

Bank Street College of Education

Educate


Graduate Student Independent Studies

5-1972

Diary of an Open Classroom

Alicia Montalvo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://educate.bankstreet.edu/independent-studies>

 Part of the [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Elementary Education Commons](#), and the [Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education Commons](#)

T
1972

M763d

c 3

Diary of an Open Classroom

by

Alicia Montalvo

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of

Master of Science in Education

Bank Street College of Education

May 1972

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

P.S. 101 is located on 111th Street, between Park and Lexington Avenues, in the area called "Spanish Harlem". It is a low income, depressed, ghetto area, with a high crime rate and a relatively high percentage of families (mostly broken families) on welfare. Drug abuse is rampant among the youth of the area while alcoholism seems to be more prevalent among the older generation. Many streets are lined with garbage and broken glass, and, occasionally, a knocked-out or semi-conscious alcoholic or drug abuser. The tenements are run down and dismal looking as well as unsafe to enter, even for the residents of the area. The few housing projects in this area are nicer and cleaner looking, but just as unsafe due to the high frequency of muggings that take place in the elevators. The ethnic composition of the neighborhood is about 65 percent Puerto Rican and 35 percent Black.

THE SCHOOL

P.S. 101 is a large, old school with a student population of about 1,700. It is a school with many problems. Among them is the fact that the building is frequently broken into and a great deal of equipment and materials is stolen. During one of these break-ins, 700 pounds of pork chops were stolen from the kitchen. Other break-ins have resulted in the loss

of all typewriters, tape recorders, cameras, over-head projectors, scotch tape, pencils, notebooks, records, phonographs, personal property of faculty members (an electric coffee perculator and about \$25.00 worth of my own records were stolen from my room last year).

P.S. 101 has many children with severe emotional problems. The guidance office has sought and continues to seek proper placements for these children, but these efforts are usually in vain because existing appropriate facilities are often filled and have long waiting lists from all over the city.

P.T.A. meetings are poorly attended in spite of great efforts made to attract members. One of the main reasons for this is the fear mothers have of leaving their homes at night, lack of money for the hiring of baby sitters, and, I believe, a general feeling that, "My presence will not really make that much of a difference". The only time school-community meetings are well attended is during a time of crisis and even then the majority of those who attend are usually militants and community leaders.

THE CHILDREN

Class 1-6 is composed of Puerto Rican and Black children from

the community. The class register started out at 39, but this figure was reduced to 26 when 13 children were taken out and placed in another first grade class which was formed in order to reduce class sizes to more manageable levels. This register of 26 finally dwindled to 22 children. About half of the children in class 1-6 had no previous school experience. At least one-third of the class was non-English speaking, or had a very limited English vocabulary.

Most of the children in class 1-6 have never been exposed to the rich culture of the society in which they live. That is to say, these children have never seen a puppet show, a museum, a restaurant, a children's theatre, the countryside, or the circus. They have never seen a firehouse, been to the pier to see tugboats and ships, or been downtown to see the city's skyscrapers. Almost half of the class has never heard a children's story or handled children's books.

About one-third of the children come from families on welfare. Many also come from broken homes. Three of the students were from nearby McMahon Shelter, a residence for children whose parents are unable to care for them.

PHYSICAL LAYOUT OF ROOM 208

Class 1-6 meets in room 208. The room looks like a typical

room in a ghetto school. All of the tables are arranged in rows, facing the blackboard in the front of the room. There are no room dividers, no book cases, no easel, nor other accouterments of learning often found in schools in other areas. Just tables and chairs and a steel cabinet in a corner in the back of the room! The one good thing about room 208 is that it is a little larger than most of the other first grade classrooms.

FIRST GRADE LEVEL IN P.S. 101

There are six other first grade classes on our floor. The classes are homogeneously grouped and they range from 1-1 (the class with the cream of the first grade student population) to 1-7. All the classes are conducted in the traditional manner. Each child has an assigned seat, all tables face the front of the room. Some of the classes have a small bookcase and a round table at the back of the room. This is usually the library table. The average register per class is 27 or 28. Attendance for each class varies. Some classes never have more than two or three students absent, other classes may never have less than 4 or 5 absent.

The average teaching experience of the first grade teacher is approximately seven years, the range being from one year to ten years.

I am starting my third year of teaching. The first grade teachers are generally what one might call "old timers" in the school. Thus, the first grade faculty is one of the most stable and experienced group of faculty members in the school.

The first grade supervisor is a person with many years experience (at least 15 years) in the public school system. She appeared to be a rigid and rather a stern individual. I felt rather apprehensive having to work under her supervision because I felt that she would not tolerate the kind of classroom setup I was planning for class 1-6. I had envisioned for my room a classroom setup which resembled a combination of both Pearl Zietz and Suzanne W. Monell at the Bank Street School for Children. As a matter of fact, I had to get special permission from the principal to setup and run my class the way I wanted. Although faculty members in P.S. 101 have a little more freedom to do what they want in their classroom than teachers have in most other schools, the changes I wanted to bring to the school were so vast that I felt I would have to present a sound rationale for having an informal or open classroom. No one in the school had such a setup in their rooms and very few of the teaching staff had ever heard of an open classroom.

It is for the reasons stated above that I experienced a great deal of tension and anxiety during the first two months of my program. I knew what I wanted to bring about, but not for one moment did I truly believe that I would succeed. My previous year at Bank Street College had taught me a great deal but it wasn't until I took over class 1-6 that I realized that I lacked the experience of actually establishing an open classroom. It is one thing to "student-teach" in such a classroom for a few weeks and it is quite another to set up, from scratch, your own classroom. I felt that I just had to succeed. Many eyes were watching me, especially those of my grade supervisor. I had the courage to start such a seemingly radical program in a traditional ghetto school. I was even fortunate enough to have two excellent Bank Street teachers to emulate. What I lacked was confidence.

Confidence and encouragement were two ingredients I received from Mrs. May Murphy, District Supervisor for District 4. I had worked for two years and two summers under her supervision during the time I worked in the Pre-Kindergarten program. She had faith in my abilities as a teacher and was very pleased about my plans for an open classroom. Another very important source of encouragement came from Mrs. Selma Knobler from Bank Street College. Mrs. Knobler had been my advisor during my year at Bank Street and at no time did she

ever make me feel that I would not accomplish what I had set out to do. I called her several evenings during the first seven or eight weeks of my program. I called her on weekends. The empathy of these two ladies, their understanding, encouragement, suggestions, and faith in me was what kept me from throwing in the towel. Both of them even came to spend a morning with me in the classroom, met the children, and discussed my plans with me.

FIRST WEEK WITH CLASS 1-6

I took over class 1-6 at the beginning of October. The class has had two other teachers before me. I must admit that I am beginning to feel rather anxious. I know what I want to accomplish and see in my room, but I'm doubtful as to whether or not I will be able to reach these goals. I am very much aware of the fact that I lack the experience of setting up and running an informal classroom on a first grade level, although, I had taught at the Pre-Kindergarten level using informal classroom techniques. Also, my supervisor makes me nervous because she appears to be a stern woman who is thoroughly oriented to teaching in a very traditional way. I feel lonely and frustrated. The children seem to be in another world; the classroom is bare, equipment is scarce, and I have no one to turn to for guidance, constructive

criticism and emotional, as well as professional support. Also, I have never taught first grade before. I feel like a sore thumb sticking out.

The first thing I should do is look into the empty room and see if there is any equipment or classroom furniture I can use. How can I have areas in my room if I have nothing to divide areas with? I would like to have a reading, writing, and math area, a science area, a cozy library corner, an art area, an area for table games like bingo, concentration, and checkers. I also need a meeting area. Perhaps I'm hoping for too much, but I would like the children to learn how to work on their own, and to learn how to go from area to area without creating a crisis in the classroom. These children are so immature, so active. Some give me the feeling that I'll never be able to reach them. I hope that by the time this school year is up they will be able to know how to share, to help each other, to cooperate, to be self-directed, to ask questions, to make up their own stories, to learn to appreciate the written word, and, most of all to feel enthusiastic about school. Some of these children come from such intellectually deprived homes! I must do everything I can to make their school experience rich, interesting, and fun.

END OF FIRST WEEK

This first week almost caused me to have a nervous breakdown. I came home and cried two days this week. I feel so frustrated. All of my energy went into trying to keep the children from fighting, looking for and moving classroom furniture, and, last, but certainly not least, trying to pretend that everything is just fine. I'll never make it. What I should do, before I make a big fool of myself, is quit my job.

The children know less than I thought they did. Most of them don't even know the alphabet, they can't read their full names or the numbers from one to ten. I also have two girls from the shelter and each girl has her own severe emotional problems. I have one boy who runs around the room all day long shouting. He has a very pronounced infantile speech pattern. When I prevent him from doing something he shouldn't be doing, he goes into a temper tantrum. I have another boy who goes around hitting the other children all day long.

The worst part of it all is that I feel so all alone, I have no one to turn to for help. There are times when I feel like a hypocrite for trying to impress upon my para-professional the values of an open classroom. I keep telling her how important it is for children to have the opportunity to make

choices and become self-directed. I tell her that many children who are forced to become more or less robots in the classroom eventually "drop out" intellectually and/or spiritually. I tell her how important it is for children to experience joy and excitement in most of their learning experiences. I say all of these things to her during the day, and then come home and panic when I think about the enormous and seemingly impossible task I have ahead of me.

I think it would be best if I start off next week by establishing routines. I am going to try and get the children accustomed to the idea of a meeting time, a playtime, a storytime, a bathroom time, a worktime, and a cleanup time. During meeting time I will introduce the letters M, E, and A. I will also start helping them to recognize the names of Magarita, Marie, and Manuel, and ask if they see the letters m, e, and a in these names.

SECOND WEEK

Monday: I arrived early this morning and placed scissors, magazines, and paste on the tables I arranged in the writing area. I planned to have at least some of the children look for and cut out the letters that will be introduced to them during meeting time. I say "at least some of the children"

and not the whole class because I wanted to start off my program by giving them the opportunity of having a choice. I also set up a little housecorner, and placed crayons and drawing paper on the tables that are in the table games area. The painting corner had also been set up on the floor in a corner of the room. The puzzles had been taken out and placed on top of a low piece of classroom furniture I had found the week before in the empty room we had on the first grade floor. I had used this little cabinet to separate the meeting place from the table games area. My plan was to have the children work with the puzzles on the floor of the meeting place area. I looked at my watch and saw that it was already 8:30. The class had to be picked up from the first grade yard no later than 8:40. I used these last ten minutes to study my room and make sure nothing was missing. I also gave the para-professional a run-down on all I had planned for the day. I felt elated and very enthusiastic. I just knew my day was going to be a beautiful one!

I brought the class up on time, helped them put their belongings in the closet, and took them around the room in order to acquaint them with the different areas that had been set up. I explained that they would not have assigned seats, that they would instead be able to sit in whatever area they happened to be working in. After our tour of the room,

I announced that we were all to go to the meeting place area and sit on the floor Indian style. Our first "meeting time" was about to begin. By now it was 9:00 O'clock.

After giving the class an official greeting, I proceeded by explaining that we were going to have a meeting time at the beginning of every morning and every afternoon, that after meeting time we would have worktime, and after worktime, clean-up time. Following this explanation, came their introduction to the reading of the three names I had selected. I flashed these cards a few times, asked the three children whose names were being used if they could come up and find their name. After these three names came the introduction to the letters. I asked if anyone could find these letters in the names we had been reading before and quite a few hands went up. Their response had been good and it just reinforced my feeling about the wonderful day I had ahead of me. Before ending meeting time, I said to the class that they could;

1. Cut out and paste the letters we had just looked for in the names
2. Play in the housecorner
3. Paint in the painting corner
4. Color in the table games area
5. Play with the puzzles on the floor of our meeting place area

After reminding them they had five choices to pick from, I asked if everyone understood the instructions. I even asked

this question in Spanish (I often translated my remarks into Spanish for the benefit of my non-English speaking students). Their answers to the question asked in both languages was a positive one. Meeting time was adjourned.

The children got up, started leaving the meeting place area, and within a few minutes there was total chaos in the room. They were running around the room like an untamed herd of cattle, picking up puzzles and leaving the pieces scattered all over the place. They were fighting over the magazines, they crowded into the housecorner, and made a mess of the painting area. I didn't know which way to turn, or what to say, or how to go about bringing order back into the classroom. I felt like a fool in front of the para-professional, and prayed my supervisor would not come into my room just then. I found myself running around the room after the children and reassuring myself that things would get better in a little while. By the time clean-up time arrived, room 208 looked as if a cyclone had blown in through the windows. I was almost in a state of shock. Clean-up time was another catastrophe. The children did not know how to clean up! Most of them just made a bigger mess. I decided to call meeting time again and announced we were going to the bathroom and downstairs for playtime. I was so upset that all I wanted to do was leave room 208 and close the door behind me.

The afternoon was no better. Nito had a tantrum when I did not let him have the book I had in my hands. I explained that I could not let him have the book because I was going to read from it to the children, but that he could look at it after storytime was over. The explanation didn't help. Marie was crying, and the rest of the class, with the exception of one boy, could not have cared less about hearing a story. I was on the verge of tears. How I dread having to go in tomorrow!

Tuesday: Today was worse than yesterday. I wonder if the children are testing me. We had meeting time (the only orderly part of my day) and I again explained what it was that they were going to do. I searched their faces during this time to see whether or not I was getting through to them. I must have seen what was apparently not there for the children acted like lunatics during the workperiod. I was frantic. Nito was running around like a firetruck. Children were in the house-corner fighting over the utensils and the roles they wanted to play. The puzzles were all over the floor again. The afternoon was a continuation of the morning. I managed to hold back the tears until I got home. I am so disgusted with the class, myself, and just about everything that has to do with school. These children don't want to listen or learn anything. I'll never get through to them.

I called Selma Knobler tonight and declared total failure on my part. She disagreed and actually sounded optimistic about my plans for class 1-6. Something inside me wants very much to believe her, but what has taken place in my class these past two days prevents me from doing so. She said she could well imagine what went on, but for me to cheer up because everything will eventually fall into place. Mrs. Knobler can't possibly imagine what has been going on because I'm an eye witness to it all and even I can't believe it! Just the same, it was refreshing speaking with her. She gave me a few suggestions about planning my day, asked me to cut down on the number of activities and to be a little more structured with the class as a whole until they get used to me, to each other, and to the new arrangement in the room. She warned me that perhaps things might get a little more hectic before a definite improvement takes place, and that it would take about two months for me to get my program into full swing. Two months! I'll never last two months! If my children fail to do me in first, then my supervisor will. She hasn't said very much to me yet but she comes into the classroom at least once a day. I tremble a little every time she sets foot into room 208, but I try my best to hide this feeling.

Wednesday: I tried Mrs. Knobler's suggestions and limited my activities to painting, cutting and pasting letters, and housecorner. It was a little bit better for me because I did not have to run all over the room as much, but the children are still wild. Most of them can't seem to relate to one another. Sometimes there are tantrums, fighting, and crying all going on at the same time.

When I came in this morning I set up the classroom and showed the para-professional the procedures I wanted the children to learn in the painting corner. I asked her if she would more or less station herself in that part of the room so that she could instruct the children one-by-one as they went there to paint. She agreed. I think this helped a little because I noticed the children had made better use of this area than they had previously.

The best part of today was meeting time. I wish I could extend this beginning part of the day to 3:00 P.M. The worst part of the day was clean-up time. The most hectic part was worktime, and the most discouraging was storytime (which came right after lunch). The children are not accustomed to being read to. They talk, jab each other, get distracted by the smallest thing, or just look bored and in a world all of their own. Yet I am determined to make storytime one of the most

important parts of the day. These children need to be bombarded with stories, filmstrips, and creative writing. Their vocabulary and ability in creative expression is very limited.

Thursday: I gave the class their seventh name and 4th letter today. The response to the reading of names is fairly good. I went over the morning plans very carefully with the class and did the same with the afternoon plans right after storytime. No change. It was just as bad today as it was yesterday. We sewed letters today for the first time and a few children actually managed to sit still and sew for a little while.

Friday: The class wasn't worse today but it certainly wasn't better. Two weeks are already up and I see no significant change. The worst part of the day is clean-up. Perhaps if I make a job chart this part of the day will improve. Imagine, after two weeks, the only thing the children have learned is that we start the morning with a meeting time, and the afternoon with a storytime. They have also learned a song. Perhaps it's unfair of me to expect so much from them at this time when even I am not so sure of how to get to where I want to go with them.

THIRD WEEK:

Monday: I made a job chart and a name chart over the weekend.

I also made a "plans for the day" chart. The emphasis today was on learning to put your name up upon entering the room in the morning and removing it to replace it in the pocket at the end of the day. I also put up the day's activities on the "plans for the day" chart. This was somewhat helpful because whenever I found a child doing something he wasn't supposed to be doing, I would take him to this chart and read the plans for the day again to him. The job chart didn't work out as well. Clean-up time is still quite chaotic. I have a feeling things were not as bad today. I felt a little more confident and in some instances was able to anticipate certain behavior patterns in some of the children. I also get the impression that the class is beginning to learn what is expected from them. But maybe I'm wrong. Maybe it's just that I am getting used to all the turmoil in room 208.

Tuesday: The day was simply horrible today. All I did was yell and scream all day long. As a matter of fact, I even broke down and cried in front of the children. I feel like quitting my job. Perhaps it would be best if I just gave up the notion of having a "Bank Street" type of classroom. I think I'm biting off more than I can chew. It is too difficult for me to reach even some of my goals, be innovative in a school like P.S. 101, and most important of all, provide the children with an exciting, instructive, and creative type of classroom setting. I would very much like to make it possible

for my children to like school, to look forward to coming to school everyday. But I must feel this way myself if I am to accomplish this. As it stands now, I dread going in each day. Working alone, feeling exasperated, and experiencing all this tension is certainly not conducive to good teaching in any kind of a classroom, much less an open classroom. But can I teach in a traditional classroom setting? Would I be happier having to face the whole class at one time all day long? Would I be able to try and encourage each individual child to express his or her individuality in such a room? I doubt it very much.

The closer it gets to the "two months", the more convinced I become of my inadequacies. I have even toyed with the idea of giving up "storytime". These children will never learn how to listen. Yet I know only too well that this is one of the most important parts of their day. Besides, I believe wholeheartedly that children must learn to listen to and appreciate hearing the written word if they are to learn to want to read the written word.

Wednesday: Nito had three tantrums today and Marie fought and cried all day long. The class was not as bad as they were yesterday but they still have a long way to go. Most of them are so dependent. They lack self-direction and the ability

to share and wait their turn. The best part of the day was when I showed them a filmstrip. They responded better to this than to storytime. I suspect this might be the case because so many of them know little or no English at all. This was also the reason why I got a poor response from them when I tried to get them to discuss the filmstrip after they had seen it. Even when I asked questions in Spanish they appeared to be at a loss for words. These children are not accustomed to being asked for their opinions. This is something they must learn to become accustomed to. Just the same, I am going to see to it that they get to view three or four filmstrips a week.

I called Mrs. Knobler up again tonight. It's funny how she sounds more optimistic than I do. She expects things to improve and has faith in my abilities. I wish I knew whether or not she is right about her feelings. I feel so low right now, I find myself expecting nothing but the worst most of the time. Sometimes I wonder if Mrs. Knobler says all the things she says to me out of kindness and sympathy, and not because she really believes them. In either case, I must admit that I always feel a little better after I finish speaking with her.

Thursday: The children can read almost all of their names by now. That is to say, they not only read their own names, but each others name as well. They can also read almost all of the letters I've given them. When I call them to the writing table (I divided them into groups because our writing area accommodates only six children at a time), almost all of them come over to the writing area without too much of a fuss. They seem to want to learn to write. They also come together for meeting without too much difficulty, and the majority of them to remember to put their names up when they come into the class in the morning. They still continue to enjoy the filmstrips, even the ones that show the alphabet, but they seem to hate storytime and clean-up time. They do not seem to be fighting as much in the housecorner and they do not feel so bad now when I redirect a child to another area when the housecorner is too crowded. The children that are giving me the most trouble are the emotionally immature ones. Nito continues to be demanding and bossy with the other children. Chuck continues to hit the others when he thinks no one is looking, and Roberto, whom I would like to nail to the floor, continues to move about the room like a little eel. What I find interesting is the fact that the children do not imitate Marie's demand for attention. What I find distressing is that Nito is slowly but surely becoming the class scapegoat. They seem to blame everything on him.

Friday: Today was a rather hectic day. We made pudding and everyone wanted to work with the para-professional who was supervising this little cooking experience. I finally solved this problem by lining everyone up outside the housecorner and letting the children go in two at a time to stir the pudding. They enjoyed this very much. However, the para-professional has already indicated that she does not like to do this with the children because they become too impatient to wait for instructions. I suggested that we could exchange places; I would supervise our little cooking experience in the housecorner if she would be willing to walk around to the different areas to supervise in some, participate in others, or just observe, depending on what was called for. She did not accept or decline this suggestion; she just acted annoyed.

Today is the end of my three weeks with class 1-6, and the end of the two weeks since I officially started the open classroom setting with them. The children in the class are no longer just "children" to me now. I am beginning to see them as they really are - individuals. I find myself worrying and thinking about their individual problems, their charm, their abilities and their potential. There are times when I find myself identifying with them. I also was born and raised in that very neighborhood. I also was brought up to be seen and not heard. I also was a hell-raiser in school.

2

I also came from a family beset by so many problems that the only expectation they had for me was that I "be good" in school. Yes; I understand the mentality of the parents of my children. The tragedy of it all is that understanding problems is not enough. I must also learn to cope with and handle them if I am to reach these children. I keep reminding myself that they were not born the way they are. Even the best of my children could be so much better if the circumstances under which they were born had been better. By better I do not just mean "more money". By better I mean a different outlook on life, different values, a better chance in life, more emotional support, a healthier kind of love...the kind of love a parent gives a child when that parent has himself experienced some measure of success in life and has had the opportunity to nurture a positive self-image. Poverty, poor health, fear, toil and instability are the burdens that most of the parents of the children in class 1-6 face day in and day out.

FOURTH WEEK

Monday: I arrived at school this morning with a little more enthusiasm. Who knows, perhaps this is the magic week. I set up the classroom and at 8:40 went downstairs to pick up the children. When we got up to our room, I reminded them to put their names up, hang up their coats, and sit in the

meeting area. This they were able to do without too much confusion. Then we discussed the day of the week, the date (a child wrote in the date in the appropriate box, and put up the card that said "Monday"), and we read a few easy sentences from the blackboard. After this we discussed the plans for the day and some children came up to select the cards that had the day's activities written on them. For example, I said, "We will paint today. Who can come up and find the word 'paint'?" Until this morning, I had always selected and placed the cards on the chart as I mentioned the activities of the day. But today I decided to let the children try to find the words themselves. They enjoyed doing this.

We went out this afternoon and bought a rabbit. Vincenti named the rabbit "Snowball". Snowball caused a lot of excitement in the classroom. I thought I had prepared the class enough for this great event, but apparently I didn't. The children were all anxious to touch Snowball but they were deathly afraid of him at the same time. Snowball was the center of attention all afternoon.

All in all, today wasn't too bad, but it wasn't too good either. Things were better than they were during the first week of school, but we still have a long way to go. I say

"we" because I'm learning also. My reading and writing groups are doing quite well, I think. With the exception of a few, all of the children are enthusiastic about these two activities, and at least half of the class is doing well with it. This pleases me very much because their positive response makes it possible for me to feel more confident about the way I'm planning this part of the day. So far, most of the children can read all of the thirteen names I've given them; they can read simple words such as like, look, I, see, can, and they are learning the difference between a letter and a word. Reading and writing is reinforced by way of other activities, such as clay work, (we make letters and words with it), finger painting, (I take their fingers and help them write their names, etc.), pasting and cutting, (I encourage them to cut out letters, make words with them and paste them. I also label the pictures they decide to cut and paste), creative writing, (the children are asked to dictate a story about the pictures they have painted or drawn. I write it for them on experience chart paper with a magic marker). While I'm at it, I also try to reinforce the learning of colors by asking them what color they want their story in. In about two or three weeks I will make a bingo game with letters and one with the words they will have had by then, plus a few picture words from "In The City", the pre-primer I plan to use with them.

Tuesday: Nito and Marie were just exasperating today. If I had but one wish, it would be that both these children could be taken out of class 1-6. I seem to be spending almost half of the time with these two children. Nito continues to have tantrums and Marie continues to cry and be very demanding. I continue to have some problems with the other children, but nothing like what I have to put up with when it comes to Marie and Nito. I am aware of the negative feelings I have for these two children and I feel guilty about them. I do not want to feel this way and yet I can't help it. I am beginning to think and believe that the success or failure of my program will depend in large measure on the absence or presence of these two children in my class. My goodness, does this mean that I have already begun to make scapegoats of Marie and Nito! Am I that desperate?

I still feel that I'm working in some kind of a vacuum. The only time I get some kind of encouragement and consolation is when I run home to call Mrs. Knobler. Her optimism in my abilities and in the final outcome of class 1-6 seems to be just what a doctor would order for me if he could. I also call my district supervisor and she gives me encouragement. My three main problems are Marie, Nito, and my own lack of confidence. With each passing day I seem to discover more and more ideas for different and creative activities for my open

classroom program. My body feels tired, my spirit is drained, but my mind is constantly ticking away with plans for class 1-6. If only I could believe more in myself!

I must admit, however, that as time runs on, I get a clearer picture about the way I'm going to try and accomplish what it is that I want to do. In other words, I am surer of myself now than I was when I first took over the class. But this is not enough. Feeling a little more sure of myself will never do. I must believe. I want desperately to believe that everything will work out, but I just can't.

Wednesday: Today was catastrophic. What few gains I have made these past three and a half weeks seem to have vanished into thin air. I wanted to kill Nito and Marie, I wanted to kill myself, I wanted to hit Chuck and Magarita, and pillory Roberto. As a matter of fact, I experienced a tremendous urge to walk into the principal's office and quit! As I sit here and write about this feeling, I ask myself why I didn't do just that. It seems so strange, I know why I wanted to quit, but I don't know why I didn't.

The children spilled paint all over the floor and ran around the room hitting each other. They were ugly and I'm a big flop. If things don't get better by the end of this year, I

will quit my job and finish the rest of the school year by doing day-to-day sub-ing. Why should I have to be the one to prove something at P.S. 101? Why should I knock myself out by putting so many extra hours into my thankless job?

Nito has me to the point where I dread going down and seeing him in the morning. It kills me to greet him each morning with a smile and to say to him, "Good morning, Nito. How nice to see you today." The reason I say this every morning is because I'm foolish enough to wish and hope that perhaps a nice greeting from me will motivate him to try to behave a little better than he usually does. Marie was also impossible. She cried a great deal, tried kicking me (I felt like kicking her back), refused to follow directions, and from time to time, clung to me and uttered cries that sounded as if they came more from a wounded animal than from a little girl. This behavior makes me feel guilty because it makes me so aware of my inability to reach her, to comfort her. I can always appease her when I have reached the point of no return with her but I know that this is not the wisest thing to do with Marie. This is what everyone else does and she has learned to manipulate people because of it. What Marie needs most is to feel loved and accepted, and not to be pitied. Rejection is the only thing this child has known since the time of her birth six years ago. Her mother was unable to cope with the

responsibility of caring for her child so she shipped Marie to Puerto Rico. There Marie lived with her grandmother, who in turn found it difficult to handle a growing child, so she shipped Marie back to New York. Shortly thereafter Marie's mother suffered a breakdown so the child was placed in a shelter for children. The shelter then placed Marie in a foster home, but after a few months she was returned to the shelter because the "foster mother" found Marie too difficult to handle. Marie started her schooling while she was in the shelter, but she attended her kindergarten class for just a few short weeks because her teacher could not cope with her either. Now she is in class 1-6 and her social worker is overjoyed over the fact that Marie is in an open classroom. Marie does need freedom to express herself, to find herself, to work or function on her own emotional and intellectual level, but she also needs to learn that imposed limits do not necessarily mean people are against her. She needs to learn how to function, handle freedom, and relate to adults and peers within the limits that have been set. This kind of learning takes a lot of time and patience and I regret to say that there are times when I just do not have the patience and so I give in to the child just to make things a little easier for me. I try to give her as much affection as I possibly can and I enjoy doing it because I know how much this means to her. What I find difficult is helping Marie to

learn to observe the rules of the class. For example, she cannot accept the fact that she is not allowed to take toys and materials from other children, and that she cannot go into the housecorner when there are too many children playing in it. I do not compel her to write because I am well aware of the fact that she lacks the ability to exert the kind of concentration this particular activity requires, but I cannot permit her to leave the room whenever she wishes. I will permit her to do something else when I am having meeting with the rest of the class, but I cannot allow her to kick the other children just because she does not want the meeting to be taking place.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs states that the need to feel safe and loved must first be gratified before a person can begin to work on his need for esteem and self-actualization.

During my meeting with Marie's social worker, I stated this and said that right now I am not concerned with Marie's learning how to read and write. I said that what I hoped to do was to help Marie learn how to accept herself and feel accepted by others, and to learn to trust her environment. The social worker agreed that right now this was of the utmost importance.

Thursday: I am so exhausted when I get home from work. It seems as if there is never an end to all the planning, fixing, and arranging. I go into work between 7:30 and 7:45 each morning, I work during my lunch hour, I work with individual children during my preparation periods, and I stay working in my classroom till almost 4:30 every day, after the children have left. There are times when I'm so drained and disgusted at the end of the day that I do not wait to come home to express my frustration in the form of tears. Instead I just put my head down on my desk at 3:00 P.M. and let the tears roll right out. My friend and colleague, Ann Whelan, has seen me a few times while I'm in one of these states and she has tried to comfort me. Sometimes she will say, "What is wrong with you is that you want to do ten million things and you only have time to do three million." Sometimes I will ask her if she thinks I'm a good teacher. I want so much to be good in the classroom, to make each day an exciting day for the children, to give them a love for learning, to help fill some of the gaps that exist in their little lives because of the kind of homes many of them come from. I want to prove to the administrators that children can function better in the classroom when they are given freedom and the opportunity to make a choice, to be independent, and self-directed, and to blossom and not just "grow"! I'm trying so hard and I seem to be getting nowhere. Much of what I have

learned so far I've learned at the expense of so much trial and error.

I put in a lot of hours at school, but that is not all there is to my work. I spent Saturdays and Sundays looking for books in the library, writing lesson plans, collecting junk from neighborhood stores, making functional charts, planning for individual children like Nito and Marie and worrying about my program. As far as my lesson plans are concerned, I have been lucky because my supervisor has accepted them. In some schools teachers have to write down goals, objectives, and methods of motivation for almost every lesson they present to the class. I can't do this with my plans because I try to always connect the various activities. I'm always expecting some negative comment about my plans but, so far so good. She hasn't bothered me at all and she says very little to me about the way I am running the class. She still comes in at least once a day but now I'm used to it. She once complained to the para-professional that I ignored her when she was in the room. When I approached her with this accusation, I explained that I was not trying to be rude but that I thought she came into the classroom to observe and not necessarily to talk to me. To be quite honest, half the time I never even know when she is in the room because I'm usually involved with a child or with a small group. Since then, however, I have

tried to make it a point to notice when she is in the room and when I see her I will ask her if she wishes to speak with me. Her answer is usually, "No".

Friday: I was absolutely furious today. The principal called me into his office to complain about my staying late in the classroom after the children have left. The custodian has informed him that he will not be responsible for my safety. I told the principal that I am also worried about my safety but that I found it almost impossible to leave at 3:00 P.M. with the kind of program I was running. His answer was that he could not understand how all the other teachers managed to get all of their work done and still leave at three in the afternoon. After this little talk, he gave me strict orders to leave no later than 3:30 P.M. I was almost in tears when I walked out of that office. Not only is there no one I can turn to for help in that school, but the amount of extra effort and work I put into my work in the classroom must be influenced by the dictates of the custodian. I really don't know if this whole idea of mine is worth the effort! I'm so disgusted.

FIFTH WEEK;

Monday: I spent a great deal of time thinking about class 1-6 this past weekend. I compared the children's classroom

response and behavior now to the way it was when I first took over the class. In spite of my feelings of frustration and defeat, I had to admit that some progress has been made. The class now knows we start the day with meeting time; they know when to look forward to playtime downstairs; they know we have storytime after lunch; most of them do their required writing without my having to get after them; the whole class has accepted the fact that they do not have assigned seats and have learned to go to the different areas of the room, depending on the task or activity he or she is going to do. Also, they respond rather well to the various activities I plan for them. For example, they enjoy seeing filmstrips, working with clay, sewing, making collages, painting, playing in the housecorner, working with the puzzles I have made for them, playing word games, dictating stories, finger painting, making butter, pudding and peanut butter, doing box sculptures, etc. The children can read each others names now and pretty soon, most of them will be able to read the little reader I am planning to make for each of them. Thinking about class 1-6 from such an objective and positive point of view, I returned to class today, October 26, full of hope, energy, and a little self-confidence.

I am glad I came to work this morning feeling the way I did, because if I had any idea of what was in store for me, I would

have stayed in bed all day. By 9:30 I had a sneaking suspicion that what I had really done this past weekend was to fantasize unrealistically about class 1-6. The children were absolutely ghastly! Nito was absent, Marie did not start the day off with her usual crying spell, but the rest of the class was unbelievable. Catherine was unusually defiant and Chuck and Magarita were in a very aggressive mood. They were hitting the other children left and right. Some children were running around the room more than usual; materials I had spent so much time preparing were destroyed or left scattered all over the room; one child had a bowel movement in his pants, and I got yelled at by my supervisor because I put up a story a child had dictated to me on a piece of paper I had torn along the fold instead of cutting with a pair of scissors. Aside from these unusual events, I had a normally hectic day. Will there be no end to the madness that seems to have made itself my working companion? There is a saying that it always rains before the sun shines. If things keep up like this, I'm afraid I'll drown before a small ray of sunlight shines through the window in room 208.

Tuesday: Nito came back today big as life, and accompanied by his tantrums. For some bizarre reason, I did not wince when I saw him. I guess it's because I found out yesterday that things can still go bad in the classroom even if he is

not there. Class 1-6 was not the hell it was yesterday, but neither was it the heaven I would have liked it to be. It was somewhere in purgatory. I feel somewhat better today because I started three children on "rod work". I picked three of the more mature and alert children in the class and the response was good. They seemed to enjoy working the rods. I also arranged a math area in the room and instructed these children to work there whenever they did their rod work.

Wednesday: I introduced two more children to rod work today and helped the three I started off yesterday. The response from these five was good and they looked beautiful as they worked happily in the math area. Most of the other children are expressing interest in the rod work. We have been playing with the rods for quite some time now, comparing sizes, building with them, and learning their colors, but it wasn't until yesterday that I started rod work in the official sense of the term.

I think today was a pretty good day. I encountered only the usual traumatic experiences and there were a few minutes when the class actually looked rather good. By this I mean that meeting time got off to a good start, Nito only had two tantrums, Marie functioned adequately, Chuck and Magarita were not fighting and hitting as much, Catherine actually looked

happier, the writing was finished by everyone (except Marie and Nito) and storytime went off rather well. Again, the worst part of the day was clean-up. I'm exhausted but I feel rather good. Who knows, perhaps things are taking a turn for the better.

Thursday: I think there has been some improvement, but I'm not really certain. The children are finally beginning to act as if they know what to expect most of the time. But there are other times when they act as if they are in some kind of classroom limbo. This past Monday was terrible, but their behavior on Tuesday showed promise. Wednesday (yesterday) also was promising, but I was discouraged again today. Many of the children have learned to go from one activity to another quite smoothly, but there are still too many that have difficulty making this transition; they will start something and then decide that what they have started is not what they want to do at all. This means that I must stop what I'm doing, go over to the child and try to convince him to finish what he has started. If I do not succeed, I must try to get him to replace whatever it is he has lost interest in. This, of course, means that whatever it is that I had been doing or working on with an individual child or a small group must be interrupted. One or two, perhaps maybe three interruptions of this kind can be easily tolerated, but continuous inter-

ruption leads to nothing less than a feeling of exasperation on my part, as well as on the part of those children I happen to be working with. These annoyances are not uncommon in a classroom. I encountered them many times before while working in the Pre-Kindergarten program. However, in Pre-Kindergarten I did not have the pressure of having to teach reading, writing, phonics, and math. I did not have to worry about preparing the children for state-wide achievement tests. By the end of the day I felt tired and defeated.

Everyone in the school is talking about the open classroom in room 208. This makes me feel even more anxious because of my determination not to fail. I cannot fail, not if I want to convince some of the other first grade teachers of the values of such a classroom. But this is already my fifth week with the class, and my class is not functioning smoothly. Yes, I have made some small gains but not enough to make it all seem worthwhile, not enough to make me feel optimistic.

I still dread going down and seeing Nito in the morning. Marie is still impossible. Magarita is not the least bit interested in what's going on, Chuck still goes around using the other children as punching bags, and Catherine's independence continues to make me feel insecure about my ability to handle, in a constructive, well thought-out, mature way, the problems

and frictions that arise between children. I say this because she often makes me feel as if she is challenging and testing me only to prove to everyone else and to me that she will be the ultimate victor. She probably will be!

Friday: I came home tonight and examined my goals for class 1-6. I listed them as follows:

1. To help children learn how to be independent
2. To help children learn how to handle freedom
3. To help children learn how to be cooperative
4. To help children learn how to make a choice without constantly seeking the approval of an adult.
5. To make learning experiences as rewarding and exciting as possible, thus making the classroom a place children look forward to everyday. A place that encourages curiosity, creativity and verbal expression.

After having done this, I asked myself whether or not I am being too demanding in expecting to accomplish this in five weeks. After all, this is my first year teaching first grade -- and an open classroom at that! Also, am I being unfair to the children? As I mentioned in the beginning, most of my children come from homes that expect them to be seen and not heard, to be obedient and conforming to the ways of the adult world. They do not come from homes that encourage creativity, curiosity, independence, and good, healthy verbal expression. I asked myself if the all too frequent chaotic outbursts in

room 208 are the result of childhood energy and curiosity that is, in many cases, expressing itself for the first time? If I were more experienced in this kind of classroom setup, would I be able to see some good in that which now appears to be nothing more than "a mess" to me? Am I being foolish in thinking that my goals can be achieved even in one short school year?

I do not have all of the answers to these questions. As a matter of fact, I don't even know if the few answers I do have are correct. All I know is that all of this questioning has made me become so crucially aware of the fact that I must not give up. The more time passes on, the more committed I feel to the children. It is for them that I must strive for some measure of success, and not for the school administrators, other first grade teachers, or for my own ego.

SIXTH WEEK:

Monday: Today was a better day than usual. The children saw a filmstrip, played a word game, listened to a story, finished their writing, went down to play ball and jump rope in the first grade yard, and many of the children finger painted for the first time in their lives. We also had tantrums, a bit of fighting, pieces of puzzles missing due to carelessness, pencils on the floor instead of in the pencil can, a jar of

paint dropped on the floor in the art area, some tears to dry up, and an on-the-spot report that had to be made for the front office.

Tuesday: I came home and read what I wrote about my goals last Friday. The day left a lot to be desired and I needed a booster shot to help me hold onto my new optimistic determination. It isn't so bad when I can honestly say that the worst part of my day has been clean-up. But when I have difficulty in pinpointing the worst part of the day because too many segments of the class time were equally as bad, then I need either to close my mind completely to class 1-6 or find something or someone to inspire me all over again. I'd like to confess that neither of the two alternatives is easy to do.

Wednesday: It was great today! It's the best day I've had. As is customary, we started the day with meeting time. After meeting, six children went to the writing table, six children went to the math area, two started painting, two or three ended up in the library corner, three started working with clay, a few started coloring, and the rest got very much involved in making things (chairs, benches, robots, etc.) with a building game I provided. Meeting ended around 9:15 or 9:20,

at this time I spent ten or fifteen minutes going around the room getting everyone settled into an activity, then I went to the writing area and supervised the writing while the para-professional took over the math area. By 10:35 everyone had done the required writing for the day and I still had time to write two stories for some children, and go around the room commenting on and observing whatever it was the children were doing. By 11:00 we were downstairs playing, and by 11:20 the class was going into the cafeteria for lunch. The morning was almost magnificent. I must confess that Nito was absent and so was Chuck. Marie wasn't too bad, and Catherine and Magarita were both in a very reasonable mood.

The afternoon was also good but not like this morning. At 12:10 I picked up the class from lunch, by 12:20 we were settled in the meeting area for storytime, by 12:40 I was instructing the class on the agenda for the afternoon, by 12:50 we broke up and got started in various activities. During the afternoon I worked with four children who need extra help, I played a word game with some others, and wrote three more stories that were dictated to me. By 1:45 we started clean-up and by 2:00 I had the class ready for the preparation teacher who comes in to relieve me. She showed the class two filmstrips and played "hot potato" with them. During this time, I introduced two more children to rod work.

What made this day such a good one? I keep trying to find a clue, something I can hold onto, so that I will be able to make the utmost use of it. But I can't find a thing. I planned for today just as I plan for any other day. What is it that made today so very different from yesterday? It couldn't have been enthusiasm because I did not have much of that after what went on in that classroom yesterday. Can it be that the children are reaching the turning point? Can it be that things have been so bad that they can now only get better? Whatever it is, I just hope it keeps up. I am so very grateful for today.

Friday: The best day I've had this week is still Wednesday. The worst day was Tuesday. Monday, yesterday, and today were good but not what I would call very good. All in all, it was a very good week. I think it is the first week in which I didn't feel like quitting. It was a good week because I was able to introduce two new art activities to the children, get five more children into rod work, and because I was able to feel somewhat more confident. Most important of all, it was a good week because of the responses I received from the children. I am beginning to feel more hopeful.

SEVENTH WEEK

Monday: It wasn't until this morning, after I stepped out of

the room and observed class 1-6 through the door, that I realized just how much has been achieved in six short weeks. The children didn't even realize I was not in the room! Most of them were involved in an activity. Some were writing their assigned sheets in the writing area, some were doing their rod work, two were painting, three children were on the floor in the meeting area taking apart a broken portable radio, one girl was working with one of the functional charts I put up on the bulletin board, three boys were chatting with one another while working with clay in the art area, two girls were looking at the pictures in the books I had placed on the science table. They seemed to be comparing the pictures of sea shells with the actual sea shells that were on display on that table. I felt so good inside. Yes, I felt good inside, but so very tired!

Tuesday: Everyday the children have a writing sheet to work with. These writing sheets contain letters, words, simple sentences, and numbers. The children trace over the dotted material and/or copy it, it all depends on what the child is able to do. After a child is through with writing, he or she reads the page to the para-professional working with me or to me. Realizing how anxious or timid children can become when they are first learning to read, I make it a point to do

my best to put the child at ease. I put my arm around the child, try to find something to compliment him on ("I like the way you wrote the A," or "I notice how hard you tried to write on the line," etc.), or I let the child sit on my lap or rest against me. Well, this morning, while reading with a child, my supervisor walked into the room and noticed a child sitting on my lap while reading his sheet to me. She came up and asked me why the child was on my lap. I could tell by the look on her face that she disapproved. My reply to her was, "I do this in order to make them feel more at ease". After she left the classroom, I continued reading with the children but tried to keep them off me whenever one of them tried to get very close. I felt as if I had just jilted the children to mollify the assistant principal. It was a bad feeling of guilt but I rationalized my guilt by telling myself that feeling guilty was much better than antagonizing the assistant principal. I had enough pressures and frustrations to cope with, without having to get on her black list.

Wednesday: Up to now, one of my main goals has been to get the class habituated to our relatively unstructured situation. It was very rough at the beginning, but I do believe they have begun to come around. They know how to go from one activity to another without too much of a fuss. Most of them do

the required work in the reading and math area without anyone having to direct them (we station ourselves there but only to help them and to observe their writing habits). They are responding to the library corner (I have noticed that more and more children are going into that area to look at books). Clean-up time is still quite hectic, but I am hopeful that even this part of the day will eventually become a better one.

What I have to focus on eventually is the curriculum itself. I know the children will eventually tire of clay, finger painting, collage, bingo, concentration, sewing, etc. I would love to have an exciting and inviting math area set up. I feel the same way about the science and language arts area, but equipment is rather sparse. I have spent practically every weekend making things for the classroom since I took over the class. I do not relish the thought of having to spend the rest or even most of my weekends from now to June the same way. A large part of the curriculum in an open classroom should be based on the interests and excitement of the children. If I were working in a progressive private school, I would ignore the "word list" my children are supposed to be able to read by the end of the year. If I were in such a school, I would really try to build at least 80 or 85% of the academic learnings on the interest of the children.

But the reality of the public school setting and expectations is such that I am going to have to make many compromises.

Thursday: The assistant principal who supervises kindergarten and first grade complained today to the para-professional who works with me. Her complaint was that I never seem to acknowledge her presence when she enters our room. This is quite true. I am usually so involved with the children I happen to be working with that I seldom notice anyone who enters the room. This is especially true if I happen to be in the writing area which is situated in a corner of the room that is diagonally across from the door and which is partitioned off by a portable blackboard. The para-professional became annoyed, complaining that she was not the "complaint department" in room 208, and said she couldn't understand why the assistant principal complained to her about me instead of telling me herself. I also became somewhat annoyed. After all, couldn't my assistant principal see for herself how busy I am with whatever child or group of children I happen to be working with? As soon as I had a chance, I wrote a note to the assistant principal and explained no rudeness was intended by my part. I said that I seldom notice people who enter the room during certain periods of the day and that when I do notice a visitor, I take it for granted that they are there to observe the class. I asked her, in order to avoid misunder-

standing, to please come up to me and tap me on the shoulder if she desires to speak with me.

As I mentioned earlier, I was (and still am) terrified of the assistant principal and have done my best to keep out of her path. However, on several occasions, when I have made some kind of an effort to speak or discuss what is going on in my open classroom, she has cut me short by saying, "I don't care how my children learn, as long as they learn". After hearing this remark from her a couple of times I dropped all efforts to communicate with her. In a way I have been lucky. At the very beginning I thought she would make my life in school utterly miserable by complaining about the children talking and walking around the room. She hasn't done this and I'm grateful. During the first few weeks, when it was really rough going and I was up in arms, I made a mental "sign of the cross" whenever she walked in and I happened to look up and see her. I only wish it were possible for me to go to her when I'm in doubt, confused, and overwhelmed at the job. It would be comforting to know there is at least one person I could turn to for guidance in that school. I wish P.S. 101 had a Pearl Zietz, a Selma Knobler, a Barbara McAllister, or an Estelle Meadoff.

Friday: Storytime, which is right after lunch, has been improving. About half of the class listens to the story with what appears to be "interest". I translate the story into Spanish whenever I think it is necessary. I often ask the children what kind of stories they would prefer to listen to, but most of them cannot answer this question because they haven't heard that many stories to be able to express a preference. Their inability to express an idea or a choice makes me so aware of the fact that they need to speak more to each other and to me and the para-professional. I have tried several times to encourage conversation during meeting time, but I seem to lose control after awhile because all the children want to speak at one time. I end up losing my patience because I seldom understand what it is the children are talking about anyway. The whole thing is ridiculous and absurd. I am so aware of their need to talk, to be given the opportunity to learn how to relate verbally to their peers and adults. Yet I get impatient when some of them get so excited that they try to speak to each other at the same time. Perhaps I wouldn't get so impatient if I did not feel so apprehensive and edgy so much of the time. I try to make this up to them by speaking a great deal to them on a one-to-one basis. Spanish seems to really get their complete attention and interest, and I by no means discourage them from speaking Spanish in the classroom. As a matter of fact, I often find

myself correcting their Spanish and explaining to them how beautiful the Spanish language is when it is spoken correctly. I sometimes wonder if all this confuses them. My feeling about hearing Spanish spoken in the classroom--in spite of the fact that I do everything to encourage English--is certainly not a negative one. On the other hand, the principal and assistant principal always go around saying "We speak English in school, not Spanish". I wonder if these two different attitudes have an effect on the children.

EIGHTH WEEK:

Monday: Very few children came in today. With the attendance down to 19 I had a very enjoyable day. Nito was absent and I heard from someone who knows his sister that he may be going to Puerto Rico. I'm ashamed to admit that I was overjoyed with the news. As usual, I worked straight through the whole day, from 7:40 until 4:30, but I feel good about myself, my class, and my work. We had such a full, exciting day. The children participated in the full gamut of activities. They went home with such happy little faces! I came home wishing, as usual, that I could do more, but knowing somewhere deep inside of me sometimes it can be just as bad to give children too much as not giving them enough. Children need to have time to master an activity, to be able to do it over and over again in order to discover different approaches to a given

task or to understand, learn and incorporate whatever learning or information there is to be gotten from an activity or game.

Tuesday: I know that children need to experiment with paint, to mix colors, to feel free of the idea that they must come up with a work of art whenever they go to the easel. Yet I find myself wishing the children would hurry up and start producing lovely paintings. The reason I feel this way is because I want to prove to the para-professional working with me that her attitude toward painting is not a constructive one. She just sees the mess that results in the painting corner. I do not want to have to worry about what the para-professional feels. After all, I have enough to worry about. But I can't help myself. Besides, I have always felt that many more positive things can happen in a classroom when there is a feeling of enthusiasm on the part of the adults in the room. I like the para-professional I work with. She is really a very nice person. I also understand the fact that it may be unreasonable on my part to expect her to see the value of everything that goes on in the classroom in view of the fact that she hasn't had the training. This is why I attempt to convey to her informally the educational value of our on-going activities.

As a matter of fact, I am thinking about finding out whether or not she can visit Bank Street with me. Perhaps if she saw all the things teachers and assistants do there, she would not feel as if she is being asked to work above and beyond the call of duty. I suspect that this feeling runs through her mind quite often, and I can certainly understand why. Most para-professionals have very specified, limited duties in their classroom. They often sit in the back of the room because there just isn't that much for them to do in a very traditional classroom.

Wednesday: Reading and writing has been going on simultaneously in our room. The children, however, did not start out writing what they were learning to read. As I mentioned earlier, the children first learned to read their names and then simple picture words. In writing, however, they started out by learning the names of the letters in their names and how to write those letters. I suppose one can say that this method is rather eclectic for it involves a combination of the look and say method, the phonetic method, and the alphabetic method. As a prelude to this approach to reading and writing, I have been showering the children with the "spoken" word. Most of the children do not have a good command of the English language, a large percentage of them don't even have an adequate command of the very language the principal and assistant principal are

always requesting them not to speak. It is for this reason that I find it important to read to them everyday, to just sit and talk with them, and to show them so many filmstrips. A lot of creative writing is also encouraged. Some children are already able to copy captions correctly. Other children dictate little stories which I write with a magic marker and hang up.

Thursday: Today was the first rough day this week. The children were in an aggressive mood and quite noisy. I got furious with them because they were so mean to each other. If they learn nothing else, I would like that these children learn to cooperate and help one another, be kind to each other, to allow their little hearts to grow with warmth and love for all things that live in their world. I know that their lives are afflicted and deprived. Some experience violence even in their own homes, others are neglected, some have never known what it's like to hear words of approval or encouragement. It is for these very reasons that I would like them to become tender, feeling children. Somehow I seem to think that if they do become compassionate and caring, the cruel realities of life that await them will not kill their spirits completely. I'm aware of the fact that children experience anger and frustration, and that these feelings need to be expressed.

What upsets me is when they become mean to each other, often displacing their feelings of hostility onto an innocent peer.

Friday: I am happy to say that in addition to the "crazy mixed-up" days we experience in room 208, we also are beginning to have our days of laughter. An example of what I mean was exemplified today. I take my class out twice a day to the bathroom, once after our morning worktime, and once in the afternoon after storytime. For the past two weeks, just before I take the children out to the bathroom, I inform them that we are going to the bathroom to urinate and/or have a bowel movement. I have been using these terms with them in an effort to get them out of the habit of saying "pee-pee" and "kakie". Today I decided it was time to ask them if they know what it is that we do when we go to the bathroom. Several hands went up but there was one little girl who looked as if her world would come to an end if she did not get the chance to show all of us just how well she had incorporated her newly acquired knowledge. When I asked her to tell us the answer, she said, "We go to the bathroom to germinate". I felt her charming answer would have amused Art Linkletter himself.

I often find myself looking at the children and wondering what they will be like come next April or May. I am really expecting them to grow a great deal in many ways. The reason

I feel this way is that even now I marvel at the change that has taken place in them since we started out. I wonder if the candy I am always giving them as a form of reward has had such an impact on them. Candy is not the only form of reward they receive. I also praise them a great deal and am constantly telling them how smart they really are. But I must admit that candy really motivates them. We still have a long way to go but I can honestly say that I feel the worst is over. Routines have been established and some amount of work has been accomplished. What I need most from now on is not someone I can turn to, but patience.

DECEMBER

Class 1-6 is doing well. The children are doing beautifully. They get their work done with a minimum of problems, they relate rather well with each other, they get involved in a lot of creative activities, and I am delighted to note, they look quite happy. The only part of the day that is still exasperating is clean-up time. I have just about given up in this area, but I must admit that I do not feel too bad about it. After all, one cannot have everything in life.

One of the most significant changes I see occurring is the sense of responsibility the children are beginning to develop.

They know what must get done each day in class and most of them do it without my having to stand over them like a warden. I'm just thrilled with class 1-6.

My so-called "problem" children have changed somewhat. (It's either that or the fact that I am used to them by now. I don't know which.) Chuck still hits and tries to be sneaky about it but not as much as before. Marie continues to cling to me and cry with the least provocation but I do believe I'm learning to tolerate and handle her a bit better. Catherine still defies me on everything whenever she happens to get up on the wrong side of the bed, but I don't mind as much because her brightness and creativity are sources of inspiration for me. And lastly, Nito was discharged.

Room 208 looks a lot nicer than it did when I took over at the end of last September. I was fortunate to be able to get two room dividers and two bookcases and I have used these four pieces of furniture, as well as my desk, to form areas in the room. I have also livened up the room by displaying the children's art work and stories all around the room. I do not display the "best" math work or "best" penmanship papers as is so commonly done in the traditional classroom. All children, no matter how capable or incapable they may be, enjoy seeing their work displayed. I feel it is ego-damaging

to the slow child who is struggling, never to see his work put up because he is unable to produce work that merits a 90 or 100%. By the same token I never grade their work. I do not feel that I have to. By now I know who has problems in the given areas of the curriculum.

I am also happy about the improved lines of communication between the assistant principal and me, I do not feel as apprehensive about her as I did when I first started out. Also, I suspect that her feelings about my abilities as a teacher and about me as a person have taken a turn for the better.

One of the disappointments I have had was being frightened into switching the children from their work with cuisenaire rods to the traditional method of learning addition and subtraction. I felt compelled to make the change after the principal told me the children were going to be tested to see whether or not they were learning in the open classroom. The children were never tested and I regretted having made the change. I felt the children would have had a greater degree of understanding of the concepts "more than" and "less than" had they been permitted to work with the rods the whole year.

The Christmas holiday will be here soon. I wonder how the children will carry on in class after their vacation. I'm

hoping they will be able to pick up where they left off and that everything will continue as it has been. I suppose it makes no sense to worry about this now. Time will eventually make everything come to pass.

FEBRUARY

I am pleased with the way things are going. When we returned from our vacation, all of us needed only a couple of days to fall back into the swing of things. The children are really great. I sometimes wonder if Nito's discharge last December was a factor in the way everything finally fell into place. I must admit that I'm glad I'm wondering about this now instead of having him in the class and knowing for sure.

I regret to say, however, that my working relationship with the para-professional has been slowly but surely taking a turn for the worse. She has begun to complain about the way I run things in the class. For example, she complains about having to instruct the children in a particular art activity in small groups. She told me she feels more comfortable instructing the whole class at once, while every child is in his or her seat. She says she finds it annoying to have to repeat the lesson or demonstration with each group. I reminded her that the method of instruction she prefers is one

that is practiced in the traditional classroom setup which we do not have. I pointed out, as nicely as I could, that young children do not get as much out of a lesson or demonstration when they are sitting six or seven to fifteen feet away from the person who is giving the lesson. I also mentioned to her that the area we have for the kind of activity she was helping the children with does not provide room for the entire class. I explained again, as I had been doing from the very beginning of the school year, the values of small group and individual instruction, pointing out that even on a college level, better teaching and greater rapport between students and teacher takes place when class size is small. I also mentioned that one of the reasons private schools such as Bank Street School are able to be so effective in teaching children is because of their emphasis on small group and individualized instruction. Her answer to all of this was, "This is not a private school". I felt so exasperated about her attitude. I had hoped that by this time I would have had some measure of success in converting her to the open classroom philosophy and its method of instruction. I feel that I am failing her in some way and this depresses me because I sincerely like this lady as a person. But, I dislike having to get annoyed over her negative attitude. Sometimes I wonder if she feels intimidated by the responsibility that is required of her in the kind of classroom setting we have.

She is accustomed to the traditional classroom, which does not make the kind of demands an open classroom does. Mrs. Granger herself has often told me that there were many days when she fell asleep in the back of the room because there was nothing for her to do in the traditional classroom.

MARCH 12

Two of my girls came up to me today, arm-in-arm, and said, "Miss Montalvo, we like to come to school." They looked happy and were grinning. When I asked why they felt this way, they replied that it was because they considered it fun to do all the activities that take place in class. I felt so touched by their enthusiasm and smiling faces that I found myself feeling very grateful to them and to the class as a whole. I was grateful to them for appreciating my effort and long hours on the job. I think any teacher who is truly involved with her students and who is really concerned about the kind of experiences her class is getting, will admit that one of her greatest sources of satisfaction is the response she gets from her children. My children do not realize it, but they keep me going, they inspire me. Their positive response serves as a reinforcement for me and motivates me to even greater interest and effort in the classroom. All of this provides a rising level of mutually rewarding experiences which benefits all concerned.

APRIL 7

Chuck started hitting again. When I went down to pick up the children this morning, two girls were crying. Several children came up to me to give me the gruesome details of the events leading up to the "hitting" incident. I immediately assumed an air of seriousness and announced that this matter was too important to discuss downstairs. I asked them to save their information until we could discuss the matter during meeting time. We went up to our room and the children and I sat down for meeting.

I must admit that I was somewhat angry and the children sensed this. Upon further questioning, it seemed that all fingers pointed towards Chuck. I asked the class, "What should we do? How can we best handle Chuck?" Four or five children said we should give him one more chance. Roberto said we should give him two more chances. A couple of other children said I should "whip" him. Then I asked, "What should we do if Chuck hits children again?" One boy answered that I should write a letter to his mother. Someone else said, "Put him in a class with a mean teacher". Poor Chuck, he looked like a helpless defendant at the mercy of the jury. He seemed so helpless, so at a loss to explain or understand the reasons for his aggressive behavior. I sympathized with him

because I know only too well how it feels to want to strike out at someone when I'm angry and feeling frustrated. But unlike poor Chuck, I have the strength or self-control to contain my impulses.

APRIL 19

Today was the first day back from our Easter vacation. Upon entering room 208 this morning, I discovered the floors had been washed and polished during the holidays and that all of the furniture had been pushed to one area of the room -- the meeting area. I saw my well thought out plans for the day flying out the window in a flash. I became a bit frantic and experienced a slight panic taking charge of me. The first thing I did was to remove the furniture from the meeting area and set up the library corner in the same place it was before. All I kept thinking about as I pushed and pulled furniture around the room was the effect this confusion would have on the children. At 8:38 I went down to get the children. When we reached our classroom, I informed them of what had happened to the room while we were away and the confusion that existed as a result of this.

The children came in, hung up their coats and slowly but surely gathered in the meeting place. The first thing we did

was to talk about our vacation. Marie, as usual, expressed wishful thinking. She spoke about all the wonderful things she had done with her family. A few of the other children spoke incoherently about the catastrophes that had taken place in that one week of their vacation. By the time the talking session was over, we had had descriptions of two fractured toes, one sprained ankle, three knocked out teeth, and two spankings. I tried to continue the conversation in order to delay the start of our workperiod. However, the children started to get fidgety and expressed a desire to do math work, reading, writing, painting, and the other tasks. I had no choice but to let them go, but not without crossing my fingers and holding my breath in view of the fact that the room had not yet been completely rearranged. By this time, Mrs. Granger had been able to set up the painting area.

This first morning after our Easter vacation was one of the best mornings we have ever had. Some children asked for some writing, and some did their math work. Danny read to two other children in the library corner, and practically half the class had a chance to paint. Marie did twenty problems in her math book! This little girl, who had an attention span of about two seconds last October and November, and a five minute attention span the following December and January, actually sat down and worked out problems in addition for al-

most one hour! I couldn't believe my eyes! The class seemed so happy and contented. They worked so well and moved about the room so smoothly. By 10:00 A. M. my panicky feeling had disappeared. The afternoon went equally as well. But as usual, I had some difficulty bringing the class up after lunch. This is an especially difficult time for them because when they finish eating in the lunchroom, they are taken into the auditorium and are expected to sit there quietly until I go down to pick them up. This is a period of the day that is usually quite hectic and rather trying for the para-professionals, school aides, and teachers in charge. The children, who are restless from being in the classroom all morning, find it difficult to sit still and quietly. Consequently, they become rather wild, yelling and running up and down the aisle whenever they manage to sneak out of their seats. Even class 1-6, which, as far as I know, is the only class to get a chance for large muscle activity in the first grade yard every morning, gets restless and into a bit of trouble every now and then. This is the main reason why I prefer to tell a story or show a filmstrip after lunch. I feel it helps the children settle down.

I learned a lot this afternoon. My children made me feel a little ashamed because I was not as trusting of them as I

should have been. They actually helped me get started again into our routines. I was more upset by the lack of physical order in the room than they were. I was more apprehensive and forgetful about our classroom procedure than they had been. They didn't realize it, but they helped and taught their teacher a great deal. Even their paper collage work in the afternoon was on a more sophisticated level than ever before. Almost everyone seemed to want to be doing something. As I quietly observed class 1-6 this afternoon, I was aware of the metamorphosis that transformed this once unruly, disorganized group into such a smoothly functioning one.

APRIL 20

Class 1-6 worked very well today. I am amazed at the paintings the children are turning out. At the very beginning, when I first set up the painting area I often found myself wondering when and if their painting would improve. What most of the children did during that time was mix colors and experiment, painting after painting. I had expected this to happen, but I couldn't help wanting them to go on to the next stage of development in this area. I find it amazing to see just how much a child's personality is reflected in his painting. Roberto, who as I mentioned before, is like an eel, paints a picture in three seconds. Needless to say he leaves out

virtually all detail. Marie who has very poor small-muscle coordination, paints rather poorly. She has a lot of trouble painting small details on her pictures. Melanie, who is an aesthetic little girl, paints the loveliest, daintiest pictures in the class. Chuck always turns out muddy, heavy-looking pictures. Magarita who is a bit stubborn, and whose need to control situations makes her unable to relate to her peers without some difficulty, often paints very morbid pictures of funerals, coffins, jail, witches, etc.

The children started making their own puzzles today for the first time. There was a great deal of enthusiasm over this project. Chuck expressed a desire to write a story about how much he loves his younger brother and how he likes to play with him. I wonder whether a favored sibling is what is responsible for his periodic attacks on the other children. Could it be that his exaggerated protestation of love for his brother is a kind of reaction formation?

APRIL 23

This morning was absolutely fantastic! The children worked so beautifully. All of the children (with the exception of one or two) were going from one activity to another on their own. The activities I made available to them provided rein-

forcement of their reading vocabulary (creative writing, bingo with words, word games), creative expression (drawing and collage work, as well as painting), and manipulative exercise (making puzzles, claywork, and playing with a building game). They also learned two new words and did their daily reading and writing sheets as well as their math work. The children got so involved in all that had been provided to them that we worked right through the allotted time for play in the downstairs yard. The climax of the day came at ten minutes to three, when we realized it was time to go home. Some of the children did not want to go home. They expressed annoyance over the fact that their school day had come to an end.

The only little problem we had today presented itself when Magarita was caught trying to destroy some of the puzzles the other children had made. She denied having done this. I feel sorry for her because, like Chuck, she seems to be taken over by impulses she herself disapproves of. Perhaps it is even this very disapproval, combined with guilt, shame, and fear that makes her deny her naughtiness even when she is caught red-handed. In an effort to keep her from thinking she is a bad little girl, I often say to her, "Magarita, good girls don't do things like that. I'm surprised at your behavior because you are a good girl". During my last parent-

teacher conference with her mother, I learned that Magarita has a three year old brother at home. It seems Magarita likes to exert a lot of control over him, and when she acts a little babyish her mother tells Magarita, that unlike her little brother, she is too big to be cuddled and cooed over. I suggested to the mother that perhaps Magarita may resent the attention her brother receives and that she should try and give Magarita the attention she seeks as well as the importance of being the oldest. I suggested to the mother that perhaps Magarita's hostile acts were those of a child who felt dethroned. Also, I told her that Magarita's inability to relate to her classmates could be due to the fact that this child, who had no previous school experience, never had the opportunity to play and relate to any other child except her younger brother. I must admit that I began to see Magarita in a different light since that meeting I had with her mother.

APRIL 27

Today was a rather hectic day. The para-professional was out and I found it extremely difficult running the class as usual all by myself. It seemed as if all the children needed me at once. Not all of them finished their writing and math work, and for a while, things got pretty chaotic. I doubt if I could run this kind of open, informal classroom, with

this many children, without a para-professional. I wonder if I would have learned to work by myself with the class the way I have been doing had I started out alone from the very beginning. One of the things I do not like about myself is the desire I have to control every move in the class when I begin to feel insecure. I believe that this temporary feeling of insecurity was in some strange way transmitted to the children because they behaved today as if it were their first week in school. No one remembered where to put scissors or pencils, or crayons. Few remembered to do their jobs. The room was quite disorderly and so was I! I'm not looking forward to going in tomorrow.

APRIL 29

It seems that there just is no way for an understanding between Mrs. Granger and myself. Her attitude over her role in the class has gotten worse. She made me so furious the other day that I found myself coming quite close to the breaking point. She accused me of not caring about her clothes as much as I care about mine. The reason for this accusation stems from her displeasure over having to supervise the afternoon clean-up...especially the painting area. She just hates to face the area. I can understand how she feels in view of the fact that in the four years she's been a para-professional, she

has never had this task. The reason for this is that children in P.S. 101, like most children in the other city public schools, seldom have an opportunity to use a paint brush after they have left kindergarten. As a matter of fact, I am the only first grade teacher and perhaps only classroom teacher in the school who provides painting to the children everyday. If teachers can't see the value of this activity, or if they do but prefer to deny it to the children rather than be faced with the extra work it requires on her part, then how can a para-professional be expected to feel enthusiastic about painting? Nevertheless, I felt that Mrs. Granger's accusation was an unjust one in view of the fact that I go in quite early every morning (7:45) in order to set up the painting area and art activity of the day. I also spend my lunch hour preparing the room for the afternoon and freshening up the painting area--which includes emptying, rinsing, and refilling the water cans so that the children will have fresh water to wash out their brushes.

I have asked Mrs. Granger to take over meeting at the end of the day if she so desires while I supervise clean-up, but she refuses to accept this claiming that I'm the teacher in the room. It seems that I can't win. I can't very well conduct meeting and supervise clean-up at the same time. I'm willing to do either but Mrs. Granger isn't. What displeases me

most of all is the possible effect our bickering has on the children. Many of them come from homes where there is constant turmoil and conflict. I think it is unfair to them to have them witness dissension in their classroom as well.

May 3 Monday

My day went well today. Roberto drew a picture of a golf club and while I was helping him write his caption, I discovered he did not know the name of this object. He explained that it was a long stick one uses to hit a little ball with, and gave me a demonstration on how it is used. I then proceeded to share with him what little knowledge I have of the game he seemed so enthusiastic about at the moment. I explained that form, accuracy, and number of strokes are what determines who the winner is in a golf match. I found myself wondering about all the knowledge these children probably have but never discuss due to their limited vocabulary. This incident with the golf club just reinforced my feelings about the value of letting children talk in the classroom. Children need to be able to practice language if they are ever going to perfect its usage. Roberto also noticed the similarities between multiplication and addition. I started him on simple multiplication last week and today he came up to me and said, "This kind of math is like addition, isn't it?" Alberto finally

wrote his name correctly after two months of trying, and he dictated his first caption. He is so far behind the other children but he relates rather well to his classmates. The tragedy in his life is that he witnessed his father's suicide. He never speaks about this but he expresses his anxiety through frequent crying, extreme sensitivity, and very morbid paintings. Lorrie came up to me today and told me she did not know how to write the letter "n". I cannot understand how she managed to do all of the writing she has done without knowing how to write this letter. Perhaps she just wanted some special attention or she somehow discovered she was writing the letter incorrectly. I never noticed this even though I have observed her writing on frequent occasions. Lorrie is blossoming out so nicely. She seems to have gained some self-confidence and is apparently coming out of her shell.

A problem that is beginning to present itself is lack of time for creative writing. More and more children are expressing a desire to write their own little captions or short stories to go with their pictures. Up until now, I have been writing it for them while they dictate whatever it is they want to say about the picture. It's wonderful to hear the children say they want to do their own writing; this has been one of my goals all along. The problem is that I find it extremely

difficult to help every child who wants to write because this requires a great deal of time. Mrs. Granger does not appear to enjoy this task and I'm afraid her attitude will discourage the children's desire to do creative writing. Besides, many of the children who want to do this kind of writing still experience difficulty in verbalizing whatever it is they want to say and helping them say it requires a skill few paraprofessionals have, due to lack of training. One must practically put words into some of the children's mouths and yet do it in such a way that it will enable the child to feel "his" words, not the teacher's, are actually the ones that have gone into the story.

My student teacher's supervisor came in today and again expressed her admiration for class 1-6. She related to me during our five minute conference the conversation she had had with Mrs. Granger earlier. She mentioned to Mrs. Granger that our class is conducted the way a class should be conducted and that she was happy to see this kind of classroom-setting in a public school. Mrs. Granger answered that it has taken her a long time to get used to it and that she still does not feel completely at home in such an informal classroom setting.

May 6 Thursday

This week has gone by fairly well. It hasn't been my best week but its a far cry from what the class was like last November. I look at the children in class 1-6 now and can't help but admire them. Clean-up time is still the most undesirable time in our school day.

May 7 Friday

I had a little difficulty with the para-professional today. She claims she is tired of all this activity in the classroom, especially the painting. Her attitude and unpleasant facial expressions not only influence the children, but put me on edge. During our morning meeting, I informed the class that we would be going to the park in the afternoon. Mrs. Granger said she wasn't going. When I asked her why, she said she didn't feel like it because the children do not walk uniformly in two straight lines down the street. I found this rather strange in view of the fact that we have only taken the class out twice, once to buy the rabbit and the second time to go to a puppet show that was being given in a neighborhood department store and both times they were well-behaved. But before I could remind her of this, she went on to say, "I didn't know about this trip to the park and I just can't go on a trip without planning things." I mentioned to her, as

I have many times in the past that all she has to do is look at my plan book to learn of the events planned for each day. I then inquired if this meant that my plans for the class now depended on her whims. I got so furious that I threw the pointer I had in my hand on the floor and just walked out of the room. I know it was the wrong thing to do but I was so angry that if I hadn't done this I probably would have done something worse. I regretted my outburst later on but by then it was too late to do anything about it. The rest of the day was rather strained for both of us. When I walked out at 3:30 P.M., I felt depressed, frustrated, and still quite angry.

May 10 Monday

I informed the para-professional today that as soon as the weather gets better, we will be taking the children to the park at least once a week and sometimes twice a week. I mentioned the fact that these children are cooped up at home and have been cooped up in school all winter long and that they need to go to the park, see grass, climb, run, and play. She listened rather attentively but did not say anything. I later found out that she had said to someone that she had no intention of accompanying the class to the park twice a week.

It was a very good day today. The children worked very effectively. I have my preparation period on Mondays from 2:00 to 2:45, which means that I was out of the room during this time doing individualized reading with a child. When I returned to the room, I discovered that Mrs. Granger had not supervised the children in the art area. When I asked her about this, she replied that the children played with the water and did not finish their jobs on time. I asked her why she did not supervise their clean-up duties and she replied that she couldn't be bothered, that she was tired of reminding them of their duties. She went on to say that the children should be able to do their clean-up jobs by now. I got so angry at her attitude that I said in a loud and furious voice, "I guess this means I should start planning to stay here till 6:00 P.M. It seems I don't have enough to do now. I'm going to have to stop doing individualized reading with the children just so that I can get the kids to do their jobs at the end of the day." By this time the relief teacher had the class lined up and ready to leave. The para-professional, who is supposed to work until 3:30, left with the class and did not come back. I worked in the classroom until 4:15.

On my way home, I kept thinking about possible solutions to the problem with Mrs. Granger. I realized that I just can't

keep losing control of myself in the classroom, especially in front of the children. One alternative is to sit down again with Mrs. Granger and try talking things out with her once more. But I have tried this several times before and it just doesn't seem to help. She views painting every day as a waste of time and flexibility on my part as a form of inconsistency. For example, the children know they must do their writing, reading, and ten math problems everyday. However, there are times when children will come up to me and say that they don't feel like doing their math and could they be permitted to do two pages the following day instead (there are ten problems on each page of their individualized math books). I usually say yes to them because I can understand the fact that children, like adults, also get tired of doing the same thing every day. Besides, I think it is good training for children to learn to keep their word on agreements they have made. This, I believe helps them develop a sense of responsibility. Experience shows me that most of the children who make these agreements with me do keep their word. I have tried to explain this to Mrs. Granger but she just does not see any value in this. She feels that if I say everyone must do math everyday, then everyone must do math, no matter what. Another alternative would be for me to do away with meeting on those days when I do not get relieved from 2:00 to 2:45 and just supervise clean-up. But this will deny the children

an extra opportunity to speak and read their stories to the group. Besides, I set up the art area in the morning, and I also work on it during my lunch hour, so I really don't feel I'm being unfair in expecting Mrs. Granger to see to it that the children clean up that area at the end of the day. Still another possible alternative would be for me to make an official complaint against Mrs. Granger. But I feel that this will just make things worse, not better. The open classroom is a very new thing in P.S. 101 and I wouldn't want to see it ruled out by the administration on the grounds that it doesn't promote better understanding and communication between school and community. Besides, I happen to know that Mrs. Granger has been somewhat unhappy about the way things have been going in her personal life lately. She has spoken to me about her problems on several occasions and I have tried to comfort her and advise her to the best of my ability. I have even asked her to call me at home whenever she just feels the need to talk to someone. In view of this, I can't help feeling that her attitude in class is in large part affected by her personal problems. When I reached home, I was still in a confused state of mind. I had failed to come up with any solutions to the problems between Mrs. Granger and me. I know that I can't possibly be all things to all people, and that my first responsibility is to the children. Nevertheless,

I must admit that I feel I have failed in spite of my successes in other areas.

May 24 Monday

Class 1-6 has been functioning beautifully these past two weeks. Visitors who come to the classroom tell me how impressed they are with the way the children work and how they are able to go from one activity to another so smoothly.

I have permitted the children to start playing with the blocks again and this time good, constructive block play has been taking place. The first time I took out the blocks--last November--we had blocks flying all over the room, which just added to the confusion and chaos that prevailed in room 208 at the time. When I discussed this with Mrs. Knobler, she suggested that I put the blocks away until the class was fully trained and able to cope with the excitement of block play. I took her advice and did not bring the blocks out again until I felt the children were ready for them. Now the children are really building with them, verbalizing and discussing their ideas with each other instead of fighting over them. I only regret that I do not have as much time to spend with them in the block area as I would like to have. So much more learning could be taking place there if I had more time to spend there.

Take last Tuesday, for example. Vincenti, Ken and Danny were building a circus. When I questioned them about the different parts of their structure, they said, "This is where the clowns and animals are, and this is where the people sit." I then introduced the words "performance", "arena", and "audience". I wrote these words for them and helped them place the words in the appropriate places of their block structure. On another day, a castle was being built. This led to a discussion on electricity and furnaces--which we have in our homes today--as opposed to fireplace, candles and a lot of warm clothing which was what was used to keep warm a long time ago.

Yes, everything is going very well, everything that is except my relationship with Mrs. Granger. Every time something exciting happens in the classroom as a result of the children having the opportunity to move about, talk, explore, and play, I point it out to her hoping that she will learn to believe as a result of having seen. But I'm afraid that her polite listening and lack of response are indications that there is no hope of my ever convincing her of the merits of the informal classroom.

Tuesday, May 25

This morning was absolutely fantastic. The children were just

great! So many good things happened. I took a couple of minutes out just to observe the class and I was overwhelmed. Melanie and Linda, two girls who at the beginning of the term asked permission for everything, can now function almost completely on their own. For example, when they finished their reading and writing, they took out their math books and sat down to do their problems without asking me if they could do so. Math work is part of the afternoon activities, but they chose to do it in the morning instead, on their own! Ken built an airplane with the blocks. He then invited me to go over and see what he had done. I took an imaginary ride with him in his plane. During our "ride" we talked about the different parts of an airplane (cockpit, fuselage, nose, tail, wings), about pilots and co-pilots, and the pilot's license. He was taking everything in like a sponge. Mrs. Garry, the assistant principal, walked in just then and seemed quite pleased at what was taking place. She promised to bring in a model airplane she has at home.

Danny, who is a holdover, felt so proud because he learned how to multiply. The wonderful look he had on his face when he said, "Now I know how to do it!", made all the frustration I experienced at the beginning of the term worthwhile. Lovely work was also going on in the art corner. The children can now get totally involved in painting. By this I mean that

many of them now "think" about and plan whatever it is they are going to paint.

May 27 Thursday

It seems that I can very seldom get the best of both possible classroom worlds together. If I am happy over the way the class is functioning, then I'm somewhat upset over the sour attitude the para-professional has. If the para-professional is in a happy mood and shows enthusiasm over her role and function in the classroom, then it seems as if the class is not quite together.

The problems with Mrs. Granger have been occurring at intervals since the later part of last year. To this day, she has not been able to understand why it is so important for children to have the freedom of making a choice and learning to be independent. She admits this openly. I have tried my best to explain to her the reasons for this, but I'm afraid that I have not succeeded. I have tried to make her understand that children can learn to think for themselves much better if they have the freedom and adult guidance to help them learn how to do so. I have tried to explain how total authoritarianism tends to forestall the development of independence and to make children feel frustrated and how frustration in turn leads to

feelings of anxiety, aggression, and a poor self-concept. Perhaps I'm trying too hard. Perhaps there really is a simple solution or way for me to handle our differences of opinion but I am blinded to it because I'm just too involved. What perplexes me is the fact that at one time, when I was her daughter's teacher in Pre-Kindergarten, Mrs. Granger thought I was a very good teacher. Perhaps it wasn't the diplomatic thing to do but I once said to her, "All the things we do in the classroom now I did while your daughter was in my class. The other para-professional, who worked with me then, and I worked just as hard as we do now." Needless to say, I regretted having said this because I felt it was a childish thing to do. If anything, comments like this would only serve to pull us further apart.

May 28 Friday

The principal called me in today and informed me that Mrs. Granger went to his office to complain about the way she is being treated. I was rather upset and nervous. I informed him that I was grateful to Mrs. Granger for having been so helpful to me at the beginning of the program. I also told him that she can work very well in the classroom when she is in good spirits but that she often comes in with a negative attitude and shows displeasure towards many aspects of the

program. I mentioned her refusal to go on trips, her negative feelings toward total individualized and small group instruction, her displeasure with simple cooking experiments with small groups of children, her attitude during the afternoon clean-up, and lack of help in the classroom between 3:00 and 3:30. He jotted down some notes and set up a meeting among all of us for the following Monday morning.

There is an acquaintance of mine who happens to be a member of the local school board. We have spoken with each other by phone from time to time during the past seven or eight months. During my last conversation with her, I mentioned my distress over the para-professionals' limited view of their role in the classroom and described the problems I was having with Mrs. Granger. This local school board member, who in her own way helped make it possible for me to get the okay from the administration to go ahead with my plans for an open classroom, mentioned her own displeasure in getting complaints concerning para-professionals who are uncooperative in the classroom. She had also brought this out at one of the conferences she had had with the supervisors of para-professionals having specifically mentioned "cleaning-up and painting". Each school has such a supervisor whose job it is to do the para-professional payroll, help assign school aides and para-professionals to their respective jobs, pass on information

from the local school board, etc. It seems that when the para-professional supervisor returned to our school from this conference, she called all the para-professionals together and relayed to them what had been said at the conference. I believe this is what finally prompted Mrs. Granger to go to the principal. I regretted ever having said a word to the local school board member. At no time did I ever intend to make an official complaint to her. It was an off-the-cuff type of conversation. I know this person was only trying to be of help to me, and that at no time did she ever mention my name. But she did not have to. The para-professional supervisor from our school knows I am on friendly terms with this local school board member and she is also very well acquainted with the problems I had been having with Mrs. Granger. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Granger had complained to her on several occasions, and as a favor to me, the para-professional supervisor has always tried her best to smooth things out and to talk Mrs. Granger out of making an official complaint.

When she found out about the meeting next Monday, Mrs. Garry, the assistant principal, the person I feared the most at the very beginning, came into my room to speak with me. She was most sympathetic and understanding and asked me not to worry about a thing. She pointed out that in a way I had initiated my problems with Mrs. Granger by trying to be too nice, under-

standing, and accommodating instead of bringing our differences into the open a long time ago. She knew I was quite upset and did her best to put me at ease. I appreciated her kind efforts and for the very first time, felt someone from the administration was on my side.

May 31 Monday

The last thing I wanted to do today was to go to work. I dreaded having to go to that meeting. My biggest fear was that the principal would turn on me in front of everyone and criticize me for being a troublemaker by not doing the utmost to maintain peace and harmony between the teaching staff and community. Para-professionals are looked upon as representatives of the community in the school; rub them the wrong way, and you're asking for trouble with the community. I did everything I possibly could to control myself. Mrs. Granger spoke first and hinted that I was inconsistent and demanding in the classroom. I felt so sorry for her because I knew how she was feeling. She happens to be a sensitive lady who appeared to be on the verge of tears. Although I deeply regretted the fact that we had come to this due to our failure to reach an understanding, I felt that I must defend my position and the values of the informal classroom, in spite of the amount and kind of work it requires both on the part of the

para-professional and on the part of the teacher.

While Mrs. Granger was speaking I became acutely aware of how sorry I was also feeling for myself. Here I was, generously equipped with a middle-class education which I was willing to share with Mrs. Granger, only to discover that she did not or could not accept my "generosity". How could she possibly? After all, she came from the same milieu as the children. (So did I. But all along I had been feeling that if I changed, so could she. The problem was that I expected her to learn in seven or eight months what had taken me years to learn.) Here is a lady who aspires toward "middle-class values", one of these values being a sound traditional education. How could she possibly, in a matter of a few short months, relinquish her positive opinion about the value of such an education in favor of a form and philosophy of education that in many ways contradicts the philosophy of traditional teaching. Mrs. Granger never had the opportunity to learn about the value of teaching a child to be self-directed and independent. Her idea of a well-educated child is one who is obedient, conforming, and who displays the acquisition of knowledge by achieving high test scores. Was I being totally unrealistic in expecting her to accept my views on education as the gospel truth?

Another thought occurred to me as I sat there listening to her. When I started teaching in P.S. 101, I truly believed that my Puerto Rican background would prove to be an asset in relating to the community people who worked in the school. Could it be that just the opposite had occurred? They know I was born and reared in that very neighborhood. Could it be that unconsciously this very factor was what prevented her from accepting me professionally? Could "identification" have a negative effect as well as a positive one? Could it be that she felt that since we were more or less cut out of the same sociological and economic cloth, I couldn't possibly be much more educationally knowledgeable than she is? Perhaps her attitude is not the result of an identification with me, but rather with the entire school itself, which in turn is a representational part of the whole public school system, a system that is notoriously known for its giant-sized problems, its inadequacies, failures, lack of imagination, reverence for administrative rituals, love of order and control, as well as for its high percentage of apathetic teachers in its teaching ranks. Perhaps it's not any of these possibilities. Maybe para-professionals as a whole constitute an adult version of the disadvantaged child who comes to school but who is unable to develop a constructive attitude toward school simply because circumstances in his everyday living make it impossible for him to do so.

When my time to speak came up, I simply reiterated what I had said to the principal last Friday concerning the differences between Mrs. Granger and myself. I also went on to say that in my opinion, teaching was the kind of job in which one often had to work beyond the call of duty. I mentioned the fact that we had to give our children the maximum and this meant doing our very best, instead of looking for the easiest way out. It was the principal's turn to speak after I had spoken. I found myself holding my breath, but found myself relaxing shortly thereafter. He complimented Mrs. Granger for being such a fine lady, and one whom he was thankful to for the help she had given to him and the school in the past. Then he spoke about the open classroom, describing it as a method of teaching which required a great deal of work and which would eventually become more and more popular. Finally he said he agreed with me about the attitude one must have in the classroom, saying that good teaching and devotion in the classroom left no room for "cutting corners" and "time" watching.

Before ending his talk, he complimented both of us, which, needless to say, made us both feel good. Mrs. Granger and I walked out of his office and back to our classroom. She still seemed upset so I took her hand in mine and told her

as gently as I possibly could that I was glad we had that meeting because it gave us a chance to express our frustrations in a different, objective type of setting. We worked rather well together for the rest of the day. Mrs. Granger had a look of resignation on her face but she really made an effort to function to the best of her ability under the circumstances. I was grateful to her for trying to continue as if nothing had ever happened; I was grateful to the principal for handling the meeting with finesse, but most of all, I was grateful to Mrs. Garry. I'm sure Mrs. Garry did more than just put in a few good words for me with the principal. I knew, however, that the core of the problem remained. The underlying issues had not been resolved, but then again, they seldom are in schools today.

June 31 Thursday

The last two weeks of the school year are often quite hectic. It is a time when teachers' clerical work seems endless, a time when everything has to be taken down and either given or put away, when books must be sent back to the library, equipment packed and sent out for storage, and desks cleaned out. The rooms are hot, and the children quite "high" due to the excitement of oncoming summer. It is a time of year when everyone in school wishes he could be anywhere else but school. I had been dreading these last two weeks, because

I thought the children would go absolutely wild--and with good reason. There would be very little in the room for them to work and play with. Besides, I knew that I would be the only adult in the room with them (para-professionals end their school year two weeks before classes officially end) and that I would often be too busy with paper work, packing, and cleaning to be able to supervise them properly. My fears had been in vain because the children were very well-behaved. They did their writing on their own, played games with each other, colored with crayons, played "school", and managed to keep themselves quite involved in constructive activities whenever other duties prevented me from working with them. They seemed like a different class from what they were at the very beginning. I'm so lucky to have gotten them. They're such beautiful children. I'm going to miss them very much during the summer months.

Many people have asked me, "What is going to happen to them next year? Do you think they will be able to adjust to a traditional classroom?" This question has caused me, to say the least, some amount of anxiety. But, I'm happy to say, I found a solution. I requested to carry the class through second grade and my request was granted. I know that I will not be able to be with class 1-6 throughout their elementary

school years, but I'm hoping that by the time they are ready for third grade, they will be better able to make the adjustment to a traditional classroom. But third grade seems so far away now for me to start worrying about whether or not they will be able to make such an adjustment. Right now I'm looking forward to September, so that I can hurry back to class 2-6 in room 208.

CONCLUSION

It has been a trying, challenging, exhausting, frustrating, and most rewarding school year. In the final analysis, I can honestly say that I feel both the children of class 1-6 and I have learned a great deal. I believe this is how it should be because a teacher's growth is the necessary spark that enables children to keep on wanting to learn.

At the beginning of the year, I felt inadequate, hampered, and insecure. As the school year progressed, I became stronger, more capable, encouraged, and excited. The reason I know this is because I was able to see it in the response, attitude, and growth of the children. I also received positive feedback from a few interested colleagues and administrators.

One of the best things that resulted from the open classroom method in room 208 this year, is the interest it has stirred up among some of the other first grade teachers. Three first grade teachers have expressed a desire to have such a classroom next September, and I have offered to help them. The other good thing that has come about is the relationship that has developed between the assistant principal and me. She has become very interested in the open classroom herself,

and has attended workshops and seminars on the subject. She has become a little more flexible in her professional attitude and I must admit, that after a certain part of the year, she did not hamper or interfere or criticize my program in any way. On the contrary, she made an effort to put me at ease by often coming in and chatting with me. I knew this was her way of saying, "I like you and the way you do things. Keep it up."

I doubt very much whether I could have been as successful in another school. I say this because, for all of its drawbacks, P.S. 101 is a school where teachers are allowed more freedom than is permitted in many other public schools. Teachers can't very well allow their students to feel relatively free when they themselves are not allowed to experience this feeling.

I have some regrets. The difficulty that arose between Mrs. Granger and myself is one of them. Perhaps our difficulties were inevitable, perhaps not. All I know is that I feel that I failed as far as she is concerned. Another regret I have is the fact that I did not do much more with the children. I worked very hard this year but there was so much I never got around to doing. My one consolation is that I'll have another chance with them next year.