



In 2004, the Spencer Foundation in Chicago gave NDSG funds to start up an oral history collection to be housed in its archive at the University of North Dakota's Chester Fritz Library. Made up at this point of taped interviews with fellow conferees in the NDSG circle past and present, the collection is an ongoing effort, first of all to help us recall and honor the various pasts that unite us as a democratic community, and secondly to serve the need every democratic community has for its members to utter their stories--not so as to convey some particular messages but primarily and

Marvin Hoffman

In Pursuit of Hellhounds

"All that the human heart wants is its chance." ¹

Starting out, kids in schools were not one of my primary interests. Not part of the game plan. It wasn't until the Child Development Group of Mississippi that I had any involvement with kids in school.

When was that? That was 1965.

simply to speak and be heard. For a good 25 years now there has been a depression in the ability of American society, as our colleague, the late Lillian Weber, once so aptly put it, to help school teachers visualize possibility: **We have a depression in our visualization of possibility right now and I'm saying that it's both the task and the challenge to keep alive the visions that do exist, even if you can't use them right away.** By locating our members' actual experiences in a textured historical 'telling,' we are trying here to bring forward and share a ratifying sense of movement, process, and direction that Weber's remarks alluded to. The democratic argument here is that, through practices acquired over the push and pull of the last 40 years, understandings gleaned from multi-cultural and multi-generational experiences, and values that have been generated thereby--coaxed into being, nourished, and held--we have more to work with than is ordinarily acknowledged.

'65. Why don't we start further back. Say 1960.

Okay. I went to City College (NY) as an undergraduate and started graduate school at Harvard in 1960, almost simultaneous with the beginnings of the sit-ins in the South. Reading accounts of what was happening, I felt a constant tension about what in the world I was doing there studying psychology when all these important social upheavals were taking place.

Wait. Who was Marvin Hoffman, in 1960, thinking these thoughts? The constituent parts?

(Laughter) Well, my parents were Jewish immigrants. My father was a garment worker. He worked in Manhattan in the garment center. He made women's coats. The International Ladies Garment Workers, his union, was a very significant part of my life and my growing up, along with all the Roosevelt Democrat beliefs that I think were prevalent in that kind of community then. Those were the political forces that shaped me.

What community are you referring to? We called it East Flatbush. Sort of where Crown Heights and Brownsville intersect. Immigrant Brooklyn: Predominantly East European Jews and southern Italians. Weathered tenements. Old Testament patriarchs. Kids of all kinds: tough guys, wise guys, the libidinous and the intellectual. Murder Incorporated.

Were you literary when you were a kid? A

reader? Very much so. My reading, in fact, was a constant source of tension with my mother. She thought I was sacrificing myself socially because I preferred to be home reading. She wanted me to mix. The public library was much more of an influence on my life than anything else, the public schools I went to included. That was particularly so for the Modern Library books that Random House published and that I gobbled up in high school. Somewhere I got the impression--maybe it was their logo, a sleek Russian wolfhound, which I found funny for some reason--that those were the books I needed to be reading. In high school, I read through most of the collection, with religious zeal. Probably including books that were over my head, like Joyce's

Ulysses. The ones that really went deeply into me--into my psyche--were the Russian novels. Dostoevsky, in particular.

Nevertheless, I began City as an engineering student. This is what good boys who were children of Depression-era immigrant parents gravitated to. There was a mystique, among us, about how secure engineering was going to be as a profession. But my feeling about being an engineer lasted only a year.

And then I did something which I think is pretty common now but which was an unusual move then. After freshman year, I took a year off to study and work in Israel. It was my first time away from home. Going to City College I was still living with my folks, commuting by subway. In Israel, I lived for part of the year in a *kibbutz*. For another few months I studied in Jerusalem. And then I worked with North African immigrants, Moroccans and Tunisians, in a newly settled community in the northern Negev. This was about 1957. I was maybe 18. The agency running the program I was in assigned me to teach school there.

What did that mean to you, "teach school?" I was the school teacher. I had a class. I taught all day long.

Were you trained? No, no training.

Teaching English? No. I was teaching history.

Whose history? World history. Israeli history. It was a cultural immersion. Difficult but fascinating. I worked alongside girls the same age as me who had been drafted into the Army, but they weren't allowed to be in combat units. Instead they got assigned to these service occupations, for which they were no better prepared than me. Actually it was a pretty bumpy ride as far as I was concerned. Not only because of management problems. It was just an odd match all around. It didn't exactly motivate me to want to be a teacher.

But you hung in there. Yes, because of what I was learning about North African Jewish culture, which

was such a phenomenal experience. A lot of the families I was involved with had never seen or lived in houses before coming to Israel. They'd lived in caves in the Atlas Mountains. The houses provided for them in the Negev were pre-built, with little cultural sensitivity about what was being created. There's a long complicated history to this. In the early stages of the state of Israel, the country was totally unequipped to absorb the flood of immigrants that arrived. And the immigrants, primarily Sephardic Jews, wound up living in tin roof shacks for a long period of time before they were resettled. It made for a lot of bitterness and resentment on the part of those who had been subjected to this. So an elaborate bit of social planning went into creating these pre-built communities, hoping to avoid a repetition of what had happened. But again there was very little cultural sensitivity behind these preparations. I was like a translator.

It sounds like not only a first teaching job, but a beginning of sorts as a social activist. At least of someone who is voluntarily taking on social responsibility. Let's say the beginning of a predisposition. You could call it that. I didn't think in those terms. I had been a participant in a youth group organized by a Jewish agency, and there was a program for future youth group leaders that the agency organized. It was called Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad. There was this five-month period of study, both Hebrew and Jewish history and so on in Jerusalem. Then three months in a kibbutz and then another three months working in this immigrant settlement. I just sort of followed a path that had been laid out.

Also sounds a bit like Peace Corps. Well, it was. With a big dose of dealing with your own cultural and religious identity. When I came back to City, I dropped engineering, and became a psychology major. My interest in psychology I think was as much literary as it was anything else. I took a course with a wonderful teacher named Max Hertzman. The only materials were stories from the New Yorker. Class time was spent analyzing characters' motivations; I was intrigued.

The other really important teacher I had in those last two years of undergraduate work, which connects with the social activist piece, was Kenneth Clark. Professor Clark had achieved great fame because of his role in the Brown vs. Board of Education decision, as well as for having organized, in the pre-poverty program days, this major effort in Harlem called Haryou (Harlem Youth opportunities Unlimited).^{*} I was very much enamored of the direction in which he was able to take his psychological training and use it for social activist causes. Although he barely knew me, he wrote the letter of recommendation that I'm sure got me into Harvard.

Cambridge student life in '60: how did that strike you? Insular, parochial. I remember there being only two or three ethnic restaurants: a French place called Chez Jean, a German restaurant, in Harvard Square, called The Wurst House, and an Italian restaurant, whose name I've forgotten, in Central Square.

Restaurant culture wasn't expansive yet. No, but I think it was a reflection of the fact that people still weren't traveling a lot internationally. It all felt by today's standards rather pallid.

What about intellectually? Intellectually, I always felt like a kid with my nose pressed up against the candy shop window because it felt like the stimulating intellectual life was going on in the undergraduate houses, and graduate students were living rather aesthetic, isolated lives. I lived in a very bleak, nondescript cinderblock dormitory. I never felt there was much of an intellectual community for me, although I did have the community of students who were in my program. In those days, all the social science programs were gathered together in a single department, the Department of Social Relations. If you were an anthropology, social psychology, clinical psychology, or sociology major, you were all mixed together. Which actually made for a rather diluted kind of training. I always felt that psychologists who went to less prestigious universities actually got a deeper richer training than I did. People don't like to hear that. They're so intoxicated by the mention of

Harvard. In situations where it was useful to capitalize on that, I have. But I have no illusions about how rigorous or how deep the training was. The best thing that happened to me at Harvard, and I think this is an extension of the Kenneth Clark story, is that I went to work as a student assistant for a social psychologist named Thomas Pettigrew, who did a very important report for the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. I did research for him, and I was a teaching assistant in his race relations course.

Race relations in Boston? Or below the Mason-Dixon line? It was almost totally focused on the South. If there was stuff going on in Boston I didn't know about it. The only connection I had with the black community in Boston during that period was campaigning in Roxbury for Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 presidential election. Other than that, nothing. But sometime during that period I went to hear Robert Coles speak at the Unitarian Church in Harvard Square about his experiences in Mississippi. The idea of going to Mississippi to work for civil rights was growing in my mind. In my wife's mind, too. We had gotten married in 1963, Rosellen Brown and I. I've skipped a year, when I married and was away from Cambridge doing a clinical psychology internship at the University of California Medical School in San Francisco. My involvement with Pettigrew and Coles came after I had returned from that year in San Francisco.

Was that internship relevant to what was on your mind? It was not relevant at all, except I think in retrospect. Clinical psychology was still, at that point, almost entirely, a very narrow Freudian-based discipline. As I approached these sort of larger social problems, it just didn't seem to speak to the kinds of issues that I was interested in. And that was borne out later, during my last year in Cambridge, when I was doing an internship of sorts at this place called Judge Baker Child Guidance Clinic. My supervisor was a child psychiatrist named John Weil. When I told him that I had decided to go to Mississippi, he said "Oh, that reminds me of this Robert Coles. He did that, too, and let me give you a little bit of advice. I did some work in the VA

hospital in Atlanta, and I can tell you that there are three kinds of problems you're going to face there. First, the children are understimulated because they're living in such impoverished circumstances. Number two, the children are overstimulated because in the cramped circumstances, they're seeing all kinds of sexual behavior on the part of adults. And third, there are all those other issues about housing and lack of jobs and so on." That's the way he saw the world, and it sort of represented to me the kind of skewed perspectives that were prevalent in regard to the social issues back then. So I finished my dissertation, which had no social aspect to it at all; no lasting significance. And, with my wife, plotted to go south. My wife had spent some time as a graduate student at Brandeis on a fellowship from the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, and the foundation had a program for former fellows in which they recruited people to work in what they called developing colleges, which were predominantly black colleges in the South. We decided that this was something we wanted to explore. It felt like a way to finally act on our social convictions and to break out of our graduate school ghetto. The Wilson Foundation sent us off to visit a couple campuses. The first, in Norfolk, Va., didn't look very interesting to us. But Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi, we found interesting. There were some fascinating people on the faculty, including somebody who became my mentor and one of the most important influences in my life: a German Jewish emigre named Ernst Barinski.

There's a piece I have to inject here which Ernst obviously brought to mind. I think that all through those years in graduate school and watching the development of the civil rights movement from a distance, I was haunted by a kind of Holocaust-related question. I had had relatives who died in concentration camps. For me, there was this constant nagging question--what am I going to be able to tell my children about what I was doing when all the things related to the civil rights movement were unfolding? That's the question so many adult Germans were unable to answer when

they were asked what they were doing when evil was afoot there in the '30s and '40s.

This sort of awareness of the Holocaust certainly had a tremendous influence on my being drawn to what we knew as a civil rights movement. The contemporary civil rights struggle was just a couple of years old at that point, but in my mind the two events--the Holocaust and Civil Rights--were joined. Barinski had been a judge and had without success tried to convince his family that they needed to leave. They refused, and so he left alone. Eventually he made his way to Tougaloo driven, I think, by the same kind of Holocaust ghosts that I was haunted by, although they were much more real for him because eventually he was to lose his whole family. He had all these horrific stories to tell about the things he had to endure trying to save himself. Having encountered him on this visit to Mississippi, which took place during the same week that three civil rights workers had disappeared, what we were contemplating felt both frightening and exhilarating. I still had another semester before I finished my dissertation, so we didn't actually get to go until January of 1965. Our parents, of course, were absolutely besides themselves when they heard what we were getting up to. But we were completely sold on the idea.

I was hired to teach psychology and Rosellen was hired to teach English. The thrust of the Woodrow Wilson effort was to try to develop honors programs for undergraduates in the colleges that they sent people to. Tougaloo College, at that point, was a very small school and still a year or two away from even the earliest beginnings of integration at the college level. Black students in the South and probably mostly everywhere else didn't have much option other than to attend historically black colleges. As a result we had an extraordinary range of students at the high end like the ones that would eventually get picked off by other integrated schools, but which wasn't happening at that point. The faculty was about half black and half white. But the students, except for a couple of exchange students from a few northern colleges that had

partnerships with the school, were all black. Again, an immersion in a culture that I knew nothing about. Lots of the astonishing to deal with.

For one thing, we were somewhat astonished to discover that relations between a lot of the black students and some of the black faculty were very strained. Some of the black faculty were people who had pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps and were distancing themselves from lower class and working class blacks and being very disdainful of many of the students who came from those backgrounds. These were all great revelations to us. We weren't exactly matured brave, heroic figures going in. We thought we'd make our contribution by teaching, pure and simple. But Mississippi was such a polarized society that if you were there you were drawn into taking sides in a much more active, open way.

The first night there, a group of students asked if we would drive them into town. There was a play being performed that got a fair bit of attention during that period--Martin Duberman's "In White America." Just the idea of riding in an integrated car was a political act at that point. And you had to make your decision about whether you were going to hang back from that. And of course, we didn't.

We did a lot of things we didn't tell our parents we were doing. Eventually we participated in demonstrations. Which is what we came to do. But ironically, once we got to know everyone, we saw how conservative and how timid the administration of the college was about engaging in the struggle. All of this came to a head when a group of doctors came to campus with a proposal for building a health clinic there, on the condition that the clinic be open to the community. The college was situated in the middle of a very poor black community, and the president refused. We knew then it was not going to be sufficient for us to stay on campus. We needed to find another vehicle for doing our work in Mississippi.

So I took a job that first summer (1965) with a newly created group called the Child Development

Group of Mississippi (CDGM). The federal government's anti-poverty program had just opened for business. And one of the first components being funded was an early version of Head Start. CDGM was a statewide organization that had been sort of hastily thrown together, an odd hodgepodge, to provide administrative cover and accountability for the very large sums of money involved. It was made up mostly of people who had been involved in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic party. From the very beginning, it had aspects to it that we wouldn't identify with a contemporary Head Start program.

How so? We were doing voter registration. We were working to make people aware of federal programs that blacks had not had access to before. And we were training black parents to be teachers in the Head Start centers. It was the first time in the state that jobs were available that were not linked to existing white-controlled organizations.

The director was a psychologist from Yeshiva University, but the board was made up of local activists like Fannie Lou Hamer and Marian Wright Edelman, who was there at that point working for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. And lots and lots of local people. There were probably about 6,000 kids in 25 or 30 different counties being served. Most of those facilities were in rural churches. A number of the centers were burned to the ground that summer. It was a very turbulent summer.

That time marked the beginning of my disengagement from a professional identity as a psychologist. Having worked as a psychologist in the Head Start program that summer, it just felt like the concepts and tools that I brought to the situation were completely inadequate to the kinds of vast social needs that weren't being addressed. The problems of hunger and anemia among the kids seemed to me much more significant than the kind of psychological testing I was doing that summer, which felt totally absurd, because I was testing kids for whom no services were going to be available

based on the outcome of the tests. There was a complete disconnect in the system.

Isn't there a parallel here with what you did in Israel with the Moroccan and Tunisian population? It's interesting that you bring it up; I never thought about it. Although there was a great deal of poverty in that Moroccan immigrant situation, there wasn't the same kind of assault on people's rights and their dignity. As difficult as the situation was in the Israeli context, there was a sense that it was part of an upbeat kind of adventure--you were going to improve the lives of those folks. In Mississippi, there weren't external enemies that so pervaded our thinking.

Anyway, at the end of that summer I went back to Tougaloo to teach for a second year. During that year the government broadened Head Start into a year-round program. And late that spring ('67) I was asked to become associate director of CDGM.

We were living in college housing on campus then because living in town was too dangerous. There was a knock on the door of our apartment. A young white guy named John Mudd was standing there, who said, "I heard there was somebody here who had been to Harvard."

Mudd had been a graduate student at Harvard, and had organized, in the summer of '64, a pre-freshman program on the Tougaloo campus to which he had brought a number of Harvard faculty and graduate students. When those folks left after the summer of '64, he stayed on. He'd gotten drawn into the whole social scene in Jackson and wasn't leaving. The others sort of handed the keys to John and said "you clean up the unfinished business" So when the program was expanded to year-round, John became *de facto* director. In turn, I became associate director.

In retrospect, it seems like a very arrogant and audacious thing for a 26-year old, such as myself, to have assumed such a role. CDGM was a huge program with a \$6 million budget. But quiet as I

appeared, I had *chutzpah* and I readily agreed to do it.

But again, my role was not directly involved with the educational component of the program. Most of my responsibilities were overseeing the medical and dental program we provided and overseeing the community organizers who worked for the program. We had a very large staff of community organizers--one in each county--who were responsible for the voter registration work and the federal programs, and generally helping to train the parents in these local centers to actually assume responsibility for running them.

People younger than you? Contemporaries, I would say. A lot of them former SNCC workers. A lot of them black. There was already a good deal of tension within the civil rights movement between blacks and whites, but it was still within manageable range.

And it was a very visible program because it came under constant attack. Stennis and Eastlake, Mississippi's two senators, threatened President Kennedy with withholding their financial support for the Vietnam War effort if he didn't comply and cut off our funding.

We had a fleet of cars our community organizers were using to travel around the state. The contention was that these cars were being used for purposes beyond the domain of the program. It was mostly fabricated stuff, but it gave the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) a reason to take action against us. Our funds were cut off on the grounds that we were misusing federal dollars. Amazingly though, even after the funds were cut off, the centers continued to operate. You couldn't turn them off. The local parents and teachers just continued to work and continued to lobby to get the funding restored. It became a national battle. For that time and for someone with my interests and my experience this was totally exciting and engaging work.

We had the support of the National Council of Churches, all the labor unions, full-page ads in *The New York Times*, meetings with Sargeant Shriver, who was the head of OEO at that point. And again, this is very intoxicating, because we actually won. After six months, we had our funding restored. There was an historic meeting in Washington where the leadership of the Child Development Group of Mississippi, Martin Luther King, Joseph Rauh, a bigwig in the Democratic party, and labor union leaders all met with Shriver to demand the reinstatement of the program. And it happened. It's one of the rare opportunities in your life to experience a victory by the good guys. Later Senator Eastland and company found ways to undermine the program, but the short-term victory was a very validating experience for the people in local communities.

But by then, as I mentioned, the Black Power movement was emerging. Tensions between the black and white staff were intensifying. So by the end of 1967, my wife and I were feeling it was time for us to step back and leave the program in the hands of the black leadership.

All that time you were basically an administrator.

Right. I had very little contact with the actual program in the schools, although I visited lots of centers. We had some really interesting innovating program staff. Some wonderful early childhood people, who I think were pioneers, like Polly Greenberg, whose book about the Child Development Group of Mississippi, *The Devil Has Slippery Shoes*, is probably the best account that anybody's written. Lots of people from the Bank Street College of Education were involved. I can see now, with what I've come to know about the education of kids, what a wonderful program it was and what an amazing job those people did in training this completely green staff. We had 2,000 employees, the bulk of them teachers in the centers, many of them only high school graduates, and they turned out to be some of the best teachers that I've ever worked with. I don't want to romanticize that too much because there was a lot of very second-

rate-and-below teaching as well. And we had a lot of problems getting people to stop using corporal punishment. Actually this was pretty close to the time I left the project. I think the staff considered it a major accomplishment that there was a significant reduction in the use of corporal punishment, both by parents and by teachers. But again, these were secondary interests for me at this point. I was really more interested in the community organizing and the medical and dental work we were able to do. We had a very large budget, which was providing services for kids who had never seen a doctor and had never seen a dentist. This was a very important aspect of our program.

Where else in the country was there anything of a similar nature going on? I knew nothing about what was happening elsewhere.

And reading. Your reading was what? My reading was all political. I had developed a huge library about black history, and the history of slavery. That's where my interest took me at that point. I don't think there was a single education-related volume in my library.

AT: And who were you drawing inspiration from at that point? Robert Coles was always a significant figure. Particularly during the period when the Senate was holding hearings in Mississippi on hunger in the South. That brought Bobby Kennedy down. Coles was there regularly. Howard Zinn was another important influence. He had worked at Spellman College in Atlanta before we went, another important black institution, and he was sort of a role model for us.

You decided to come back to New York. We decided to come back. We moved into an apartment in Boerum Hill, which was a neighborhood in Brooklyn that didn't exist by that name when I was growing up there. It was a real estate agent's invention. We came in really at the beginning of its gentrification. There were a lot of rooming houses on our street. It was sort of a crazy mixture of gentrifiers and old-time residents, mostly Puerto Ricans. Rosellen wrote a wonderful book of short

stories about our time there, called *Street Games*. John Mudd who had been the director of the CDGM all that time left Mississippi with us and came to New York, as well. He and I had gotten a grant from the Field Foundation to write a book about our experiences.

The Field Foundation was a very important element of our lives, even when we were still in Mississippi. The director of the Field Foundation was a man named Leslie Dunbar. Leslie Dunbar was sort of a classical Southern Liberal, a very principled and decent man, who had actually provided the small resources that kept the Head Start centers going during the period of the funding cutoff. It was just enough money to provide \$25 a week salaries for the staff members who continued to work. And when Mudd and I made our plans to go north, Dunbar gave us a grant to write a book, and also some consulting work, reviewing grant applications from southern organizations, to tide us over. Unfortunately the book never got published. Not yet anyway.

We arrived in New York at the beginning of 1968, smack in the middle of the control battle between the teachers union, the United Federation of Teachers, and parent groups in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville decentralized school district. John and I felt like we actually knew something from our experience in Mississippi about how to prepare local people for controlling their own educational institutions. We thought there was a role for us in New York. But we had trouble finding a way in other than sort of as individual actors.

I wound up during the strike sleeping in at the school in our neighborhood so that we could keep the school open, which was a very troubling experience. It was my first anti-union act, and very hard to do for someone from my background. But I felt so aligned with the community interest as opposed to the union interests here. Actually I also went down to the board to see if I could sign on as a substitute teacher so I could work in one of the striking schools, but my Ph.D. didn't get me very far.

Meanwhile what was playing in the back of my mind, from the time we left Mississippi, was that I had been completely immersed in the politics of an educational institution, and I knew nothing about the substance of what CDGM was actually created to do. I felt like I wanted to understand more about kids, and schools, and teaching.

Had you begun yet to read the writing that was being done on the subject by classroom teachers?

I think the first things that I read were the articles that Herb Kohl was publishing in the *New York Review of Books*, which became his book, *36 Children*. And ironically, those articles lead me to what was sort of my first more direct involvement in an educational program. A couple of people who had worked for the Child Development Group in Mississippi and who had left before me, a husband and wife team named Sheila and Richard Murphy, had wound up working at Teachers & Writers Collaborative in New York, which is the organization that Herb had started. One of the people who had succeeded Herb as director of Teachers & Writers Collaborative had left, and there was an opening there for the job. I applied and was hired on the spot. Again here I was, on the one hand pretty green, overseeing this project. It was a very tiny operation at that point, just a couple of years old, if that, using donated office space at Pratt Institute near downtown Brooklyn. On the other hand, being able to focus on writing with kids seemed like the right entry point into education for me. Just thinking, in romantic terms, about this sort of incredible, creative spirit that was locked up in kids that Herb had managed to find a way to liberate was very inspiring.

In the essay of yours in *Journal of a Living Experiment*, the collective memoir that T&WC published in the '73, you raised questions about who was being served by the work T&WC did in schools. You were critical of how T&WC was dealing with the pedagogical nature of the work.

That piece was written at a point when I had already sort of morphed into being a classroom teacher. I was seeing that experience from a very different

angle than when I had actually been involved in Teachers & Writers. I continued to appreciate the special elements that a writer could bring to a classroom. But I felt that that was always going to be limited unless you found a way for teachers to incorporate those special elements into their practice.

Of course, the one thing that my work at T&WC did that was critical for my education about schooling from 1968 to 1971 was get me into a lot of New York City classrooms. I was visiting on a regular basis, observing what the writers were doing. I had even started writing with kids in a school in East Harlem. I had done a review of a book called *Homework* by a teacher in East Harlem named Gloria Channon. She wrote to thank me and invited me to visit her class. I wound up not just visiting, but going there on a regular basis to write with the kids, sort of playing off some of the things I had learned from observing the T&WC writers at work. It was becoming clear to me that it was much more fun to be in the classroom than to be in the office. I felt I needed to find a way to make that happen.

And at that point, we had some friends who were living in a rural area in Vermont, who knew about the work we were doing in New York and had told the local school superintendent about it. The superintendent, in turn, invited us to come and talk with him about the possibility of setting up shop in his school district. "Us" being my wife and I and this other couple from Mississippi--the Murphys.

Where in Vermont was this? A small town on the Connecticut River, called Fairlie. We went up to visit and were intrigued by the situation. There were other factors that were driving us. By then we had two little kids, age 3 and age 1, and we really didn't feel like New York City was a good place for them to be growing up. The opportunity to leave the city and set up in Vermont was very appealing.. We were offered a huge chunk of a school building that was being underutilized to set up as a writing center. The superintendent wanted us to work directly with the kids in that school, and also do workshops for teachers in the district.

Say a little about the approach you were bringing to Vermont? Well, I don't think we could dignify it with the word "approach." I think we knew we wanted to write with kids, and we were going to use some of the techniques and approaches that writers had used at Teachers & Writers. It became both a sort of pull-out program, where kids during the school day rotated through the writing center, and an after-school program, where we were doing a lot of special projects.

Was Pat Carini's work at the Prospect School in North Bennington known to you then? Not at that point. We were sort of working--in retrospect--in what was a very narrow orbit of knowledge about what was going on. But what happened here was that in the middle of the first year, one of the teachers in the school left. And I had been complaining to this superintendent that we were doing all these really interesting, innovative projects with students, but then they went back to their classrooms, and there was no continuity between what we were doing and what was happening in their classrooms. So this teacher left, and the superintendent said, "Well, I'm tired of hearing you complain about this. Why don't you take this teacher's class?" And I said, "I'm not a certified teacher." And he said, "Well, now you are," because it turns out that in this liberal, open environment in Vermont, there was a provision that authorized local school superintendents to certify people who they thought could be educationally beneficial to children in their district. So poof! I became a certified teacher. With nothing but sort of second-hand observations in other people's classrooms as training.

No classroom pedagogy, but enormous experience. Maybe, but there were still a lot of gaps. Dick Murphy and I became the co-teachers of this classroom. I was the nominal teacher, because I had the certification. Dick actually didn't even have an undergraduate degree. And I think, in this state of blissful ignorance, we did some of the most creative teaching that I've ever done. Unfortunately, in some ways, the more I learned about pedagogy and about

education and child development, the more constrained I felt. The students wrote marvelously. We produced plays. I had my first exposure to other content areas. I discovered that I loved teaching science. I have very little recollection of what we did with math. I think we sacrificed the math program, realizing that we couldn't do everything. I think the math was pretty much a workbook-based kind of program. But this is where I began to learn about other resources.

This is where I first encountered the work produced by the Educational Development Center (EDC). I discovered "Man: a Course of Study." I don't even know who exposed me to it. The material sort of just arrived at my door. I was completely enthralled by it. It seemed so consonant with the way we were working with kids and attuned to our primitive understanding of the active way in which it was best for kids to learn. Actually it was, "Man: a Course of Study" and the "Elementary Science Study (ESS)" material that arrived at my door. Those both had a tremendous impact on my teaching, which I think has continued to this day. Growing out of our "Man: a Course of Study" work, we began making films that paralleled the films that were part of that material, namely a whole series of films about an Eskimo boy and his wife in the Arctic. Since we had lots of snow in Vermont, we were able to expand the series and do our own cartoon movies. In our science studies, in great excitement, we were filming the emergence of the monarch butterflies from their chrysalises, and doing all the ESS units.

But political issues arose. In a manner of speaking we came under siege. We're talking about 1973 now. In Vermont, the local schools were run by three-person school boards, and we had some enemies on the school board who I think were put off by a combination of xenophobia (New York people were coming to their community), a little bit of antisemitism, and just general bewilderment about the unrecognizable way in which we were working with their kids. For one thing, we didn't have desks. It was the archetypal open classroom: the British infant schools and all of the stuff that Jay

Featherstone and others had been writing about. And so at the end of 1973 the local school board refused to renew my teaching contract. The local affiliate of the NEA offered to go to bat for us, because they felt we had a good case, and that the refusal to rehire was groundless. But I felt at that point it was best to leave, even if we would have won our case. Fairlie was such a small community, it would have created such terrible divisions that we couldn't be effective continuing to teach there. The political struggles would undermine our efforts.

For a while I was a little bit at sea about what I was going to do next, but I came across an ad in the *New York Times*, which I answered cold. A branch of Antioch College called Antioch New England, which at that point was located in a small New Hampshire town called Harrisville, was looking for someone to be director of its teacher education program. It was one of those moments when you learn how to exploit your credentials. I think they were more enamored of my Harvard Ph.D. than my work experience. And so they hired me to be the director of this teacher education program, which as it happened had had very close ties with the Prospect School. In fact, at that point, many of the students in the teacher education program at Antioch had completed internship placements at the Prospect School. However, just around the time that I started there, Prospect started its own teacher education program, so we were no longer able to place people there. But my predecessors had created a school on campus called the Harrisville School, which was very much a clone of the Prospect School. And that's where I absorbed a lot of the Prospect School vision and ideology. And from time to time teachers from Prospect would come to our program to do workshops for us. So, again, with about a year and a half of classroom teaching experience, there I was running a teacher education program with a very interesting population of students., Even from its starting days, in Putney nearby, Antioch New England attracted a heavy representation of Peace Corps graduates who were interested in going into teaching.

What do you mean by "Prospect School

ideology?" I don't think I had ever seen instruction that was, to use a contemporary cliché, so "child-centered," where kids had as much choice as they did. Where the curriculum grew out of kids' interests. Where the learning was as active as it was.

This is again where I realized that the people working in classrooms were having a better time than I was. Essentially a repeat of what happened to me at T&WC. Supervising students in the small town schools in the area around Antioch, I felt strongly they were doing really what I wanted to do. Not only was I fascinated and engaged by these small schools which were very rooted in their communities, I also was recognizing, as I told you earlier, how limited my own classroom teaching experience was. I didn't feel that I could sustain this work of training other teachers over a long period of time without deepening my own experience. So when a position came open as the teaching principal at one of the schools in which I had spent a lot of time in supervising my interns, I decided that I was going to apply for it.

It was a school that had four classrooms, and about 90 kids. The three teachers who became my colleagues were all involved in the hiring process. I had to do a demonstration lesson for them. They wanted to observe me teaching. I had to call a principal in an adjacent town with whom I had a very close relationship to get a class to do this with. His school was another place where we had placed interns during the years I was running the Antioch program. It was a somewhat rigged situation. He said, "you do it in my classroom, and I will tell the kids that if they don't make you look good, they are going to have to deal with me." (laughter) Be that as it may, the teachers who came to observe me were sufficiently impressed and I was offered the job.

Then I went to meet with the local school board representative. The school boards in New Hampshire were organized differently from the ones in Vermont. I mentioned that each town in Vermont had a three-person school board. This new situation in New Hampshire was a consolidated school

district involving nine towns, all of which sent their kids to a consolidated high school, and there was a single community representative from each town on the consolidated school board. So I went to meet with the representative from the town where I was working. He owned a grocery store in an adjacent town, and was one of the rare publicly acknowledged Democrats in town. I thought on that basis I might have a comfortable conversation with him. The question that I posed to him was "what are the implications of this Jewish guy from New York coming to be the principal of your town? Is that going to be an issue?" And he said a very wise thing, which I think turned out to be true in my years there. He said "if everything goes smoothly, it will never be an issue. If anything goes wrong, it's the first thing that people will point to." Well, I had six years of pretty untroubled experience there. And interestingly, I think because I was very publicly identified as a Jew by my own choosing, it actually became a source of respect. The people in that town--a combination of French Canadians and Yankees--somehow appreciated that I was observant. The local radio station would call and ask me to explain on the air what the Jewish holidays were about. My fellow teachers asked me to do the same. I'd go around to all the classrooms. But I also was, I think probably in ways that might not feel comfortable for my ACLU friends, not adverse to having some representations of the Christian holidays in the school, as long as they were balanced by other representations. Every December, for example, I went out into the woods with my students and cut down a Christmas tree to put in our classroom. I think it was all part, in turn, of my willingness to show respect to the community.

Another part of that story involved the relationship I had with one of my teaching colleagues. The school was a two-story building. I shared the upstairs, where there were two classrooms, and my neighbor, who taught the 4th grade class, was a local woman. Very grass roots New Hampshire, and a very strict, old-fashioned teacher. We didn't know how we were going to make it with each other. She was a little skeptical about how much more noise came out of

my classroom than she was used to, and although later I moved to the basement of the building, where my classroom stood by itself, my relationship with her became a very important part of my experience there. I think we each came to appreciate the fact that we valued kids in the same way, although we went at them very differently. And long after I left, and long after she retired, we maintained a very strong relationship. I should tell you, also, again jumping ahead of the story, she died a few years ago, and I wrote a tribute to her in the local newspaper. Next year it'll be 25 years since I left my position at that school, but I've gone back to New Hampshire every single summer since we left, and every summer I've had at least one lunch with all of the teachers who worked with me in that school. We've maintained that kind of relationship, and of course, she was part of it as well until she died. I think I learned less about certain kinds of progressive instruction there than I did about the importance of the community in the school.

'Teaching principal' sounds sort of like 'a playing manager' on a baseball team. Exactly. These were schools too small to have full-time administrators, which I think was a blessing. I had a full-time classroom teaching responsibility and did the administrative work on the side, and it made me a very efficient administrator, because I was really much more interested in investing my time in the teaching. It was a school where there weren't enough kids to separate them out by single grade levels. I taught the 5th and 6th grade class. The town was also Bennington. But not Bennington, Vermont. Bennington, New Hampshire. A mill town, very blue collar. The mill was a very high-end paper producer, one of the most enlightened non-polluters in the industry, and quite an amazing organization. In an earlier era, in fact, they had donated the school building to the school system. The mill and the school had a very close relationship. Further down the line we did a great project inside the mill. We spent days photographing various aspects of the mill operation. The kids then interviewed people working in the mill. Then they wrote a narrative to go along with the photographs that we had done, and

made it into a slide show. I made us a dark room, which I had done for my school in Vermont, as well. We did a number of photography projects around the town.

Did you have a model for what you were doing? Foxfire? The WPA? I was mostly figuring it out by myself. I wanted not to repeat the way in which my experience in Vermont ended, which in some ways was contentious. The fact that the community leadership in Fairlie didn't approve of what we were doing in the school helped shaped my thinking about the kind of relationship that I wanted to have with the community in this new situation. And in some ways, that was a sign of some greater maturity on my part. On the other hand, there were losses, because I think I was much less bold about some aspect of my instruction. I was trying very much to build a relationship with people in the community, and not get too far out in front of them, so that I could have a more prolonged run and a greater opportunity to have an impact. And I did wind up staying there six years.

Tell me about the children. I had a very wide range of kids. One of the things that I tell people now, since most of my later teaching career has been in urban environments, is that people have a very misguided and idyllic view of what rural and small town education is like. I think I saw as much social dysfunction in that town, among the kids and families I worked with, as I have in any urban environment I've been as a teacher. There was a lot of alcoholism, a lot of spousal abuse, some drug problems. It was, in its own way, a fairly violent environment, with not a great deal of value placed on education beyond the basics. I think it was very important for parents to know that their kids were learning to read and write, but there were no aspirations for them to go on to college, for example.

Kerouac came from such an environment, didn't he? New England milltown, French Canadian. A lot of alcoholism, a lot of spousal abuse, low aspirations in regard to education. His achievement in American literature couldn't

really be comprehended fully there, even though they celebrate him now in the town. In the end, he went back there and died, an alcoholic himself. As if, in his own mind, he failed to be the person he had already become. There were aspects of this that were hard for me to adjust to. Every year, around graduation time, the local newspaper published and still does publish a special supplement which listed all of the graduates of the local high schools and what their future plans were. It took me awhile to adjust to the fact that the vast majority of the kids were either going to work after high school, or go to really second- or third- rate colleges or vocational schools. Eventually I came to appreciate the fact that that community was still a part of the country where kids had respectable avenues for finding ways to earn a living without going to college. There were entry-level jobs there that don't exist anymore in urban environments. And in spite of all the dysfunctionality that I described, there were also very strong family bonds. People didn't necessarily want to leave and go away to school and move out of the area.

What were the strengths of those kids? Well, I think they were much more comfortable in the physical world than I was. This is something that I had already experienced, going back to the previous school in Vermont where kids had worked with their fathers building houses, and had all those physical skills that I had never acquired. I actually learned a lot from them about how to do things with my hands. Generally, they didn't present serious sorts of behavior problems in school. It was the kind of situation where it was very easy to call a parent and sort of "out" a kid for the way they were behaving in school. Issues would be addressed immediately, and problems would disappear. I think they loved the projects that I brought to them. I'll tell you one story from the early years, which I think is one of the high moments of my teaching: one of those opportunities that rarely come your way. I lived in a nearby town which was kind of the market town for some of the small towns in the area, Peterboro, New Hampshire. Mostly known, if anybody knows it, for two reasons: one is that it was the real setting for *Our*

Town, the Thornton Wilder play, which is an American classic, and because there's a famous artist colony in Peterboro, the McDowall Colony, where Thornton Wilder did several residencies, and I think where he got the inspiration for writing *Our Town* in the first place. Of all the surrounding towns, it had the largest middle class population. The reason I mention that in this story is that Peterboro was running out of space in the town dump and made an arrangement to dump its garbage in an area of Bennington, because like every good New Hampshire town there were no zoning regulations. This is "Live Free or Die" territory, and people thought they could not be constrained by government. So the dump trucks started rumbling into town and dumping their waste in the woods in Bennington. The kids in my class were up in arms about it. Out of their anger grew a whole elaborate project. We went out and photographed the areas where the garbage was being dumped. We measured the distance from the river and made estimates of what kind of seepage into the river water was taking place from the dumping, and put together a presentation that we did for the town selectmen, which resulted, to everybody's surprise, in the town approving for the first time zoning regulations which essentially shut out the companies that were doing the dumping. Talk about authentic instruction. It was a great victory for the kids. I think it set the tone for a lot of my tenure in the town.

What about that experience still serves you? Part of it was a political understanding. If you're going to have any staying power in a situation, you have to find an appropriate case for the kind of change you want to introduce. I think I also learned to be a lot more temperate in the way I went at my efforts to introduce new ideas into the school. I continued to be committed to the idea of the importance of project-based work with kids. And I think I found a way to combine that project-based work with kind of a more traditional education that was recognizable and acceptable to parents.

The community needed that from you. That's right. And I have to say I was fortunate that the

administration of this school district was very enlightened. They were interested in and supportive of innovation in ways that were maybe a step ahead of the local communities themselves. There was an interesting incident that sort of underscores this. The first year I was at this school, I ran into a problem. One of the girls in my class brought a book home that she had taken out of my class library, that she was reading for independent reading. It's a book fairly well-known among young readers, called *Go Ask Alice*, which is a fictional diary of a girl who eventually dies of drug overdose. But it's so skillfully done that you don't realize that it's fiction. It's very realistically written. Well, she brought it home to her mother and told her that there was some bad language in the book. And as often happens in these censorship situations, the mother, of course, didn't read the book. She read only the page her daughter had pointed out. And she called but she never talked to me. She called the district superintendent to complain about what I was doing in my classroom and the ways in which I was corrupting the kids in my class. So the superintendent called me in and said, "Tell me about the book." And I explained what the book was about. He said, "Why do you have it in your class library?" I said "Well, in addition to the fact that it's a very engaging piece of reading, I think it has a message for kids in it about the dangers of getting involved in drugs." And, he said "That's all I needed to hear." He called the parent back and told her to get off my back, and I never heard anything more from her. Think of all the situations where teachers don't get that kind of support, and administrators just bend to any kind of parental complaint immediately. It's part of the reason I came away from our New Hampshire experience feeling very positively about it.

Another thing that contributed positively to my thinking there was a workshop in Boston, half way through that stay, organized by the people who later would become the creators of the project, "Facing History and Ourselves." From that point, in the late '70s, all through the rest of my teaching career, in one way or another, the study of the Holocaust

became a springboard for my addressing a lot of other social and moral issues in my classroom.

But at the end of those six years--I seem to work in roughly six-year cycles-- I felt that my own learning curve had leveled off and that my ability to go beyond what I had already accomplished in the school was going to be very limited. I was beginning to just go through the motions. I didn't think that the community was going to be ready for any more dramatic experiences.

Basically you were on your own here, in terms of professional development. I was, for the most part. I was bringing along bits and pieces from earlier experience. I did a lot of writing with my kids that grew out of my Teachers & Writers Collaborative work. I'd also so internalized the whole Herb Kohl story. I think it was my core vision of what I wanted my classroom to look like. I think I was forever aspiring to create another *36 Children*.

The weakest part of my instruction was in math. With one exception I had never been exposed to any innovative math instruction. The one exception was one of these workshops in Boston that I attended from time to time. I lived about an hour and a half from Boston, so whatever sort of professional development experiences I had were there, or at the University of New Hampshire, where a lot of my own early interests in writing were reinforced by Donald Graves and later Lucy Calkins. This math piece was a workshop based on Caleb Gattegno's work with Cuisinaire rods. I can't remember whether it was Gattegno himself or somebody who worked with him who presided. But I became fascinated with using the rods. They became a key part of my math instruction. That was the first departure for me from doing traditional workbook drill.

In any case, we decided the time had come to leave New Hampshire. Partly because I was feeling this flattening of my learning curve; partly because the house that we had been renting all through our time in Peterboro was being sold; partly because my older daughter had just finished her freshman year at

high school and felt staying at that high school was going to be a dead end for her. She was seriously interested in theater, and what they had to offer was very limited. Plus we wanted our kids to have a more visible Jewish community to be a part of. There was a Jewish community in the town in New Hampshire where we lived. It was a very wonderful, tight-knit community. In fact, I had become its *de facto* Hebrew teacher. I prepared the handful of kids who lived close by for their *bar mitzvahs* and *bat mitzvahs*. But it was tiny and we wanted something broader.

Coincidentally at that point my wife was offered a job teaching in the writing program at the University of Houston. What could be broader, in all the meanings of that word, than a settlement the size and wealth of Houston. Not only that, Phillip Lopate was at that point living in Houston. Phillip was one of the original writers for Teachers & Writers Collaborative. And the ultimate New Yorker. If he could live in Houston, so could we, we felt. It seemed like an interesting if somewhat dramatic shift for us. And so it proved to be.

In 1982, when we moved in, Houston was still a rough place for African-Americans. It was in that sense very much a southern town. It was also about to become rougher because of AIDS. We moved into what was the center of a very sizable gay community, part of the 18th Congressional District, which was represented in Congress by an African-American anti-poverty activist Mickey Leland, one of the few liberal Congressmen in the Texas delegation. In a short time we began to encounter AIDS-related deaths, which was a new experience for all of us. And very quickly, before we really knew anything about what was going on, the whole gay community in which we lived was decimated. A large portion of the population died. All of the sort of gay institutions in the community came apart. That was very much a part of the social milieu of the times in the town. In 1989 Leland would die in a plane crash while on a mission of mercy to an isolated refugee camp in Ethiopia, which sheltered

thousands of unaccompanied children fleeing the civil conflict in neighboring Sudan.

I went to Houston thinking I wasn't going to look for a teaching job. I was interested in possibly doing some writing about my work as a teacher before I forgot all of what I wanted to say. But that feeling was short-lived. The first month there, a student in my wife's writing class told her about this wonderful school that her daughter was attending that was looking for an English teacher. And I couldn't restrain myself. Somebody once asked the writer William Carlos Williams, who had a medical practice in Patterson, N.J. that included delivering babies, how he could write and do his doctoring work at the same time, and he said, "I can't do either without the other." That was how I felt when I stepped back from it. I realized that I wasn't ready to be done with teaching.

I went to visit the school and met with the principal. I found the school to be truly interesting. An unusual place. Two distinct populations were occupying the same building. There was a program for gifted kids, and there was a program for multipli-handicapped kids. I didn't think this grouping was some brilliant programmatic design on somebody's part. I thought it was a matter of "parking bodies" where there was available space in the system. In fact, there were no plans for these two groups to interact. But I saw the possibilities.

I'm getting ahead of the story.

So what happened? Well, first of all, as I said, I realized that I was hardly done teaching. This idea of my writing without being actually immersed in the work itself just didn't make sense to me. Then I was able to talk my way into a job with a dual capacity: classroom teacher and school psychologist.

Actually I had inquired about the possibilities of working as a school psychologist when I first came to Houston, but the working condition for psychologists seemed daunting, to say the least. In a school system of some 200,000 students, there were only five psychologists on staff and each one was

responsible for 40 schools. I didn't think you could drive to 40 schools over the course of the school year, no less relate to their problems. It seemed like a ridiculous, impossible work load to impose on anybody. So I just stepped away from that. But this was one of the few schools in the Houston system because of their multipli-handicapped population that actually had a full-time psychologist on staff. And he was somebody who I could see was doing really interesting work. When I told him about my background, he welcomed my input. And the principal went along with it. We worked out an arrangement where I had a slightly reduced teaching load so that I could both teach and psychologize in partnership with the other school psychologist. The timing couldn't have been better.

Shortly after I started working there, there was a rash of teenage suicides in a suburban community, and a lot of concern about copycat suicides. We organized a suicide-prevention education program at the school. We also arranged activities where the gifted kids were working with the multipli-handicapped kids. And because all of the handicapped kids had deafness as part of their handicaps, we had everybody in the school--staff, gifted students, etc.--learn sign language so we could communicate across the populations. We also started a counseling group for children from divorced families and another counseling group, a kind of bereavement group, for kids who had lost parents or close relatives. We managed by keeping our ear to the ground and getting assessments from the teachers about the kinds of needs that were emerging. It was a very rich and unusual program, especially for a school system that was so impoverished in terms of psychological services.

The school was a magnet school, and at that time, there were racial quotas for admission, which made for a very diverse population of kids. A very interesting population. Very bright. Some of the minority kids who didn't have the greatest test scores in the world and wouldn't have gotten passed the gatekeepers if special dispensation hadn't been made to admit them for the purposes of racial

balance turned out to be extraordinarily capable and gifted students, as has been the case throughout my teaching experience. But eventually there was a suit filed by a parent, a white parent, whose child hadn't been admitted, who had higher test scores than some of the black and hispanic kids who were admitted, and the whole magnet school program and the program for gifted students unraveled at that point. The program population tipped from being diverse to being predominantly white. I'll get to another chapter of that when I tell you about the next school that I went to.

But while the program lasted, I experienced a great deal of freedom in that school. The principal was very supportive of both my work as a psychologist and my teaching. I was again working with a very heavy emphasis on student writing, which included a student magazine that the students ran themselves. When I left at the end of six years, the parents, as a parting gift, gave me a bound volume of all the issues of the student magazine that had been published during the time I was there, which still sits proudly on my shelf.

Also during that time, starting probably the second or third year we were in Houston, I helped Lopate put together a Houston variant of T&WC: the Writers in the Schools program. We worked through the University of Houston's writing program, and convinced them that it would be to their benefit to engage their students in a project like this, and to give us space to operate out of. We started with just two or three graduate students.

No money? No money. Phillip and I were doing our piece on a volunteer basis. We got some small grants to pay the writers honoraria. Eventually we got enough schools to buy in so that they were willing to pay a share of the writers' costs. And over the course of the next few years we raised money from local foundations to fund a full-time director, at which point the program really grew. That program is still going on some 30 years later, and on a much larger scale than what we started. In fact, it's become the hub of other Writers in the Schools programs around the country. They've had funding to clone

themselves and to work as consultants in places as far flung as Montana to help set up Writers in the Schools programs. There is a whole network of these programs now. I was going to leave Houston at that point to take a job at Michigan State University. A very enlightened dean of education, Judith Lanier, was trying to put together a faculty of people who had the credentials to be university faculty but who really were still fundamentally classroom teachers. They were starting on a bold venture to revamp the teacher education program at MSU and also work in the public schools in East Lansing. Lanier would become quite well-known in the country for having organized this thing called the Holmes Group, made up of deans of education involved in teacher education reform. Under Lanier's inspiration, MSU's education department worked out an arrangement where faculty members got credit not just for publication but for various kinds of service. Maggie Lambert, a math educator, who was one of these appointees, and had been my assistant when I was running the teacher ed program at Antioch, put Lanier onto me. I went up to East Lansing, got interviewed, was offered the job and accepted.

But my younger daughter was just going into her senior year in high school, and I felt I couldn't leave until she graduated. It didn't seem fair to pull her out at such a critical moment. The people at MSU said, "That's fine. You can serve as a consultant in the interim year. We'll start with a formal appointment the following year." So, I traveled back and forth during that sixth year, continuing with my job at the school in Houston. Toward the end of the spring I even went up to East Lansing and bought a house for us to live in. And then when the end of the year came I backed out of the whole thing.

A woman at Rice University named Linda McNeal who was running something called the Center for Education, who knew about my involvement in writing, knew about Writers in the Schools, and had heard that I was planning to take off for Michigan State at the end of that sixth year, had offered me a position at Rice that would kind of replicate the arrangement that I was about to enter into at

Michigan State. I had been mulling it over for months. Leaving where I was suddenly didn't feel right. I felt it had taken me six years in Houston to really learn the system and to have a network of connections that I could capitalize on, and I was going to have to start from scratch again in East Lansing; I realized I wasn't ready to go. Fortunately, I was able to undo everything that I had done--the sale of the house, the faculty appointment. And what I wound up with in Houston was an interesting arrangement which, again, had this combination that was so attractive to me of the university connection, but with my feet still firmly planted in the schools. According to the arrangement we worked out, I was actually an employee of the school district, but Rice University bought back 40 percent of my time to create a writing project for teachers, which we called the School Writing Project, which was very much modeled on the National Writing Project network.

Was there a difference between the National Writing Project and Teachers & Writers

Collaborative? Absolutely, and it goes back to the comments you made about that essay in the *Journal of a Living Experiment*. The difference was whether you invested your energy and attention in the work that writers were doing in the schools, or whether you invested your attention in helping teachers become better resources for writing. Although I still valued the work that the writers were doing, I felt that ultimately teachers had to be better equipped to do the day-to-day work of writing in their classrooms.

At this point, for the first time, I became a high school teacher. For the next seven years of my time in Houston I worked at Jones High School, which was in a predominantly low-income African-American community. Jones also had a magnet program for gifted students sort of embedded in it, which was fairly well integrated, while the rest of the school was African American. And most of the teachers taught in either the magnet program or the neighborhood program. I was not willing to do that. I said if I worked there, I wanted to be able to work

with both populations. I think I was the only teacher in the school doing so.

Why did you feel strongly about that? Even though I worked all those years in programs with gifted kids, it was with a great deal of discomfort because I felt like what I was doing in that program and what the kids were getting in that program was what everybody should be getting. I was convinced that with the same kind of rich instruction, the kids who were in the neighborhood portion of the school could flourish as much as the gifted kids. The problem was not about differences in ability, but (a) differences in the level of stimulation of the work that kids were exposed to, and (b) most of the kids in the regular program had gone to schools that promoted a very different work ethic. So although they were very bright, they were not invested in doing the work as diligently as the students in the gifted program--who were not particularly gifted, by the way. They were bright kids who were diligent students. The definition of "giftedness" was a very loose one in these programs.

Was there any political flack about you doing this; complaints from the people who were invested in these magnet programs? The only flack in the situation came from some of the internal conflicts between the parents of the kids in the two programs. There was a great deal of resentment, suspicion, and wariness between the two groups. I felt like I could serve as a bridge between the two programs although this wasn't an official part of my job. The parents of the kids in the gifted program, like a lot of the parents of bright kids, were a handful. We organized parent groups where they provided support for each other, sort of problem-solving about how to handle their kids. And in the course of those parent conversations, I was also trying to develop some understanding about the kinds of relationships that needed to be developed between the neighborhood school and the magnet school. At the same time, I was building this school writing project.

In trying to convince me to stay, Linda McNeal asked what design the school writing project should

have that would make it satisfactory for me. So I asked myself what was missing in my life as a classroom teacher. One thing was the time and the opportunity to see what other teachers were doing; I felt very isolated in my classroom. Another thing was time to read about what the best practices were. And thirdly time to write. So working from my own sense of what other people might be missing as well, we designed this program. We started with a group of eight teachers, who worked with us for a semester-long cycle. They met together for a writing workshop on a weekly basis.

They were not writers themselves? They were not writers themselves. And some of them had had very bad experiences as student writers. But for whatever reason, either because they were looking for a professional network to connect with, or because they were specifically interested in developing better approaches to teaching writing in their classrooms, they joined us. We were able to arrange with the school district substitute days so that during the semester-long cycle people had several opportunities to leave their classroom--either to visit my classroom or to visit another colleague's classroom to observe the writing instruction. They spent part of their release days doing that and part reading about teaching writing. And, of course, all along in the workshops, we were doing a lot of our own writing. I think the basic assumption was the same as the National Writing Project assumption that in order to be good teachers of writing, teachers had to be engaged in the process themselves and understand what the challenges were. In the early negotiations setting up the program, when we arranged these substitute release days with the school district, the superintendent in Houston at the time said, "Why are you doing this on such a small scale? Why are you working with eight teachers? Why don't you assume the responsibility for writing instruction for the whole district?"

This is a period when Houston's school establishment had some liberal tendencies. Yeah, it was before the height of the testing and accountability mania, which ultimately killed this

program that I'm describing. I insisted that we needed to start small. We worked with cycles of eight to 10 teachers each semester, and then some of them got to the point of being workshop leaders themselves, sort of also on the model of the National Writing Project. So there was a pyramid being created. And by the time I left at the end of that seven-year cycle we had an active membership of about 300 teachers, all of whom had been through the workshops and who were committed to doing more serious instruction in their classrooms.

Teachers of English? Some of them were English teachers and some of them were all-purpose elementary teachers, because we were working across the grade levels. Writers in the Schools, by the way, remedied some of those shortcomings that Teachers and Writers had by having a more active workshop program for teachers. Also they ran and continue to run a summer writing program for kids in Houston, where the classes are co-taught by a writer and a teacher, so there's much more interaction there. The teaching experiences I had during those years at Jones are mostly the subject of the book that I wrote called *Chasing Hellhounds: a teacher learns...from his students* (Minneapolis: Milkwood Press, 1990). It's the piece of writing that I'm proudest.

By now the size of your oeuvre is quite respectable. Actually I have something now that I'm finishing for Teachers College Press that should be out in 2008. In a sense it is a re-publication of a book with which you may be familiar. A translation from the original Italian was published here in 1970 with the title, *Letter to a Teacher by the Schoolboys of Barbiana*. It was a book that had a great impact on me when I started teaching. The book kind of dropped out of sight after a time. And when I started working with the Teacher Education Program here at the University of Chicago, which has a really strong social justice component to it, I wondered whether the book would speak to my students who were getting ready to be teachers as it did to me, and it did. And I said, "this book needs to be back in print." So I kind of shopped it around, not

particularly with an interest in my writing about it. I just wanted to find somebody who would get it back out there again. A friend put me in touch with Teachers College Press, and they proposed this idea that if I was willing to write the introductory piece, they would include it in their series. Vito Perrone has a book in that series as well.

And the research for it has been just fascinating. First of all, and I didn't know this when I started on this campaign, one of the two translators of the original text, Tom Cole, is a close relative of my son-in-law's, and he's fortunately still alive. So I've been in interesting correspondence with him about the story of how they came upon the book and their contacts with it, and with the kids themselves in Barbiana. Also thanks to the wonders of Google, I found a rare video which had footage from the school itself, plus interviews, 30 years later, with a number of the kids who had gone there. It had been done by French television, but it had subtitles. Also, I found other writings by the Catholic priest who created the school, a man named Don Lorenzo Milani. Just doing the research to flesh out his story sort of became a central part of the whole project. He was a fascinating human being, a radical priest who the Vatican had exiled to Barbiana, which was a place that had no electricity, no phones and no roads. Of course, he had rubbed the church hierarchy the wrong way, and in this place where they thought they had finally silenced him, he created this school. He became a nationally known figure in Italy—not just because of the school, but because of some of his outspoken political views on war. He was a conscientious objector. In many ways, he was more a disciple of Ghandi's than he was of Jesus. The stuff he wrote reads like a lot of Martin Luther King's work. If all goes well, the book should be out next year. I'm hoping that there will be an audience for it, particularly among young folks who are getting into the business.

In some ways, doing that book is a coming together of so much of the history of my own engagement in education. It is tragic in some ways that the problems now are no different than they were then.

If you remember, Father Milani's major focus was on researching drop-outs rates in Italy, and looking at the way in which they are class-determined. The building I work in now, in Chicago, also houses this wonderful research operation called Consortium on Chicago School Research.

A think tank? Not exactly a think tank. Their mission is to do data-based research on what's happening in Chicago public schools. They came into being in 1989, when Chicago's first school reform legislation was passed. They've published dozens of reports that since then have had a real impact on what happens in the system. But the most recent reports, which are profoundly depressing, are about the drop-out rates in the city, particularly among minority populations. In the most recent study, and this is one of the more shocking bits of data that always takes people aback when they hear it, they followed a cohort of ninth graders. They were kids who hadn't been left back, so they were moving through the system in the normal way. The study followed them through to age 25 to determine how many of them had actually finished a four-year college program. What they found was that only six-and-a-half percent of the kids in that cohort had graduated from college, a four-year college, and of the African American boys who were in that population, only two percent. It's so devastating. And the data to me looked so much like the Barbiana data, you know? It made me feel the same way I do when I ponder the fact that the North Dakota Study Group came into being to counter the regressive tendencies in assessment that were afoot at the time, and it's only gotten worse since then. As a friend of mine said recently, "We've been at this for 40 years—is there a single thing that's better as a result of what we've done?" That's a painful question to confront. If you're inclined to depression, which I'm not fortunately, confronting this can be very paralyzing. I've always felt that my attitude toward the work is existential. You sort of have to operate as if you can have a significant impact. Otherwise, you have to go do something else.

How did it happen that you went from Texas to Chicago? In 1995 my wife, who through most of the years that we were in Houston was teaching in the writing program at the University of Houston, decided that she wanted some time away from her teaching because she hadn't been getting enough time for her own writing. And I said, "Well, if you're going to do that, I think we need to go somewhere else. Otherwise, your writing students are going to be depositing manuscripts in our screen door, and you're not going to be any freer than you were when you were teaching." Then through the usual networking channels, I looked around for someplace where I might be able to do a year's leave, and somebody recommended to me this group in Chicago which was then called the Center for School Improvement. Some of the work that they were involved in had some parallels to what we were doing in the School Writing Project. They were training teachers to be literacy coordinators in a network of Chicago public schools, hoping to become an in-house professional development resource for reading and writing instruction. And I felt like I knew a little bit about how to do this work. So to make a long story short, we agreed to come for a year. We both got leaves of absence from our jobs. It was the first time in many years that I wasn't going to have my own classroom, and I felt somewhat uncomfortable about that.

And in fact moving to an office type world made me very restless. As crazy as school is, it's stimulating all the time. Things are in motion all the time, and you have to be up for it. There's no let down. My sense of life in the office was that there was a lot of unproductive time, and when people didn't feel like being up, they could pretend to be staring at their computers or whatever. It was not a life that I was accustomed to. So of course as soon as I was set up with a desk and computer I found ways to get out of the office as regularly as I could. During that year I developed a relationship with one school and one teacher where I became her in-house mentor and spent a lot of time in her classroom introducing writing workshop ideas. So I was still getting my classroom *fix*, doing my time, so to speak.

But at the end of the year, I didn't feel this training program I had started for literacy coordinators was solidly enough in place to leave it at that point. So I arranged to extend the leave for a second year, and my wife did to. And we continued the work. And during that second year, the staff at the Center decided that in order to move our work in the direction that we hoped it would go, we needed our own school. The kind of literacy instruction that we were training people to do and that we were advocating was running up against all the bureaucratic obstacles that you would expect in a large city system. At the same time that we were promoting this reading and writing workshop approach, teachers would be getting mandates from the Central Office to do scripted instruction, and all we had was the power of persuasion. We didn't have any authority over the schools that we were working with. Their boss was really the Central Office. So it was very hard implementing our ideas, particularly since the teachers who we were working with and the teachers who we were training never had the opportunity to see what this kind of instruction actually looked like in its full implementation. That year the state passed a charter law. Even though most of us had some reservations about going the charter route, we decided to apply for one.

What were your reservations? I was ambivalent about operating in a system that was partially designed to circumvent the teachers union. That created some real discomfort. Also, from the beginning, there was always this sense that if you were in the charter school business, you were operating alongside some very strange bedfellows. A lot of the people who were charter school advocates were using it as a Trojan horse for instituting vouchers, and that was something that I was not comfortable with at all. But it seemed like the only route we could go to accomplish what we wanted. Plus the school was going to be a professional development school; we were not separating ourselves from the rest of the system in the way charter schools normally do. We were going to be a training base for teachers from other Chicago public schools. Our work was intended to improve

public education across the system, rather than undermining the system, which I think was the idea and the intent of a lot of charter school operators. So we applied for a charter, and once we decided to go that route it was clear to me that I had to stay in Chicago. This was an opportunity I didn't want to miss.

Actually in the middle of that second year in Chicago I had gone back to Houston to explore the possibilities of starting a charter school there (which wasn't to be). But there is a very telling story in connection with that trip. I'm making a slight detour, but it's a very telling detour. Going back to Houston, I had a meeting about charter school possibilities with one of the school board members who was just finishing his term in office. The Houston school system was already in the period of heavy duty accountability: the so-called Texas miracle testing mania. And this school board member, a man named John Franklin, one of the major advocates of this approach to what they called school reform, said to me at the end of my interview with him, "You know, I have to tell you that sometimes I wonder whether what I've been promoting all this time will in the end serve to destroy children's souls." He was agonizing over this in a way that I found very poignant, and unfortunately all too prophetic. I had a similar encounter with the guy who was chairman of the Houston School Board at that time, Don McAdams.

I'm going to have to back up a second, again, because mention of that man's name brings up another whole episode in the Houston story, which is quite significant. Probably around my 5th year at Jones High School, a series of conversations began between Rice University and the school district about creating a new school. This was before the days of charters. This was going to be a regular public school, but with an opportunity for introducing new approaches to instruction. And Don McAdams represented a residential area near the university that had overcrowded schools. So he was very anxious to see this happen in a way that could relieve that overcrowding. This was an upper

middle-class community. The school was going to serve a mixed population of these upper middle class, almost entirely white kids, and a sort of representative population of minority kids from across the city.

The school system built an incredibly lavish structure which won all kinds of architectural prizes. The building was called the Rice School because of the collaboration. Several of the people that I worked with and I were part of the planning and design team. But the fact of the matter is that the school was completely under the control of the school district. We had a year's worth of planning time, during which we brought in a lot of outside consultants, including a friend and colleague, David Cohen. But no one in charge was really listening to and thinking about what they had to say. Once after we spent a couple of days together in planning meetings, I drove David out to the airport. Before he left, he put his hand on my shoulder, and said, "You know, Marvin. These kinds of ventures rarely succeed." And he was right, because the school district forced on us many decisions for political reasons that really undermined the school. And this goes on everywhere. So it was a fiasco from the beginning. And I think a lot of the things that I learned about what not to do in a situation like that--starting up something new--sort of informed the planning and the design for North Kenwood Oakland Charter School, where I am now as principal. Fortunately, the relationship between the University of Chicago and the charter school is very different from the one that existed between Rice and the Rice Charter School. Rice was more concerned about issues like what kind of liability is the university going to have if a kid hurts himself on the playground in the school? When an institution approaches a venture in that frame of mind you know that things are not going to go swimmingly.

In contrast to that, the University of Chicago has been unswerving in its commitment to North Kenwood Oakland. And again, I know, I'm jumping ahead in the story. I'll hold back for a minute. But this train of thought all started because I mentioned

this man, Don McAdams. He called me in Chicago, after I had left, to say, "I heard you have a book about your work in Houston." I said "yes." And he said, "Well, I have a book, too. I want some help getting it published." I said, "Well, Don, I have no idea what kind of writer you are. Why don't you send me a chapter?" Actually he sent the whole manuscript, which was kind of an astonishing document for somebody who was still sitting on the school board. What McAdams had written was a very revealing look at the inner workings of the Houston school board during the period when Rod Paige, who was George W. Bush's secretary of education, was a school board member. When the then superintendent left to take a job elsewhere, the members of the Houston school board encouraged Paige to resign from his position on the school board and apply for the superintendency, McAdams being one of Paige's great advocates. His manuscript was about what he referred to as the reform school board. And "reform" by that definition was all about testing and accountability. That was the reform. When he finally read my book, he said something to me that I found shocking. He said, "I found the book very interesting because"--and by this point, he had been on the school board for seven years--he said, "I found the book interesting because I've actually never visited the schools." He didn't feel that that was his responsibility. This man had overseen this system and had no idea of what was actually going on on the ground. It gives me chills just to think about how outrageous that is.

Getting back to Chicago. The university had complicated reasons for supporting our application for a charter school. First, Chicago, like a lot of other urban universities, had a very contentious relationship with the surrounding community. They had been involved in urban renewal projects that had cleared out local businesses and residences, and for years there was a lot of acrimony between the school and the community. And I think the university saw the creation of this school as a way to get back into the good graces of the community. That was one piece.

The second piece was that during that period of neglect, the university had done away with its department of education, which created a big stir locally, and nationally, because this was the education department that John Dewey created. How could the university dissolve it at this point? Well, the truth is, the education department had become a kind of dinosaur. It was not involved in the local schools at all. It was not training teachers. It was involved in a lot of esoteric educational research. And so, by supporting the school and its sponsor, which was the Center for School Improvement, the university was demonstrating that it still had a commitment to education, and in fact had a stronger commitment to education because they were going to be more directly involved with urban schools and with the local community. So our proposal was approved, and the school opened in the fall of 1998: I was its director for the first five years. This was a position that I had never imagined myself in. I was not interested in being an administrator any more. First of all, I didn't have administrator's credentials; and secondly I wouldn't have had any interest in dealing with the madness of big city school bureaucracy. But this was a much more manageable, controllable and well-supported situation.

What was the size of the school? It was an odd beginning. The typical pattern is to start with a couple of early grades and grow out a year at a time. We did a kind of mixed model. We started with pre-kindergarten through first grade, and with a 5th grade class. And that had to do with the fact that the network of schools that we were providing professional development for said that if they waited until we grew out to the middle grades, their middle and upper grade teachers wouldn't have anything to relate to in the school.

Sounds sensible. Yeah, it was sensible, but there was a cost attached to it, because taking kids in the 5th grade from a variety of mostly dysfunctional previous school experiences, created another whole layer of turmoil in the school. But there was an important reason for doing it that way. So the school

started with just 110 kids. It was only one class for each grade. And then the next year, we added 2nd grade and 6th grade, as the kids grew into those grades. Then, 3rd and 7th; then 4th and 8th. So by the end of the fourth year, we had all eight grades and our first graduating class. And then we started growing again from the bottom, by adding a second class at each grade level. So now—this is the beginning of Year 9, the school has between 400 and 450 kids, and that two classes per grade bubble has now reached as far as the 6th grade. The school has a 100 percent African-American student population with a very mixed faculty. It's still two years away from being its full operating size, but the school has done very well.

With a 'what' faculty? With a very racially diverse faculty. It's pretty much 50-50, White and African-American teachers. One of the things that I prided myself on was that racial conversations were very open, and race issues were on the table for discussion, rather than being an elephant in the room, as they are in so many institutional situations.

The kids have done very well. Just looking at standard test scores, with all their limitations, they have far outstripped the regular CPS population, and in some areas, particularly in writing interestingly, have exceeded the overall state scores, which include the suburban school districts. And now—I handed over the directorship at the end of the 5th year to one of the teachers that I had hired. We had just been through a renewal cycle. Charters are granted for 5 years. We had just gotten our charter renewal for our 2nd five-year cycle.

Renewal is based on what? It's based on academic performance and administrative performance. And we were pretty much flawless on both sides of that. Not to say that this is anywhere near an ideal institution. I think we've always felt from the beginning that with all the support and all the advantages that we've had, we were still hitting a certain kind of ceiling that we had trouble breaking through, which was a continual surprise.

I remember taking a group of teachers to visit this school system in Union City, New Jersey. There were a lot of interesting things happening there. This was primarily a visit to look at their technology program. And the person in charge at that point, who had really overseen an incredible turn-around in performance whereby this school district, which had been one of the worst in the state, had become one of the best, said to us at the end of our visit, "We've gotten about 80 percent of the way there, and we can't seem to break through any further because there are just too many other things that are beyond our control," which are obviously all of the incredible social problems that exist outside the realm of the school. And I would say the same thing about us. I think even getting 60 or 70 percent of the way there, in the face of the obstacles that you have no control over, is no small accomplishment.

Bureaucratic obstacles? No, I don't think they're bureaucratic. We—as a charter school, we don't have much in the way of bureaucratic obstacles. It's really all about us. The obstacles that I'm talking about are all of the insurmountable social obstacles, of health, and poverty, and housing, and employment, and things that tend to erode the efforts of even the best instruction. Were you at the North Dakota Study Group the year Richard Rothstein gave his presentation? Do you know his stuff? Two years ago, maybe. It was all from his book *Class in Schools*. He argues that schools can only account for about 20 percent of what needs to be accomplished. The other 80 percent is all about the social obstacles that exist. I'm oversimplifying what he has to say, but it's a somewhat discouraging message for teachers.

So, I left at the end of the five years, partly because it felt like the right time in the cycle of the school for me to go. Institutions really need different kinds of leadership at different stages. I had the personality and temperament to do the start up, but a lot of the consolidation work didn't play to my strong suit. I think I was successful at building a strong community around the school, both among the staff and with the parents, and—

How did your strength--your strong suit--

contribute to doing that? Somebody asked me about why I didn't consider writing a book about what it takes to be an effective principal, and I said because my ideas about it are too simple-minded. Never having had any formal administrative training, the only guidelines for me have to do with the fact that if you treat people respectfully and if you trust them with responsibility, they're more productive; they feel more of an investment in the institution. I think it was all about respectful dealings with parents, with kids, with teachers, and being very willing to share decision-making and authority, which I think was awkward at the beginning because most of the teachers whom we hired came from their experience in the Chicago public schools, and they were still used to the kind of top-down authoritarian structure. They didn't quite believe or trust in this invitation to become partners in the operation of the school. I think that wore away over time.

The third reason for leaving at that point was that simultaneous with the start of the school, I had also helped to start another project that was sponsored by the Center for School Improvement, which was called The New Teacher Network, and it was a program that was support for first and second year teachers in Chicago public schools. A couple of young teachers had come to me to say they were interested in working in the schools, in the network we were supporting, which were mostly really struggling, low-performing schools, but they were frightened to be out there all by themselves, and I offered to provide support for them informally, meeting with them regularly. With that start, a group of three teachers, the New Teacher Network began. Now, after a couple of years--this was sort of like the Houston experience--there are 200 in the New Teacher Network. This was another one that I was operating sort of on the side, alongside the start up of the charter school. One of the staff members at the Center said, "Some day, this program is going to require its own full time staff," which seemed unlikely at that point. But now there's not just one

staff member, but five who are running this program.

The reason I'm telling you about that is that the people who came to the New Teacher Network were people who had all been through other certification programs. So they came as certified teachers, many of them with masters degrees. But they were, for the most part, really paralyzed by the challenges of working in these urban schools. In looking at what they were missing, and what their programs had not provided, we began to think about creating our own teacher education program, and the university was interested in sponsoring that. Again, it was partially their way of filling in the gap that had been left by the demise of its Education Department. So sort of through this kind of back-planning process, of looking at what was missing for the teachers in the New Teacher Network, we designed this Urban Teacher Education Program. When I left the school at the end of those five years, I moved over to become the co-director of the Urban Teacher Education Program, which was very closely linked to the school, because the school was the base for the program. Part of the program involves a year-long internship in the schools; half of which is spent at the charter school, and half at a regular Chicago public school. I have an office at the school, and I have an office here at the university, and I move back and forth between those two. So I'm still very closely linked to the school. I have a very close and warm relationship with the director who took my place. I think I've been diplomatic about never encroaching on her authority, or being a back-channel for complaints from staff or parents. It's been possible for me to maintain this presence at the school without undermining her.

How does the Urban Teacher Education Program differ from teacher training that undergraduates get in traditional college teacher training programs? There were four things that we realized the people in the New Teacher Network were lacking: 1) They had very limited preparation for the sort of bedrock work of teaching reading and writing. At best they had a kind of slapdash methods

course that really didn't prepare them for the challenge. 2) There had been very little attention to equipping them to deal with the classroom management issues that are so critical in urban schools. 3) They had very little sense of how to go about building classroom communities. And, finally, there had been very little attention to issues of race, class, and culture in their programs, and these were, for the most part, white teachers who were going to be working in black and hispanic schools, and needed a much deeper understanding of what it meant to be working across cultural identities.

The Urban Teacher Education Program is in its 4th year now. We've graduated two cohorts who are out teaching. My impression is that we've been able to equip them with the kinds of skills that have short-circuited the usual first year teacher problems, or at least abbreviated them. It's still a very small program. We've had cohorts between nine and 13 students, and we won't grow much bigger than 20 or 25 students eventually. This is all an elementary program. We're about to start a high school program, which will be of equal size, and will be, I think, more of a drawing card. Right now, the program's only opened to University of Chicago students. We will eventually open to students from outside, but the secondary program is going to attract more University of Chicago students than the elementary program has.

Let me add one postscript here. The one charter school now has become three. Two years ago, we opened the second and third elementary charters and these are all ventures that I've been involved in myself.

They're your babies. Exactly. And then just a month ago, we opened a grade 6 through 12 school, and I was the head of the design team for that project. That opened with a 6th and a 9th grade class and will be filling in in the usual way. The plan is for the university eventually to be operating five charter schools, and also providing professional support for a whole network of other start-up schools on the south side of Chicago. Chicago, like

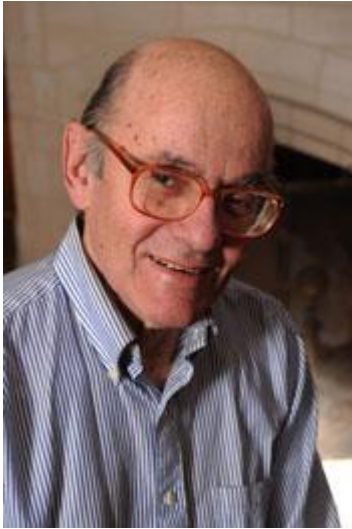
New York, is just exploding with new school start ups—for better and worse.

You're operating now on another level in terms of your creativity, compared to where you were in New Hampshire running a teacher education program. Well, I think I actually know something about teaching now, which I didn't then. I've also found a way to keep my hand in. I'm continuing to work with the middle school language arts teacher at North Kenwood Oakland. I'm in there regularly doing Writers Workshop with them. Continuing to work with kids while I'm doing this other work keeps me honest. But the teacher education work has been fascinating. The students are very bright and deeply committed. They distinguish themselves from the many patriots who go for Teach for America. They feel like they're in it for the long haul. They know how hard the work is. They want to be well-prepared. I have some serious reservations about the way the Teach for America people get parachuted in, with very little preparation. Our program is still too young for me to say whether we actually have prepared our troops for a longer stay in the urban schools, because a lot of them are working in very frustrating, very difficult situations. With very bright students like those at the University of Chicago, when things get sufficiently uncomfortable, they have a lot of other options in their lives. Whether they're really going to hang in there to the point where they can become teacher-leaders and have impact beyond their own classrooms, whether that's the way it's going to play out, I can't say. But that's what our hope is. What we're doing is small. I mean there are still a lot of things we can accomplish because of our small scale. We've got a strong model for the way it should be done. But I think we've got to figure out how to do this on a somewhat larger scale than what we're doing right now. We are in the process of trying to create a network of urban teacher education programs so we can share our experiences and provide support for each other.

Still a work in progress: keep tuned. Exactly.

--October 2006

1. William James.



*Haryou was a social action organization funded by Dr. Kenneth Clark in 1962. The group worked to increase opportunities in education and employment for young blacks in Harlem. It was also designed to teach residents of Harlem how to work with governmental agencies to meet their demands. In 1964, the same year that saw the publication of Clark's massive study, *Youth in the Ghetto*, the Johnson administration provided \$110 million to back educational changes recommended by Haryou. These plans included recruiting educational experts to reorganize Harlem schools, providing preschool programs, after-school remedial education, and employment programs for dropouts.

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED, CONDENSED AND EDITED BY
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