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ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS IN ACTION

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ALTERNATIVE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS: PROSPECTS AND PROBLEMS

During the middle and late 1960s, growing public disenchantment with the public schools led to the development of a small number of "free" or "alternative" schools outside the public system. Their founders ranged across a wide spectrum in terms of political beliefs and educational philosophy, just as their location ranged from rural commune to ghetto storefront. Whatever their politics and pedagogy, however, these schools were all based on the assumption that they were ultimately accountable not to a specific body of knowledge or to a set of bureaucratic rules and procedures, but to their clients—to the children and parents whom they served. Their aim was to foster self-respect and a sense of community through processes of shared decision making in which students assumed a major role in determining the nature and direction of their own education. Many attempted to create settings more closely tied to the community, utilizing community resources and analyzing community problems.

In the past three or four years, such free schools have proliferated rapidly, and while they still serve only a fraction of the total school population, they exercise an influence far beyond their numbers, thanks to exposure through the media and to considerable support among the public at large. Evidence of this impact can be seen in the recent rapid growth of a number of alternative schools within the public system.

Many free school people have viewed the development of public school alternatives with alarm. The movement began in direct, explicit opposition to the structure, the methods, and
the outcomes of public schooling in this country—the facelessness, the tracking and age-graded regimentation, the training for passive consumerism, and the frequent repeated failure to transmit even the most basic skills, let alone a plurality of cultural values. Now the prospect of being swallowed up by the very system they oppose is uninviting indeed. These critics argue that any effort to change the system from the inside, or even to secure and control a space within it, is misguided, that at best it will blunt student and community activism, and thus diminish the chances of broader reforms.

However, public school is where most students are, and many students, teachers, and parents within public schools share the basic positions of the free school people. Their positions are related to conscious attempts to change things; to the struggle for control over their schools; and to establishment of schools characterized by relatively informal, unregulated, nonauthoritarian, person-to-person human relationships, by shared decision making, and by respect for and acceptance of a wide range of personal and cultural backgrounds and value systems.

Indeed, it would be a mistake to assume that all free schools are “freer” than public alternatives. In many instances, the relative financial security of public alternatives provides a degree of independence and release of energies not available in their nonpublic counterparts. Any school that lasts establishes some form of relationship with the system; an alternative based on resourcefulness ought to be able to carve out as much autonomy with public money as with foundation or other private money. It is the issue of control that is important, and then the issue of what is done. Does the school, public or nonpublic, exercise control over its own program and structure, and how is that control distributed (who participates)? Ultimately, does the school work to control the thoughts and behavior of its teachers and students, or does it seek to empower them?

In any case, public school alternatives are certain to grow in numbers and influence as community groups demand public funds for their proposed alternatives and as school personnel attempt to deal with community dissatisfaction and student apathy and unrest. Soon we may expect every school system to have its alternative; a number of public school systems already
offer a wide range of alternatives, as in Seattle and Berkeley. But as the trend grows, alternatives remain in a precarious position pedagogically, politically, and financially. How will they avoid administering the same old bland education pill in a new coating; how will they gain time to build upon their initial thrust towards change—change in schooling, change in other institutions? In other words, what are the prospects for a viable alternative school movement?

Our intent is (1) to describe what goes on inside two public alternative high schools; (2) to indicate some of the successes, problems, and patterns of development that recur in many alternative schools; and (3) to suggest some of the tasks that must be accomplished if alternative schools are to remain true to their initial calling and have a deeper and more lasting impact than previous educational fads. We will describe two ongoing public alternative high schools—the Cambridge Pilot School (a “school-within-a-school” in Cambridge, Mass.), and Metro High School (a “school without walls” in Chicago). These two schools are similar in many respects: they serve diverse urban student populations, selected at random to represent a cross-section of the city in each case; they represent two different attempts to develop innovative curriculum; they subscribe to student participation in institutional decision making and to informal, nonauthoritarian relationships among students and staff; they began on the initiative expressed outside the school system; and they are seen in some sense as experimental and thus have received considerable public scrutiny in their respective communities.

As public school alternatives with diverse student bodies and relative autonomy, they represent a pivotal subclass where several complex political and pedagogical issues facing the broader range of alternative schools, public and nonpublic, are confronted:

Given the initial negative impulse from which many alternative schools begin (“we know what we don’t like”), what are alternative schools for? What are their aims, what is their notion of the good society and the good citizen?

What should happen inside alternative schools: what should be taught and learned (and who should do it), what range of options should be provided, and what should be required?
How should it happen: who should make decisions, how should they be carried out, what should be the nature of human relationships inside the school?

How should the school relate to the system? Should it be an agent of change? If so, how can alternative schools have the maximum impact on the system?

These crucial issues are addressed within most alternative schools on a day-to-day basis. Few schools achieve anything approaching unanimity in resolving these issues, and failure to air disagreements has led to the fragmentation and dissolution of many schools, despite the common struggle that their participants share. The experiences of the Pilot School and Metro offer no instant solutions. However, the experiences of these two schools and other schools with similar goals and programs do suggest certain specific and crucial tasks facing the movement as a whole.

The reader will note that we devote more of our discussion to issues of process—who makes decisions, how people relate to each other, and how the school defines itself relative to the system—than to program content. This emphasis is consistent with the general emphasis in alternative schools, which frequently develop out of a concern with the so-called hidden curriculum: the effect of the structure and process of schooling independent of curriculum content. Therefore, their concern is not so much with designing effective learning packages, but with creating a setting where students can play an active, creative role in deciding the direction their education should take. They wish to create a school community which is itself a model for that process in its relations with other institutions.

Often the process itself becomes part of the curriculum, as in the case of an alternative school that offers a course in “alternatives in education,” or the school whose struggle for survival is in fact the basic curriculum. Curricula may vary across and within schools, from crafts to neighborhood studies to basic skills, but every alternative must face directly the issue of self-definition and self-determination.
THE CAMBRIDGE PILOT SCHOOL

The Cambridge Pilot School began in 1969 as a joint effort of the Cambridge School Department and the Harvard Graduate School of Education, two institutions whose relations with each other were marked in the past by mutual distrust and often by open hostility. Most of the initial impetus came from a small group of faculty and doctoral students at the school of education. This group obtained federal money for the “Training of Teacher Trainees” (TTT) in their proposed subschool and convinced the school department to set aside space for it in Rindge Technical School, one of the two adjoining public high schools in Cambridge.

Like many alternatives, the Pilot School began out of the notion that much of the growing alienation, disaffection, and apathy among high school students could be traced to an irrelevant or culturally biased curriculum and to the impersonality of the public school bureaucracy. It was believed that one way to counteract the problem might be to create a small school characterized by informal human relationships and respect for cultural diversity. To test this notion, 60 freshman volunteers were chosen by lot to represent, as closely as possible, a cross-section of the city with respect to race, sex, neighborhood, previous school achievement level, and post-high school aspirations. Each year since then a new freshman class has been added, so that during 1972-73 the school will have its first graduating class in a school of about 200 students. The school occupies about one-half of the fourth floor, and its students represent about one-fourth of the enrollment at Rindge.
Inside the School

The visitor to the Pilot School first encounters the bulletin board, at the top of the stairs to the fourth floor. It is a huge board with signs all over it—course notices, meeting and special event announcements, personal messages, and a little graffiti here and there. To the right is a tiny room, formerly a chemistry storage room, crowded with desks, machines, and people. The phone is ringing, three conferences going on, a secretary is trying to type, and a teacher is running something off on the ditto machine. Students stand in the office and outside in the hall, talking and laughing.

Across the hall in Room 410, surrounded by lavender walls they painted themselves (in contrast to the rather dim and dreary hallways), students work on individual social studies projects or bargain with their teacher about their homework assignment. The room next to 410 is empty; the class is in Harvard Square or East Cambridge, interviewing residents and shopkeepers there, or touring the MIT space lab, or playing basketball. Next door, in the Afro-American studies course, students role-play a confrontation between black and white parents over school integration. One student stands up to deliver a foot-stomping speech on the evils of segregation. Another declines to participate in the role play, but later contributes a thoughtful analysis of the current racial imbalance question in the Boston schools. Clearly, this class allows for a wide range of personal style in learning and communication.

At the end of the hall is the crafts room. Mobiles hang from the ceiling, and sketches and prints adorn the walls. One student works at a potter’s wheel, while another, aided by a volunteer from the community, fashions a ring out of silver. Other students drift in and out, some to work on projects, others just to see what is going on. Across the hall in the student lounge, a few students play cards, listen to the radio, or just look out the window at the entrance to Rindge four floors below. Here, the visitor may meet some cold stares. After all, this is the student lounge, and adults, while not excluded, are not overwecome. This room, too, has been painted, and some students, with the help of a parent, have built some sturdy furniture for it. Others
have seen the furniture as a challenge and have destroyed some of it. Today, in fact, the room looks as though a tornado had passed through; at other times, especially if important-looking visitors appear in the halls, the room gets a quick and surprisingly thorough cleaning.

Strangely, there are not many students in the lounge; it has become an unattractive place. Last year the lounge was the "office," where everyone congregated. Teachers' mailboxes were there, as were the phone, the coordinators' and secretary's desks, the ditto machine, and, most important, the ping-pong table. This year, however, the office aspect has been moved to that tiny room down the hall, and the action—especially student-staff interaction—has moved with it. Students are far more likely to gather in the new office or in the adjoining teachers' work area than in the lounge.

What impresses the visitor most is the degree of informality and movement in the school (some call it chaos). Students call teachers by their first names, bargain over homework assignments, and often walk freely in and out of rooms where classes are going on. The teacher is sometimes hard to find, even in a class of 10 or 15. Staff members are young, dress informally, and prefer not to stand in front of the class, but to sit in a circle along with students or to work with individuals. Students sometimes teach courses, too, as do parents and community volunteers and a number of Harvard MAT (Master of Arts in Teaching) interns.

The atmosphere, then, is quite different from that of Rindge, the host school, or of nearby Cambridge High and Latin, where Pilot School students take science courses and other electives. Indeed, many Pilot School students regard the fourth floor as an island or haven. Some have made it clear that, were it not for the Pilot School, they would not be in school at all.

Students would agree, however, that the school does not offer as much freedom as it used to ("freedom" is going to the store during lunch hour, walking down the halls without a pass, or choosing one's own course of study). Partly in reaction to external pressures, partly because of internal needs, the school has tightened up considerably. An initial vague concept of freedom has raised a complex question: Is the kind of freedom we sub-
scribe to conducive to learning, functional to the school as a community, and empowering?

The answer is evolving. The school has had to reconstruct some of the rules it scorned in the beginning, and pay heed to some of the constraints it wanted to ignore. It has had to learn that the structure/nonstructure argument is a false one, especially in an environment that is so obviously structured from the beginning and that is inhabited by adolescents who need to test the limits of structure, overt or hidden. It has had to learn that friendly, informal relationships, however valuable, are not in themselves a sufficient goal. People have to know what they can count on from each other, too.

If it is Monday, the visitor may attend a staff meeting after school, in which policy will be discussed. At this particular meeting, the director proposes that grades and comments be recorded by computer. Several staff members oppose this suggestion, insisting that their comments are too unique and personal to be coded on a machine. After a lengthy discussion, the proposal is dropped. A few students are there, too. One proposes that the school hold a dance. More discussion follows, focusing on possible problems, until one staff member volunteers to help with preparations. A teacher then brings up the condition of the rooms and halls. One room has been vandalized; the rest are strewn with litter. Staff members agree to have their classes clean up the next day.

The meeting moves in a slow, sometimes tedious process of consensus, yet it obviously has a curious attraction for its participants. One wonders where staff members get the energy to participate in such a meeting after a full day of classes, and then discovers that some of them will attend still another meeting tonight to plan for a presentation before the school committee.

The Program

The Pilot School program has emphasized humanities on a non-tracked, elective basis, taught in small classes (students take most of their science, some math and language, and all their shop and gym courses at the two regular high schools). Social studies electives have included such topics as Cambridge neigh-
borhood studies, women’s liberation, Vietnamese culture, law and student rights, native American history and culture, and child development (including work as teacher’s aides in one of several local nursery schools). English electives have ranged from mythology to “Monsters in Literature” to “Great Books” to media and journalism to creative writing.

Initially, the staff did not place much emphasis on grammar and related courses, but more recently courses have been offered in grammar, test taking, composition, and SAT preparation, as a result of pressure from both students and parents. Many trips leave the school—to the wilderness for solo camping, to Cape Cod for a week as part of an environmental studies program, to a Vermont farm to help bring in the harvest, to a nearby state prison, to traditional schools, and other alternative schools in Philadelphia, Boston, and Vermont.

As in many alternative schools, direct attempts have been made to deal with the sociocultural diversity of its students. During the second year of operation, all students were assigned, in heterogeneous groups of ten students and two staff, to “home groups,” where their task was to get to know each other and de-
vote projects for group accomplishment. Many of these groups had difficulty operating without an agenda, and by the second semester home groups had evolved into a series of electives around the general theme of survival. During the third year, the home group “core” was replaced by a required course in Afro-
American studies.

In addition, the school has attempted to deal with individual needs and concerns through an advisory system. Each staff member helps seven or eight advisees with course selection, school-related problems, and personal concerns. In 1972-73, this program will be expanded to become the core of the school. Parents, MAT’s, and a selected group of students will share advis-
ing responsibilities with full-time teachers in teams of four—one teacher, one parent or community volunteer, one MAT, and one student member to work with advising groups of 22 students on a regular basis.

Activities at the Pilot School often extend beyond the regular school day in each direction. It is not uncommon to see a teacher meeting with an advisee at a nearby coffee shop before school,
or to see staff and some students embroiled in meetings until eleven or twelve at night. Indeed, one of the school's strengths has been the willingness of staff not only to listen carefully to students, but to spend far beyond the usual time and energy in planning and implementing the school program.

Still, the frequent committee meetings and other extra-curricular events, together with the classroom practices of many Pilot School teachers, demonstrate a clear priority for social process over curriculum development. In the classroom, much time and attention are devoted to group planning, to bargaining, and to group evaluation and feedback sessions. Moreover, classes are suspended about once every two weeks for school-wide meetings or advisory sessions.

Curriculum offerings are not unplanned, uninteresting, or un-rewarding, but the curriculum as a whole tends to be a smorgasbord of electives without a coherent unifying rationale. Even the core programs—home groups in the second year, Afro-American studies in the third—have tended to become isolated from the other offerings.

**Goals, the Setting, and Survival**

Early in the life of the school it became apparent that different people involved had different ideas about what the school should be doing. In general, for the Harvard group the school was both a training site and a place to develop innovative practices in education. For the two Cambridge superintendents, it was a pilot run for a plan to break Cambridge's monolithic high schools (Rindge, 900 students, and CHLS, 3,000 students) into houses of 200-250 students each. For the participating Cambridge teachers, it promised a more congenial atmosphere in which to teach or an opportunity to influence program and practices in the two high schools.

For those parents and students who were dissatisfied with the local high schools, the school was maybe an exciting venture, maybe just a risk worth taking, with little to lose. Not all the initial 60 students applied for altruistic reasons; some came because their parents wanted them to, and others were influ-
enced by the promise of getting paid for participating in a summer workshop to plan the first year of the school.

These varying initial orientations created a number of contradictions. Most important, the professed goals of the school were inconsistent with its setting. The school practiced informality and freedom of expression, but it had to coexist with persons who adamantly opposed these notions. Pilot School values dictated that students should be free to walk through the halls, free to play the radio in the “office,” free to go across the street for lunch, free to call teachers by their first names.

Such practices were prohibited in the adjoining corridors of Rindge, so Rindge students alternately envied and scorned Pilot School students, and many Rindge teachers justifiably resented what they saw as a near-total breakdown in discipline right in their midst. Indeed, it was true, especially during the first and second years, that many Pilot School students abused their privileges or freedoms. Even the fact that the Pilot School brought 30 girls (the school was formerly all-male) or installed rugs in three rooms created a commotion.

Pilot School staff members themselves often felt trapped in value conflicts—and still do. Did the notion of freedom, for example, include freedom not to go to class? Even now, although the staff has established a no-unexcused-absence policy, there is considerable division among the staff as a whole, and ambivalence within individual members about such questions. This kind of division and ambivalence make it difficult to set and implement school policy. For example, in the middle of the first year, a group of teachers and students established a “red tag” demerit system for cutting, lateness, disruption of classes, and so on. The second year, when a group of staff members tried unilaterally to revive the system in an all-school meeting, students were outraged that they had not been consulted. This led to a hot debate over whether teachers were “more equal than others” and whether that had been the promise at the beginning. The result was that teachers did not give out red tags, preferring instead to ignore undesirable behavior or deal with it in other ways.

Despite problems in implementing its ambitious goals, the Pilot School experienced considerable success during its first
year. Parents and students developed firm loyalties to the school, based not only on the quality of relationships that staff members and students were able to achieve but on the breadth and depth of learning that could take place when a talented staff could meet with students on a small-group and individual basis.

Looking forward to a productive second year with 60 additional students, students and teachers participated in a summer session to get to know new students and to plan the curriculum for the fall. Even during that initial spring, however, a storm was brewing. Given the external signs of disorder (dirty rooms and students in the halls), given the long history of town-gown hostility and distrust, and given the Pilot School's explicit opposition to some of the central tenets of the school system, it was not altogether surprising when a veteran Cambridge school committeeman began a campaign to disband the school.

The upshot, after a barrage of rumors about communism, sexual adventures, filth, and a generally subversive atmosphere, was that Pilot School parents requested and got a public School Committee hearing to decide the future of the school. At that hearing, in October of the second year, the school committeeman presented his case for over two hours, replete with six-foot photographic blowups showing dirty coffee cups and bulletin boards with "radical" materials on them. Parents and students responded. Yes, those rooms were filthy, but the pictures were taken in the summer when school was not in session and the rooms were being repainted. Yes, there were Black Panther materials on the bulletin board, but they were right alongside materials from *Time* and *Life*, not shown in the photos. Yes, the school was providing educational experiences, giving students opportunities to make choices and try new things in a humane setting. No, the school was not connected with the slaying of a policeman in a Brighton bank robbery. And, finally, yes, there were United States flags hanging in Pilot School rooms.

As presented, the case against the Pilot School was a caricature. Clearly, the students and their parents supported the school overwhelmingly. The School Committee voted, five to one, to continue the school through the year.

The experience of the hearing was an education in itself, a case study in American education and local politics. Students
confronted basic educational issues and learned something about the political process in their own community. They and their parents made a disciplined and coherent defense of its practices. However, because of the superficiality of the charges, the victory may have been too easy, with the result that some really important questions were deferred. Underneath the charges lay two very deep concerns about the school: that things—and kids—were getting out of hand, and that "our children" would end up ill-equipped to make it in the real world. Stated otherwise, these were concerns about the leadership patterns in the school and the quality of the program. While the hearing solidified Pilot School community feeling, the energy expended in defense might better have been devoted to these two concerns.

Eventually, the school moved to confront these issues by hiring an experienced director for the third year to replace the two part-time graduate student coordinators, and by strengthening its program in both skills and guidance. Now that survival is a less immediate concern, the school can more easily focus upon internal questions.

**Diversity and Student Power**

The Pilot School has made several attempts to develop community governance mechanisms, including town meetings, a parent-student-staff council, and a representative student government in successive years—with little success. For one thing, students have been distrustful of governance mechanisms. Furthermore, it is clear that the real policy-making arena is the staff meeting, where students are welcome to participate but staff members, because of their superior "meeting skills" and endurance, have held the balance of power. The meeting itself is not always a model for efficient decision making, and the staff does not always recognize as legitimate some of the students' real concerns and needs.

Two notable exceptions to this pattern have been the hiring and curriculum committees. At the end of the second year, the new director and several staff members were chosen by a committee of students, parents, and staff; the process was repeated
at the end of the third. This year, all full-time staff appointments, including that of the director, were made on the basis of recommendations from that committee. The curriculum committee, also composed of students, parents, and staff, was responsible for the basic idea for an advising core for 1972-73. The recommendation was based on visits and conversations with other alternative schools as well as discussions with Pilot School students.

Student involvement in other activities has been high, including other committee work (goals and principles, advising, grade reporting), town meetings, clean-up, staff-student basketball games, and a dance. Last year over half the students played instrumental roles in planning and implementing such activities. Student involvement, then, has been primarily on an ad hoc basis focusing on issues of immediate and deep student concern.

One such issue has been the composition of the student body by race and neighborhood. When, in the middle of the third year, the director admitted 14 new white students, the black students reacted swiftly and decisively. (Black students make up about 25 percent of the students at P.S., a figure somewhat higher than the proportion of blacks in the Cambridge public high schools.) They called a black students' meeting during school hours, asked the Afro-American studies teacher to counsel them, and drew up a list of three demands to present to the director: (1) that two additional black staff members—an Afro-American studies teacher and a guidance counselor—be hired; (2) that at least six new black students be admitted to the school immediately; and (3) that until a guidance counselor could be hired, the black secretary be released to counsel black students on a part-time basis.

The director responded constructively. The demand to admit six new black students was readily met, with the provision that black students help with recruiting. Fortunately, there were funds available through TTT to hire two new black staff members on a part-time basis. A special hiring committee was formed, including black and white students, and staff and parents. Candidates were interviewed, and within a month the school had added two new staff members.
If one important criterion of success in an alternative school is its responsiveness to its participants, its direct accountability to those it serves, then the Pilot School negotiated this incident successfully. It demonstrated the capacity to listen to students’ concerns, recognize their legitimacy, and act upon them. The school was considerably strengthened by the addition of these two staff members. Students revealed an awareness not only of the school’s structure and goals, but of its basic operational dynamics. They had acted effectively to advance real concerns, and the community was stronger for it. Furthermore, the incident had educational value not only for students, who exercised organizing skills which may easily prove valuable in later life, but for the staff as well.

At the same time, however, the incident exposed some of the school’s weaknesses. First, it indicated a white middle-class bias on the part of the director and staff. The admission of 14 new white students showed some insensitivity to minority student concerns, not only on the part of the director, but on the part of the staff as well.

The staff had specified as a matter of policy that any new admissions should maintain the school’s original balances, but they were not quick to perceive what had occurred. In addition, the demand for more black staff members exposed a shortcoming—the staff did not mirror the students’ diversity in terms of race or sex. Of the seven full-time teachers, there were six white women and just one black man, a graduate student who, though he taught a full load of courses, could not be present in the school full time. The school had tried to recruit black staff members the preceding spring and fall, but it took the black students’ demands to get results.

The admissions incident suggests a further explanation for the failure of formal governance mechanisms at the Pilot School. These mechanisms have always assumed a representative model, as well as a mode of operation (discussion, debate, voting, and so on), which is suited to the staff’s custom. The admissions incident followed a different pattern: conflict, negotiation, and resolution.

In this case, the conflict involved most immediately the black students and the director. If the black students had felt they
had to win the support of a "representative" group of students and staff, they might never have reached the point of articulating their concerns, and the school would have suffered thereby. However, the black students did not melt into a larger consensus body, but established their own identity as a separate interest group first, and then set up lines of communication. Perhaps schools with student bodies as diverse as that of the Pilot School should examine the latter model. Rather than set up governments that the students do not trust and that do not have any real power anyway, they might attempt to establish agreed-upon procedures for the resolution of conflicting group interests.

Built-in Conflicts

We have mentioned that different people—staff, students, and parents—came to the Pilot School with varying goals and expectations. In particular, three goal conflicts continue to be a source of strain within the school (though there has been some progress in dealing with them): (1) the conflict between institutionalization and autonomy as practical goals; (2) the conflict between informal, nonauthoritarian relationships and the need for structure; and (3) the conflict between the relationships and "choice" goals and the goal of education through diversity.

Institutionalization vs. Autonomy—From the beginning, the school has faced decision after decision where staff members and others disagreed about what the primary political objective should be. Should the school become a part of the system (therefore not doing anything to rock the boat) or maintain as much autonomy as possible with respect to program, structure, and staffing. Such issues have ranged from whether to permit students to go across the street during lunch hour (in violation of Rindge and CHLS rules) to whether to remain on the fourth floor of Rindge or look for another base of operations. Some argue that there is no real conflict—that the school can in fact maintain its autonomy as an integral part of the system.

But the conflict does exist. During the past year, much of the money for salaries and fellowships, including the salaries of the two black staff members hired in mid-year, came from the fed-
eral government through Harvard. For the coming year, however, all teachers’ salaries are provided by the city of Cambridge, which means that the school’s hiring decisions are subject to a much more systematic review and approval by the School Department. Already, as responsibility for funding shifts to Cambridge, the staff of the school has undergone a complicated interviewing process in order to remain as teachers and, in theory at least, can be transferred to other schools.

Here the question of autonomy-within-the-system emerges, full force. The Pilot School hiring procedure, which has worked so well in the past, is being called into question, and meaningful student and parent participation in that procedure has been jeopardized. The job description for a Pilot School teacher demands a willingness to work long hours as an advisor, teacher, and policy maker. Clearly, parents, students, and staff must exercise some real control over staffing decisions. Should the school insist on maintaining a significant degree of control over hiring, even to the extent of waging a full-scale campaign? How much control can it afford to yield to the system?

The issue has programmatic implications, too. Decisions about such problems as noise in the classroom are often made on the basis of what “they” will think. As Cambridge teachers, the staff will be required to sign in at 8:30 a.m. next year. It is through just such petty constraints that freedom is lost and imagination goes down the drain. When a teacher says, “I can’t teach my evening course about the city council because I have to sign in at 8:30 downstairs, and I’m not going to teach morning and night,” then the program suffers.

Relationships vs. the Need for Structure—To overstate the case somewhat, the staff began with the assumption that the kind of human relationships they envisioned not only would evolve easily and naturally at the school, but that such relationships would obliterate many problems that exist in regular schools. Students would be eager to learn and would respect others; behavior problems would disappear. This, in fact, did not happen. Students, coming out of eight years’ experience in public school, were not transformed (nor was the staff, for that matter). Students did not step forward immediately to take charge of their
own education. When home groups were given money to spend during the second year, some groups chose to spend it not for "educational" films or trips, but for ice cream. The following question is raised: Given that things don't work out right away, do we wait patiently for students to come around, or do we take matters in hand, as they do in the regular high schools?

Given this new freedom, students were more likely to test its limits than to assume responsibility. Staff members, committed to student responsibility and reluctant to behave in the old ways, were often uncertain about how to react when individual freedom and choice conflicted with community needs. As a result, staff members tended to respond inconsistently to behavior problems. A student who burst into a classroom might be reprimanded one day and ignored the next. If a student cut several classes, the teacher might assume the blame and not confront the student.

As a result, neither teachers nor students had a very clear sense of what constituted unacceptable behavior in the school, or of what sanctions, if any, would follow such behavior. The problem persists, although some idea of boundaries has emerged. One boundary-setting incident occurred toward the end of the second year, when two students were involved in a knife fight. After several long, agonizing sessions, the staff decided that this incident required the expulsion of the two students, and that they, not the students, had to make that decision. (Most alternative schools, it seems, begin without dreaming they will ever have to expel anyone. When it eventually becomes necessary to consider expulsion, the experience is a traumatic one for everyone concerned.)

*Relationships and Choice vs. Diversity*—The staff's informal approach to students and classes may have a cultural bias. The students who respond best to the available choices and the absence of regimentation are likely to be from backgrounds similar to those of the staff—middle-class, college-bound, school-oriented, and verbal. On the other hand, many students expect much more discipline and clear direction from the staff: "Why don't you kick me out? You should have kicked me out a long time ago." Conferring with a student who is deficient in writing skills, and who has elected an English course in "media" where
very little writing will be done, a staff member may project his or her own bias to say that grammar does not matter and can not be taught, and buttress that argument with the school’s commitment to “choice.” That choice, however, may actually limit the student’s later options instead of empowering him.

During the period when the director and the black students were discussing demands, a number of white students became upset because they did not know what was going on. They approached a staff member to request an all-school meeting to discuss not only this issue, but others as well, such as the physical condition of the school. At that meeting, black students described their grievances and actions, and the administration’s response. At this and subsequent all-school meetings, students held impassioned discussions of the school's admissions and recruitment practices, focusing on the school’s image and why it attracts so many more white middle-class applicants than others. Many students felt that the school had difficulty attracting black
and white ethnic applicants because of its appearance (dirty floors, broken furniture, and so on) and its reputation as an "easy" place.

Two of these meetings resulted in suspension of classes for a thorough cleaning of the school the following day, and at the end of the school year two days were set aside for painting, rug shampooing, and general clean-up. Still, some students continue to feel that the school maintains a middle-class bias not only in its program, but in its style and atmosphere as well.

**Evaluation at the Pilot School**

The Pilot School has employed a number of techniques to check its progress toward alternative goals. Most notably, students themselves, trained by a staff member, conducted extensive interviews of other students during the first year concerning their goals and their reactions to the program. In addition, several graduate students from Harvard and elsewhere have studied the school and written papers about friendship and territorial patterns, governance, teachers' attitudes, special programs (home group, environmental studies), and Pilot School dropouts. The school itself conducted a series of peer teacher evaluations during the second year, and many of the classes hold periodic evaluation sessions.

There is no shortage, then, of analysts, but as yet there is little coordination of their efforts and little feedback to students, staff, and parents. The school needs to develop systematic ways to feed back information, so that it may continually adjust its program to the needs and concerns of the participants.

**Successes and Strengths: The Future**

The measure of the Pilot School or any school like it is not its problems, but what it does to confront them after the initial burst of enthusiasm has dissipated, when people begin to discover that they have not changed their own lives overnight. What is the extent of the school's sustaining power, and what is the nature and depth of its continuing commitment?

Several recent developments indicate that the Pilot School
is taking positive steps to deal with its problems. At the end of the second year, the school decided to hire a strong, experienced director, recognizing that some single focus of leadership was needed not only internally, but in relations with the school system. Partly out of the dynamics of staff-director interaction during the third year, a group of parents, students, and staff members drew up a statement that attempted to clarify basic Pilot School principles: that human relations in the school are characterized by relative informality, that the diversity of the student body represents an opportunity for cross-cultural education, that attention to individual needs and concerns is consistent with the needs of the school community, and that anyone affected by a decision in the school has the right to participate in that decision. This was the first time a statement of Pilot School principles had come from such a diverse group.

Thanks largely to the efforts of the director, the school managed to obtain early approval of the School Committee for 1972-73. This enabled the staff to devote considerable time during the second half of the third year to planning for the next. What has emerged is a comprehensive plan for an advisory system that hopefully will deal with many of the school's concerns, especially individual attention and parent and community involvement. What was important about these planning sessions was that staff members began to make definite commitments and set limits on the time and energy they would expend—and to insist that others set limits, too.

Finally, it appears that the school may yet achieve some form of systematic evaluation and feedback. Associated students and faculty at the Harvard Graduate School of Education are beginning to get together in teams rather than work in isolation as they have in the past.

The Pilot School students are older now and know more about how to operate in the school's environment. The staff continues to work in its dedicated way, while realizing that limits have to be set on time and energy if the proposed advisory system is to be more than a paper "core." Parent support continues to be strong. Some potential dropouts continue to insist that, were it not for the Pilot School, they would be long gone. There are strong indications that college admissions offices will respond
favorably to applications from the school's students. The school provides a potentially invaluable experience for MAT interns interested in continuing in alternative settings.

Still, in some respects, the school's position is precarious. Several questions to be resolved over the next year or two before it can consider itself a success on its own terms:

Can the school maintain a significant degree of autonomy with respect to hiring and program as the base of financial support shifts from the federal government to the city of Cambridge?

Can the school define itself more clearly, both for its participants and for the outside?

Can the school overcome the constraints of its setting to more fully operationalize its principles. Can it become more effective in its attempts to foster student initiative and participation? Can it create more of a sense of community in the context of respect for diverse styles and interests, and get tougher on skills where necessary?

Can the school develop a more effective means of gathering and digesting information about itself?

Can the school successfully intensify its efforts to involve parents and community in its operation? Can it fashion stronger links with other alternative institutions in the Boston area?

The answers to all of these questions, of course, hinge on the basic issue of continuing commitment.
METRO HIGH SCHOOL

Metro High School is a fully accredited four-year high school operating within the Chicago Public Schools. The school currently has full-time responsibility for the education of 350 students. It draws no special outside funding, but is supported by the school system at the per pupil expenditure of other public schools in Chicago.

Metro is a "school without walls;" it does not have a conventional school building. A major idea behind its program is that the human and physical resources of the city create the best environment for a high school education. Metro’s founders felt that education should not be confined to a building separated from the rest of the society because the resources for learning available in the larger society can never be duplicated or simulated inside a conventional school building. The core staff and the students themselves have developed learning experiences all over the city in cooperation with more than 200 businesses, museums, universities, community groups, and individuals with special skills and talents. A typical student could begin his day interviewing inmates at a state prison as part of a course in "Penal Justice." He might then head for the Loop (downtown), where he meets in a conference room provided by Montgomery Ward to discuss his program with a counselor and some other students. He might end the day by photographing buildings as part of a course in city planning. His next day could consist of a math skills lab at Metro headquarters, a class in electronics at
the telephone company, or a free period spent at the library or just relaxing at Metro headquarters.

Metro was started with impetus provided by the Urban Research Corporation, a Chicago publishing and consulting firm interested in urban issues. Urban Research convinced the superintendent of schools and several of his assistants that the school system should establish Metro and that Urban Research could be helpful in getting the school off the ground. Urban Research consultants described the idea to the heads of many of the city's major businesses and cultural organizations, who promised that they would participate in the program. After the school was approved in the fall of 1969, the consultants worked to translate general commitments into a meaningful educational program. They also played a major role in selecting Metro's staff, established some agreements with the school system that they hoped would guarantee the school's autonomy, supervised the selection of students, and made dozens of other preparations necessary for the opening of the school.

Metro opened in February of 1970 with 150 students selected at random from a group of 1,500 applicants. They were predominantly freshmen with some sophomores and juniors. They represented every neighborhood in one of the world's most diverse cities, closely reflecting the high school population of the city as a whole in terms of race, family income, and previous success in school. The student body was 55 percent black, 5 percent Latin, and 40 percent white, as it is today.

These students described dozens of reasons for coming to the school. Some had a highly developed idea of what they wanted to accomplish in a school without walls. Others expressed a vague hope for something new or merely relief that they had escaped one of Chicago's huge, regimented, dangerous high schools.

The school opened with a strong dedicated staff of six full-time teachers and a principal who had only a few days to prepare for the opening of school. The Urban Research consultants took the lead at this point in orienting the students and staff to the Metro concept. They had planned a two-week orientation that would allow everyone to participate in refining the plans for the first pilot semester. Looking back, people remember this
first semester as a honeymoon, a period when the energy and commitment of the staff and students seemed to surmount every obstacle and when it seemed that the problems that have wracked other schools could not touch Metro.

The consultants and the first students and staff had many of the same ideas about education that had impressed the founders of the Pilot School. They wanted a more human relationship to develop between teacher and student, based on mutual trust and respect. They wanted to serve the needs of a diverse urban student body, and develop respect and mutual understanding among students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. They wanted students to play a major role in developing their own educational programs and in governing the school. They wanted students to learn basic skills, but as a result of a broader process that promoted creativity and independence of thought. They spoke of developing a community where people cared about each other and could obtain support in accomplishing these ambitious goals.

All of these ideas had been outlined in the original planning documents for the school. But the idea that really caught the eye of the school system’s leadership was the school without walls concept. The central administration wanted a program that drew on community resources, but did not question the established educational patterns of the system—the way students relate to teachers, who makes decisions, and who controls the money. In contrast, Metro’s consultants, teachers, and students felt that the school without walls idea was meaningless unless it was coupled with an effort to achieve the school’s other stated goals for humanizing education.

The school’s history during the first semester reflected the school’s commitment to fundamental change in the process of education. The basic learning experiences in the program were called learning units. They were taught by the school’s full-time teachers, by staff members of participating organizations, and by interested individuals. Some units dealt with traditional subject areas, including geometry and chemistry; others emphasized basic skills, such as reading. More than half of them focused on activities not usually covered in a high school curriculum: studying the current show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, ex-
ploring probability with a group of insurance actuaries, assisting a veterinarian, learning film techniques from television film producers, and studying a neighborhood's problems with a neighborhood organization.

Except for a few distributional requirements, a student was free to choose from among 100 unit offerings. After nine weeks, students and teachers sat down to evaluate each student's progress. They filled out a long descriptive evaluation form, and finally, based on these discussions, the teacher decided whether or not the student should receive credit. Metro decided to do away with letter grades, and if a student did not receive credit, the learning unit was simply not recorded.

At the end of the first learning cycle, students also evaluated the quality of the learning units Metro had offered. Based on this feedback, new units (some student-taught) were begun, and existing units were dropped or modified. Then students registered for a second nine-week cycle similar to the first. For this second cycle, some of the earlier learning units were continued with the same students, so they covered a full eighteen-week semester.

As at the Pilot school, the formal curriculum represented only a small part of the learning program. Metro's founders believed that informal relationships between students and teachers and shared decision making were as important for student learning and growth as the structured learning units. One reflection of this concern was Metro's counseling groups. Each week a student met for two hours with a group of 15 other students and a teacher. They planned students' schedules, discussed school problems, and participated in group discussions and activities that were designed to help people get to know each other and to teach students to work cooperatively.

Teachers also encouraged close relationships with students outside of classes and counseling groups. During the first semester, Metro's headquarters was a large open floor in a downtown office building. The room was divided by rows of lockers into a lounge, a few classrooms, and a teacher work area, but, in practice, these spaces blended together. Teachers were constantly talking informally with students, and felt that the close relationships compensated for the noise and lack of privacy.

A major topic of concern among the staff during the first
semester was student involvement in decision making. The staff wanted students to be involved in shaping every aspect of Metro’s development, and agreed to a student proposal to govern Metro through an all-school meeting each Wednesday. But little was accomplished in these large meetings, and student attendance dropped off. As at the Pilot School, staff meetings soon became the major arena for decision making. Most students were not upset by this development because they liked Metro and trusted the teachers. They saw little reason to spend hours in long meetings when things were basically going their way. They felt that if they did not like something, they could complain to the staff and get it changed. However, many staff members and some students doubted that this system could work in the long run. They felt that unless students became directly involved in making and carrying out decisions, their interests would not always be served by the staff. Thus, various schemes for involving students in formal decision making have been initiated regularly only to fade away because of lack of interest.

A major problem emerged during the first semester, in which two of the school’s basic concerns came into conflict. Student attendance was poor in several classes conducted by cooperating organizations, which threatened to drop their tie with Metro unless attendance improved. In response, students and teachers struggled with the issue of student responsibility to attend class. Many students had felt initially that Metro’s freedoms included the freedom to cut class when a student felt it was boring or just did not feel like attending. But it was clear that if students continued to exercise this freedom, the school without walls was in jeopardy.

At an all-school meeting, students developed a statement concerning student responsibility for attendance. Students, they agreed, had a responsibility to attend class regularly. If a class was unsatisfactory, they would try to change it instead of cutting it. The staff was responsible for helping students change weak classes and would allow students to drop classes when efforts to improve them did not work. As a result of this understanding, attendance improved for the rest of the semester. But a student’s responsibility to attend class has continually emerged as an issue at Metro.

A second major area of difficulty during the first semester
was Metro's relationship with the school system bureaucracy. Several of the school system's central administrators reacted with positive hostility when it became apparent that Metro's program was challenging some of the cherished procedures of the school system. A second large group of central administrators was merely indifferent to Metro. Thus Metro's requests for equipment, assignment of staff, payment for outside services, and so on were treated with characteristic inefficiency, arbitrariness, and delay. What Metro needed was not hostility and indifference, but positive support on a day-to-day basis. The school system should have acknowledged the necessary connection between educational program change and change in administrative procedures. Such a relationship was not accepted, however. Thus, Metro's staff and, particularly, Metro's principal had to spend much of their time dealing with bureaucratic obstructionism. Most of these early battles were eventually won, but each cost valuable time that should have been spent developing the school's program.

Despite these problems, however, the year ended on a positive note. Metro was approved for permanent operation and for expansion from 150 to 350 students. Staff and students received money for a summer workshop, which allowed them to reflect on the first year's experience and to plan for the next one. During the workshop, the focus of discussion was on ways of dealing with several issues that were beginning to emerge.

The curriculum of 100 learning units had several strengths. It allowed many good ideas coming from staff, students, and cooperating organizations to be tried out for a short time. If they worked, they could be refined and expanded. If they did not, they could be easily dropped. But there were two major problems with this smorgasbord approach.

First, the program lacked over-all continuity and continuity within any one area of study. There was considerable discussion of how to develop sequences of learning units and experiences that would help people see broader relationships without putting the school's program in a traditional straitjacket. Second, the learning units offered during the first semester had a middle-class bias. "Groovy" units were fine for kids who could already read, write, and compute, but many of them allowed stu-
dents who lacked skills to avoid improving them. Further, the curriculum did not seem to place enough emphasis on understanding a city where racism and poverty were the daily reality for many students.

A final topic of concern discussed during the summer was the quality of the "community" that everyone had said they wanted to build. There had been little overt racial hostility among students at Metro, but they tended to form friendships pretty much along racial lines. Most counseling groups were not functioning well; they had not developed the close cooperation that had been written about. In general, people could not count on each other as much as they had hoped. Doing one's own thing turned out to be in conflict with building a community.

The strength of Metro is that these problems were faced honestly and openly during the first summer workshop and that such a process of careful analysis has been continued to the present.
Course sequences have been developed and refined; long-range programs in areas like day care have been established; a comprehensive black studies program has focused on urban realities; and the need for skills laboratories and emphasis on basic skills in most learning units have taken a high priority. Various schemes have been attempted for involving students in formal decision making—thus far with limited success. Staff, students, and parents used a crisis to press for more autonomy for the school—again with only limited success. Counseling groups have been structured and restructured.

In the process, more mistakes have been made and other problems have emerged. But successes have been frequent enough to sustain the staff and students. An independent interview study by the University of Michigan confirmed that a cross-section of Metro students has a strong positive identification with the school. Eighty percent of the first graduating class went on to college. Students who might have been dropouts have published newspaper and magazine articles, organized community action groups, made films, mastered complex skills in industrial laboratories, and acted in professional theater companies. Now a mature school with the starry-eyed dreams of the first few months far behind, Metro still struggles to grow and improve.
THE ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS MOVEMENT

Patterns

The experiences of the Pilot School and Metro illustrate several patterns of development among alternative high schools, public and nonpublic. Two of these patterns deserve special mention: the prevalence of faith in "organic development" and the effects of built-in constraints. Like these two schools, many alternative schools begin with a negative ideology. Their initiators know what they do not like about traditional schools—bigness, regimentation, tracking, passive learning, and student powerlessness.

But rather than replace the structure of the traditional school with other structures, these schools emphasize process, believing that things will work out naturally when everybody "gets it together," believing that, in the absence of the restrictions of traditional schooling, students and staff alike will immediately embrace or create new patterns of interaction and become the new man, the new woman. Coupled with this faith in organic development is the notion that everybody will "do his own thing," a notion that often runs directly counter to the communal needs of these schools.

Typically, staff members plunge into action with a feeling that everybody's needs can be met, and a wide range of ambitious goals is set for the school. Distrust of centralized authority is common, and considerable time and energy are expended on group decision making with efforts to reach consensus on
even relatively minor operational matters. Efforts are made to involve students in this process, with varying degrees of success, depending on the issues involved. While this initial burst of energy has many positive aspects—people participate and learn through participation—there are negative effects as well. Staff members expend enormous amounts of energy on a variety of tasks, ranging from service on a curriculum committee to course planning to evaluation to individual tutoring and counseling; the "hang-loose" principle often leads to role confusion and inconsistency in personal interactions. The diffusion of energy on a variety of unrelated tasks leads to the phenomenon of "burning out," as teachers and students retreat into more constricted roles. In the absence of a clearly defined structure, people have a hard time specifying what they can count on from each other.

This last issue is crucial to new schools. Those that survive in any healthy way are those in which people have been able to establish clear commitments and mutual expectations, whether by appointing a leader and writing out job descriptions, by establishing contracts with students, or simply by learning to confront each other more honestly and immediately when expectations are not being met.

Any new school begins with a set of built-in features; size, location, funding relations, composition of student body and staff, and the emerging history of the program—all of which exercise constraints on what the school can accomplish. For example, the Pilot School's location within a public high school makes certain behaviors unacceptable which might go unnoticed in another setting. Students take science and some math, language, and shop courses at the two high schools; therefore, it is difficult to arrange intensive study units or projects, as students have to make their daily round of classes. Even the week-long Cape Cod trips, valuable as they were from both an educational and a communal point of view, created problems for students in their non-Pilot School courses. Such constraints become all the more salient given the faith in organic development that downplays the necessary planning to deal with constraints.

To compound the problem, many schools like the Pilot School and Metro, are situated in an alien and even hostile and threatening institutional context. This hostility can be a good thing
for a while, because it brings people together, but it provides no permanent basis for community.

**Dangers**

As more and more public school systems begin to develop alternative schools, it becomes clear that the movement could easily founder in either of two basic ways: faddism or the repetition of mistakes. Given the American tendency to market new educational and other ideas on a mass scale, there is a clear danger that many systems will adopt alternatives as their next pet project, hopefully with grant money, without considering some of the basic criticisms of traditional schools that motivated the early alternatives.

In one likely scenario, a school system allocates money for a new program, "trains" its teachers in three days of workshops, provides no consultation or orientation for students or parents, and calls the result an alternative. In another, a system gets federal money for alternatives and buys new curriculum packages without instituting any changes in school organization or classroom practices. Partly as a simple result of the rapid spread of alternative schools, partly because of a mistaken assumption that each new school situation is unique, many schools are repeating the mistakes of their predecessors: putting their faith in organic development, failing to plan, burning out, and failing to evaluate.

**Tasks**

Given the current problems and patterns of development in alternative schools, individual alternatives and the movement as a whole must deal with at least five major tasks if they are to survive and grow as flexible, responsive institutions committed to change.

(1) Secure the field. The alternative school must stake out its claim, secure its ground. It must gain the time, the space, and the autonomy—the security from external threat—to devote the major portion of its energies to the clarification and active pursuit of its goals. Battles for survival with school boards, funding agencies,
bureaucracies, and other opponents may be inevitable and may offer valuable lessons, but alternative institutions cannot run on crisis forever and cannot fully develop alternative practices if they must spend all their time fending off attacks.

(2) Clarify goals, priorities, constraints, and limits for everyone. In the initial phase, alternatives often list more goals than they can possibly accomplish, and efforts to meet all of these goals means that none of them are fully accomplished. Then the participants often blame themselves for failing to meet their high expectations. Setting priorities, then, means understanding the implications of one’s goals and accepting limitations on what one can do.

Perhaps efforts to more clearly delimit the function of the school, as at Philadelphia’s Bartram School for Human Services, or the composition of the student body, as at the Southern School in Chicago (mainly for Appalachian whites) and Berkeley’s Black House, represent positive steps in this area. Again, the built-in constraints of size, student body, and so forth, should be recognized, stated, and planned for at the outset, so that all parties understand what they can expect of the school and what they cannot.

The Pilot School, committed to a notion of cross-cultural education, promised implicitly to deliver both basic skills and college preparation in an atmosphere of student initiative and choice. The school is still wrestling with the contradictions inherent in this promise.

(3) Develop alternative structures and practices, consistent with goals and constraints. Alternative schools must realize that structure and discipline, far from being antithetical to their principles, are the prerequisites to building a viable alternative setting. For example, in the area of governance, people must work to develop listening and decision-making skills to accomplish the common goal of shared decision making.

If cultural diversity and cross-cultural education are a condition and a goal for the school, then, at a minimum, the staff’s composition should reflect the diversity of the student body. If the goal is to provide adaptive skills for the future, to combat “future shock,” then an emphasis on transitional, transactional, learning-to-learn skills must be structured into the program. The
school must in fact see itself as transitional and must be a model for active learning, must itself push for change in itself and the institutions around it.

In the absence of bureaucratic structures, clear delineation of responsibilities is still a necessity, including students’ rights, exclusion procedures, required courses (if any), and provision of decision-making procedures. The experience of a wide variety of alternative schools has shown that failure to attend to these matters at the outset can lead to serious problems later on.

(4) Develop procedures for systematic, supportive evaluation and feedback. Many alternative schools are suspicious of evaluation, and rightly so, for many of the standard evaluation procedures do not measure what the alternative schools are trying to accomplish. However, action without reflection is no antidote to inadequate or inappropriate evaluation. There are ways of evaluating for alternative goals, ways built upon established interviewing and observational techniques with the objective of feeding back information directly to the participants at a given site. It is important for alternative schools to further develop and share these methods.

(5) Establish communication networks with other alternative institutions. As alternative schools grow in their ability to plan, evaluate, and develop practices consistent with their goals, it becomes important to share these experiences with each other. Numerous clearinghouses have been established for that purpose, and while they do share some information and carry on discussions of the goals and philosophy of alternatives, they have not yet achieved anything like a systematic dissemination of information. In the Boston area, for example, there are many alternative schools, but it is surprising how little these schools know of each other.
CONCLUSION

We have emphasized some of the problems that the Pilot School and Metro in particular and alternative schools in general have encountered as they attempt to build new institutions. In doing so, we have measured these schools against their own lofty ideals, rather than against the practices of traditional schools. If we have been critical of these schools, it is precisely because their ideals are so high. These schools are hopeful ventures, and it is in that spirit that we reemphasize three perspectives which seem to us essential to the continuing development and maturation of the alternative schools movement.

(1) Alternative schools must see themselves as transitional, not as ends in themselves, but as flexible, changeable institutions, as expendable forms that will facilitate the transition to the education of the future. Part of this process involves learning from the young, who are already making adaptations to the speeded-up, atomic, electronic, laser beam, one-world universe that their teachers are too old to make without help.

(2) Alternative schools must see themselves as part of a network of other mutually supportive institutions, including not only other alternative schools, but day-care centers, storefront counseling centers, food cooperatives, political action groups, and other alternative and counterinstitutions as well. It does not make much sense to view yourself as an alternative institution unless you can envision an alternative world, and work to bring it about.
(3) Most important, alternative schools must maintain the distinction between education for empowerment and education for control, and attempt to practice the former. To blur this distinction would be to destroy the basis for alternatives, for alternatives imply real choice. The initial impetus of alternatives is a freeing impulse from the impersonality, rigidity, and oppressive practices of the public school system and the larger social system of which it is a part.

The ultimate goal of alternative practices is not to control people more effectively, but to enable them to exercise control, to recognize their basic human right to transform their lives and institutions. This is why we spend so much time talking about the quality of participation in hiring committees, curriculum committees, community meetings, and classes, for an organization which cannot model the behavior it seeks to foster in its young will never achieve its promise.

Footnotes


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