemporary African cultures and society, took over the class a few times and Elombe and I moved the subject from Ghana in West Africa to Swahili-speaking East Africa. He gave the children some language lessons, and each day we both traced the route from Berkeley to Accra and from Berkeley to Dar es Salaam on a world map.

Beginning this way was part of keeping a promise I had made to myself in Harlem. Children there told me that they'd learned in school that Africa was a country where black people lived in jungles. It shamed me to be part of the perpetuation of that racist myth. I tried to counter it in my classroom, and I also resolved that when I did work with younger children, I would start them out with a sophisticated, appropriate sense of the complexity of cultures and their transformations through history, beginning with a look at some of the many faces of Africa. I wanted all of the children to begin free of the stereotyping that most early social-studies curricula plant in their consciousness.

After getting to know the children a bit, I introduced one more daily feature: a letter. A few of the children had come to school knowing how to read. Most of the first-graders knew the alphabet and had a modest informal reading vocabulary. Some of the kindergartners and two of the first-graders had what could be called *Sesame Street* confusion. They knew jingles, letters, and rhymes, but had no coherent sense of how all the pieces they had seen on TV went together to make reading a book possible.

I decided we needed a daily dose of reading that the whole class could participate in. My aim was to design a learning experience that would catch up those students who had not learned to read at home or in preschool and would still challenge the most advanced readers in the class. So I bought dozens of sheets of large poster board, wrote down each child's first name on a three-by-five index card, and during one class meeting explained that for the next few months we would choose one special letter a day—the first letter of the first name of someone in the class—and then see how many words we could come

up with that began with that letter. I put all the cards in a hat from the dress-up room and asked Carolyn to draw one. She came up with "Malcolm," so our first day's letter was M.

I wrote "M" in the middle of a piece of poster board and sounded it out in as many ways as I could. I play-acted "Mmmmm," as if it were delicious, growled it like a monster, hummmmmed it. Then I asked for contributions; the children came up with "mother," "man," "maybe," "me," "monster." I wrote them down and asked for volunteers to draw pictures under them. I told the children that anytime they thought of an M word or came upon one in their reading, they should tell me and I would add it to the poster, even if it meant filling the whole room up with "M"s. James, who read beautifully, ran to the reading center, picked up a dictionary, and asked me to add all the M words in that. He had a way of showing off his intelligence that often defeated my educational intent, so throughout the year I had to maneuver in ways that both recognized his accomplishments and protected the other children from his arrogance. On this occasion, I suggested he make an "M" dictionary: pick the most difficult "M" words and write them in an illustrated book, which I would copy for all the children. I turned him into a teacher, honoring his knowledge and helping him see how to use it to help everyone.

I didn't care whether all the letters in the alphabet were covered by this exercise and if a letter came up more than once we could push ourselves to find or make up new words. What I wanted and did manage to achieve was to have everyone engage actively in reading-writing-thinking-playing as a unified, ordinary, daily activity. This was a way of equalizing the knowledge and skills the children brought to school with them while raising the standards for all. And besides, children simply do not learn how to read in linear ways, no matter how they are taught. They take what adults present to them, look at the written page themselves, and more often than not, figure it out themselves, as long as adults are around to answer their particular questions.

The afternoons went well. I spent my time learning about the first-graders' skills in one-to-one reading and arithmetic sessions. I used my informal diagnoses to build a program for these children. I also encouraged the children I wasn't working with directly to pursue group projects, taught a few of them chess to take my game program a bit further, and tried to set up an informal situation that could be

structured by the projects my student teachers would plan and teach. The goal of the afternoon was to develop community, make children feel comfortable with me as their reading and math teacher, and prepare them to become active senior contributors to some of the morning learning programs that involved the whole class.

The romance ended after a few weeks. I trusted the children to work with simple tools, but kept an eye on the workshop at all times —fortunately, because one day a boy named Matt tried to hit Sam on the head with a hammer. Matt was a year older than the other children; his family had just moved to Berkeley. He'd been placed in my class as a special favor by the principal, and I was told that he'd had problems in his previous schools. That turned out to be an understatement.

Matt was tall, lean, and pale. He had blue eyes and blond hair and, when he wanted to, could look disarmingly innocent. I learned quickly that those innocent looks were storm warnings. I caught him just before the hammer descended on Sam's head. The next day's incident involved a saw with which he seemed ready to part Tamara from several of her fingers. When I temporarily closed the shop Matt turned to the block corner and just missed Martin with a block the size of a small two-by-four.

Sam, the smallest child in the class and one of the shyest, was Matt's main target. One day it was a stick carved into a dagger. Another day it was a rock or a pair of scissors. Yet Matt never actually injured anybody; indeed, I noticed that he made sure I was around and watching when he was about to strike. I was patient with him and had private conversations with him and his parents. I ended up suggesting he hang around me and tell me, before he picked something up, what he was inclined to do. He agreed; his parents begged me to hang on with him; and my inclination to work as hard as I could to get kids out of knotted self-destructive and dangerous inclinations rather than expel or punish them countered my constant anxiety over what he might do. It was a matter of my teaching intuition, which led me to feel that this was a solvable problem. But, I have to admit, Matt pushed me to the limit of my skills and patience.

One day he went after Sam with a small pocketknife. I grabbed him and was about to sit him down roughly and tell him that the price of continuing his attacks was simply to be thrown out of the class, but he cracked and started screaming and attacking me.

The other children stopped everything they were doing and turned to watch us. Times like this create major moral and social dilemmas. I had to control him and protect the other children while keeping him in the process and helping him maintain some dignity and face, so that he could be with the other children the next day and not have to feel that they had made him their enemy or seen him humiliated. I also had to show him that I would not let him go berserk in the room, for his own sake as well as mine and the other children's.

I picked him up. He was screaming and kicking; I turned to the class and, calling on my theatrical skills, said in a calm and confident way that we would be back and that they had to show how strong they could be by running the class without a teacher for a few minutes.

In the hall, I sat Matt down in a chair and held him there. By now he wasn't screaming or kicking but struggling not to break down and cry. I still held him tightly but told him it was fine to cry. On the chance that he was ready to talk, I asked him why he hated Sam so much. He did break down then, and sobbed that Sam hated him, that all he was trying to do was make Sam his friend, but Sam kept running away from him so he had to hurt him.

I nearly laughed: here was a normal desire turned pathological because Matt just didn't know how to be someone's friend. Developing acceptance and love through violence: he just didn't know that it never works.

I also noticed, while he was crying, that there was not one healthy tooth in his mouth. I rarely pried into my students' home arrangements, but when health is an issue I'm adamant and tenacious about their getting care. Matt needed a total remake of his mouth; he must have been in constant pain for years. He couldn't make friends; he never stopped hurting: that was enough to encourage me to try harder.

So I spoke to Matt's parents and they took him to a dentist who fixed his teeth and alleviated the pain that drove him to be so volatile in class. Matt and I set up afternoon getting-to-make-friends lessons. For a few weeks, during what would have been our one-on-one reading time, he and I playacted making friends. I was Matt and he was Sam. He needed that role reversal—which in spirit and intent was not so different from the schoolwide cross-dressing we had done at Other Ways. And it worked better: little by little he became Sam's

friend. This was great for both of them, but for a while it meant trouble for me, since one of Matt's first impulses in the friendship was to show Sam some of the techniques he had developed to hurt children and get away with it.

Both boys stayed with me for two years and by the end of that time were close, compassionate friends who also lived in reasonable and ordinary peace and tension with the other children. I still hear from Matt and his parents. He is a delightful person and a well-integrated, successful computer scientist. I could never have guessed that he would turn out that way. In this case, at least, I can say with certainty that I did make a difference: he, as an adult, has told me I did.

Robert was a different challenge. Dan Peletz, a wonderful preschool teacher whose early learning center was across the playground from our classroom, asked me to take Robert and promised to help me with him. Robert had severe kidney problems and was not given long to live. He had to wear diapers, which he had learned to change for himself. He was a charming, mischievous boy who asked nothing but to be treated the same as the other children. He loved to run with the wildest and most active children. Though he was always a step or two behind, he was so persistent and feisty that all the children slowed down a bit so he could keep up.

I was nervous about accepting him in the class. My parents wanted me to be a doctor, but I throw up at the sight of blood and can't dissect a frog without feeling like a murderer. Dan sat me down and said that I had to learn to see Robert as a child, not as a patient, and give him what I would give any other child. I trusted Dan so Robert joined the class. But at first I was nervous. Would he be all right? How would the other children treat him? Would his supply of diapers run out? Would he get sick in class? Should I teach him to read, given that he had so little time to live, or were there more important things he needed to know?

As it turned out, I did not have to explain much about Robert to the other children; most of them had gone to preschool with him. And Robert taught me what he needed, which was simply to be a child, to run with the other boys, to cause mischief, to learn to read and pretend I was making him work too hard. He jumped into everything, and his enthusiasm was infectious. One day at story time he asked a provocative question and I realized he was trying to trick

me, so I crafted an answer that I hoped would surprise him as well. Later that day I noticed that I had stopped worrying about Robert without even thinking about it. Somehow that direct engagement with him beyond his problem defused my anxiety. Thus I learned to be useful to Robert by forgetting about him. This may sound paradoxical, but I didn't worry about every child in the classroom at every moment. If I had, there would be no time to teach and have fun with the children.

For the rest of the year, Robert was his delightful self. He had planned to continue with us the next year; however, he became too ill for school and, though he fought to stay alive for several more years, this courageous child did not live to see ten.

Robert was a member of the Pee Wees, along with Martin, Paul, Hal, and three or four other boys. Here was a thoroughly male, thoroughly integrated band of troublemakers. The boys all wore sweatshirts, which they pulled down over their knees. During recess and snack time they wandered around the classroom and the playground hunched down so that they looked as if they had no feet. They chased girls and boys who weren't Pee Wees and played at scaring them. The song of the Pee Wees was "I'm a Pee Wee, / You're a Boo Boo, / Get the heck out of here." Occasionally they would make someone cry or end up in a minor skirmish. Once I tried to bring the Pee Wees up before the class and talk about whether they should be prohibited or not. It was one of our first experiments in student governance and part of my plan to turn over to the children as much as possible of the maintenance of civil order in the classroom. Everyone agreed that fundamentally the Pee Wees were harmless and fun. Carolyn even argued that if we got rid of the Pee Wees then the girls who played in the dress-up corner and had a secret club would have to stop, too. The other children agreed that so long as no one was hurt mischief wasn't too bad a thing and could be fun.

I remember some other mischief, created by my daughter Erica and several of her friends during my second year at Hillside. Near the reading center was a rug which we used for class gatherings and stories. A chair and a large movable chalkboard stood at one end of the rug. I sat in the chair when reading stories, and often the children took turns sitting in the chair and making a presentation to the whole group themselves. It wasn't *my* chair but "the storytelling chair," a

place from which anyone who wanted to address the whole class could speak and command a respectful audience.

I used the chalkboard to draw stick-figure illustrations when introducing new concepts or vocabulary. During one of my geography lessons I decided to draw a diagram of the school and add directions to show which was north, south, east, and west, based on where the school was with respect to the San Francisco Bay, the Berkeley Hills, and so on. Erica knew that I easily become hopelessly confused about directions; I navigate on the basis of familiar landmarks, not a rational understanding of the points of the compass. Over the week, while I used my diagram as a way of introducing map-reading skills, Erica and her friend shifted the chalkboard or changed the drawing so that it never faced where I claimed it was facing. By the end of the week I was facing a giggling class as I pointed in the direction of the Bay on my map and the students pointed out to me that someone who followed the lines on the board would end up northwest instead of north, or south instead of east. Hopelessly confused, I ended up letting my student teacher plan a series of more sensible corrective lessons for the next week. By this time in my teaching career I found it delightful that the children had thought things through well enough to play a trick on me. It certainly doesn't hurt children to have an occasional experience of outwitting adults, or be appreciated for that cleverness.

Another time I passed out metal mirrors to all the children. This was the beginning of a month-long unit on light, during which I wanted to teach about topics from reflections and symmetry to color theory. I gave the children the mirrors in order to have them notice the reversal of left and right in mirror images. Matt immediately took his mirror, captured the light of the sun shining through the window, and reflected it directly into my eyes, temporarily blinding me. I suppressed my impulse to take the mirrors away and instead asked all the children to do what Matt did and try to blind me. The children turned from looking at Matt and me to looking at their mirrors and the sun, and then to thinking about how to capture the rays and reflect them toward my face. Once they caught on, I asked them to make light patterns on the wall and then, as a challenge before we broke up, to draw what they thought was happening when they got control of the sun.

I had intended to begin our study with symmetry and handedness, but instead shifted to reflection. On this occasion, as on others I've encountered over the years, I saw how mischief can be turned into learning if you're prepared to respond with teaching instead of discipline.

Not all of the mischief in the class was creative, however. Lewis was the biggest child in the class and was the kind of African American boy who, too often, is singled out as a troublemaker and then made into one by teachers and administrators who seem to see him at the age of six, seven, or eight as a six-foot, 200-pound eighteen-year-old. At times during the beginning of the school year Lewis arrived sullen and angry. He would push other children out of his way, or knock over their games and scribble on their work. But on most days he was the gentlest, most charming, most considerate person. He was articulate—he called me Herbie the Grouch every time I got angry at him—and a master of both praise and insult. It was impossible to tell from one day's behavior how he would be the next morning. In other words, Lewis was the kind of child who can be a great challenge and joy to a teacher. If you engage his intelligence and win his respect, you can change his identification as a troublemaker into an expectation of future excellence.

Lewis was usually the first student I called to read, or at least the one I looked at first. I watched the way he walked into the room, noting the set of his brow, how he held his hands and fists, how his eyes scanned the room. At the first sign that it was going to be a bad day I jumped in with:

"Lewis, today you'll take care of yourself. . . ."

"Lewis, you read first today. . . ."

"Lewis, keep your hands to yourself. . . ."

"Lewis, do something . . . sit down . . . enjoy yourself . . ."

"Lewis, don't . . ."

I knew how he'd respond. Grouch, Grouch, Grouch—that's what he called me, and the other students picked up on it. I didn't like being called Grouch and tried to joke off the name. On the other hand, I couldn't let Lewis continue to harass other students, destroy their work, and hurt himself with the internal warfare between his intelligent, creative self and his aggressive, defiant self. Whatever the causes of that conflict, my job was to intervene in it and help him grow more confident of his mind and more compassionate toward

the rest of us. I simply had to accept a minimally Grouchy role until I figured out a better way to work through the situation.

It became easier, after a while, to set limits on Lewis's behavior by sitting on him at the beginning of the day. However, the tone this set for everyone began to be uncomfortable, and I found myself showing a tough face even when it was no longer useful. Lewis and other students would look at me occasionally and tell me to turn the Grouch off, pointing out that they hadn't done anything wrong. They pointed out that on some days I let Lewis play around or make noise, and that on other days I didn't. This was caused by the Grouch factor, they claimed. Lewis said one day during a class meeting that the factor was located somewhere in the back of my brain.

I immediately saw that he had given me a way out. Admitting that there *was* a Grouch factor, I went to the blackboard and drew a head and a brain. At the back of the brain I labeled a section "The Grouch's House," and we began to discuss what brought out the Grouch in me—and in the others as well. For the idea of a Grouch in the brain allowed many of the students to acknowledge that they, too, had days with their Grouches out.

We decided that there were inside reasons and outside reasons that set the Grouch off. I admitted that sometimes I Grouched because I'd come to school in a bad mood. At other times I Grouched because some of the students were fighting or bothering others and I had to set limits. Lewis acknowledged that he woke up some mornings with his Grouch out. On those mornings his Grouch got my Grouch going. The discussion was more sophisticated than I had expected five- and six-year-olds to be capable of. We were able to use the Grouch image to think about and analyze complex behavior.

The notion of a Grouch factor even changed behavior in the class. One day we speculated on what kept the Grouch happy, and the students suggested jokes, snacks, praise, and isolation. We talked about ways we had of bringing angry feelings under control. I suggested that the students remind me when my Grouch was showing, and told them I would do the same for them. It was no longer necessary for me to look at Lewis for signs of aggression. I could look at his Grouch, and I could appeal to him to control it when he came in angry.

Since the problem was his Grouch and not *him,* Lewis began to assume responsibility for its behavior. He learned to leave other stu-

dents alone, to scribble on his own work, to go outside and break a stick instead of a game or a sculpture. After a month, the Grouch became boring. The powerful metaphor became a stale cliché and we no longer referred to it. But it had helped cement community, keep Lewis part of the group rather than alienated from it, and taught me about indirect ways of dealing with so-called discipline problems.

Over the years I have discovered that there are times when indirect ways of discussing feelings are the most helpful in neutralizing a situation. It is possible to use superheroes, animals, imaginary friends, TV characters, athletes and other real-life heroes, and astrological symbols as tokens of thought to create discussions, dramas, and writing that deal with pain and conflict. Such substitution is one powerful way of turning problems of self-discipline and control over to the children; by letting them speculate on how they do behave and how they might behave, you can help young people assume responsibility for their own behavior.

During my first year, Lewis wasn't the only one with the potential to disrupt our learning community. There were times when what could have been a bit of fun and creative mischief turned into group disorder, especially in the middle of the rainy season, when the children had been cooped up in the room all day or when there was a violent incident on the bus or playground. I discovered something that settled the class down one day when things were so out of control that I was ready, despite my best intentions and strongest will, to grab and shake a particularly troublesome student. Some of the children began fighting; others made a circle around the fighters; and a few moved into the corners and tried to hide. With the most menacing look I could muster, I moved toward the child I thought had instigated the fight and swept him off his feet. The class turned silent, waiting for the hammer to fall. I gritted my teeth, turned the student over my lap, and raised my hand as if to spank him. Then, lowering my hand as slowly as possible, I proceeded to mime spanking the child, whispering to him that his role was to pretend to cry. He let out the most drawn-out and mournful moans. The other students, catching on immediately, wanted their turns at being play-spanked. I obliged a few of them, then asked everyone to sit down and told them we would try something new. There would have been no use going back to what I had originally intended for that day.

The class sat quietly and expectantly, which surprised me. I asked

two of the most restless students to stand up and get ready to fight each other. Then I told them that they could move only in slow motion and must not touch each other. They had to mime a battle. They also had to control their bodies so that they never broke out of the slow rhythm of the mime. I asked one of the two students to practice, and she quickly realized that it wasn't such an easy thing to slow up her body and take conscious control over her movements. After this practice, the students fought their mock battle. Then I asked them to pretend to embrace. Next I asked the whole class to stand up as slowly as they could and raise their hands as high as they could, and when they couldn't go any higher to get up on their tiptoes and pretend that they could take off and fly.

After the exercise was over, the students fell on the rug and giggled and rolled around. After a while everyone quieted down and asked for more improvisations. I drew on my experience with the high school students at Other Ways and used exactly the same improvisations we had done. I suggested that the children all lie down on their backs and close their eyes. Then I asked them to imagine that they were asleep; I would become a dream master for the moment and suggest they live in a dream for a while. I filled their dream world with water and said we were all underwater and could only move the way fish moved. I suggested they begin to test themselves in the water and swim around, thinking of the kind of fish they were, whether they were sharks or minnows, beautiful tropical fish or fearsome blowfish with poison spines. The spell was broken by a fire drill, but I remained amazed at the self-discipline some of the most defiant and undisciplined children in the class had shown.

From that time on I did warm-up improvisations almost every day and found them a good way to lead children into larger theater projects and acted-out storytelling. These improvs became a way of bonding the children to one another, helping them master long narrative structures, and teaching them to discharge the hostility and anger that occasionally invaded the classroom from home or the streets. Once again, theater had become a way to overcome difference, anger, and fear.

I have always prided myself—perhaps even more than I do in the skills my students acquire and the intelligence of their conversation—on the fact that all my classes have come to feel at home with and care about each other. Sometimes this passage is difficult and takes

up almost half a school year. At Other Ways, to develop that kind of bonding was a constant struggle, which succeeded only with constant, strenuous effort to overcome the racial tensions at the school. Other times, as at Hillside, things click right away. A visitor can tell if we've reached the stage of conviviality by watching how students greet them and introduce them to the classroom. My students express joy in ownership, delight in learning, and a wicked sense of knowing all of our secrets, having that special knowledge that makes one an honored member of a group and not merely a visitor.

Throughout the two years I spent at Hillside I was amazed by the open and democratic sentiments the children expressed and by the logic and sensitivity of their arguments over questions about maintaining order in the class. We had fights; a new student was caught stealing other children's things; cliques were formed and some children felt rejected. Everything happened that usually happens with young children, but we talked about it—and the children raised issues of fairness and caring about each other that delighted me. They gave me occasion to introduce ideas and stories and poems that clearly spoke to their concerns about happiness, safety, and order.

My first year at Hillside was the year of divorce. One day in November I noticed Sage crying at the door. She refused to come into the room and wouldn't talk to me. I thought someone had hit her, or that she had lost something or had been teased. My daughter Tonia, who by this time had transferred into the class, ran over to her, along with Susan, Carolyn, and Ann. They stayed in the hall talking through the first hour and refused to come to the circle for story time. Now, these were my story freaks, the children who would grab any book read aloud and take it home and memorize it. I told them, very sternly, that they knew attendance in the morning circle was required, and I insisted that they knew how important that was to what we learned in class. Tonia turned to me and said that what they were doing was more important. The other girls agreed. Something in their tone made me back off, and I said it would be okay—just once.

During lunchtime the girls, including Sage, came up to me as a group and explained that Sage had just found out that her parents were going to divorce. She didn't want to stay home with them that day, as they'd suggested, but just couldn't come into the room. Car-

olyn and Susan then explained that Sage needed them: their parents had already been divorced and they could help her.

For the next several weeks they and Tonia became Sage's counselors and supporters. They told her how to develop a world of her own, helped her deal with her anger at both her parents, and in very small ways nurtured her through this hard time.

Sage's experience was the norm in our class. Except for Tonia and a few of the African American children, every child in the class came from a one-parent family, a family that was on the verge of collapse, or a (usually successful) second marriage. During my first year, about a third of the children in the class experienced the dissolution of their families. The majority of the parents were European American, middle-class, and well educated. Given the way in which the stereotyping and stigmatizing of the poor has become fashionable, it is essential to underline that many children in great need are those whose parents have succeeded on the terms of the society but have caved in under the pressures of that success.

My way of trying to be useful to the children was to keep them focused on the future. This was more a matter of creating hope than of healing old or current wounds. My role as a teacher was not to deal with the children's coming to terms with their past so much as to make them feel strong and enthusiastic about the future. That meant helping them through the current pain but not dwelling on it; instead, I gave special attention to their personal skills and inner dreams. This meant discovering what they liked to learn, what they cared about, and how they could use these things to have safe, pleasant time with themselves apart from their grief.

For example, Carolyn, who also experienced the disintegration of her family, always gravitated toward books on mechanical inventions. When I remarked on this to her, she said she loved to create things. The next day I presented her with a construction set with gears and a motor and other components that allowed her to make moving machines. Then I set aside a small place in the classroom where she could work with the set when she was done with her other work. It was a learning center for one.

I frequently give my students learning gifts, and by the time Carolyn got her invention kit the other students knew it was another one of Herb's "presents for learning." I borrowed this term from the

nineteenth-century German educator Friedrich Froebel, who first created kindergartens and who built his curriculum around giving children specific gifts that would contribute to their learning. What I was doing was just a reconceptualization of what some progressive educators had been doing since the mid-1830s but without the rigid system that developed around the gifts.

It was a delight to see Carolyn work on her wonderful inventions. It was a time-out from grief, a passage into accepting a new way of living, and a chance to refocus on herself and discover how to develop her own path in what would probably be a difficult few years ahead.

I also did a lot of work in the class on families throughout the world. I dealt with culture and family, with the understanding of what it meant to be a member of an emotionally caring community, and with mutual assistance. This might sound abstract, but when such ideas become integrated into everyday life in kindergarten and first grade they become specific and immediate. For example, we spent a few weeks looking at how towns are built and on building our own ideal town. We designed a community square and talked about the kinds of things kids wanted to do and the kinds of spaces they needed to do them in. We talked about how children and adults might relate to each other in an ideal town and wrote stories and drew pictures on the theme "Life as It Might Be: Our New Town." Then we built a cardboard model of our town and made up some plays in which kids had to deal with adult problems, set up a town government, and play adults trying to figure out how to make new lives for themselves when their old lives weren't working. The children's work was delightful, often hilarious, sometimes scathingly critical of grown-up ways. We discussed the issues raised by the plays and skits and stories; however, I deliberately refused to tie things up with a neat summary after a discussion or event, or to draw a moralistic conclusion about what was a good or bad way to be. It was up to the individual children to figure out for themselves how they felt and how what we did could help make sense of the problems in their worlds.

Of course, many things besides divorce happened that first year, one of which led to the theme that played throughout my second year at Hillside. That theme was the politics of food.

Ray and Sharon Nitta, a brother and sister of Japanese and Hawaiian descent, were part of the first group of students at the Center for Open Learning and Teaching. They brought incredible skills, sensitivity, and experience to our group. Ray is a traditional Japanese carpenter (meaning, among other things, that he does not join wood with nails but uses wooden pegs) and a healer; he has extraordinary insight into the structure and nature of games and puzzles. Sharon had a degree in nutrition before she came to us, and her holistic view encompassed classroom learning, food, health, and the making of a convivial, multicultural school community. Though neither she nor Ray had ever taught children before joining the Center for Open Learning and Teaching, both understood how people learn, had neither fear of nor respect for dysfunctional institutions, and were willing to follow their instincts and the children's lead to completely rebuild schools if necessary.

During the time Ray was a student teacher in my classroom, the children constantly complained about the school lunches. Both the food and its packaging bothered them. Some of the children took one look at their lunch and dumped it whole into the garbage. Those who did eat, dumped aluminum foil, plastic, paper, and other leavings into garbage cans, which were carted away at the end of the school day.

Ray's curriculum theme was environmental sanity. We had talked in class about recycling, about the problems waste creates, and about how it is possible to live simpler and more satisfying lives by taking care of our environment and taking collective responsibility for keeping it beautiful and whole. One of Ray's exercises was particularly effective. He suggested that the children in our class collect all the aluminum foil thrown away every day and see how large and heavy a ball of aluminum we could come up with after a month.

Garbage became part of our curriculum, as it had at Other Ways. During one of the evening seminars at my house that focused on curriculum development, Sharon offered a suggestion that reminded me of my resolution, made years before when I was teaching at P.S. 103/79, to do something about school lunchrooms. Her idea took us beyond critique to a schoolwide experiment in conviviality that directly addressed the issues of multiculturalism, nutrition, waste, and community involvement, and that helped children become part of an organic community of learning. The class came up with a radical,

sensible educational idea that provided a small but powerful model of school restructuring, and we decided that with the help of the principal, Frank Fisher, we would make Sharon's dreams a reality at Hillside.

Here is the simple, radical idea: Make the school kitchen into a nutrition-education and curriculum-development center involving parents and students as well as food-service workers, and turn the lunchroom into a restaurant, meeting place, multicultural art gallery, and recycling center. In other words, turn eating into a communal and congenial time and make the lunchroom gracious, educational, and environmentally responsible. From Ray and Sharon's perspective, one which I readily adopted, we could develop schoolwide learning centers and expand to the rest of the school what we were trying to do in our classroom. Ray even wanted to extend the idea further; he suggested that we could develop a solar greenhouse, and a year-round rooftop garden. We could use the food we grew for school lunches, and the gardens as natural-sciences learning centers.

Over the next year we did all that and more. With Frank Fisher as our central supporter, and with the enthusiastic cooperation and participation of most of the staff and many of the parents, the school's lunchroom and roof underwent major transformations. This didn't happen easily; we got approval for our program only after we turned out about a third of the parents and children at a Berkeley school board meeting where we requested and got local control of our lunchroom.

We took out the long tables and benches in the lunchroom and replaced them with tables Ray had built to seat three, four, five, or six people. We obtained nice chairs for the children to sit on. With the assistance of some of the school's older children, Ray built partitions and put in a hi-fi sound system. Frank was ingenious about finding sources of money for these changes.

One Monday I arrived at school to find an enormous fish tank, tropical fish swimming around in it placidly, right in the middle of the lunchroom space. The fish seemed to have a calming influence on the children. When everything was up and working the children took turns selecting appropriate lunch music, helped with cleanup, and ate in a civil, intelligent, and gracious way. For my class, at least, the new lunchroom made all the difference in the world. The children came back from lunch ready for an afternoon of learning, and I no

longer had to spend the first half hour calming them down or worrying that some of them were hungry.

The menu completely changed as well. Sharon helped the food-service workers, as well as community volunteers, cook foods from all over the world. She emphasized food from the cultures our children represented. Each week she put out a printed menu, which was also a multicultural curriculum bulletin for everyone in the school. On one side she had the daily menu (with vegetarian options) and several recipes for the foods that would be featured during the week. On the other side she had a world map indicating where the food had originated, along with puzzles or folk tales or statistics. The menu was prized by the teachers, who used it in their classes, as well as by the children, who could share it with parents and siblings.

Sharon planned a chicken meal once a week. Each week the chicken would be prepared in a different way: we had chicken curry from India; fried chicken and collards; *arroz con pollo;* boiled chicken with latkes; chicken shish kebabs with Thai sauce. The meals were carefully balanced and there were always vegetables and salad. Sharon tried to balance nutrition and cultural habit in a way that would provide the children with the best meals possible. She also went around to classes and had tasting sessions, preparing the children for meals that had new and interesting flavors.

In a very quiet and warm way, Sharon and her nutrition program became an integral part of the school's learning program. The new program actually cost less than the old lunchroom and had practically no waste. We replaced the plastics with dishes, silverware, and glasses and hired some dishwashers, expanding the food-service staff with money that otherwise would have been spent on disposable packaging.

Ray's roof garden was taken over by several of the third-grade teachers and began producing lettuce, carrots, herbs, potatoes, and other vegetables for school lunches. The flowers they grew were used to decorate classrooms, the lunchroom, and the school office. In a way we had not planned at all, Ray and Sharon, with Cynthia's and my help, managed to infuse the school with gracious and civil living habits at no extra cost to the public.

In the classroom, I connected all this to the United Farm Workers' grape boycott. One of the children asked me privately whether we would allow grapes in the lunchroom; her parents didn't buy

grapes because of the farmers. I suggested she bring the issue up when the class gathered, and we had an intense conversation about the table-grape boycott. Some children felt that the boycott existed because Safeway was a bad company. Others thought it had to do with farmworkers but no one seemed sure of what a farmworker was. So, along with my student teacher, I developed a grape curriculum in which we spent a few weeks looking at the path grapes took from the vine to the table. We didn't just look at the grapes themselves, as all the elementary school textbooks I perused did. We looked at the human context in which grapes were grown, picked, distributed, and consumed. Then we met some members of the United Farm Workers, who were delighted to provide an illustrated and animated discussion and playlet about their struggle for better wages and working conditions. I even invited someone from Safeway, who turned out to be quite sympathetic to the boycott and explained to the children that Safeway did not grow grapes and was indeed taking the works and actions of the UFW and the boycott very seriously.

Some of the children, including my own, eventually joined their parents on the picket lines in front of supermarkets. Some didn't, and one or two had parents opposed to the boycott. I had explained to all the parents my intention of discussing the farmworkers' situation in class, and I had told them my position on the issue. However, I assured them—and they knew from the rest of my practice in class —that my major concern was that the children understand what the issues were and what was happening. Having spoken with our children about such political and social matters I knew that five- and six-year-olds were perfectly capable of understanding social struggle and could develop informed opinions. I'm not so romantic as to believe that these opinions would be based on complex logical reasoning backed by careful historical and factual analysis, but I do know they would be more carefully weighed, more thoughtful, and more sensitive than most of the political and social opinions held by many adults in our society. Education for democratic citizenship should begin as soon as children first gather to learn from adults and with each other.

In 1975, the new California state teacher-credentialing law went into effect and we no longer qualified as a credentialing program. So after three years, during the last two of which I taught at Hillside, we had

to end our teacher education program and close the Center for Open Learning and Teaching.

Looking back at those three years, I believe we accomplished several major things. We managed to get credentials for forty-five people, most of whom, twenty years later, are still doing wonderful, caring things with or for children. Two-thirds of our graduates are people of color, so we made a major contribution to the diversification of the teaching profession in the Bay Area. I have visited many of our former students' classrooms and they are welcoming places for children. Finally, I have been blessed with lifelong friendships that emerged from the program. I would do it again tomorrow, perhaps this time on a middle school level, if the possibility presented itself.

At Hillside I was able to show that it was possible to move from desegregation to respectful diversity, and to deliver skills to the children while creating a working classroom environment that crossed boundaries of class and culture through respect and inclusion. The curriculum was pervasively multicultural, as were the adults the children came in contact with, from guests to student teachers. The children felt good, spoke well and thoughtfully, and learned skills. This is not the contradiction some critics of open and multicultural education make it out to be. In fact, for me, the essence of good education is rooting skills in the more important and sophisticated understanding that develops in a convivial learning community.

However, there were some failures. Over my two years at Hillside three or four of the white parents pulled their children out of the class because I wasn't permissive enough. I refused to allow their children to do whatever they wanted, whenever they wanted and instead insisted on group participation, or at least respectful attentiveness during group time. I also refused to allow these children to follow their impulses and whims if it meant monopolizing the resources in the class. I believed they had to learn to share, but their parents felt that this was an unwarranted intrusion on their children's freedom. The only way we could deal with this major difference in educational orientation was to suggest that these children find a more congenial place, which they did at one or another of the private Free Schools in Berkeley.

My failure with Peter, one of the African American students, bothered me much more, since we were together for a year. Over that time he was in my class, he and I totally failed to connect and he

acted as if he despised me. I couldn't find a way to break through his hostility; several times I asked him if he wanted to be in another class. He said no, they were all terrible. I did not teach him to read, did not succeed in making him feel better about himself, nor discover anything that interested him or might motivate him to learn or just to smile. To this day, I cannot figure out what happened to create such a relationship or what else I could have done to change it. It bothers and saddens me, and is a reminder of how difficult it is sometimes to teach.

As wonderful as our work at Hillside was, its effects did not last long. This was not because of the principal or the other teachers we worked with, but because of the disastrous spiral of the Berkeley Unified School District from busing and desegregation into resegregation through absence. The district had been about 50 percent European American and 50 percent people of color; after major white flight, 80 percent of the students in the district are children of color, while the European American children are in private schools or in the suburbs, as are many middle-class African American, Asian American, and Latino children. There has been a major exodus from the public school system in Berkeley, enrollment in which, over the past fifteen years, is down by about half.

With the withdrawal of the middle class came the withdrawal of political support and financial assistance for the schools. As funding and enrollment decreased, there was a retreat to "the basics," meaning the idea that such aspects of education as decent cafeterias and gardens were just frills, no longer affordable. And with that, our Hillside programs were dismantled.

This retreat from public education brought with it a deterioration in the quality of education—not an intensification of learning, as some of its adherents claim. When schooling is spare, minimal, and obsessed with skills without content you get the impoverished thought and marginalized imagination that show up, as children enter adolescence, in terrible test scores and scorn for school and everything it represents. Without conviviality, school comes to resemble a minimum-security prison, a depressing holding pen for people who want to get out and get on with their lives. Learning becomes a secondary matter; control becomes central.

It is disheartening to see people abandon the public schools, not merely in Berkeley but throughout the country. For me it is a danger-

ous way of quitting on democracy and is bound to increase the tensions and violence our children will have to live with in the future. These days, when so much negative is said about public education, my experiences at Hillside remind me of what is possible and provide me inspiration and energy I need to keep working at nurturing public education. Young children, five- and six-year-olds, bring the fullness of their being to school, and all children, no matter how damaged they might be by everyday pressures or horrors or how privileged they are, should be welcomed and shown the same high regard that the wealthiest people can afford for their children.