

The Young In Art

MAXINE GREENE

Teachers have always known they ought to attend to their students, to notice them as individuals, to hear what each one has to say. John Locke, writing "Some Thoughts Concerning Education" in the 17th century, made the point:

Begin therefore betimes nicely to observe your Son's Temper; and that, when he is under least Restraint, in his Play, and as he thinks out of your Sight. See what are his predominate Passions and prevailing Inclinations; whether he is fierce or mild, bold or bashful, compassionate or cruel, open or reserv'd, etc. For as these are different in him, so are your Methods to be different, and your Authority must hence take Measures to apply itself different Ways to him.

Locke, like Rousseau after him, was thinking in terms of a tutorial relationship between a teacher (who might as well have been a parent) and a single child; but the advice was taken seriously by later educators concerned with large, variegated groups of children—even in public schools. It is still regarded as good advice, at least in abstracto. Far too few teachers find it possible to act upon it, especially those in the crowded urban schools. Mary Alice White and Alice Boehm, for example (in the January 1968 RECORD), talk about the discrepancy between the scholar's—or the teacher's—way of viewing knowledge and the child's. "Pupils," they write, "need someone to represent the child's world of learning."

Not only is it important for the child's criteria to be known, and as many of his traits as are connected with his learning; it is equally important, it seems to us, for the child to be recognized as a distinctive person, worthy of concern and regard. We are aware that this sort of noticing is particularly difficult. There is the inevitable gap that yawns between the adult and the child, the discrepancy in ways of seeing and feeling; and there is the role played by such abstractions as "child,"

"adolescent," "youth," and even "pupil" in obscuring concreteness and diversity.

We are aware, too, of the sometimes painful effort it demands of teachers separated from their students by differences in color or social class. We know something of the degree of self-knowledge it requires for a teacher to relate to a child as a "fellow-creature" and to continue to act upon his commitments as adult, teacher,—yes, and scholar as well.

Apart from simple prescriptions, there are relatively few clues in educational literature for the teacher eager to learn this art. There are times in the history of educational discussion when attention veers from the person qua person to concepts like "learning," "teaching," "subject matter," and the rest. This was the case (for good reason) in the recent period of concentration upon the "cognitive," during which many of our presently practicing teachers were trained. Terms like "the whole child" were set aside as empirically meaningless. Talk of "needs" and "interests" was avoided, as educators sought greater clarity about what the process of educating actually implied.

It is true that the growing interest in the work of Jean Piaget, so much of which was grounded in talk with actual children, drew the attention of many educational psychologists back to living human creatures once again. But, as in the case of Jerome Bruner's *The Process of Education*,¹ instances of children's behavior in classroom situations were used not to focus attention on individual young people, but to exemplify (quite properly) certain learning principles.

Within the last few years, and particularly since our first confrontations with the facts of poverty and inequality as they have affected the schools, we have seen the emergence of a group of writers with an unusual ability to impose visibility on the invisible, to make audible what has long been unheard. Psychologists, social scientists, and

teachers, they have all become "popular" writers, even as they have gained various degrees of standing in their particular professional fields. Classroom teachers, it would appear, have welcomed many of their books with special enthusiasm; and this may be indicative of a need.

There was, among the first of these innovators, Paul Goodman, whose *Growing Up Absurd*² and *Compulsory Miseducation*³ both appeared in 1962. A Utopian, outraged by the impersonality of large institutions, he tells how it is among the "Angry and Beat," the bored, the cool, the delinquent young; and he tells it dramatically, with specificity and immediacy. ("Are we allowed to climb up there on that ladder?' Naw! of course not! 'Then we'd better not'—even though there is nobody to catch them at it. But they then climb up anyway.") In 1963, there was Jules Henry's *Culture Against Man*,⁴ with its fictionalized account of adolescent life in Rome High School, complete with characters like secure, fourteen-year-old Lila, "Id-leader" Heddie, hardworking Bill, alienated Chris.

The *Vanishing Adolescent*⁵ by Edgar Z. Friedenberg was published in 1959; his *Coming of Age in America*,⁶ in 1965. Much of his work too is immediate and dramatic. The account (in his recent book) of high school students' responses to "The King's Visit" at an imaginary institution called LeMoyen High School involves the reader with a highly individualized group of adolescents. The point is to present "The Structure of Student Values" on the basis of their reactions; but just as striking, when the book is recalled, are the multiple sound of youthful voices, the diversity of personal styles.

Henry and Friedenberg present themselves as researchers in their books; Jonathan Kozol, in *Death at an Early Age*,⁷ and Herbert Kohl, in *36 Children*,⁸ provide personal accounts of their own experiences as teachers in ghetto schools. Both are popularly and skillfully written, almost novelistic in their handling of action and dialogue; and Kohl's has the further virtue of including many pages of personal writing by his students. These books, like Nat Hentoff's *The Children Are Dying*⁹ hold a magnifying

glass up to the public schools. What we are accustomed to reading about in "pedaguese" we suddenly encounter in dramatic prose; and the effects are considerable.

Much the same can be said of Peter Schrag's reportorial *Voices in the Classroom*,¹⁰ which presents finely honed feature stories on a variety of American school systems, and about his recent study of the Boston schools, *Village School Downtown*.¹¹ Related, but in a rather different genre, is Robert Coles' *Children of Crisis*¹² the story (by a participant observer) of how desegregation of the southern schools affected the human beings involved. Much of Dr. Coles' book is composed of transcribed tapes of what his "children" actually said; but, as the author points out, the tapes have been edited and given form by someone passionately concerned. Engaging with Coles, the reader cannot but feel that he has "seen their faces," and that somehow it will be difficult to keep himself from seeing in time to come.

There are other authors and other books, all relevant in some fashion to the work of the teacher eager to pay heed. John Holt's vignettes of little children in *How Children Fail*¹³ and *How Children Learn*¹⁴ are frequently suggestive and may have the effect of sharpening the teacher's ear. Increasingly, as in Thelma P. Catalano's "The Process of Mutual Redefinition" in *The Urban R's*¹⁵ (Eds., Bender, Mackler, and Warshauer), accounts of counseling or teaching children of the poor go beyond case history in order to communicate a sense of how it is.

This is done with artistry in Studs Terkel's *Division Street: America*¹⁶ a book full of insights for a teacher, in spite of the fact that it is not concerned with schools. Composed of a series of interviews with men and women in Chicago, it thrusts the reader into direct confrontation with human creatures, old and young, caught in the midst of their lives. Doing so, it cannot but instruct the reader in the art of attending to persons, of paying heed.

Terkel concludes with some recollections by Jessie Binford, who came to Chicago in 1906 to join Jane Addams at Hull House:

When you look to the older people for what the young should find in them, it isn't there. Nothing's there. Do we have to wait for these young people to grow up and awaken those who are older? Or those who are in control and make all the decisions? To help us clarify the eternal truths which America seems to have forgotten? They'll meet opposition, no matter what they do. Oh, the terrific waste! We've forgotten the spirit of youth, in things we permit to happen to them. I mean, if we're ever going to fulfill the possibility of life for all men, not only in Chicago, but in America and in the world, the spirit of youth must not be neglected. It must not be injured. It must not be killed.

This passage, especially in Terkel's intricately woven fabric of dialogue, comes close to poetry; and it suggests what is, for us, a fundamental concern: the peculiar role of art, in contrast to document, in enabling teachers not only to see those others who are their students, but to see themselves.

Many of the books we have mentioned will continue to be valuable; and some may shed several kinds of light upon the educational task. Appealing as a number of them are, dramatic, readable, even moving, they are (with the exception of Terkel's) primarily discursive in character. This means that their primary function is to inform, to present reasons for points of view, to transcribe, or to report. It interests us to note the number of techniques borrowed from imaginative literature by the educational writers concerned: the fictionalized case histories in Henry; the imaginary episodes in Friedenberg; the dialogues and set pieces in some of the others. All these are effective in making what turn out to be discursive points; but their use should not persuade readers that what they are reading is literary art. We are somewhat concerned, in fact, that the current enthusiasm for highly readable books of this sort will cause teachers to overlook the distinctive contributions to perspective potential in works of art.

The modern world is rich in art forms with the capacity to make us painfully aware, to

see as we have never seen before. But, because they demand a certain degree of perceptiveness and effort, they are not as immediately available nor as self-evidently relevant to the lives lived by teachers in the classrooms of our time. Nevertheless, the surprised welcome given by educators to the recent spate of books about the schools may indicate a desire for the particular, a desire for the concrete—desires which we often forget—may be uniquely fulfilled by the arts. No matter how recognizable Death at an Early Age, for instance, may be, a narrative of that sort (as Jonathan Kozol apparently knows full well) can never work at the many levels of meaning distinctive of a work of literature. No matter how fascinating Friedenberg's imaginary episodes may be, they can never touch the person who encounters them—as literature may—in the depths of his inwardness. The books we have mentioned may offer more verifiable information than imaginative literature; they may address themselves more directly to rationality; they may even function more effectively to persuade their readers to bring about changes in the educational domain.

They do not, however, have the capacity to return a reader to himself. Because they refer to the "real," the common sense world, they cannot move a reader to break with conventional, public ways of categorizing phenomena nor with common modes of discovering meanings. Even when they expose, move to indignation, or stir emotions like anger, pity, fear, they do so by engaging the reader with the writer's vision of the world. Again, there is nothing wrong with this, so long as the writer is truthful, so long as he speaks clearly, so long as he cares. But it is quite different from the searching and the seeing made possible by works of art.

We forget sometimes that many of the discoveries we think we are making with Goodman's aid, and Friedenberg's, and Holt's, have been at hand in novels like *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Catcher in the Rye*, and John Knowles' *A Separate Peace*. Experiencing such works is to enact (or reenact) the young person's alienation from prevailing pieties and controls our documentary writers discuss discursively.

Goodman, Friedenber, and some of the others remind us—tell us—of the expressiveness of youth, which presumably we fear. They talk about the sexuality of young people, the undercurrents of violence, the precarious hold of a questionable "civilization," the arbitrariness of codes. We have read, or we can read, Richard Hughes' *The Innocent Voyage* or William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and experience for ourselves, in our own inward terms, what it means to give way to what Conrad in *Heart of Darkness* called "the horror" and what it means to struggle to conform.

To confront the separation of the generations, the distrust experienced by so many of the young, we can turn to Andre Gide's *The Counterfeiters* or to Roger Martin Du Gard's *The Thibaults*. To see, to know what it is to go in pursuit of one's own purity, we can take up (perhaps after many years) Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time*. To be reminded of what it is actually like to be young, to feel misunderstood, to be skeptical of the adult world, we can read a very recent book, Frank Conroy's *Stop-time*,¹⁷ a marvelously wrought memoir of the writer's youth. Conroy writes at one point:

An adult recognizes petty problems for what they are and transcends them through his higher preoccupations, his goals—he moves on, as it were. A child has no choice but to accept the immediate experiences of his life at face value. He isn't moving on, he simply is. Children agonize over an overdue library book, or an accidentally broken gas meter with all the emotion that an adult experiences at the threat of prison.

This is *sui generis*, but it is also exemplary of what art can do if we permit ourselves to engage with it. Conroy is not telling about a child's sense of alienation; he is not representing an element of the "generation gap." Reading, we do not say, "Yes, one can agree with Conroy. His observations are just. His conclusions about young children can be confirmed." Rather, if we say anything at all, we murmur, "Yes, I know. That is the way it was. That must be the way it is."

Literary art has the capacity to thrust us into our own private worlds. Stimulating imagination, it may move us to break for a moment with habitual and conventional (or even partly conventional) ways of interpreting and making sense; and suddenly we may be enabled to feel ourselves to be authentic, spontaneous, open in a new way to others and to the world. It is at moments like this that we can pay heed and attend, because we know for an instant who we are. And this is true for our lives as teachers as well as for our private lives.

Of course it is necessary to read theory in our several fields. Of course it is helpful to read the new dramatists of the educational scene. But we need at times to remember as well the special values to be discovered in the arts. Truly to attend to our students as persons, we need—as Thomas Mann once said—"to look both ways."

MG

THE NUFFIELD MATHEMATICS PROJECT



"... the publishers deserve rich congratulations for beginning this great service to teachers and anyone else interested in new approaches to learning."—*New Republic*

Teachers' Guides

Pictorial Representation

40 pages. \$2.25.

Beginnings 101 pages. \$2.50.

Mathematics Begins

61 pages. \$2.25.

Shape and Size 101 pages. \$2.50.

Computation and Structure

103 pages. \$2.50.

Introductory Guide

I Do, and I Understand,

62 pages. \$1.95.

Weaving Guides

Desk Calculators

 8 pages. \$.95.

How to Build a Pond 8 pages

11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches, plus an 8 page supplement 9 x 8 inches. \$1.75.

CONTEMPORARY EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

Some Models Applied to the School Setting

Helen I. Snyder, *Associate Professor in Educational Psychology, The Pennsylvania State University.*

1968. 256 pages. \$8.95.

SCHOOL ORGANIZATION AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A Study Based on Achievement in Mathematics in Twelve Countries

Neville Postlewaithe, *UNESCO Institute for Education, West Germany.*

1968. 146 pages. \$8.00.

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

The Case of Sweden

Torsten Husén and Gunnar Boalt, *both of the University of Stockholm.*

1968. In press.

INTERNATIONAL STUDY OF ACHIEVEMENT IN MATHEMATICS

A Comparison of Twelve Countries

Ed. Torsten Husén.

Vol. I 304 pages 1967

Vol. II 368 pages 1967

Sold only as a set \$19.95.

A HISTORY OF GENETIC PSYCHOLOGY

The First Science of Human Development

Robert E. Grinker, *Professor of Educational Psychology, University of Wisconsin.*

1967. 247 pages. \$8.95.

THE COMPUTER IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

Don D. Bushnell, *Vice-president and Director of Research and Development, Brooks Foundation, Santa Barbara; and Dwight W. Allen, Associate Professor of Education, Stanford University.*

1967. 300 pages. Cloth: \$6.95. Paper: \$3.95.

JOHN WILEY & SONS, Inc.

605 Third Avenue,

New York, N. Y. 10016

1 Harvard University Press, 1960.

2 Vintage Books.

3 Vintage Books.

4 Random House.

5 Dell Publishing Co.

6 Random House.

7 Houghton Mifflin Co.

8 New American Library.

9 Viking Press.

-
- 10 Beacon Press.
 - 11 Beacon Press.
 - 12 Atlantic—Little Brown.
 - 13 Pitman Publishing.
 - 14 Pitman Publishing.
 - 15 Frederick A. Praeger.
 - 16 Pantheon Books.
 - 17 Viking Press, 1967.